Bond mentoring programme, 2010-2011 pilot

Evaluation Report, July 2011
**Introduction**

This evaluation report summarises the results of the Bond mentoring pilot for NGO leaders, covering the period August 2010 to April 2011. The findings here were gathered through a number of methods, at different moments in the pilot programme period. All mentors and mentees made some contribution to the evaluation, via telephone interviews with mentees (Dec 2010/ Feb 2011), a half-day review workshop with mentors (Dec 2010), and an end of programme evaluation survey (Apr 2011). The purpose of the evaluation is primarily to capture learning from the initiative to inform options for future Bond programme roll out in the area of mentoring for leadership development.

The report sets out an overview of the pilot mentoring programme, including financial context and process/methodology. It then focuses on findings – successes and issues – as they relate to: appropriateness of mentoring as a capacity building approach, indications of quality in relationships and process, results from the programme as they relate to specific examples of change in mentees’ practice, and a summary of feedback on Bond’s role in managing the pilot as a whole.

**Mentoring programme overview**

Bond’s 2010 Capacity Building Research revealed high levels of demand, and a significant gap in existing provision, for a focused programme of capacity development support for leaders of UK international development NGOs. Towards meeting this need, in June 2010, the Bond Learning and Training (L&T) team designed and launched a pilot mentoring programme for leaders of small and medium-sized member organisations. The pilot was funded through a mix of Bond’s own internal ‘initiative fund’ resources, the Big Lottery Fund grant, and a small commitment contribution made by participating organisations.

Bond recruited five professional mentors, selected on the basis of their existing mentoring expertise (as for the purposes of the pilot, Bond was not offering training/support for mentors), coupled with NGO sector, international development, and organisational (change/development) experience. All of the mentors had either some existing or previous capacity building delivery relationship with Bond, or were recommended by other mentors in the cohort. All mentors were involved in the initial stages of shaping the programme, in consultation with Bond L&T.

Through targeted low-level marketing, Bond identified ten leaders (mentees) of small and medium-sized member organisations to participate in the pilot. One unique – and key – feature of the pilot was the matching process: mentees selected their own mentors from the pool, through a half-day ‘matching meeting’ focused around lightly facilitated group discussion. Bond coordinated the establishment of relationships following the matching process and each mentee was able to access six half-day mentoring sessions every four to six weeks with their chosen mentor, between September 2010 and April 2011. 9/10 of the mentees who signed up to the programme completed their mentoring sessions; one was unable to commit the time due to wider organisational challenges faced at the time. A summary of the main stages in the pilot are set out in annex one.
Results

Overall, testimonies from participating leaders suggest that the Bond mentoring pilot has been a considerable success in terms of approach and methodology, in terms of Bond’s design and coordination, and – most importantly – as it relates to positive outcomes in mentees’ leadership practice as a direct result of their participation in the programme.

8/8 mentees who contributed to the final evaluation were very satisfied with the quality of the professional support they received, and many were able to cite concrete examples of changes in their ways of thinking and working, and beneficial consequences for their organisations as a whole.

Successes

- Mentoring as an effective approach to supporting leaders:
  - Several mentees noted that a major issue for individuals in their positions is a feeling of isolation, having “no one else to turn to”, or lacking an appropriate network or forum for peers working from similar perspectives or on a comparable scale. Bond mentoring “plugged that gap”.
  - The approach enabled a safe space for mentees to focus on complex, sensitive, organisational issues – from governance/management relations, to business and external relationships development, and organisational sustainability – with a level of openness and honesty which would have been less possible through other capacity building approaches.

“I believe this programme is one of the best ways Bond can add value to the sector.... Nothing short of brilliant!”

“I’ve been fortunate to have had many professional development opportunities during my career – but I believe this has been the best!”
• **Quality of mentoring relationships:**
  o Whilst all mentors brought substantial experience and expertise, they also took quite different approaches to their mentoring practice. The ‘matching meeting’ provided an excellent opportunity for mentees to gauge the type of approach which would be most beneficial to them on a personal level – selecting from their perceptions of those mentors who would “challenge me to think differently” to those who would “reflect back and encourage me to find my own solutions”.
  
  o Mentees consistently commented on the level of trust and respect they had for their mentors – from their comparable and relevant professional experience, to their flexibility, process-focus, organisational/relational insights, and ability to “bring something new and valuable to the table”.

• **Professional development and change in mentees’ leadership practice:**
  o A number of mentees were able to cite specific examples of changes in their ways of thinking and acting, with some observing making the same decisions in terms of organisational strategy, change and so on, but taking new approaches to delivering on those decisions (improved focus on effective communications, negotiating and influencing, gaining consensus, etc.).
  
  o Improved levels of self-awareness were commented upon by many, indicative of the potential for sustainable changes in leadership practice which will outlive the particular organisational issues addressed during the mentoring pilot period.
  
  o Two mentees commented on new levels of calm and assurance brought about through their mentoring relationships, having had space to “let off steam”, address the underlying issues, and “put things in order” during mentoring sessions.

• **Key programme success factors:**
  o Overall, feedback suggests that the pilot offered the right mix of features to support this group. All mentees valued the one-to-one nature of the relationship, and their mentor’s professional experience of NGO and/or organisational issues.
One mentee added:
“...the absence of any one of them would have detracted from the overall quality of the experience. In addition, I feel my mentor’s understanding of change (at both theoretical and practical levels) was an important success factor. The affordable cost was an important factor in enabling access to the programme in the first place.”

• **Bond coordination, communications and resourcing:**
  o Mentors and mentees commented positively on Bond’s role in designing, overseeing, monitoring and communications around the whole programme.

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**Annex one: key stages in the pilot**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May/ Jun 2010</td>
<td>Mentor recruitment</td>
<td>Bond selected 5 mentors and consulted in the design of the overall approach.</td>
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<td>Jun 2010</td>
<td>Mentee marketing and communications</td>
<td>Targeted emails to 32 CEOs of small/ medium sized members; advert on Small NGOs Group site.</td>
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<td>Jul 2011</td>
<td>Mentoring matching meeting</td>
<td>All mentors and mentees participated in a half-day workshop, where – through a series of small group discussions – leaders identified and selected which of the mentors they would like to begin working with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug/ Sep 2010</td>
<td>First one-to-one mentoring sessions</td>
<td>Each mentee has first mentoring session, and confirms their wish to continue.</td>
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<td>Sep 2010- Apr 2011</td>
<td>Mentoring sessions two-six</td>
<td>Each mentee has 5 further mentoring sessions, arranged at a time, place and appropriate phasing, in agreement with their mentor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 2011</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Final evaluation survey.</td>
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