

## **Lotta Haglund**

### **Mentoring as a tool for staff development**

At the EAHIL workshop in Tarttu, Estonia in 1999 I met an Australian colleague – Ann Ritchie. We spent some time together and she told me a lot about her work with mentoring in Australian libraries. She has written a thesis on mentoring, “Group Mentoring and the Professional Socialisation of Graduate Librarians: a Programme evaluation”, and has worked with mentoring at the Australian Library and Information Association. In Australia, as in Sweden, there is a lack of continuing education, especially for middle management, and mentoring programmes are used as a way of furthering the knowledge of graduate librarians. I left the workshop in Tarttu very inspired by what Ann had told me, and started thinking about how we could apply this way of working in Sweden

In 2000 I started working at the Karolinska Institute University Library (KIB) and I got my chance to use my knowledge and interest in mentoring when the library director started talking about an in-house mentoring program. I volunteered to set it up.

#### **Background**

KIB is the largest medical library in Sweden and also National Resource Library for medicine for the whole country. Today it has some 140 staff, and during the last two to three years a lot of new staff has been hired, many of them directly from library school, without much working experience. At the same time the bulk of the library staff has been working at KIB for many years.

At that time the library was divided into five libraries around Stockholm, one large and four smaller. Some of the staff worked in more than one of the libraries, but most staff had no experience of the library outside their department, except for customer services where the majority does their share of work.

With five different libraries divided into 11 departments, many new and quite young staff and very differentiated skills the library director wanted

- ◆ To increase contacts between the departments at KIB
- ◆ To increase contacts between staff with long experience at KIB and more recent employees
- ◆ To increase possibilities to learn from each other
- ◆ To provide tools for staff to take an interest in areas where they have not been involved before

These were the objectives of the program.

I would like to emphasise here that what I will describe is just an example of how you can use mentoring as a tool for staff development. It is not a scientific study and especially the evaluation was not done scientifically. It was just a way for us to find out what the participants thought about their part in the mentoring program.

#### **What?**

Before organising the program I did literature searches, reading up on the subject of mentoring in libraries, and mentoring as a method. I have to say not a lot is written about mentoring in libraries, it seems to be used in Britain, the United States as well as in Australia. I also contacted Ann Ritchie in Australia who sent me some material and gave me plenty of good advice.

Since the library director wanted the staff to get to know each other, and to learn from each other I came up with the idea of an unorthodox “two-way” mentoring process – with everyone taking part as both mentor and mentoree. In our case it didn’t fit with the regular older mentor and younger mentoree because the young had skills the old lacked, i.e. information technology, and the older staff had skills in cataloguing, indexing etc that the younger lacked, and also a unique knowledge about the collections in the library.

### **When?**

The program started in October 2000 with a presentation of the program at a staff meeting where most of the employees were present. Two project co-ordinators were appointed, with me as a kind of mentor for them since it was their first time as project co-ordinators. Their job was to put the pairs together, to support them during the year, and to evaluate the program.

In December 2000 most of the couples got the go-ahead and started their activities. At the end of 2001 the program was evaluated, using a questionnaire.

### **How?**

After the presentation of the concept of mentoring, and of the program, the interested staff had two weeks to decide if they wanted to participate, and to apply to the project co-ordinators. Out of, at that time, 120 staff 28 persons on all levels in the organisation applied to participate in the mentoring program.

In early November we sat down with all interested staff and asked them to do a SWOT-analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of themselves, concentrating on strengths and weaknesses in their professional skills, to determine what they needed and what they could supply in terms of mentor-mentoree. The analyses were only read by the project co-ordinators and myself and were used to pair the participants together.

After this the project co-ordinators sat down to the real hard work – to match the pairs. Much thought was put into finding partners for everyone. We wanted, if possible, the pairs to consist of one “old” and one “new” employee, with each supplying a skill that the other needed. They should not come from the same department.

After the pairs had been put together, using the SWOT-analyses each person was informed about his/her partner, and which weakness they were supposed to help him/her with, and vice versa. Everyone was given the opportunity to say no to a potential partner, which two persons did. New partners were found for them from the list of interested persons. For four persons no partner was found. The project co-ordinators identified possible partners within the organisation that hadn’t applied for the program, contacted them with the suggestion that they participate, and finally found partners for all but two persons. We also had to deal with some late applications from those who needed a little more time to warm to the idea.

After a lot of work from the project co-ordinators, finally 32 persons took part in the program. Not all of them had applied to participate at first, some of them were sought out by the project co-ordinators to meet specific needs from a colleague.

Examples:

Participant	would like to develop skills in
A	inter library loans
B	user education
C	information technology
D	medical databases
E	customer services
F	MeSH
G	webb production
H	indexing articles

etc

The pairs then had one year to work together with the skills/weaknesses they had put down in the SWOT-analysis. The instructions the participants got from the project co-ordinators was that it was up to them what they wanted to do, how often they were to meet and for how long. It was suggested they meet a couple of times to get to know each other and perhaps act as “shadow” in the daily work. Since the pairs were so different in what they wanted and needed it was decided that it would be impossible to make some kind of schedule for all to follow. All meetings were to take place during working hours, unless the participants themselves wanted something else. One suspicion we had was that it would be hard for many of the participants to find the time to meet and work together on their skills, due to the constant heavy and scheduled workload.

All participants were asked to formulate an action plan for their work, and to send it to the project co-ordinators. They were asked to state their individual goal and what kind of activities were to take place to help them achieve this goal. Only seven of the participants actually did this, which made it impossible to use for the evaluation.

The project co-ordinators kept up contact with the pairs during the year to try to aid when problems arose, but on the whole the participants were left to themselves. A few of them contacted the project co-ordinators for advice during the year. A couple of persons left KIB for other jobs and thus did not complete the program.

### **Evaluation**

In the evaluation process of the program we have found both success and failure. But even without an evaluation it has been evident that the program has been successful in increasing contacts between different levels in the organisation, between older and younger staff members and between different departments and branches, which was the most important objectives. It has been an unrivalled way to make everyone feel needed, and to show that we work as a team, where everyone, with their different skills, are essential for us to supply what our customers need.

The program was evaluated by a questionnaire. Out of the 32 participants six did not complete the program. Some of the participants answered together as a pair, some as individuals. Some did not answer all the questions.

The following questions were asked:

- How many times did you and your mentor meet during the program?
- What kind of activities took place (what did you do when you met)?
- Did you increase your knowledge of the things that you gave as your weaknesses in the SWOT-analysis?
- What were your expectations of the program?
- Were they met?
- What has been good with the program?
- What has been not so good/bad?
- Did you miss anything in the planning or organisation of the program? What?
- Do you think mentoring is a good tool for professional development and co-operation?
- If the program is repeated, what do you think should be changed?

The 26 persons that completed the program met approximately four times during the year. Some met only twice while others met as many as eight times.

At the meetings most pairs has discussed their respective tasks, organisational questions, or their working place. They have participated in meetings at their respective departments, or taken part in courses. One or two of the pairs have formulated and completed a project to learn from each other with an end product to show.

When we did the SWOT-analysis each person stated the weaknesses he/she wanted increased knowledge about. The goal was that the mentor should help the mentoree to learn more about this subject. In the evaluation 13 persons (50 %) said that they had increased their knowledge about their weakness. Five (19 %) answered that they had not increased their knowledge on the desired subject, and four (15 %) did not answer the question.

A total of 11 persons (40 %) answered that their expectations of the program were to learn more about KIB, about the other libraries, get to know persons not working in the same department etc. Seven persons (25 %) answered that they wanted to learn (more about) something specific, while three (11 %) had no expectations at all!

When asked if their expectations were met, 12 persons (46 %) says “yes”, no one answers “no”, but four persons (15 %) say “only partly”.

A majority of the participants felt that the positive sides of the program has been the new contacts with persons and department that they hadn't been in daily contact with, the mutual learning, and, not least, the possibility to see your own tasks with new eyes. Some also state that it has been positive to learn new skills and to work together with a project.

The not so good things about the mentoring program have been the lack of time, as anticipated by the project co-ordinators. Some wanted more directions from the project co-ordinators, while others state that it was up to the participants.

When asked if something was lacking in the planning or organisation of the program many again answers lack of time, and more support from the project co-ordinators.

A total of 17 persons (65 %) answers that mentoring can be a very good tool for professional development and co-operation, one more adds that it might be good if the program is continued. Several different things are suggested for change if the program is continued or repeated; some wants to choose their mentor, more directions, perhaps a schedule from the project co-ordinators, more meetings with the project co-ordinators during the work, joint meetings for all participants, not a two-way mentoring program, etc.

This evaluation does not give us any evidence of success, but the questionnaire together with the overall positive impression tells me that the program exceeded all expectations.

### **The future**

Starting in January there will be a new round of the mentoring program, organised more or less the same way. The only planned change is perhaps to state the scope of the program, to tell the participants that it is advisable to meet a specified number of times.

In the questionnaire some participants stated that they wanted to choose their mentor. This will not be changed. I feel that in doing the SWOT-analysis and thus getting facts as a base for finding a mentor was a key to the success. If you choose your own mentor you will pick someone you know, or think is nice, probably not the person who can help you with your stated weakness. And a lot of the less extrovert persons will not be chosen, because they usually don't advertise their skills.

Finally I would like to call on you to use mentoring as a tool for staff development. Do it by the book, or find your own solutions, like we did.