



# Training programmes for company mentors

## Recommendations based on pilot initiatives in Denmark

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## Introduction

During the Best Agers project, Green Network developed three types of mentor training programmes for company mentors. The training programmes were developed and tested in close cooperation between Green Network, the Jobcenter of Vejle Municipality and the educational institution Campus Vejle. By the completion of the testing phase, Green Network hosted a "Train the trainer" session for project partners in order to share knowledge and debate the applicability of the training programmes.

In this report you can find information about the structures, contents and preconditions of the two training programmes that Green Network recommends based on the pilots. The report also includes recommendations for those who would like to implement similar programmes.

## The Danish labour model

To understand the relation between the private companies, where the mentors are working, and the jobcenters who often is a mediator of mentor-mentee relations, a short introduction to the Danish labour market model is appropriate.

The Danish model is based on a division of work between the state (and other public authorities like municipalities) and the labour market organisations (employee organisations and trade unions). The significant influence of these organisations on employment policy, wages and working conditions is particular to the Danish model. This means that the public authorities' cooperation with employee organizations and trade unions is an integral part of Danish employment policy – even in areas like occupational health and safety, jobcentres and unemployment insurance, which is regulated by legislation.<sup>1</sup>

The Danish model is characterized by *flexicurity*, a concept that - with it's mixing of two words - indicates the *flexibility* on the labour market and the social *security*. By combining flexibility and security, both employees and employers become more willing to take risks: The employees become more mobile on the labour market, because they are socially secure, and because employers can more easily hire and fire, they are more willing to hire people and to hire people who are at the edge of the labour market (i.e. long-time unemployed, fragile people, etc.)<sup>2</sup>

The cooperation between the private business sector and state and not least between the individual private company and the local municipality jobcenter is also part of the traditional Danish understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility: the inclusive labour market, where companies take up responsibility by cooperating with the Jobcenters to include people.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Danish Employment Ministry, <http://bm.dk/da/Beskaeftigelsesomraadet/Arbejdsret/Det%20arbejdsretlige%20omraade/De%20danske%20model.aspx> (retrieved 2012.12.10)

<sup>2</sup>Source: Danish Employment Ministry, <http://bm.dk/da/Beskaeftigelsesomraadet/Arbejdsret/Det%20arbejdsretlige%20omraade/Flexicurity.aspx> (retrieved 2012.12.10)

## The partnership

*Green Network* is a business network for CSR – corporate social responsibility. The members of Green Network represent both private and public companies as well as local municipalities. With the initiation of the Best Agers project, Green Network established a local project steering group represented by jobcenter managers in the municipalities. Within the steering group there was a continuous exchange of ideas on mentoring. Jobcenter Vejle became the closest collaborator in the actual testing and development of the mentor training programmes.

*The Jobcenter of Vejle Municipality* is one of 91 Danish Jobcentres. The main objective of the jobcentres is to assist people on sickness leave or work retention, help unemployed find a job, and help companies find new employees. At the jobcentres people can:

- Register and unregister as unemployed
- Be called to an interview about job seeking and special procedures
- Have a job plan developed, which can include education, job training etc.
- Get advice on how to apply for education or for a job on special conditions like flexijobs
- Register as sick

The jobcentres also help companies recruiting labour and companies help jobcentres to train unemployed who are not ready for the labour market. This is where mentoring and mentor training becomes relevant – in support of new employees and people in job training. The jobcentres have the possibility to pay mentors some hours per week for their duties as mentors.

*Campus Vejle* is an educational institution with educations in the fields of:

- Business college
- Vocational training for office, retail and trading
- Preparatory education for upper secondary school and other

Campus Vejle also has a unit for continuing education for employees in companies. These continuing education activities can be assembled in accordance to different needs and can lead to a qualifying education.

## The mentor training programmes

### What is a mentor?

*A mentor is an experienced and respected advisor, who helps his student/mentee with whatever he/she needs. The concept "mentor" is used in various context, i.e. for integration purposes or as a discussion partner. A mentor is a role model, whom you can learn from and who is interested in passing on knowledge, experience, attitudes and thoughts as inspiration for personal and professional development.*

This is how a mentor has been defined by educator William Husted in the mentor training programmes.

### Main objectives

The main purpose of the mentor training programmes is to prepare best agers to the mentor role, (re-)integrate fragile people into the workforce and/or help them to get an education and create a network between mentors.

### Target group(s)

The primary mentor target group is best agers and experienced employees from companies.

The mentee – who is being mentored by the mentor – can be a new employee or a person who for a shorter or longer period is participating in a job training programme in the company. These are primarily people who have few relations or none to the labour market, for example because of long-time unemployment, psychological/emotional problems, illness, etc.

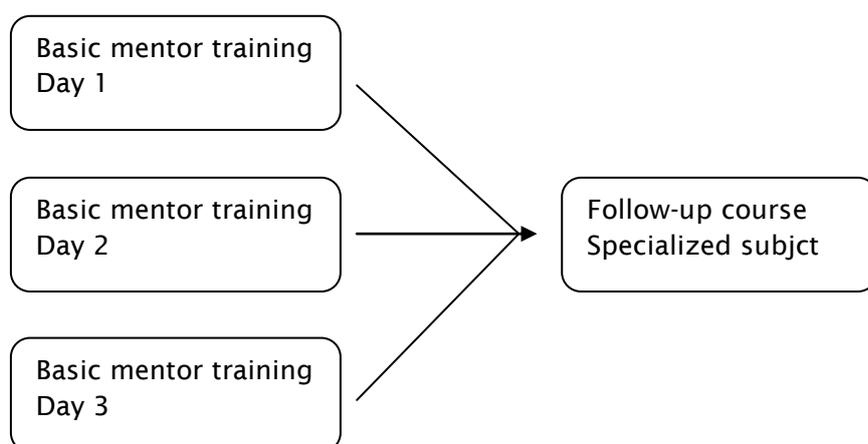
### Recruitment

Recruiting mentors for the mentor training programmes has been done in cooperation with the jobcenter and educational institution. As for Mentor Training Programme I, Green Network and Jobcenter Vejle has distributed invitations by e-mail and personal contact. Mentor Training Programme II has been communicated via Jobcenter Vejle, Green Network and Campus Vejle, including a public information meeting. The local steering group has also been continuously informed about the training programmes.

## Mentor training programme I: The basic model

### Structure of the mentor training programme

During the testing, Green Network learned that it is important to have trainings programmes that balance completeness of training with not having mentors take too much time away from work. Different lengths for the programmes have been tested and a structure of 3 days basic mentor training with the option of additional 1-day follow-up courses in specialized subjects like fragile people, minorities, etc. is recommended as the basic model for mentor training:



The 3-day basic course was conducted over a period of 6 months, where mentors met approximately every second month. This way they had time to apply the methods in their every-day life and work and get feedback on return. Conducting the course over several days and a period of time also supported networking between the mentors, since they met several times.

### Content

During the 3-day basic course, the participants were introduced to methods and tools in the fields of:

- Understanding different personality types (C.G. Jung)
- Active listening and feedback
- The difficult conversation
- Conflict management
- Appreciative Inquiry

The training was based on an involving approach where participants were expected and encouraged to actively engage in debates about mentoring and train tools and approaches in simulated mentor-mentee relations/situations.

## Understanding different personality types

This approach is applied in mentor training, because good communication is crucial to the mentor-mentee relation. By getting a deeper understanding of oneself, the mentor becomes a better mentor. The approach is based on the consideration that every personality type is good, but not every personality type is equally good at everything.<sup>3</sup>

The approach is grounded on the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung's theory of psychological types. The typology tells something about ourselves and other people; what we have in common and how we differ. It tells something about a person's preferences, needs, intentions and energy, but it is important to note that it cannot with certainty state anything about behaviour or skills.<sup>4</sup>

During the training programme, the mentors were introduced to the characteristics of the 16 personality types included in this typology and had the option of doing a self-test of their own traits and type.

## Active listening and feedback

Active listening is a method to help the person speaking to elaborate and focus; give them the opportunity to express themselves and to concentrate. This is an important tool in mentoring and during the training, the mentors were introduced to five basic preconditions for active listening:

1. Be sincerely curious
2. Be interested and empathic. If a person experience that the listener is really trying to understand his intention and opinion, he/she will be willing to explain his/her situation and problems more elaborate and this way reach higher realisation.
3. Acceptance. Accept the other person as unconditionally as possible, meaning not to agree or disagree, avoid to influence with your own opinions and understandings.
4. Actively and helpfully keep focus on what is tangible.
5. Make sure to be in contact with the person all the time (also non-verbally).<sup>5</sup>

## The difficult conversation

In the mentor-mentee relationship, it is sometimes necessary to talk with your mentee about something unpleasant. To be a good mentor, it is necessary to master these conversations, make them good conversations and have the courage to take them. During the training programme, the mentors had training sessions where they simulated difficult conversations and were introduced to this 9-step tool to make a difficult conversation a good conversation:

1. Prepare

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Presentations given in the mentor training programme by William Husted

<sup>4</sup> Source: Broegger, Bent & Lene Bohnsen: "Which Type Are You? Jungian Based Type Analysis®", BROEGGER Organizational Psychologists, 2011

<sup>5</sup> Source: Presentations given in the mentor training programme by William Husted

2. Imagine yourself in the other person's position
3. Express the other person's importance
4. Tell what you have observed
5. Express your honest opinion
6. Offer your support
7. Make an agreement on concrete actions/changes
8. Confirm that the mentee is important to you/the workplace
9. Make an agreement about follow-up<sup>6</sup>

### **Conflict management**

A mentor has to be able to handle conflicts – and more important, be able to prevent a disagreement from turning into an actual conflict that affects the relationship in a negative way. Conflicts usually develop in a characteristic pattern. During the programme, the mentors were introduced to this pattern and learned methods to actively stop conflicts from getting intensified.

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

The method called Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is widely used in the public and private sector in Denmark. The basic assumption of AI is that every person does his/her best at any given time – based on their conditions and qualifications.<sup>7</sup> This approach is useful for mentors who wants to help their mentee develop in a positive direction.

The idea of AI is to focus on what works and be inspired by that. In the programme, mentors trained AI during sessions.

One specialized course was tested in Training Programme I. The theme of this course was fragile people (or “Mentally vulnerable mentees” as it was originally titled). The course was conducted by a professional work psychologist. The psychologist introduced characteristics of stress, anxiety and depression, which are some of the conditions that the mentee target groups may struggle with. On a practical level, the course dealt with factors as motivation and communication and tools to support these. For further inspiration on specialized themes, see pages 8-9.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Presentations given in the mentor training programme by educator William Husted

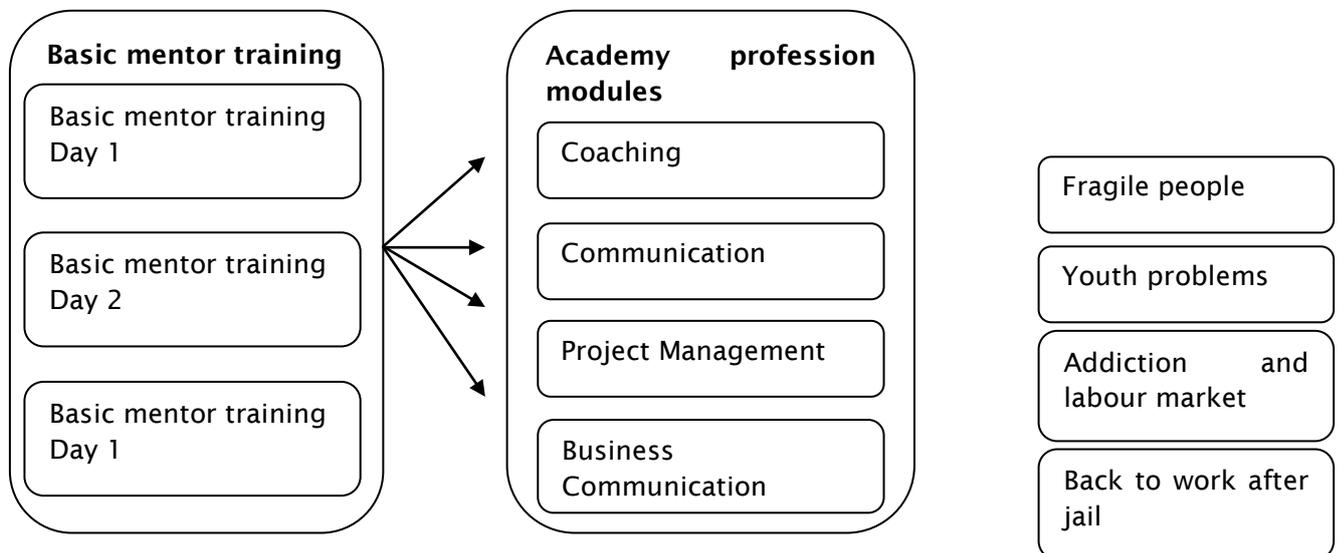
<sup>7</sup> Source: Presentations given in the mentor training programme by educator William Husted

## Mentor Training Programme II: Ordinary education

### Structure of the mentor training programme

For companies who want to offer their mentors qualifying education, a mentor training programme integrated into the ordinary educational system in Denmark has been developed. The training programme combines basic mentor training with courses in Coaching, Communication, Project Management and Business Communication. This programme qualifies for 40 ECTS<sup>8</sup> point. It qualifies the mentor further in mentoring with specialized knowledge about for example coaching and communication, but it also qualifies them to take on new assignments in the company. This could be part of the company's age management structure to let older employees qualify for and take over new assignments which might be less physically demanding.

The structure of the academy profession training programme is:



### Content

The content of the basic mentor training is similar to the contents in Mentor Training Programme I (see pages 4-6)

The Academy profession module teaches the mentor skills to be used both in their role as mentor and in different job positions in the company. By acquiring new skills, the best ager is able to shift work from for physically demanding jobs to other types of assignments.

#### Coaching

This module will teach coaching skills by introducing theories about coaching in organizations, training coaching methods and develop ability to reflect about the ethics and oneself in the role as coach.

<sup>8</sup> ECTS is European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – a standard for comparing studies

**Communication**

The communication module gives insight into communication psychology, tools and practice. It will teach the participant to take part in critical conversation as well as handle traditional communication tasks within the company.

**Project management**

This module gives insight into different types of projects, project organisation and project management.

**Business communication**

Whereas the communication module is very practical in its approach, the business communication module digs deeper into theories about internal and external communication, psychology, analysis and strategy.

The specialized theme days are one-day courses in themes that concern mentors in their every-day interaction with and mentoring of mentees. The courses are a combination of presentations and sharing experiences. This way the courses will support the network between mentors.

**Theme day: Fragile people and the mentally ill**

There is an increasing focus on the importance of helping people with psychological illnesses to (re-)integrate into the labour market. A mentor with the understanding of the needs of fragile and/or mentally ill people is a crucial factor for success. This theme day will focus on the challenges that mentors meet in working with mentally ill/fragile mentees and their integration to the work place. The theme day will touch upon questions like:

- What type of psychological conditions do we usually meet?
- What is the difference between being fragile and mentally ill?
- What should we as mentors be particularly aware of and do in relation to this target group?

**Theme day: Youth problems**

This theme day considers the challenges mentors usually meet in relation to young people and their integration to the work place.

- What characterizes the mentee target group? What are their typical problems?
- What particular options are there to support young people in the work place?
- What should we as mentors be particularly aware of and do in relation to this target group?

**Theme day: Addiction and labour market**

The mentor task can often be to support a person with a former addiction to drugs or alcohol in their return or introduction to the labour market. This theme day focus on the challenges that mentors typically confront in relation to this group.

- What characterizes this target group?
- What are their typical problems?
- What particular options are there to support the integration of this mentee target group into the work place?
- What should we as mentors be aware of and do in relation to this target group?

**Theme day: From jail and back to work**

This theme day is focused on the challenges for the mentor face when supporting someone with a criminal past on their way back to the labour market. The participants should learn about and respond to questions like:

- What characterizes this mentee target group? What are their typical problems?
- What should we as mentors be aware of and do in relation to this target group?

## Recommendations

During the development and testing of mentor training programmes, Green Network had a continuous dialogue with Campus Vejle and Jobcenter Vejle. Participants' evaluations were also collected and it is on the basis of these dialogues and evaluations that Green Network decided to recommend the above-mentioned mentor training programmes. Mentor Training Programme I has taken into account the importance of balancing between sufficient training and not taking too much of the employers time away from work.

Mentor training programme II is a much longer process, but in return the participating mentor will acquire skills that are of importance both to the role as mentor and to other types of assignment within the organisation. This mentor programme is integrated into the ordinary educational system for adults and this provides extra security in terms of quality.

The cooperation with Jobcenter Vejle has been important in terms of both development and evaluation and in recruitment for the training programmes. The cooperation with Campus Vejle and external trainer and consultant, William Husted, has been equally important in the development and execution of the training sessions. Campus Vejle has also contributed to the recruiting process for especially Mentor training programme II which is yet to be tested in practice. The cooperation with jobcentres might not be possible or the most fruitful approach in countries where the labour market and jobcentres operates on different terms than in Denmark. However, other ways of recruiting mentors should be possible via different types of network. Collaboration with professional and experienced educators should be considered a key factor to secure relevant content of high quality in the mentor courses.

The training session for project partners mentioned in the introduction made it clear that the contents and themes from the basic mentor training modules were not only relevant to mentors working with the mentee target groups specified above, but also to mentors working with for example business development and inventors.

To sum up, Green Network recommends the following to anyone who wants to establish mentor training:

- ✓ Cooperate with professional educators when you develop contents
- ✓ Gain access to or establish networks of best ager mentors
- ✓ Take a practical approach with training exercises and exchange of experience as important parts of the courses, recognizing the experience and knowledge of your best ager mentors
- ✓ Balance between sufficient amount of training and not taking away too much of the best ager mentors time from work/daily activities

