Programs that promote mentoring should be regularly evaluated to determine whether they are proceeding as planned and achieving their intended objectives. The evaluation process begins by looking at the program's intended outcomes and targeted goals. It then measures progress, achievements, and effectiveness against those outcomes and goals. That is why it is essential to state mentoring program objectives when the program begins in a way that allows you to measure progress and results once it is under way.

Evaluations should be done at least at the program's mid-point and upon completion of a program cycle. Interim evaluations measure the *process*: Are people doing what they are expected to do? Are they on track to achieve targeted goals? Should any changes be implemented immediately to improve the mentoring experience for program participants? Evaluation at the conclusion of a program cycle measures *results*, i.e., to what extent program objectives were achieved and the program's overall impact. Because many mentoring programs have goals that will take years to achieve, evaluations should analyze both short-term results from one mentoring cycle and long-term results over several cycles.

Measuring the success of a mentoring program requires evaluating both the overall program and individual mentoring relationships.

Evaluating the Overall Mentoring Program

Mentoring program evaluations are conducted for several purposes: to measure the program's effectiveness, improve the program, and/or demonstrate that the program is a cost-effective use of the firm's resources. Evaluation is critical for making decisions about whether to continue, change, expand, or curtail the mentoring program. Questions to ask in the program evaluation include:

1. **Is the program's purpose clearly understood?** Objectives and expectations must be clearly explained at the outset of the program so that you have a basis for measuring the program's success. The firm needs to know what a successful program will look like and participants need to understand clearly what they are expected to do in the program.
2. **Did participants receive adequate training to carry out their responsibilities?** People have varied ideas about what mentoring is and how it is done. In a mentoring program, it is important for participants to have a common understanding of mentoring dynamics. Effective mentoring programs provide training that teaches mentoring skills and clarifies mentoring expectations. The evaluation process is a means for determining the adequacy and effectiveness of this training.
3. **Did the matching process make effective matches?** Mentoring relationships are most successful when mentor and mentee have compatible personalities and the mentor is able to meet the mentee's development needs. An evaluation measures several aspects of the matching process, including success in pairing mentors and mentees, sufficiency of participant input in the selection process, and procedures for reassigning poorly matched pairs.

4. **Did the firm provide adequate resources?** Mentoring programs require administrative support and resources. This aspect of the evaluation measures the adequacy of firm leaders, the program coordinator and staff in providing program support and resources, including incentives, events, reminders, and educational materials for program participants.

5. **Were the benefits of the program worth the cost?** Compared to most professional development programs, mentoring programs cost relatively little. Nonetheless, it is important to take a close look at the expenses attributed to the program, the time spent in mentoring activities, and the benefits attributed to the program (e.g., reduced turnover, fewer write-offs, advantage in recruiting, increased associate satisfaction).

The evaluation process should focus on particular *indicators* of success, i.e., the factors that will indicate whether specific program goals were achieved. Indicators should be realistically linked to the goals they seek to measure, although this may be difficult. For example, one common mentoring program objective is to increase associate retention. But the rate of retention is influenced by many factors in addition to mentoring: management practices (e.g., work assignment systems), events (e.g., economic downturn, merger), and firm culture. The evaluation process should therefore measure specific factors that link mentoring with increased retention, e.g., associates reporting that the mentoring program has influenced their decision to stay with the firm. Depending on a program's goals, indicators could include:

a. The degree of participation of mentors and mentees in planned program activities such as training, social events, and mentoring meetings

b. Creation and achievement of mentees' development plans

c. Ability of mentors to address mentees' identified needs

d. Increased productivity and work quality of mentees

e. Improved communication between mentors and mentees in the firm

Indicators form the basis for collecting evaluation data. The most common tools for collecting this data are interviews, focus groups, and surveys of participants and observers (e.g., supervisors). These tools can be used to establish a baseline, record interim progress, and assess final results. Baseline data should be collected as part of the initial needs assessment or planning process. If, for example, one of the goals of a formal mentoring program is to increase associate satisfaction, a preliminary survey about associate satisfaction with informal mentoring can produce the baseline. At the conclusion of the program cycle, a survey of associate satisfaction with formal mentoring provides the comparison data that determines whether the goal was achieved.

Once a program is up and running, collecting and analyzing evaluation data – and comparing it to baseline data – helps you measure the quality of the program design, progress toward program goals, and levels of accomplishment. If the data show that certain aspects of the program are especially valuable, that aspect of the program should be highlighted in subsequent cycles. For each interim indicator or final result that is less than optimal, the data analysis should lead to development of specific new targets and tactics for program improvement.

Evaluating Mentoring Relationships

The purpose of mentoring is to promote professional growth through a personal relationship. Successful mentoring relationships are measured by two criteria: the quality of personal *affiliation* and the degree of *development*. In a relationship with a high level of affiliation, both parties relate well on a personal level, with the mentor providing care and guidance, and the mentee appreciating and utilizing the mentor's support. In a relationship where the quality of development is high, both parties learn from one another, with the mentee progressing toward higher levels of understanding, expertise, and career advancement. Successful mentoring relationships rate high on both factors. High affiliation with little development may be enjoyable but produce little professional growth. High development with little affiliation is tutoring, not mentoring.

Evaluation of the mentoring relationship should measure the mentor's and mentee's levels of affiliation and development. The evaluation of affiliation examines the mentor's and mentee's experiences in the relationship, how well the two got along, and how effectively they were able to meet each other's interpersonal expectations. Measuring development requires a baseline that allows you to assess the degree of change. Although the mentor should also benefit and learn from the relationship, most developmental change will happen to the mentee. Various aspects of the mentee's progress can be assessed, including:

- Social integration (e.g., increased feeling of connection to the mentor, feeling of acceptance and inclusion in the firm)
- Cognitive development (e.g., improved technical, problem solving, management, or client relation skills)
- Professional performance (e.g., higher level of productivity or work quality)
- Identity development (e.g., growth in confidence, greater autonomy and self-direction)

Methods of measuring mentees' development include pre-, mid- and post-program surveys, interviews, self-assessments, and assessments by observers (e.g., supervisors). An additional approach is to use competencies, benchmarks, or other performance standards that describe levels of expected or acceptable performance at particular stages of lawyer development. A mentee's progress can be measured against those standards.

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