

Notes from Project Management Network 27 September 2007

Participants: Active Biotech, Alligator, Ambu, Astra Zeneca, Capio, Cartela, CMC, Lundbeck, Nordic Vaccine, Novo Nordisk, TrialFormSupport, Ventac and MVA

Theme: Mentors for project managers - Useful or not?

Lars Hedbys, Ventac and Ingegerd Dalfelt, TFS had prepared statements to start the discussion.

For:

Having a mentor is a good way of being introduced to new duties or a new company. It also is useful as support for a new manager. It is also meaningful for the mentor him/herself to reevaluate his/her role and views. TFS has started to use mentors fairly recently. It should, however, be remembered that there is a cost for the time used for mentor meetings and phone calls.

Mats Persson informed about the AZ system, run by the HR-department, where the adept wanting a mentor is mapped against experienced managers who have supplied their profiles. The rule is that the two are not supposed to know each other beforehand. There are 3 meetings per year booked by the adept, in addition to phone calls. HR is also educating the mentors during a project with 50-100 mentors for 1 year.

Against:

A mentor is a friend, advisor and teacher- originally the word was used for the teacher for Ulysses' son (!). Today a mentor is more like a good leader, but in Lars Hedbys experience, primarily from AZ:

- It takes time to build up the relation
- The person chemistry is important for this relation to be productive
- It can be difficult to get started- the older manager does not want to expose him/herself

The alternative is to rely on informal mentorships, with older colleagues or contacts even outside the organisation. And you can teach your personnel to use advisors (internal or external) and facilitate the use of informal mentors (instead of impose a mentor on someone).

The discussion was positive to mentors during periods of acclimatisation in a new position, but it was difficult to separate the roles of a mentor and of an advisor. Somebody meant that the difference between a mentor and a coach is that the mentor has more specific knowledge.

It was proposed that MVA could start a service for small companies, where it is not so easy to find an internal mentor. This idea should be taken up at a forthcoming meeting.

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