

FEM MENTORING MANUAL GUIDELINES

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0. Foreword

The FEM Mentoring Manual Guidelines is based on women entrepreneurs' mentoring experiences in 7 countries during the Interreg IIIB FEM –project in 2004-7. It is based on experiences in both group and pair mentoring. The Guidelines has been prepared in cooperation with the leaders and coordinators of the FEM mentoring in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden. Work-package leader Leena Heiskala from Finland has mainly been responsible for the guidelines.

The idea of this Mentoring Manual Guidelines is to spread the experiences in mentoring during the FEM and to help others considering mentoring. The manual gives support and concrete advice to those who plan and are running mentoring projects, especially the coordinators involved in practical mentoring. This is not an exhaustive presentation which gives an answer to every question but it provides a selection of issues that are important in the mentoring process. In some cases it may give an answer, in others it will only wake the reader to think.

However, it is important to remember that in mentoring there is not only one right way to do it but a variety of them and every mentoring relationship and project is special and will realize something new and useful.

The Mentoring Manual Guidelines is free to be used and we hope it will help others to start and run successfully mentoring among women micro entrepreneurs.

1. What is mentoring?

1.1. Mentoring in general

Mentoring is a method that has been used for a very long time. The term mentoring originates from Greek mythology. Before Ulysses started his journey he asked his friend Mentor to guide and help his son while he is away.

In mentoring there is an exchange of knowledge and experiences between the younger, less experienced person and the older, more experienced one. It is carried out through discussions and it is important not just to transfer thoughts and ideas but to make the partner, in most cases both partners think, react and understand her/his own way to live and work. The goal is both personal and professional development.

There is a group of methods which all have a very similar goal – to help persons use her/his capacities more fully, especially in working life and thus to contribute in getting a better life. The most widely used methods aiming at the same goals are mentoring, coaching, sparring and work guidance.

Classical mentoring is carried out in pairs. Most often it has been used in big organisations the way that an older person has taken the younger one under

her/his wings and slowly introduced her/him during regular meetings into the company's traditions and ways to work.

Mentoring is not a new phenomenon in business life. There has been a lot of mentoring projects in different areas of working life. However, only in recent years mentoring has been used among small and micro entrepreneurs. One of the mentoring project developers is the Women's Enterprise Agency in Helsinki. There they have developed models for women entrepreneurs in both pair and group mentoring. The mentoring processes applied in the FEM are very much based on the models developed by the Women's Enterprise Agency.

1.2. Mentoring in the FEM

The goal of the FEM mentoring projects is to support and strengthen business readiness and abilities as well as to create functioning small business networks between women entrepreneurs.

Both pair and group mentoring for micro entrepreneur women have been implemented in the FEM project. The emphasis is to use group mentoring widely. The Finnish group mentoring has been used as a basic model and new models are getting developed.

Group mentoring has a main role in the FEM because

- it is not always easy to find the right mentor for each mentee, especially in rural areas and
- all members of the group learn to act as mentors with each other, they learn to value their own capabilities as well as to respect the others
- it is a way to learn networking in practise
- working in a group is a special challenge for the transition countries: in order to work in networks, the micro entrepreneurs need to trust each other; creating confidence is an important part of group mentoring.

Implementation of the mentoring projects in the FEM countries vary and many countries have both group and pair mentoring. They are all well planned, guided and supervised, often by regional coordinators who are responsible for the overall organisation and implementation.

1.3. Mentoring concepts

The most usual terms in connection with mentoring are:

- **mentoring** - transaction and transfer of experiences and knowledge gained in practise
- **mentor** – more experienced, often an older person, who offers her/his experiences to the mentee/mentees
- **facilitator** – in mentoring connection, the mentor of a mentoring group
- **mentee/actor/adept** - less experienced, often a younger person, who is interested and willing to develop her/himself

- **coordinator** – a process leader in the mentoring process who has the whole project in her/his hands

Concepts close to mentoring:

- **coaching and coach** – a certain methodology in personal growth and development and a person active in coaching

- **tutoring and tutor** – in universities and other educational institutions new students are guided to their studies by older students, tutors

- **adviser** – a specialist, like a business adviser who offers services in business life

- **consultant** – a specialist who offers and charges for her/his services

- **business godmother/godfather** – a person experienced in business life who probably is retired but wishes to give her/his expertise to the use of younger people

Basic qualifications of a mentor

In order to be successful in micro entrepreneur mentoring, the mentor has to be an experienced entrepreneur. It is also important that

- she/he is genuinely interested in other entrepreneurs and in helping them
- she/he is a good listener and interviewer
- she/he is ready to give her/his time, experiences and network
- she/he even understands how rewarding it can be with new ideas and contacts for her/his own business as well.

The Mentor is a role model with big responsibility.

1.4. Principles of entrepreneur mentoring

Mentoring is a real **win-win activity**. Both mentors and mentees gain from it. It is a deeply human relationship in which partners learn to respect and appreciate each other.

Starting point for being a mentor is a genuine **interest** in other persons, belief that it is possible to transfer one's own experiences and that it is also possible to educate a grown-up person. The same applies for the mentee.

The mentor works voluntarily, **is not paid** for her/his work. The nature of mentor's work gets changed if it is paid for. It easily gets closer to the work of a professional adviser or consultant and that is not the purpose of mentoring. In mentoring the mentor brings her/his own experiences in entrepreneurship to light and guides the mentees to use the expertise of advisers and consultants.

Confidentiality is a very important element in business life and so also in mentoring. The issues discussed in pairs or in groups shall not be spread outside this circle. There is a written agreement between the mentor and the

mentee/mentees stating that both partners will keep the issues they have learned in the mentoring process to themselves and will not discuss them elsewhere.

2. Mentoring models

Mentoring models in the FEM are pair and group mentoring. It depends on the needs, demands and qualifications of the potential participants as well as on the entrepreneurial environment and attitudes to entrepreneurship which one they will choose. There are often prejudices against cooperation with entrepreneurs. The best way to dissolve these prejudices is to give information of successful mentoring projects and ask the experienced mentors and mentees to tell about her/his experiences.

2.1. Pair mentoring

The traditional way of mentoring is pair mentoring. There are two persons involved, the mentor and the mentee/actor. They are equal.

The mentees are chosen first. The justification for her participation is that she wants to develop her business and is ready to put her time and effort on it. The mentor will be chosen very much according to the wishes of the mentee. Often her wishes concern the branch and special experiences in business life. However, it is good to have a look at the personalities, as well. The working “chemistry” between the two has proved to be very important.

In pair mentoring both the mentee and mentor are “protected”: there are only the two of them. It is easier for the mentee to tell one person, the mentor about her problems than to several persons. However, there are a lot of expectations, maybe demands on both partners. The coordinator’s support as well as training are be of big help.

Benefits of pair mentoring:

- close and safe relationship between two persons
- concentration on one mentee’s problems
- work can be very effective
- possibility to be flexible, only two persons agreeing on meeting times, themes to be discussed, goals etc.

Limits of pair mentoring:

- limited amount of views, opinions and visions
- depends very much on the relationship, chemistry between the two persons
- difficulties in finding the right mentor

For whom is pair mentoring the right decision? Even all experienced entrepreneurs are not always ready to discuss their businesses with other people. Especially entrepreneurs at the very beginning, who may be a bit shy will gain from pair mentoring as do also those who know exactly what they want.

2.2. Group mentoring

In group mentoring there is a group, usually 4-6 mentees and a mentor. The mentees will be chosen first and then according to their wishes, the mentor.

In group mentoring the role of both the mentor and mentees is different compared to pair mentoring. The mentor is guiding and facilitating the group more to the chosen direction and the mentees act like mentors towards each other. The main role in the group lies with the mentees.

To participate in group mentoring may be regarded in many ways more demanding than participating in pair mentoring. The mentees need to believe in themselves and their businesses and to have the courage to share their experiences with others, even though they would be in the same situation. However, it soon proves to be very rewarding, too. The mentees get several opinions, suggestions and advice from their fellow mentees who work in the same society and know the business environment inside out.

Benefits of group mentoring

- activating and building of self-confidence for the mentees; they realise how much they know and can help the others
- all participants get new experiences and make contacts with many persons instead of only one: they also learn practical networking and cooperation
- the group will become a team when everybody in the group has enough confidence in herself and will contribute by giving credit to the other participants, their capabilities and achievements
- responsibility to give support to the group.

Limits of group mentoring

- a mentor may not be as good together with the whole group
- the composition of the group can be restricting for the exchange of views: there is not any common factor
- lack of commitment: all mentees are not eager enough and do not participate regularly.

For whom is group mentoring the right decision?

The potential participants are also interested in developing their businesses through networking and practical cooperation. They are open minded and ready to receive new viewpoints as well as to discuss their own businesses and exchange experiences within the group.

Our experiences

In the FEM project, pair mentoring has been more successful in countries with shorter business traditions. Whereas, in those countries with longer business traditions they have succeeded with group mentoring far beyond their expectations. However, in Estonia group mentoring has been a success as well as in Southern Sweden.

In really small companies, micro enterprises, there is no tradition of calling in experts or external board members who can be relied on to help with the process of decision making.

Group mentoring gives people who run their own businesses a network of other business owners to support them in their company development.

2.3. **Other Working Methods in Mentoring**

In group mentoring the number of mentors is usually **one**. However, there is no reason why there could not **be two** of them. In South Ostrobotnia they have good experiences of having two mentors in a group.

In both pair and group mentoring the mentors can also change the pair or group: act as **rotating mentors**. It has been practised successfully in Estonia.

There is also **social mentoring** in which unemployed persons are assisted by persons who have been in a similar situation before.

In Finland during the recent years, mentoring has been used also in **situations like change of generation or in helping recently graduated** to find her/his own direction in business life.

We in the FEM are working with micro entrepreneur mentoring. There are a lot of various groups in society with specialised mentoring. For instance the retired entrepreneurs can act as mentors or god-fathers/mothers for entrepreneurs who will buy/have bought their own company, in change of generation etc.

3. **Mentoring process**

Mentoring process should always be a carefully planned, guided and followed, a project with a start and an end. It is a defined period of time from 1 to 2 years.

The phases of the process are

1. Need of identification and publicity
2. Planning of the process and organising finances
3. Selecting the coordinator, her/his training and tasks
4. Selecting and training the mentees
5. Matching
6. Kick off
7. Training of the mentors
8. Mentoring in practise; first meeting and trainings
9. Kick out
10. Follow-up, reporting and evaluation

During the course of working with this project a number of tools for carrying out group mentoring programmes have been developed in Sweden:

- Information material in the form of a letter of invitation and Power Point presentations
- Basic aids for recruitment in the form of strategies for group composition regarding type of business and sector, expectations and “learning styles”
- Information material and workshop material for the “Launch” of the project
- A confidentiality agreement
- A template for the mentees’ development plans
- Templates for the mentees’ note-taking
- A model for group note-taking
- Visual representation of results in the form of a Power Point presentation for the concluding meeting
- A way of publishing the results on the Internet

3.1. Need of identification and publicity

In order to start and run a well functioning mentoring process, there should be a well identified need and a demand for it behind. Who would need and profit from mentoring? With a clear picture of the need, it is also easier to get the project financed.

The micro entrepreneurs are not used to making use of business specialists, consultants and extern members of the board who could be considered to take over the decisions in the company. Mentoring can be a concrete way towards creating opportunities for business development.

You need knowledge of the others’ experiences when giving information to the potential participants or trying to convince the financiers. The realistic, down-to-earth examples are the best ones in facilitating the possibilities of mentoring for small and micro entrepreneurs. There is a lot of literature about mentoring and on the web you may find a huge variety of information.

It is very important to give information to the community, region, municipality or town about what mentoring is and for whom it is meant, especially at the planning and starting phases as well as in the course of the mentoring process.

Our experiences

In Skåne in Southern Sweden, they used the Regional Resource Centre newsletter as well as an e-mail list of the local resource centre organisations in spreading the information about the mentoring project plans.

3.2. Planning the process and finances

In the implementation plan, the process will be described and scheduled, roles of the participants explained and the need of money justified. The targets, how the activities will help women entrepreneurs to succeed should be clear and easy to understand.

When planning the mentoring process it is important to know the demands as well as the available resources. Experiences from other projects are always valuable, not least when convincing the potential financiers.

The mentoring project can be financed locally, by the municipality or e.g. an entrepreneur organisation, regionally, nationally or by the EU. Finances are often divided between several partners or stakeholders.

Mentoring can also be a rewarding part of a bigger, more versatile entrepreneur project.

Often the participants, mentees have to pay a small amount. The mentors do not get paid for their work and neither do they need to pay. However, a compensation of travel costs is paid for both mentees and mentors whenever there are long distances, often in rural areas.

Our experiences

In Finland, in the regions with long distances both the mentees and mentors have had their travel costs payed

Exception proves the rule also in this case: in Sweden the mentors have been paid for their work.

3.3. Selecting the coordinator, her/his training and support

The coordinator of the mentoring project has the strings in her hands. She is a person familiar with entrepreneurship and business. She is good at organising things, gets along with different kinds of people and can cope with various situations. She needs the trust of the organiser, financier and the participants.

The experience of her being an entrepreneur makes her more credible and she feels more secure among other entrepreneurs. Knowledge of project work and at least the basics of creating groups would be of great help for the coordinator.

If the coordinator has not been working with mentoring projects before, she should be especially trained for the job in order to familiarize what mentoring is about, principles of mentoring and starting a project as well as experiences from other projects.

Coordinator's support

Along with the mentoring process the mentees and mentors will have the coordinator's support. In practise it means that they may contact the coordinator and ask her to explain something, whatsoever that has not become clear in the introductory training. It is good to contact her if there is a problem with the meetings, some participants or just changes in personal life that may affect the plans.

The coordinator follows that the project is running according to plans. She is the person responsible for the every-day work of the mentoring project from the beginning to the end.

3.4. **Selecting and training the mentees**

The mentees to-be will go through a selection process. It is possible to use special methods and it is always important to interview all the potential participants.

When selecting the mentees/actors/adapts it is important to find out:

- that the applicant is serious about her business
- that she is ready to commit herself to the activities; in practise it means that she will arrange **enough time** for the meetings and trainings
- that she is experienced enough to gain from mentoring; it is recommended to have from 1 to 3 years experience in business before mentoring
- if there are persons who do not have their own enterprises yet, it would be worth considering that they have a group of their own; they would learn a lot when developing their business ideas together with more experienced entrepreneurs
- **General rule:** it is important that the enterprise is the main source of income for the mentees and that all participants have the same starting point – a business of their own.

Training the mentees

The mentees will have introductory training in the mentoring process. This will help them understand the meaning and the various and deep going possibilities of mentoring as well as how it differs from e.g. advising. It also supports her/the group to identify the needs for a mentor and to set her own and the group's goal for mentoring.

The training of human interaction, ethics and how to develop the abilities to understand different personalities are good subjects and can be included both in the introductory training and the training performed in the course of the mentoring process.

There is a difference in acting as a mentor or as a consultant. This should be made clear for the mentees. They should not expect consultation from their mentor.

3.5. **Matching**

Matching is a process which will facilitate and ensure the successful mentoring, that the best possible combinations are selected to both the pairs and groups and they are helped to start to work. It is a very important part of the mentoring process.

In matching

- in pair mentoring the right, best possible mentor will be chosen for the mentee and
- in group mentoring, the mentees are put into different groups, the combinations are made so that the groups can be expected to work and cooperate well together and
- the mentors are chosen for the groups according to the wishes of the groups.

The matching process takes some time and it is recommendable to use a specialist to ensure the best possible results. For using a specialist there are a lot of methods though.

At its best both mentors and mentees will find synergy between their businesses and they all get new experiences and contacts out of the exchange of thoughts and views with each other.

The wishes of the mentee are decisive when selecting the mentor in pair mentoring. She may wish to have a mentor who comes from the same branch of business, is not younger than the mentee or is especially experienced e.g. in marketing or has several employees. Testing the characters' compatibility can be used but very often when the partners meet, they can tell immediately if it is going to work or not.

Matching has two steps in group mentoring. At first the group will be put together and then the members will be chosen, the mentees will discuss with each other what kind of a mentor/facilitator they wish to have and then the mentor will be chosen according to their wishes.

Testing the characters compatibility can be used to find the best combination for the group. Different methods can be used in the testing here as well. It has proved essential that there are different kinds of characters in the group so that they will make an active group, get well along with each other and keep up the group spirit.

Business branches of the members in the group may vary; they may have businesses close to each other's branches or totally different ones. It is important that there is some kind of a link or a joint interest combining them. The link can be an interest in marketing, to find customers in concrete, to find solutions for financial questions or product development.

The grouping starts at this phase and will continue all over the mentoring process. There are a lot of methods to facilitate group building and it is useful to make use of the trainings as well.

Our way of matching

In Kainuu in Northern Finland, we have had good learning experiences of having potential but not yet entrepreneurs and some experienced ones in the

same group. In Sweden the experience of having a “part-time” entrepreneur in the group was not so rewarding.

3.6. Kick-off

The first get-together is an event for all participants in the mentoring process. It is also a celebration on behalf of the important decision they have all made.

The program may include introductions and discussions such as:

- presentation of the participants
- information about mentoring in general and the respective project,
- roles of the mentees and mentors,
- setting of common goals,
- something concerning entrepreneurship.

3.7. Training of mentors

The mentors will get an introduction to the respective mentoring project. In it they will learn why the project has started, what the goals are and the general principles of working in the project. Part of this has naturally been explained to them already before they promised to join in, but it is good to repeat it.

Special emphasis will be put on the role of a mentor. The roles in pair and group mentoring are different. However, in both of them the role of a mentor has to be kept apart from the role of an adviser or consultant and the mentor herself has to understand the difference.

It is highly recommended to use development tools in group work, especially trainings that will help strengthen the professional skills in mentoring and human relationships. The combination of clearly business training and human relationship training has often been functioning very well. The experiences from other mentoring projects presented by their mentors can be very informative.

In the course of mentoring it is also good to have some meetings only with the mentors. They can exchange experiences and learn a lot from each other.

3.8. Mentoring in practise; first meeting and trainings

The mentoring pairs and groups usually meet once a month. They can also meet more often, especially at the beginning. However, it is important that there is enough time in between the meetings in order to have enough time for digesting the discussed issues. In a relaxed atmosphere they will all eagerly wait for the next meeting.

There is the timetable for the meetings of both pairs and groups as well as for other events, training and networking. The meeting usually takes 2-3 hours. The agenda of the meeting is decided in advance and minutes will be kept. The meetings have specified themes and it is important that all participants are prepared for them.

It has proved to be good to start the meetings with a chat drinking coffee or other refreshments. It is easier to start on the agreed issues in a relaxed atmosphere.

First meeting

At the first meeting the mentees and the mentor will introduce themselves, tell the others about themselves and what they expect to get from mentoring. It is important to get to know each other and to repeat it once more, even though they probably have met before.

They agree on the way to work, the methods, structure and themes of the meetings: where the meetings will be held, how they will keep contact between the meetings and everything that is important for their work. They will also set a preliminary timetable for the meetings.

The mentoring agreement will be signed by both mentors and mentees. It includes the above mentioned issues of the mentoring process: working principles, the period of mentoring as well as the confidentiality.

Confidence is a very important: the issues handled at the meetings are confidential and they shall be kept in secret both during and after the process.

The pair mentoring agreement includes at least: - names of the mentee and mentor, - period of the mentoring relationship, - general goal of the activities, - the working idea: the mentor will support the mentee to develop her business and they both will commit themselves to achieve the goals that have been set in the beginning, - meeting principle: - once a month, maybe time for ..., - how to keep contact in between, - open and confidential interaction, - confidentiality: - what it means in practise, - the mentor is not paid for the work, possible costs during the meetings will be agree on, - the process will be followed monthly and at the mentor meetings. It is also good to mention that the given advice in during the mentoring process is not instructional but the responsibility lies with the one who will put it into use.

In principle the group mentoring agreement includes the same issues. It is signed by all mentees and the mentor.

They **will set their personal goals** for mentoring and as a basis they agree on their common, **group goals**. When setting the goals it is important to keep in mind the short period of mentoring time and be realistic about what is possible to achieve. It is wise to write the goals on paper and sign it. There will also be an evaluation of the starting level (number) and the goal.

In Finland it has proved to be important and also fun to invent a name for the group. It is a sign of creating a common intention and a team spirit for the group.

Trainings

In the introductory training all participants are trained separately, the mentees and the mentors. In this way they will understand and adopt the process, its possibilities and responsibilities. Commitment to the activities will get strengthened and building of a network will get started.

Training will be organised during the mentoring process for everybody and separately for the mentees and mentors. It is important for many reasons. Entrepreneurs always have to keep themselves up-to-date. An entrepreneur can always get better in the basic everyday issues of running a business. There may be changes concerning taxation, bookkeeping, social responsibilities, etc. It is also important to learn to understand and have knowledge more widely of the economic situation and trends in the market. All events are important opportunities to build networks.

There will be training concerning different areas of entrepreneurship and business management but also other areas of life and not least in the issues concerning women. Entrepreneurship is the main issue and the focus has to be on developing professional skills. Marketing, financial and legal issues, product development and price setting are always important issues as well.

3.9. Kick-out

Kick-out is an event, maybe a seminar where the mentoring participants meet, look back, discuss and evaluate their experiences as well as celebrate their time together and everything they have gained from mentoring.

3.10. Follow-up, reporting and evaluation

The follow-up will be planned already at the planning phase. The follow-up will be carried out, at least when the project is halfway through, maybe even after every meeting. It is important to keep up with the activities. In this way it will be possible to make changes as well as to use the good experiences already during the respective mentoring process.

The evaluation is carried out after the process. It is based on the prepared reports. The follow-up, reporting and evaluation are closely connected, covering and supporting each other. A well implemented follow-up will make the reporting and evaluation easier to carry out and also makes it more reliable.

4. Success factors to overcome the pitfalls

Also in mentoring like in all human activities one has to be aware of certain threats and pitfalls not to run aground.

First of all to have **realistic expectations** for the process; the mentor cannot be a saviour who can do everything, but she/he is a guide showing the right direction for the road, who makes the actor stop and think and who makes the

entrepreneur understand that she always has the responsibility. Respect for each other is a good insurance.

The mentor and/or mentee/mentees do not **get along with each other**; their chemistry is of the kind that they just do not understand each other. That is why it is so important at the matching phase to find out the personal characteristics and, if possible, to use reliable methods to ensure them and if not, to have confidence in your own instincts.

Working **principles and goals are not clear** enough for all participants. The principles should be handled during the introductory training; they will not only be presented but also discussed, even in the middle of the mentoring process if necessary.

Crisis of confidence is a consequence of the former issues. If expectations are very high, you soon notice them to be unrealistic and the first reaction is disappointment. If you do not know the working principles and targets but are using your own ones that are far from those you have in theory agreed on, but are not committed to.

“There is not enough time”. In practise this means that the one with not enough time, is not committed to this work: mentoring is not that important for her, there are too many other things going on.

The mentee is **passive**. There may be reasons that have been mentioned above like poor commitment or having no realistic expectations or maybe too much modesty. The reasons for this kind of behaviour should be discussed. The coordinator is the person who's responsibility it is to make sure that the group or pair is working well.

The mentee is **cautious** or even **afraid** of the mentor. In order to be avoided and tackled, imbalances like this should be found out at the matching phase. The mentor and coordinator should discuss the problem together with the mentee.

Patronizing attitude of the mentor can be tackled; e.g. what equality means in practise in the group or pair work should be discussed.

Criticism should be brought openly to the discussion immediately when it has emerged.

In order to cope with the pitfalls and to secure a successful mentoring the core factors have been identified. In Sweden the evaluation showed the following success factors:

- Well-composed groups and
- Highly motivated mentees who are prepared to contribute their experience, tips and advice
- Experienced entrepreneurs as mentors
- Good structure to the meetings and execution of the project
- Well organised meetings with topics
- Documentation to enhance the experienced quality.

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This paper will be worked on during the FEM project