
Małgorzata Sidor-Rządowska

Mentoring: Support for Executive Development at Sanofi Polska*

This article concentrates on questions related to implementing a mentoring program in an organization. It characterizes the challenges accompanying successive phases of the introduction of such a program at Sanofi. It describes program goals, educational efforts preceding program implementation, selection of mentor–mentee pairings, and the course of the mentoring sessions. Special attention was devoted to evaluating actions taken, including the defining of success factors on the sides of both the mentors and program participants.

Key words: mentor, mentee, development, pairing, mentoring session, program evaluation, success factors.

Introduction

As is known, the concept of *mentoring* traces back to Greek mythology. According to Homer, when Odysseus was leaving for the Trojan War, he entrusted his friend Mentor with the education of this son Telemachus. “Give your knowledge and experience to my son,” he said. Mentor performed his task well and for centuries has become the symbol of support for the young man.

In times closer to our own, it has been observed that people who have achieved true professional success, when asked for its source, often make reference to a person–authority figure whose help and care brought about a breakthrough in initial difficulties opening the way for full development of inherent potential (Sidor-Rządowska, 2014, p. 17).

An overview of the definition of mentoring would significantly exceed the framework for this article. Concepts formulated in both topical literature and during meetings of practitioners are so abundant as to cause Eric Parsloe and Monika Wray (2002, p. 81) to define the discussion around the concept of mentoring as a “semantic jungle.” In order to evade immersion in that jungle, this article shall limit itself to presenting only three definitions:

- “Mentoring involves continuous contact between the inexperienced worker and the mentor, who is an experienced worker with a caring and kindly attitude with respect for the novice and whose task is to introduce him or her to the content

* This article was written on the basis of information and materials provided by Anna Jarzębska, coordinator of the Sanofi mentoring program in Poland.

of the job and the professional environment. The goal of mentoring is the rapid achievement of independent and efficient work on the part of the employee as well as his or her adaptation to the environment” (Oleksyn, 2010, p. 233).

■ “Mentoring is a partner-like relationship between the master and the apprentice aimed at uncovering and development the potential of the apprentice. It is based on inspiration, stimulation, and leadership. It mainly involves the discovery of him- or herself by the apprentice, developing self-awareness, and overcoming any fear of proceeding down the selected path to self-fulfillment, thanks to appropriate efforts on the part of the master” (Karwalla, 2009, p. 111).

■ “Mentoring is voluntary assistance outside any official hierarchy provided by one person to another thanks to which significant progress may be made in knowledge, professional work, and manner of thinking” (Clutterbuck, 2002, p. 13).

The last of the quoted definitions served as the basis for development actions at Sanofi in Poland.

Sanofi, a global leader in the pharmaceutical sector, is involved in the discovery, development, and dissemination of therapeutic solutions that satisfy the needs of patients. Sanofi is developing its position a leader in seven main areas: solutions for diabetics, vaccines for people, innovative medications, healthcare products, emerging markets, animal healthcare, and rare diseases.

Sanofi is listed on the Paris (EURONEXT: SAN) and New York (NYSE: SNY) stock exchanges. The Sanofi Group in Poland includes Sanofi-Aventis Sp. z o.o. [Ltd.], manufacturer of innovative and over-the-counter medications, Sanofi Pasteur, the world’s biggest manufacturer of vaccines, Zentiva, a leader in the production of generic drugs in Central and Eastern Europe, Nepentes Pharma, a recognized company active in the derma-cosmetic industry, Genzyme, manufacturer of drugs used in rare diseases, and Merial, world leader in the veterinary industry. One of the 112 Sanofi Group factories is located in Rzeszów. The Sanofi Group in Poland employs over 1,000 workers. According to IMS Health Polska data, the Sanofi Group occupies a leading position in the domestic ranking of the largest pharmaceutical companies.

Goals of Implementing a Mentoring Program at Sanofi in Poland

Sanofi is an organization that places great weight on the development of its employees. This is expressed in both its painstakingly developed training programs and in other forms of support for the potential of its employees, such as defined-time contracts, job rotation, and coaching efforts. However, the company management has come to the conclusion that this is not enough. There is a growing need for

a fuller exchange of knowledge and experience accumulated in the organization. A well-planned and well-implemented mentoring program provides just the opportunity needed. Program goals have been defined as follows:

- Creation of a platform for sharing knowledge through people from various business units (in this case, this is a matter of support for management processes and the dissemination of a learning organization where the continuous quest for innovative solutions becomes a natural way of proceeding);
- Strengthening the commitment of employees by offering them an opportunity for creative and inspiring contacts with people who are authority figures;
- Assistance in the development of the potential of workers whose development path assumes promotion to managerial positions in the long-term perspective;
- Utilization of the leadership competencies of the most experienced leaders;
- The building of communications and collaboration among various divisions of the organization.

Invitations to participate in the program as mentees were directed to people defined in Sanofi as “Early Potentials.” This group consists of employees whose promotion to managerial positions is assumed no earlier than in three years. For their part, people asked to serve as mentors have significant managerial experience, including division directors and members of the management team as well as people from the “High Potentials” group (this group consists of people who, in the short term, less than two years, may take over higher managerial/director positions than they presently occupy).

Educational Efforts through Program Implementation

Implementation of the mentoring program at Sanofi was accompanied by well thought-out training support. Since the HR Department was responsible for the whole project, it was also one of the first recipients of mentoring workshops. Department staff involved in the process had an opportunity to not only become familiar with all aspects of its coordination and management, but also had sessions necessitating filling both the role of mentor and mentee.

Prior to commencement of sessions, mentors attended two-day workshops provided by external companies. Their objective was:

- Discussions with participants of the essence of the concept of mentoring as well as opportunities and threats connected with filling the role of mentor;
- Improving communication skills, especially the capacity for active listening, asking pertinent questions, and providing constructive feedback;
- A theoretical look at all the phases of the mentoring process;
- Mentoring practice sessions;

- Clarifying any doubts connected with entering a new role;
- Getting not only into the role of mentor, but also mentee, made possible by workshop exercises;
- Opportunities to meet all the mentors and develop relations with them serving as a basis for mutual support during program implementation.

A training program was also developed for the mentee group. Participants learned the principles of mentoring as well as the detailed goals and assumptions behind the offered program during all-day workshops organized in-house by HR. Much attention was devoted to questions of mutual relations between the parties to the mentoring process. Workshop participants were given the opportunity to learn the essence of the roles of mentor and mentee, discuss their expectations with respect to the offered program, and assess which of those expectations are realistic and which of them cannot be met.

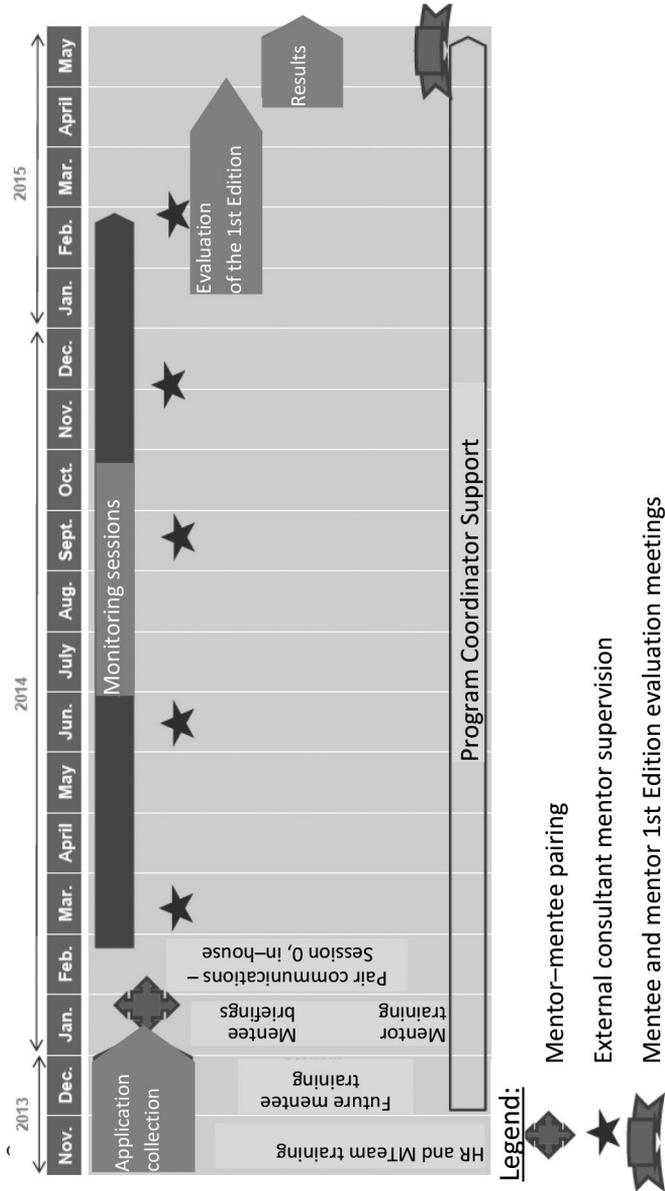
A very important element of educational efforts conducted prior to the implementation of the program was the organizing, including within the framework of the HR Department, of meetings for the superiors of persons belonging to the mentee group. The company management was perfectly aware of the fact that it is the attitudes of direct superiors that is a condition for the success of all mentoring processes.

Mentor–Mentee Pairings

This matter usually elicits the greatest emotions in organizations implementing mentoring programs. At Sanofi the process was launched with an overview of best practice, which came down to three possible models of actions—situations in which (a) the mentee selects a mentor, (b) a mentor selects a mentee, and (c) selection made by the program coordinator (Chyrchel, 2013; Sidor–Rzadkowska, 2014). An in-depth analysis was conducted of each of these solutions and a decision was made to use a mixed system. Initial selection was made by the program coordinator. This choice was subsequently verified by the HR Business Partner and the HR Director on the basis of knowledge on the course of the professional work of the mentor and the mentee, the preferences of both parties, and declared topics of future work. This initial proposal was discussed individually with both the mentors and mentees, and was subjected to necessary adjustments. An effort was made to provide each mentee with a choice of two mentors, where the final decision was communicated to the mentor and subsequently to the program coordinator after a meeting defined as “Session 0.” The described method significantly extended the process of pairing. Together with previously presented educational activities it took over four months. Subsequent experience showed that this was a price that was well worth paying. Collaboration in the so-associated mentoring pairs proved 100% satisfactory for both parties.

Course of the Mentoring Program

Figure No. 1. The Course of the Mentoring Program at Sanofi P



Source: Sanofi Polska in-house materials.

Persons responsible for the project were absolutely aware of the fact that mentoring is a flexible process, where, nevertheless, establishing a certain general framework for its course was worthwhile. It was assumed that the mentor and mentee would meet every three–four weeks. In practice, the frequency was somewhat lower. Meetings took place once a month or even less. The recommended duration of a mentoring session was one and one–half to two hours. Again, practice introduced certain modifications to the initial assumptions. Some sessions lasted less than an hour while others exceeded three. Program participants were from various cities in Poland, which was a reason for certain difficulties in mutual contacts. Efforts were made for the mentoring sessions to be personal in character. This, if necessary, was supplemented by telephone or e–mail contacts. Both mentees and mentors could count on support over the course of the process. Approximately once every third session an external consultant provided supervision. The described actions can be presented in the form of a diagram (Figure No. 1).

Program Evaluation

Evaluation work was commenced in February of 2015. The program coordinator conducted structured interviews with all participants on the basis of two questionnaires.

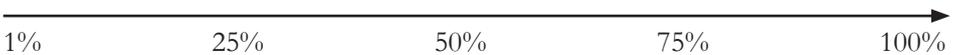
Questionnaire No. 1: Mentoring Process Summary

I. Mentee:.....
(Given and surname)

II. Ultimate goal of the mentoring you underwent with the mentor:
.....

III. Number of mentoring sessions in which you participated in this process:

IV. On the scale below mark the percentage to which your goal has been achieved.
(Mark the percentage or state the figure for goal achievement percentage.)



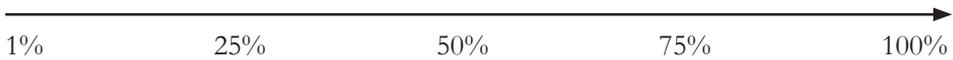
V. Describe the area/aspect of the mentoring program achieved that you are most proud of. What has participation in the program given you?
.....

VI. In your opinion, what was of greatest importance / what had the greatest influence on the achievement of your mentoring goal at the stated level?

.....

VII. In your view, to what extent has your participation in the Mentoring Program had an impact on your personal development?

(Mark the percentage or state the figure for goal achievement percentage.)



Additional comments:

.....

Source: Sanofi Polska in-house materials.

Questionnaire No. 2: Mentoring Process Summary

I. Mentor

(Given and surname)

II. On the scale below mark the percentage to which your goal has been achieved.

(Mark the percentage or state the figure for goal achievement percentage.)



III. In your opinion, what was of greatest importance / what had the greatest influence on the achievement of your mentoring goal at the stated level?

.....

IV. In your view, to what extent has your participation in the Mentoring Program as a mentor had an impact on your personal development? (Mark the percentage or state the figure for goal achievement percentage.)



Can we count on you as a mentor in a successive edition of the Mentoring Program?

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Additional comments:

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Source: Sanofi Polska in-house materials.

The results of the evaluation surpassed the expectations of the program organizers. Those in the mentee group defined the level of goal achievement at an average level of 88%, while the figure for the mentors was 74%. As to the impact of mentoring on personal development, the mentees' evaluation gave an average figure of 85%, which to the mentors was 70%. In many statements, representatives of both groups stressed the benefits they received thanks to participation in the program. Below are a few examples:

MENTEES

- “[The program] gave me an opportunity to take an in–depth look at my motivation, strengths, predispositions, and professional aspirations.”
- “[...] Thanks to collaboration with my mentor I was successful in looking at my actions and skills in working with a team from a different perspective.”
- “[...] Thanks to meetings with a very experienced mentor I could look at my work from a different perspective and, primarily thanks to inspiring pointers, I gradually learned to introduce change.”
- “[The program] allowed me to fully prepare for the role of leader in increasingly difficult and continuously changing business conditions.”

MENTORS

- “[...] Each and every meeting with a mentee was extremely inspiring and stimulating for me.”
- “[...] This experience also helped me in looking at new ways to approach collaboration with my own team.”
- “[...] Thanks to the process, I myself over its course had a better look at myself and my work. I was capable of looking at myself, my behavior, and my motivation from a distance.”
- “[...] This is a program giving new inspiration for work with people.”

Mentors considered the following the main success factor:

- Honesty and trust in mutual relations, and
- A readiness on the part of the mentee to take responsibility for his or her own development, especially a high level of motivation for change, a positive approach to the mentoring process, commitment, and a readiness to work on oneself.

Persons participating in the program as mentees considered the following the main success factors:

- Good mentor–mentee pairing,
- A sense of trust with respect to the mentor,
- The high level of energy on the part of the mentor and the mentor's ability to inspire change, and
- The mentor's openness in sharing experience.

The success of the 1st Edition of the Mentoring Program resulted in preparations starting at the end of 2015 at Sanofi of a 2nd Edition for the year 2016. This means that mentoring is becoming a fixed element of organizational culture at Sanofi Polska.

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Mentoring jako wsparcie rozwoju kadry menedżerskiej firmy Sanofi Polska

Streszczenie

Artykuł koncentruje się na zagadnieniach związanych z wdrażaniem programu mentoringu w organizacji. W tekście scharakteryzowano wyzwania towarzyszące kolejnym etapom wprowadzania programu w firmie Sanofi. Opisano cele programu, działania edukacyjne poprzedzające jego wdrożenie, dobór par mentor–podo-
pieczny, przebieg sesji mentoringowych. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono ewaluacji podjętych działań, w tym określeniu czynników sukcesu, leżących zarówno po stronie mentorów, jak i po stronie uczestników programu.

Małgorzata Sidor-Rzadkowska – Doctor of Humanities, Adjunct Professor with the Vistula Academy of Finance and Business. Also collaborates with the University of Warsaw, KSAP National School of Public Administration, and other educational institutions. Author of several dozen papers and many books, including *Kształtowanie nowoczesnych systemów ocen pracowników* [Shaping modern employee assessment systems] (OE Economic Publishing House, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2013, and 2015), *Kompetencyjne systemy ocen pracowników* [Competency-based systems of employee assessment] (Wolters Kluwer, 2006 and 2011), *Profesjonalny coaching* [Professional coaching] (Wolters Kluwer, 2012), *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w administracji publicznej* [Human resource management in public administration] (Wolters Kluwer, 2013), and *Mentoring. Teoria, praktyka, studia przypadków* [Mentoring: Theory, practice, and case studies], (Scientific Editor, Wolters Kluwer, 2014).