

English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2019:31

At the right level
Mentoring as a path
to employment

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A study of IMDi's mentoring and trainee schemes

This report evaluates the scheme by which mentoring or trainee programmes that target persons with an immigrant background can apply for partial grants from IMDi. The general questions asked in this evaluation are whether this scheme is an appropriate instrument for achieving the goal of increasing the employment rate among immigrants and whether this in turn may help promote diversity in the labour market. The report draws on a variety of data sources, and is based on a survey among previous participants in mentoring programmes, interviews with programme managers and a review of programme reports, as well as observations from four ongoing mentoring programmes. The project should answer two main research questions, with a number of sub-questions:

1. Does participation in mentoring or trainee programmes increase the likelihood of finding a job?
 - What are the critical success factors?
 - To what extent are these conditions transferable to other public enterprises?
 - What are the characteristics of programmes with a high rate of goal achievement? Have these programmes helped achieve the goals of the grant scheme?
2. What are the consequences of mentoring programmes for the enterprises themselves?
 - Are the mentoring schemes bringing about changes in enterprise hiring practices?
 - Is this giving rise to increased diversity?

The key to a successful hiring process is to find a good match between job seekers with specific qualifications and employers in need of manpower. This matching of job seekers and employers can be classified into three closely intertwined factors, around which we have organised this evaluation: (1) skills; (2) signalling; and (3) the employers' assessments. Each of these are critical, in the sense of being necessary but not alone sufficient.

Our analyses point to certain key preconditions required for the mentoring programme to succeed in enhancing the participants' (1) skills. The main issue is whether the mentoring programme is able to identify the real skills shortfall in the participants. We have pointed out the importance of recruiting professionally suitable mentors in order to succeed. Furthermore, we have pointed out

that in order to raise the level of formal qualifications, the participants must perceive the content of the mentoring programme as something they need, at a level adapted to their pre-existing skills. Face-to-face training appears to be a better method for enhancing informal skills, and this is also the main approach in the mentoring programme.

We have also highlighted the importance of being able to (2) signal skills credibly to employers when seeking work. This lays the basis for establishment of mutual trust. We have pointed out that the mentoring programmes address this in three different ways: formal skills in CVs and applications, informal skills in preparation for job interviews, and establishment of networks that help signal these skills to the right people. We have also seen examples of how some mentoring programmes highlight the advantages of cross-cultural competence.

Finally, we have investigated the employers' (3) assessment of job seekers and how mentoring programmes may affect such assessment. When it comes to recruitment and networks, mentors may undoubtedly act as crucial door openers. On the other hand, the mentors do not act as ambassadors or representatives of workplaces, quite the opposite. It is reasonable to assume that the mentors bring this experience with them in their further career, while the direct transfer value remains quite limited. It is also reasonable to assume that face-to-face meetings may be of great value for both parties.

In addition to identifying the factors required for the mentoring programme to succeed in enabling the mentee to prevail in the three critical stages of the recruitment process, we have also found that the programmes share some challenges of a more general nature. We have shown that comparisons of goal achievement in the four mentoring programmes are difficult when it comes to determining their rate of success for the participants. The reason is that they have different objectives, which differ in terms of their specificity. The programmes therefore vary considerably in how they report goal achievement and in terms of how specifically they can answer questions about relevant employment, and the extent to which this can be attributed to participation. We also regard as a challenge that many programmes have unclear expectations and task descriptions for mentors, and often have no guidelines that describe what the mentor's role involves. The different programmes also follow varying practices in terms of how often the mentoring dyads meet; some meet frequently and others hardly at all. Establishing a clearer structure in this respect would be an advantage, in addition to having a programme manager to provide close follow-up of the dyads. We have highlighted four success factors that we have identified, which include an appropriate process for the selection of participants, a good match between mentors and mentees, training of the participants in their roles prior to programme launch, and plenary sessions as key elements of an optimally successful mentoring programme. In this way, mentoring programmes can ensure that a participant will be the right man or woman for the job.

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