Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy

SBNA PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

The Importance of Mentoring in Building the Professional Excellence in Maritime Sector

To cite this article: C. L. Cojocaru, C. Popa, F. Nistor and A. Bogdanowicz, Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy, Vol. XXVI 2023, pg. 144-149.

The Importance of Mentoring in Building the Professional Excellence in Maritime Sector

C L Cojocaru[1], C Popa[1], F Nistor[1] and A. Bogdanowicz[2]

[1] Associate Professor PhD, "Mircea cel Batran" Naval Academy, Romania
[2] Senior Lecturer PhD, Polish Naval Academy, Department of Marine Engineering, Poland

Abstract. The present study is seeking to explore the conceptual perspectives and the practical-operational aspects of the mentoring process with an emphasis on its intrinsic achieving mechanisms, peculiar for two distinct types of learning and training processes: the cognitive and the social dimensions. The authors have considered the mentoring process in the broader scope of the social learning theory, which describes it as an essential element in the context of growth, development, maturation throughout life, complementary to the specific learning context of other processes such as: coaching, training, tutoring, consulting.
Keywords: mentoring, growth context, learning context, naval industry

1. Introduction. Literature review

It may seem axiomatic to say that the mentoring is one of the "universal" forming vectors of human behaviour, a natural process as old as humanity, co-existing as immanent to the generic human being. Paraphrasing Ebbinghaus who described the "drama" of Psychology as a science in a Psychology Manual from 1908 as having "a long past and a short history", we can affirm that mentoring as a phenomenon has known in its semantic and meaning evolution, a series of ups and downs, confusions, somehow similar to the human life to whom it is ontologically linked.

The issue of the mentoring process and its complex and dynamic evolution, bring into debate two types of approaches: some mythical, of empirical essence and the others scientific, integrative, highlighted by systematic studies in the specialized literature.

Referring to the first category of arguments, the term mentoring originates in the mists of time, in Ancient Greece, Mentor being the central mythological character masterfully described by Homer in his work, the Odyssey. Homer may have chosen the name Mentor because, translated from the ancient Greek, it means "to counsel, to think, to remember." Later, Fenelon (1651-1715) developed a moral tale called The Adventures of Telemachus, in which Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope, has Mentor as his tutor. So Mentor, as the wise counsellor who guides and protects Odysseus' son until his father's return, becomes the symbol of moral authority, a landmark of the Good suggestively evoked in the sense of the perennial sapiential teachings. This myth thus generates reasonable explanations about

power and authority, about morality, about the need to define one's own identity by solving inner contradictions, to evolve by overcoming obstacles and facing hostilities under the guidance of a mentor who ensures safety, trust, hope.

2. Conceptual aspects describing the mentorship in theory
The second way of approaching the phenomenon of mentoring, without opposing the first set of arguments as an axiological value, raises the scientifically legitimate question whether mentoring has as a psychological mechanism to achieve learning contexts or, rather, contexts of psychological growth and, implicitly, professional. In the current sociocultural context, the education system promotes as a systematic model of training and education cognitive learning, of a pedagogical type, centred on the transmission, assimilation of information and the acquisition of multidisciplinary skills. We could state that learning, as a unitary universal phenomenon, defines its dual purpose: informative through the active summarization and memorization of valid informational contents and another purpose, a formative one that mainly refers to the transformative evolution of the psychic structures assigned to this objective, namely those cognitive, affective, volitional, conative.

Often, the psycho-pedagogical literature claims as an important limitation of this concrete learning program based on directing and controlling the learning actions of young people, obtaining "a well-filled head" instead of "a well-formed head." Hence, the rhetorical question of educators if the school prepares pupils/students by focusing on a certain specialization and omits or is less involved in preparing them to face the challenges of real life.

From this perspective, the process of continuous adult learning, throughout life in the andragogic system based on the exploration and experimentation of life situations, can be encountered in various forms: continuous training courses, as an employee who assumes norms, values, rules on the spot of work, as a disciple of a professional in the field "stealing the job", as a passionate autodidact with the need for performance or, simply, as an adult actively involved in his own personal and professional development and maturation. We find in all these situations the student/graduate/master's student/doctorate student, even the teacher - practicing in the field of the naval industry, assiduously building professional and personal excellence.

In this context, we could more easily understand Constantin Brancusi's statement when parting with his mentor, August Rodin: "Nothing grows in the shade of big trees." or the meaning of the Indian proverb: "Nothing grows under the banyan tree" - adage for a context of growth, development and emancipation, subsequent to that of learning. [1]

3. Mentoring Process
A more accurate reporting and a more adequate understanding of mentoring can be achieved conceptually by framing this complex phenomenon within the wider framework of social learning considered to be the intrinsic mechanism of socialization and social integration. Referring to the context of growth, concurrently with the well-structured and linear cognitive learning process, the phenomenon of development, of psycho-behavioral maturation unfolds, which is non-linear, heuristic, individualized. It is generated in particular by socialization - a complex process through which norms, values, psychosocial interactions, traditions, customs are internalized, processed in one's own psycho-motricity and then exported in the form of behaviors, attitudes, principles about the world and life, in agreement with the socio-cultural and professional environment.

The main forms of social learning such as: trial and error, reinforcement, imitation, role learning are practiced consciously and voluntarily but also unconsciously throughout life ensuring the development of personality.

Thus understanding the mechanisms and contexts of personal adaptation and acculturation specific to the conceptualization of mentoring and taking into account the specific conditions of activity in the field, we can optimally integrate it into the education and training of professionals in the naval industry.

3.1. Definitions. Theoretical background

"Mentoring is a special relationship in which one person (the mentor) supports the learning process and progress of another person (the disciple). A mentor provides support by providing information, advice, and assistance so as to empower the disciple." Using the metaphor of the journey similar to the sailing of sailors who individually set their starting point and destination, mentoring appears here as a "path" travelled to a time, sprinkled with obstacles, deviations but also satisfactions, which creates a context of personal and professional growth. Mentoring thus reveals itself as a rich source of self-learning and personal development. [2]

"Considered to be an experience that leads to self-discovery and development - which opens up new opportunities for the disciple for personal fulfilment and professional achievement - the mentoring process is primarily aimed at change - at the level of skills, performance, social skills or career path" [3]. From this perspective, the mentoring process facilitates the development of personal identity and the sophistication of coping mechanisms through the practical application of mentoring principles and the empirical experimentation of various growth situations. Social learning uses, in the author's opinion, modelling and social comparison, learning through observation and discovery, solving concrete problems specific to adults. In this situation, the mentor can propose a structured program to carry out the process, sharing useful knowledge with the disciple, encouraging his efforts, helping him detach and emotionally integrate the lessons obtained from the successes and failures experienced by the disciple.

"Mentoring is a consensual relationship between two individuals where both can benefit and grow. Mentoring is a mutual relationship of respect regardless of the professional position of the people involved." [4]. We observe how, in the conceptualization of the mentoring process, the focus shifts to the nature of the mentor-disciple relationship even if it is a vertical, unequal relationship, the transmission of knowledge, skills or expertise taking place from mentor to disciple. The author discusses mentoring in both directions that does not diminish hierarchies but strengthens mutual respect and trust, found even in academia when young disciples with greater ability to navigate cyberspace "mentor" those in leadership positions and they have the modesty to recognize their limits and be available to learn new things. As is well known, "age does not guarantee wisdom just as youth does not indicate its lack", says an old proverb emphasizing that there is no age considered optimal to be a mentor because the maturation of the personality which requires the biological age to be as close to psychological age is a laborious process that takes place throughout life and is influenced by a number of factors, the potential of becoming is individualized.

3.2. Mentoring, Coaching, Training, Consulting – brief comparative analysis

The scientific literature highlights the non-discriminatory, interchangeable use of these terms: mentoring, coaching, training, consulting, sometimes even tutoring due to linguistic ambiguity or semantic confusions that do not notice the nuanced differences in their understanding.

Julie Starr, concerned with this aspect, brings a series of clarifications in approaching the conceptual delimitations of these notions using two criteria: specific features and characteristics of each notion in particular and the identification of the person who must take responsibility for learning, development and change in these different contexts.[2]

Thus, starting from the traditional definition of the "archetype" of the mentor role, namely that of supporting the growth of the disciple's potential, the author evaluates according to the first criterion that the mentor must "possess a relevant set of skills, experience and perspectives." Being associated with the growth context, the mentor will focus on the potential of the disciple and the relevant content of the discussions, while coaching and training will be interested in the unfolding of the learning context. If the mentor can be considered a model with experience in the field and a mature psychosocial personality, from whom the disciple can learn cognitively, academically and socially, the coach could be compared to a "professional therapist" if we are allowed the phrase.

The coach is, as a rule, a person trained to guide others, especially in the specific professional field, with active listening skills and formulating revealing questions regarding behaviours in the work

environment, the work activities themselves, the practical achievement of professional goals. In this way, a learning context is created in which the student discovers for himself which is the optimal strategy for him to rise and access his career.

Also, from the perspective of the first criterion, that of the specific characteristics of each process, training is an activity that can be carried out individually or in a group, centred on a certain well-defined theme, which requires the trainer to have thorough theoretical and practical knowledge related to it. However, the effectiveness of the training requires that the trainers develop certain psycho-pedagogical skills regarding the creative approach to learning (online training and/or live training, group training techniques, individual work and group feedback...).

Similar to the Venn Euler diagram for verifying the validity of inferences, we could describe tutoring as a type of basic guidance located between coaching and training, a learning process guided by a teacher/educator with the explicit aim of training hard skills for a specific profession, without aim to monitor the personal development of pupils/students. Staying within the perimeter of the first criterion, Starr opines that consulting services deal mainly with situations and less with people, being carried out by people who have in-depth knowledge and experience in the field but also tools or ways to improve practices respectively. [2]

Analysing the concept of mentoring from the perspective of the second criterion, the author differentiates between assuming responsibility for learning/development/change and evaluating the effectiveness of the respective activities, mentioning that this is done as part of the scheme of the ongoing programs. Thus, in the case of mentoring, in the generic way, the disciple is the one who realizes and assumes the progress of his own evolution by mentally self-programming for success and the mentor, depending on certain personality traits (locus of internal control, level of aspiration...), may assume secondary responsibility. Regarding coaching and training, even if the coacher is advised to be responsible and to be aware of moments of progress, regression or stagnation, the evaluation of coaches and trainers is carried out by evaluating their abilities to facilitate change, the effects produced in the competencies, the behaviour style of beneficiary persons. As for consulting, it is valued according to the consultant's ability to stimulate change and improve the situation by engaging and encouraging work teams.

To conclude, we could state that a person with a psychologically and socially mature personality, with certain personality attributes compatible with the demands of mentorship but also with consistent professional experience, could exercise all these different roles as a result of his different statuses but for people, different target audiences or audiences.

3.3.”Mentor-disciple relationship "mentee" or "protégé"

Traditional mentoring describes the mentoring relationship as a 'dyadic' interpersonal relationship which, according to Farr 'it changes over time and includes an intentional process of care, support, protection, guidance, training within agreed ethical parameters mutually agreed upon that include the personal integrity and professional aspects of an individual's life." [5]. It is, therefore, a mutual relationship, with conscious, direct psychological involvement that goes beyond the transmission of information, knowledge, teachings, but, more likely, it is an interpersonal relationship in which meanings are traded, this aspect being the defining element in provoking and achieving change. It may seem paradoxical, but even if the mentoring relationship is predominantly focused on the development needs of the less experienced disciple, the change does not only take place in the disciple's frame of reference, but also at the level of the mentor's personality.

Spontaneous, informal mentoring relationships can be described, initiated according to the immediate interest of the disciple and supported by sympathetic affinities, based on mutual respect and trust from the initial stage, or formal mentoring relationships, developed by organizations through mentoring programs. Also, depending on the difference in status of the relational dyad as a vertical relationship, we can talk about an asymmetric relationship in which the mentor has a high personal and professional authority due to experience in the work environment but also certain personality attributes: oriented and open to others, what and how he knows how to motivate, self-confident, desire

to achieve [3]. Also known as beneficial mentoring relationships are mentoring relationships between partners with equal social and professional status or those of "step forward" mentoring where the mentor is on a hierarchical level next to the disciple in the organizational hierarchy and progress. [5] This assertion is also supported by the American Psychological Association which affirms that sometimes, a mentor can be a colleague of the same age or even younger, with special expertise of interest to the protégé [6].

The specialized literature abounds in classifications, explanations of the nature, types, characteristics of mentoring relationships, emphasizing the impact of the mentoring process in the development of effective strategies for promotion and personal and career development. They can be predominantly task-focused or predominantly relationship-focused, with variable duration and frequency, within organizations, in communities, on social networks. In addition to the traditional direct mentoring model, other forms of mentoring can be described: co-mentoring, mutual mentoring, peer-mentoring, group mentoring, team mentoring, professional insertion mentoring. In these particular situations, the role of the mentor is focused on providing psychosocial support based on teamwork or facilitating the integration of the newcomer in the profession, with an emphasis either on acquiring skills or on supporting the achievement of the level of aspiration, with a direct impact on the value growth of the organization.

Although the mentoring relationship is professional in nature, it has both a career-oriented function and an important psychological function. From a career perspective, individuals who experienced a mentoring relationship reported "career satisfaction, opportunities for advancement and compensation gained, increased power in the organization, level of engagement, and effective socialization" [3]. On the other hand, the psychological benefits inherent in the mentoring process cannot be denied: validation, confidence in solving new and challenging tasks, confirmation, acceptance, psychological comfort, emotional support, facilitating self-exploration. [5]

Exploring the "recognizable" characteristics of a classic mentoring relationship, Starr lists several forms of "adequate assistance" offered by the mentor throughout the process: sharing his experience and knowledge, creating the learning context in which the disciple can express his thinking critical, self-reflective, giving constructive feedback, understanding the disciple's vision and aspirations, appropriate recommendations or advice, willingness to share influence and the network of contacts built over time. The author believes that the effectiveness of a mentoring relationship has a direct impact on the development of the disciple's potential and requires certain interactive practices of high human value: goodwill, respect, generosity, compassion, active personal involvement. [2]

4. Conclusions

The explicit goal of any mentoring approach is the formative restructuring of the disciple's vocational personality, achieved through the consolidation of learning and the sustained development of a professional identity. This involves the systematic integration of a set of variables: personality attributes (attitudes, values, perceptions), profession-specific characteristics (assumed roles, professionally desirable behaviours, ethical considerations), the exploration and reframing of learning by doing experiences (predominantly in the andragogic system), introduction to the professional community in the naval industry.

"Mircea cel Bătrân" Naval Academy as a prestigious naval higher education institution belongs to the category of "learning organizations": it learns itself by making flexible its strategies for continuous adaptation to change and only then teaches others, the graduates and their careers being the final products of the influences of the maritime organizational culture, the current economic, social and societal environment.

From this perspective, organizational mentoring can be conceived as a "triadic" mentor-disciple-university relationship, as a "peak" (apogetic) learning process in which these important factors have distinct but synergistic roles: the mentor/teacher/educator reinforces learning and models effective vocational behaviors, the disciple/student/subordinate learns to know and develop his own potential and our institution creates the framework, the system, the learning situations that allow the

dissemination of the results of the entire mentoring process promoting human and professional value and excellence.

Another final thought aims at the continuous training process that corresponds to the need for professionalization of the career of teaching individuals, civil and military, in the sense of perfecting the skills and capitalizing on the specifics of mentoring activities in education in the current context of professional training for the teaching career. The analysis of the needs for training and modeling of mentoring skills can be carried out by integrating different aspects: informational resources with an emphasis on the practical-applicative side, instrumental support that addresses especially constructive critical thinking (mentoring resources), realistic and rational feedback forms, support emotionally in order to strengthen a positive self-image, psychic self-programming for career success. Such programs, strategies and flexible mentoring tools can capitalize on the professional experience of teachers in achieving the transfer of professional and transversal skills to the mentored person (mentee) as well as in the development of effective models of professional behavior.

5. References

[1]   Adair J 2015, Leadership strategic, Meteor Publishing, Bucuresti.
[2]   American Psychological Association 2006 Introduction to mentoring: A guide for mentors and mentees. Washington, DC
[3]   Farr H 2021 Mentoring in the training cycle of clinica land counseling psychology doctoral students: a critical review of the literature, Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology
[4]   Olivero O 2014 Interdisciplinarity Mentoring in Science. Strategies for Success, Academic Press is an imprint of Elsevier, USA
[5]   Palos R 2008 Rolul procesului de mentoring în dezvoltarea carierei, în Avram E, Cooper C L (coord.), Psihologie Organizațional-Managerială. Tendințe actuale, Ed. Polirom, Iași
[6]   Starr J 2022 Manual de Mentorat, Ed. ACT și Politon, Bucuresti