

METHOD MENTORING CIRCLES



Area of CoP Activity: Building Relationships
 Learning and Developing Practice
 Creating Knowledge
 Taking Action as a Community

CoP Lifecycle Phase: Launch
 Grow
 Sustain

CoP Success Factor: Community Interaction
 Sharing Best Practice
 Supporting Tools and Resources
 Mutual Culture, Values, Belonging
 Learning
 Knowledge Production and Access to Knowledge

EIGE Step: Step 1: Getting started
 Step 6: What Comes after the GEP

Group Size: 6-8 people per mentoring circle

Difficulty Level:

Time Needed:

Facilitator Preparation:

Participant Preparation:

Description: Mentoring Circles typically involves one mentor working with a group of mentees or groups of people mentoring each other. Often there is a facilitator to ensure the conversations are focused and productive. Circles generate many diverse perspectives, with group members creating synergies through combining experiences beyond what individual members know or contribute.

More Information: Ambrose 2003
 Darwin and Palmer 2009

MENTORING CIRCLES¹

Short Description

Mentoring Circles differ from the traditional mentoring model in that they involve using an innovative, group mentoring, where one mentor is working with a group of mentees or groups of people mentoring each other. Often there is a facilitator to ensure the conversations are focused and productive. Circles generate many diverse perspectives, with group members creating synergies through combining experiences beyond what individual members know or contribute.

When to use

Multiple mentoring can be generally used when you want to:

- Combine the unique skills of many individuals who can share them with their colleagues;
- Encourage the spirit of teaching, sharing, giving, requesting help, and helping;
- Support team building and mutual competency development within a team;
- Cross-train on specific expertise or skills;
- Capitalise of the seasoned expertise of one knowledgeable individual and share it with many learners simultaneously.

How to

A: Brief explanation

Mentoring Circles is particularly effective when there are not many mentors available. It involves one experienced individual, acting as a mentor to a group of mentees, and who provides them with technical and organisational advice and guidance. Moreover, the mentor helps the circle members utilise their combined energies and experiences to support each other to excel, which they would not have been able to do on their own. This approach facilitates generating diverse perspectives beyond a single point of view.

Before you begin, consider the following questions:

- ✓ *What outcomes do you expect from the mentoring group experience?*
- ✓ *What three things do you want the mentoring group to be known for?*
- ✓ *What professional growth and development issues do you want the mentoring group to focus on?*
- ✓ *What do you believe could get in the way of the mentoring group's effectiveness?*
- ✓ *When it comes to facilitating ideas in a group, where are you the strongest? Where are you the least effective?*
- ✓ *What do you expect of other participants in your group?*
- ✓ *How will you know if the mentoring group is working? What will indicate success?*

¹ Adapted from Ambrose (2003), and Darwin and Palmer (2009).

B: Detailed Step-by-step guide

- Identify an experienced, knowledgeable individual who will freely agree to become a mentor.
- Invite 6-8 members to be mentored. It is very important that their attendance is voluntary.
- The members have to commit to meet x (e.g. eight) number of times for two hours (or longer) over a period of x (e.g. six) months.
- Appoint a facilitator for each circle to maintain the focus of the group, promote discussion and ensure equal participation.
- The initial group meeting should clarify expectations, review topics to be covered, set ground rules for working together, outline desired outcomes, and raise potential concerns such as teamwork, confidentiality within groups, developing trust among participants, and preventing meetings from becoming “complaint” sessions.
- Start with Four Quadrants, which is included in the toolkit to help you get people thinking about the circle. Use 1-2-4-All to discuss expectations, topics, desired outcomes, and potential concerns.
- Address discussions from previous sessions, share weekly learnings and discuss outcomes of previously identified action items.
- In the final session, the circle should evaluate the relationship in a formal fashion and discuss whether the goals and objectives of the sessions were met, what worked well, and what could be done to make the process better.²

Additional ideas / information

Mentoring Circles success factors include a commitment to attend, confidentiality, rapport between circle members, and voluntary attendance. These sessions need to be seen as one of many developmental activities offered within the institution to support staff, and potential participants need to feel comfortable with working in groups. Above all, participation must be voluntary³.

This activity is adaptable online, in that the meetings take place through an online communication platform. This mode of communication may in fact facilitate the frequency of meetings, as geographical and time barriers for all participants to meet can be diminished.



ADAPTABLE
ONLINE

² Taken from Ambrose (2003: 59)

³ Adapted from Darwin and Palmer (2009: 134)

REFERENCES

Ambrose, L. 2003. "Multiple Mentoring: Discover Alternatives to a One-on-One Learning Relationship." *Healthcare Executive*, 18(4): 58–60.

Darwin, Ann, and Edward J Palmer. 2009. "Mentoring Circles in Higher Education." *Higher Education Research and Development*, 28(2):125-136.