



Conceptual Article

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Designing and Developing an 'E-mentoring Tool Kit' to Enhance Business Aptitude

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ABSTRACT

Three decades after the launch of the World Wide Web (www), the role of the internet has undergone a complete transformation. Today, the internet is a pervasive network available 24x7 and utilized by millions of people worldwide. Apart from facilitating connectivity between individuals, the internet has emerged as a platform for one-to-many communication. One area where this has seen significant growth is in the field of education, leading to the emergence of online education that transcends geographical boundaries and cultural barriers. One such development is the concept of 'e-mentoring,' (Electronic Mentoring) which creates a link between experienced mentors and less skilled mentees. While e-mentoring is increasing for business aptitude and entrepreneurial learning, there is still a lack of fully developed programs with comprehensive modules and outcomes.

This paper proposes an online business module to initiate the development of an e-mentoring program. The module aims to provide valuable business development information to both mentors and mentees. It can serve as an alternative to traditional face-to-face programs or be implemented entirely online or via email. Successful programming of e-mentoring can enable matching mentors and protégés based on shared interests and business aptitude.

INTRODUCTION

Three decades after the launch of the World Wide Web, the role of the internet has undergone a complete transformation. Today, the internet is a pervasive network available 24x7 and utilized by millions of people worldwide. Apart from facilitating connectivity between individuals, the internet has emerged as a platform for one-to-many communication. One area where this has seen significant growth is in the field of education, leading to the emergence of online education that transcends geographical boundaries and cultural barriers. One such development is the concept of 'e-mentoring,' which creates a link between experienced mentors and less skilled mentees. While e-mentoring is increasing for business aptitude and entrepreneurial learning, there is still a lack

of fully developed programs with comprehensive modules and outcomes.

E-mentoring, utilizing the internet (Knouse, 2001), offers freedom from time and place constraints (Akin & Hilbun, 2007), making it suitable for individuals with busy schedules or located at a distance from each other (Homitz & Berge, 2008). It provides options to overcome barriers using email and listservers (Knouse, 2001). Terms associated with e-mentoring in its early stages included computer-mediated mentoring (Cascio & Gasker, 2001), tele-mentoring (Christina S., 1995), e-mail or online mentoring (O'Neill, 1996), and the latest being 'virtual mentoring' (Knouse, 2001). While these terms are recognized in terms of their usage, benefits, and outcomes, there is a need for evaluation of mentoring or e-mentoring

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(Perren, 2003) specifically for entrepreneurs to ascertain its influence. E-mentoring can be an exclusive vehicle (Digital Heroes Campaign, 2001) for mentors to support new-start entrepreneurs through their experience and assistance in overcoming problems.

The main objective of this paper is to design and develop an entrepreneurial learning module to enhance and support the development of business aptitude. This module will be beneficial for both mentors and mentees, facilitating the delivery and reception of business development-related information. It can be implemented as an alternative to traditional face-to-face, fully web-based, or email-based programs. Successful programming of e-mentoring can enable matching protégés and mentors with similar interests and business aptitude. The module, named the 'e-mentoring toolkit,' aids in the effective application of e-mentoring.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop appropriate content that supports the growth of business aptitude in protégés.
- To design a model of business aptitude development called the 'e-mentoring toolkit.'
- To identify a methodology to study the effectiveness of the e-mentoring program.

E-Mentoring Toolkit

To initiate an e-mentoring program, the following guidelines are suggested:

- Developing the philosophy of a specific e-mentoring program.
- Setting specific goals and objectives.
- Deciding on the size and duration of the program.
- Targeting specific groups.
- Designing a technology implementation plan.
- Recruiting volunteers and determining their roles in administering the program.
- Developing a blueprint of the e-mentoring program.
- Preparing mentee-mentor conversation guidelines.
- Delivering and evaluating the program.

Developing the philosophy of a specific e-mentoring program

The philosophy of e-mentoring should aim to offer a positive and dedicated program that empowers the program's beneficiaries. This philosophy should be reflected in:

- The aims and objectives of the program.
- The program's delivery.
- The orientation and training provided.
- The mentor-mentee relationship.

Setting specific goals and objectives: The success of any e-mentoring program relies on its well-defined aims and objectives. Focused objectives will support the creation of program curricula, activities, and guidelines. The primary

goal should be to encourage young people to explore their potential and make informed decisions about their future. "Mentoring functions deal with job-related activities: coaching, providing guidance in career direction, training, and providing feedback on performance" (Knouse, 2001).

The focus of any e-mentoring program should accomplish the following

- Career counseling.
- Improvement in academic performance.
- Enhancement of potential.
- Assistance in addressing social problems.

Deciding on the size and duration of the program

Before determining the size and duration of a program, it is advisable to explore existing e-mentoring programs. "Most successful mentoring programs are long-term and comprehensive" (Digital Heroes Campaign, 2001). The availability of mentors will also influence the number of participants (mentees). The duration of a new program will depend on its objectives and the number of activities and interactions involved between mentors and mentees.

Targeting specific groups

The selection of target groups (mentees) depends on several factors critical to the successful implementation of an e-mentoring program. However, the following points can be considered before selecting the group:

- The subject for which mentoring is needed.
- The socioeconomic conditions of the mentees.
- The availability of mentors.
- The availability of internet connectivity for mentors and mentees.
- The expected outcomes of mentoring.
- The nature and scope of program implementation by mentees.

Designing a technology implementation plan

Technology has an impact on both mentors and protégés through its interaction with individual factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, and personality (Hamilton & Scandura, 2003). The following methods are suggested for the delivery of online mentoring programs:

- Web-based programs.
- Email-based programs.
- Integrating e-mentoring into face-to-face programs.
- Stand-alone programs.

Recruiting Volunteers

To establish an effectively functioning program, it is important to appoint trained program coordinators, interested mentors, and motivated young people seeking knowledge.

- Appointing trained program coordinators and defining their roles in administering the program will ensure support throughout its duration.

- Individuals interested in becoming mentors may not be aware of their mentoring skills through the internet, so program coordinators can provide training.
- Mentees who are interested need to be identified and trained technically and academically to derive the full benefit of the online mentoring program.

Developing a blueprint of the e-mentoring program

A final blueprint can be developed after securing appropriate volunteers and deciding on the program's delivery method. Key decisions should cover:

- Duration of the program.
- Objectives of the program.
- Understanding and expectations of the volunteers.
- Confirmation of available technology.
- Training of mentors and mentees.
- Publicity and promotion of the e-mentoring program after finalizing the blueprint.

Table 1: E-MENTORING TOOL KIT SCHEDULE

S.No.	TASK	DURATION	OUTCOME
1.	Prepare an action plan Complete R&D Recruit program coordinators Select technology for delivery	4 Weeks	Blueprint of the program will be designed
2.	Training session for Program Coordinators	6 Weeks	Trained professional coordinators
3.	Identify and create mentor's profile	6 Weeks	Mentors will be enrolled to deliver the program
4.	Identify and create mentee's profile	6 Weeks	Interested participants will be identified
5.	Decide and develop business module syllabus	4 Weeks	Syllabus will meet the Industry standards
6.	Run a pilot program	6 Weeks	Effective creation of program
7.	Matching of mentor-mentee	2 Week	Right-Matches will be created
8.	Announce the rules and regulations to both mentor-mentee	2 Week	Strengthen the communication channel
9.	Program Launch	Deciding DAY	--
10.	Follow-up by Program Coordinator	16 Weeks	Mid-point assessment
11.	Post-Program Analyses and Evaluation	2 Weeks	Find the Role of E-mentoring

Table 2: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1.	Program Coordinator	Screening Recruitment of Mentor and Mentee Matching of Mentor-Mentee Mid-program coordination Mid-program evaluation
2.	Mentor	Enthusiasm to deliver knowledge Accessible Meet the timeline and work under the timeframe Techno-savvy
3.	Mentee	Keen learner Disciplined and Determined Techno-savvy

Preparing Mentee-Mentor interaction guidelines

Based on the chosen technology for the program, email-based, web-based, or stand-alone, the contact pattern between mentors and mentees needs to be determined.

Delivering and evaluating the program: After successfully launching the program, assigning responsibilities to coordinators who will oversee the interaction patterns is crucial. Program coordinators and mentors should adhere to the program's evaluation guidelines.

EVALUATION METHOD

The post-program evaluation can be conducted using an ex-post condition and a quasi-experimental research design. The evaluation can utilize research methods such as case studies involving mentors, mentees, and program coordinators.

The focus group method can also be applied for post-program evaluation involving mentees.

Panel studies are also suggested as a good research methodology for conducting program evaluations with mentors.

For a long-term understanding of post-program evaluation, longitudinal studies can be conducted to assess the benefits of e-mentoring over extended periods of time.

The Future of E-Mentoring

E-mentoring is widely accepted worldwide, with various individuals (mentors) involved in the online or virtual delivery of knowledge. If implemented appropriately, the program can enhance the skills and potential of young people. It can serve as an alternative learning method without geographical boundaries hindering the learning process. E-mentoring can be a valuable tool as it transcends cultural differences. Online mentoring can also empower physically challenged individuals to acquire skills that improve their lives.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest: No funds were received for the aforementioned research work. Research involving human participants and/or animals:

No human or animal participation was involved in the research work.

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