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Desk research on reverse mentoring practice:

MENT TOOLKIT

MENT

2024-1-IT01-KA210-VET-000248591

KA210-VET - Small-scale partnerships in vocational
education and training



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Introduction to the reverse mentoring toolkit: context and objectives

The **MENT** project is a 12-month initiative developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ KA210-VET program, aimed at promoting innovation in vocational education and training within the craftsmanship sector. By introducing reverse mentoring as a key methodology, MENT seeks to facilitate intergenerational exchange, enhance digital skills, and boost the competitiveness of micro and small craft enterprises.

This **Toolkit** is the result of the research activities conducted as part of the MENT project. The research highlighted the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing reverse mentoring in the craft sector.

The toolkit has been developed to address specific needs:

- Provide practical support: Offer clear and customizable tools to design and implement training workshops (Activity A3) and mentoring programs.
- Address identified challenges: Mitigate risks and barriers highlighted by the research, such as generational differences, cultural resistance, and operational limitations.
- Enhance mentoring effectiveness: Ensure that the programs are relevant and tailored to the needs of young workers, senior employees, and entrepreneurs



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What is Reverse Mentoring?

Reverse mentoring is an innovative approach where the traditional roles of mentor and mentee are reversed: a younger or less experienced employee mentors a senior or more experienced colleague. This model aims to foster knowledge and skill sharing between generations, promoting collaboration and creating a supportive and inclusive workplace environment.

Initially designed as a tool for transferring technological knowledge, reverse mentoring has evolved into a versatile and strategic method to address various organizational challenges.

Today, it is used to:

1. Leverage intergenerational competencies
2. Break down traditional hierarchies
3. Build a leadership pipeline
4. Redefine HR strategies

Reverse mentoring is particularly relevant in the era of digitalization, where technological advancements and the integration of people and machines demand specific skills from employees. Older generations use this model to gain technical knowledge, understand current trends, and explore new concepts, while younger generations benefit from the wisdom and experience of senior colleagues. This approach also allows younger employees to develop leadership skills, build strong workplace relationships, and gain a better understanding of their organization's activities (Harvey et al., 2009; Satterly et al., 2018; Meister and Willyerd, 2010).

The characteristics that set reverse mentoring apart from traditional mentoring are:

- Role reversal: A junior employee takes on the role of mentor, while the senior becomes the mentee.
- Two-way knowledge sharing: Both parties learn from each other, creating a balanced and reciprocal relationship.
- Mentor skill development: Younger employees enhance their leadership and communication skills.
- Commitment to mutual support: The focus is on creating an environment of continuous learning and collaboration.



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Reverse mentoring benefits

	Benefits	Description
For Mentee	Leadership development	Young mentors gain leadership and relationship management skills, improving their confidence and professional growth.
	Teaching and communication skills	Mentors learn to explain concepts clearly while improving their communication skills.
	Empowerment and confidence	It increases the perception of being an integral part of the organization, stimulating work involvement.
	Personal satisfaction	Contributing to a senior's growth can be rewarding and reinforce a sense of work accomplishment.
For Mentor	Technology upgrading	Seniors gain digital skills and better understand new technologies and emerging trends.
	Adaptability and openness to change	Contact with new generations helps reduce resistance to change and adapt to new ways of working.

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	Better understanding of the younger generation	Help senior leaders learn more about the expectations and values of Gen Z and Millennials.
	Increased confidence	The mentee develops greater confidence in the younger generation and their skills, reducing resistance to change and improving intergenerational collaboration.
For organization	Improving Organizational Climate	Fosters a collaborative culture based on trust and mutual exchange.
	Promoting an inclusive and collaborative culture	Reduces the generation gap, creating a more harmonious and integrated environment. Reduction of stereotypes between seniors and juniors.
	Innovation and Continuous Learning	facilitates the transfer of digital skills from juniors to seniors and accelerates digital transformation. It also fosters creativity and problem-solving, stimulating innovation through the integration of different perspectives.



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	Increased Efficiency and Productivity	Improves knowledge transmission and reduces the time needed to acquire new skills. Optimizes work dynamics through greater understanding of generational needs. Contributes to more effective management of talent and skills in the company.
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Reverse Mentoring challenges

Challenges	Description
Resistance to change	Senior mentees may initially show reluctance to learn from younger mentees because of generational bias or perceived threat to their authority.
Lack of Mutual Trust	If a relationship based on trust is not built, the mentee may not be willing to take advice, and the mentor may feel underappreciated.
Intergenerational communication gap	Differences in communication style between generations can create misunderstandings and hinder the transfer of skills.
Hierarchical barriers	Rigid organizational structures can limit active participation and effectiveness of reverse mentoring.
Learning	Difficulty in ensuring effective mutual learning between generations with different approaches and backgrounds.



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Implementation of REVERSE MENTORING

The first step in implementing reverse mentoring is to clearly and strategically define goals, which must be aligned with business needs and expected benefits for mentee, mentor and organization. Below, key steps are proposed to guide companies in implementing reverse mentoring.

1. Program Planning

Define the **specific objectives** of reverse mentoring in the company.

Below are some possible strategic goals of reverse mentoring:

- Digital skills development: support seniors in acquiring new technological skills to cope with digital transformation and to improve business management.
- Improving intergenerational collaboration: creating a more inclusive work environment by reducing the generation gap and promoting dialogue between juniors and seniors.
- Promoting inclusive leadership: helping senior managers develop a more open and innovative approach to managing teams.
- Retention of young talent: engaging junior employees, providing them with opportunities for growth and visibility within the organization.
- Innovation and problem-solving: stimulating creativity through the cross-fertilization of ideas between generations with different experiences and perspectives.
- Improved retention and engagement: increase employees' sense of belonging and motivation, reducing turnover.
- Transfer of tacit knowledge and key skills: ensuring that corporate know-how is shared among different generations, preventing the loss of strategic knowledge.

Outputs of the Planning Phase

After this phase, the enterprise will have:

- A set of clear objectives that reflect the challenges and opportunities of reverse mentoring in the craft context.
- A strategic framework for evaluating the impact of the program in terms of learning, innovation and business growth.
- A solid basis for structuring the matching between mentor and mentee, ensuring that each pair works on focused and concrete goals.



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2. Selection and Matching

The selection of participants should be based on well-defined criteria, taking into account factors such as professional development needs, technological expertise, and openness to change. Once the participants are identified, the matching process should focus on aligning mentors and mentees according to their complementary skills, professional goals, and mutual expectations. To ensure a successful mentoring relationship, it is essential to facilitate an initial dialogue where both parties can clarify their roles, define their objectives, and establish shared expectations for the program.

Outputs of the Matching Phase

After this phase, the enterprise will have:

- A structured and well-balanced mentor-mentee pairing based on criteria such as skills complementarity, development needs, and openness to learning.
- Clear role definitions and expectations for both mentors and mentees, ensuring alignment on objectives and responsibilities.
- A commitment from both parties, ensuring that mentors and mentees actively engage in the process and recognize the mutual benefits of knowledge exchange.

3. Training and Support

Training should focus on two key aspects: understanding reverse mentoring and developing the skills needed to run sessions.

To ensure the success of reverse mentoring, it is essential to provide an initial training phase that prepares junior mentors.

Providing clear guidelines helps structure the meetings, facilitating an effective exchange between youth innovation and senior experience.

To support participants throughout the journey, it is useful to establish a support system with coaches or facilitators who can provide assistance when difficulties arise, monitor progress, and collect feedback. Creating moments of comparison and evaluation allows the program to be optimized over time, ensuring its long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Outputs of the Training and Support Phase

After this phase, the mentor and mentee will have:

- Necessary skills to guide sessions effectively.
- Clear and accessible guidelines to help participants navigate their roles, structure their meetings, and foster productive interactions.



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- An active support system, including coaches or facilitators, to provide ongoing assistance, resolve challenges, and ensure the program runs smoothly.

4. Structuring of Reverse Mentoring Sessions

It is essential to establish a structured yet adaptable framework for the sessions. A well-defined schedule provides consistency, while flexibility allows adjustments based on participants' progress and evolving needs.

Regular meetings help maintain continuity and ensure steady progress.

Each session should follow a clear format, starting with a review of previous discussions, followed by an in-depth exploration of key topics, and concluding with the definition of actionable steps to be taken before the next meeting.

Encouraging open dialogue and active participation fosters an interactive exchange where both mentor and mentee can share experiences and collaboratively address challenges. Sessions should be flexible enough to allow adjustments in frequency and content based on the progress made and any emerging priorities.

It is necessary to regularly collect feedback from participants, allowing for the identification and resolution of any challenges that may arise during the reverse mentoring process.

Using evaluation tools such as surveys or follow-up meetings helps track progress and assess whether the initial objectives are being met. Ongoing support through facilitators or coaches can assist both mentors and mentees in overcoming difficulties and staying motivated throughout the program.

Output of the structure of Structuring of Reverse Mentoring Sessions Phase

At the end of this phase, the program will have:

- Reverse Mentoring sessions structured around concrete learning objectives.
- A balance of consistency and adaptability to meet individual needs.
- Active engagement and knowledge exchange between mentor and mentee.
- A monitoring system to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with goals.

5. Evaluation and Sustainability

The last phase of the reverse mentoring program should focus on evaluating its impact and ensuring its long-term sustainability within the organization.

It is essential to monitor the impact of the program, assessing organizational changes and the effective transfer of knowledge between generations.



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Gathering qualitative and quantitative data through tools such as surveys and focus groups allows for measuring participant engagement, skill improvement and perceived value of the initiative, as well as analyzing the influence of reverse mentoring on business dynamics.

These data provide the basis for ensuring that reverse mentoring is permanently integrated into corporate learning and development strategies, preventing it from remaining an isolated initiative. Analysis of the results also allows incentives for the creation of internal mentoring networks, where ex-mentees can take on the role of mentors, promoting a continuous cycle of intergenerational learning and growth.

Output Evaluation and Sustainability Phase

- A sustainable mentoring model that continues to generate value over time.
- A structured, evidence-based approach to monitoring and improving the program.
- A continuous cycle of learning in which new generations of mentors and mentees will



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Checklist

Before meetings:

- ❖ Define mentoring goals.

Establishing clear goals allows you to align mentoring with goals of professional growth, business development and mutual learning.

- ❖ Select balanced mentor-mentee pairs.

A good match directly affects the effectiveness of mentoring, maximizing learning and reducing the risk of lack of harmony between the parties.

Selection criteria: Alignment between mentor experience and mentee expectations.

Consideration of generational and cultural compatibility

- ❖ Hold an introductory session to clarify expectations and rules.

A clear introduction avoids misunderstandings and helps build an environment of trust and collaboration.

During meetings:

- ❖ Create an environment of trust and open dialogue.

A trusting environment is critical to successful reverse mentoring, as it increases knowledge sharing and engagement.

Practical strategies for building trust: Active listening and structured feedback (mentors should practice open-ended questions and provide constructive feedback).

Psychological safety (ensuring that the mentee feels free to express themselves without judgement).

- ❖ Encourage sharing of experiences and knowledge.

Reverse Mentoring is not just theoretical training, but also sharing experiences and practical knowledge.

Types of knowledge transferred: Hard Skills (technical and operational skills related to the reference sector). Soft Skills (leadership, communication, problem-solving).

Digital Skills (knowledge of new technologies and innovation). Corporate culture and values

- ❖ Monitor participants' level of involvement and satisfaction.

A good reverse mentoring program needs to be continually evaluated and improved.

Evaluation tools: Post-session survey to collect immediate feedback.

After the meetings:

- ❖ Collect feedback and evaluate progress.



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Feedback allows us to improve mentoring, adapting it to the needs of participants and increasing its organizational impact.

Feedback collection methods: Post-session survey; Individual interviews or focus groups

- ❖ Make improvements based on the results obtained.

A good reverse mentoring program constantly evolves to remain effective and meet business and individual needs.

- ❖ Promote program continuity and involvement of new participants.

To prevent mentoring from being an isolated initiative, it must be made an integral part of the company culture.

Reverse mentoring thus represents a win-win model, in which both junior mentors and senior mentees benefit significantly in terms of growth, learning and integration into the organizational context.



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