

# Mentoring Goes Global

A global mentoring program breaks down barriers and creates a sense of community. By moving beyond geographically bound mentoring, employees enjoy an informal feel to their international connections.

*By Randy Emelo*

The expansion into a global marketplace has revealed a weakness when it comes to filling leadership gaps and cultivating top talent: Organizations can't grow enculturated leaders quickly enough to keep up with the demands of these emerging markets. Locally based employees possess an intuitive understanding of culture, local issues and the nuances of effective business practices needed for success in these markets, but they often lack the experiential depth and leadership qualities that would allow them to flourish as high potentials on the organizational level.

How can organizations take advantage of the homegrown talent available around the world and bring them into the fold of the larger company? Many multinational organizations have begun using a revolutionary approach to mentoring to address the issue.

Functioning as a symbolic water cooler to catalyze intentional learning relationships built on collaboration and rich dialogue, mentoring allows colleagues around the world to share cultural understanding, experiences, critical organizational knowledge and wisdom with each other.

Organizations are moving beyond simple language translations and briefings on cultural differences to actually leveraging cultural differences to increase creativity and effectiveness within their companies. The use of mentoring for supportive developmental relationships and intentional learning engagements offers a way for organizations to accomplish this.

## Mentoring the Global Workforce

The learning solutions of tomorrow will emphasize global interconnectedness, dynamic and mobile approaches, flexibil-





ity and performance impact. To start down this path today, global organizations are looking for ways to address urgent learning needs by connecting workers with the people they need as resources, whether these people are peers, partners, formal mentors or even customers across their entire enterprise. A more networked view of mentoring opens the door to all of these possibilities.

Aon Corp., a global provider of risk management services, insurance and reinsurance brokerage, and human capital solutions and outsourcing, embodies this attitude. It offers mentoring to all of its more than 55,000 employees across 28 countries and supports participants in their quest to build connections and knowledge networks across countries.

## TOP 3 GLOBAL MENTORING BENEFITS

1. Grow and Retain Global Leaders
2. Unify and Exchange Culture
3. Accelerate Global Learning and Competency

Source: Triple Creek 2011



## In Mentees' Own Words

When Sarita Pereira applied and was accepted to a group mentoring program sponsored by the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association in March 2009, she hoped to be paired with mentors who would help develop her ability to manage others and to become a better leader.

As a scientist and associate director of regulatory affairs for biopharmaceuticals company Ikaria, Pereira worked in a matrix environment, serving on many cross-functional teams. While she had experience managing projects and coordinating the work of others, she knew her next career step would involve managing a department and several direct reports. That happened with her promotion to regulatory affairs director just as the mentoring program she signed up for began.

Pereira was born in India and is of Indian-Portuguese descent. She lived in Nigeria and the Philippines before coming to the United States just before her 21st birthday. Culturally, her orientation was more Western than Eastern, and her Portuguese heritage shaped her work and communication style. Accustomed to greater formality in business conversations, Pereira knew her reserved manner could be misinterpreted as aloofness, and she found demonstrations of emotion in the workplace to be somewhat jarring and out of place.

In the book *Communicating Across Cultures*, authors Don Prince and Michael H. Hoppe identify five questions to help individuals recognize the influence of cultural boundaries on their communication style. One is: "Am I willing to adjust my communication in order to be more effective?" This query had special resonance for Pereira. Placed in a mentoring group focused on leading others, Pereira was one of three mentees matched with two experienced mentors. These five women spent the next six months working as a team to help mentees grow, develop and accomplish their goals. They met twice a month — usually once in person and once by teleconference — and were quickly able to establish trust and build rapport. Group members also were available outside of scheduled meetings to support each other and

serve as sounding boards when an immediate response was required.

Pereira tapped her mentors and fellow mentees on a number of issues. She learned to acknowledge others' feelings — even when expressed in a highly emotional and animated fashion — and to demonstrate empathy, while not permitting such conversations to hijack her day or schedule. "I recognize you are upset right now," is how Pereira said she would start. "Would you like to schedule some time when you are more collected to discuss this problem and how I may assist you?"

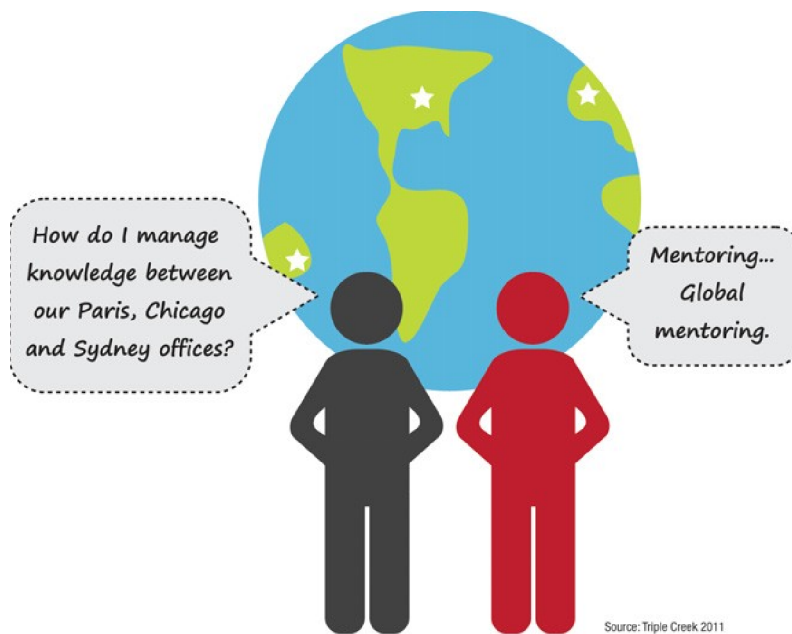
With an all-business focus and a more reserved style, some co-workers did think Pereira was aloof, and she realized that a simple but genuine compliment or a smile goes a long way to help build a connection between employee and manager.

E-mail and other written forms of communication can pose different challenges. Writing as a scientist, Pereira might underline text to point out a particularly important piece of information. However, she discovered it was key to "let the reader know why I was bringing to their attention a particular sentence," so that her actions weren't misconstrued as highhanded or strident. Even more importantly, Pereira said, "I learned to write fewer e-mails and pick up the phone instead."

Being part of a mentoring circle helped Pereira see things from other perspectives. Her team helped her break big challenges into smaller pieces and provided feedback and suggestions along the way.

"Communication and performance are vibrantly cross-linked," she said. "It's up to me to relay specific expectations to my reports and to confirm that they understood what I said." When beginning this mentorship journey, Pereira focused on developing skills needed to manage others and in the process she said she learned a lot about herself as well. «

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“Enabling colleagues to work on career development and to be able to understand other cultures and backgrounds is very important to Aon,” said Linda Crisanti, manager of informal learning within Aon’s talent development department. Broadening people’s cultural knowledge and understanding plays a vital role in how Aon’s employees can assist their global clients.

It’s not about being groomed for that high-profile job. Mentoring is about connecting with people to share skills and knowledge throughout an organization.

An open-access program such as Aon’s allows for knowledge to be shared across the scope of the entire organization. By moving beyond highly controlled, geographically bound mentoring programs, participants enjoy an informal feel to their connections but still accomplish actual business-related goals while they learn cultural nuances in a relational manner.

Forward-leaning organizations have invested more resources in expanding their view of mentoring to encompass global learning connections for several reasons:

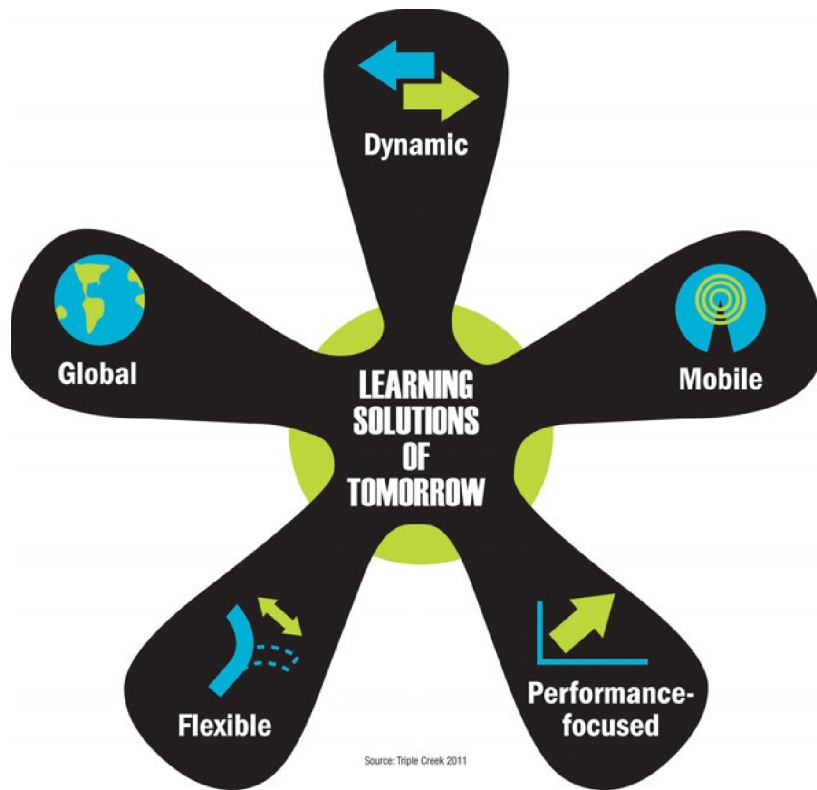
- Training budgets have shrunk over the past few years, and organizations need to leverage more internal talent and expertise rather than spend resources on formal training that can become quickly outdated.
- Globalization demands organizations help their employees connect to, understand and promote diverse views if they are to survive in the expanding marketplace.
- Social networking and the popularity of connecting with people online means there is a greater comfort level with meeting someone virtually and learning from them, even if those involved never meet face to face.

Progressive organizations know there is much value to be gained from investing in a global approach to mentoring.

### Growing and Retaining Global Leaders

Chicago-based Northern Trust, a provider of investment management and asset administration, started as a local business in 1889 and has grown into a global powerhouse today. With 12,000 employees around the world, Northern Trust currently leverages mentoring for both career development and to support diversity and inclusion. Nearly 2,400 employees currently take part in the organization’s voluntary global mentoring program, such as members of its Women in Leadership Forum.

“We pride ourselves on being a relationship-driven organization,” said Michelle Hoskins, senior vice president and head of talent management at Northern Trust. “It wasn’t until we started using open mentoring and opening [the program] up globally that we’ve gotten to know talent that we wouldn’t have tapped into previously.”



Northern Trust is now able to identify and retain talent throughout the entire enterprise. “By virtue of opening up mentoring globally, it helped us to start thinking outside the box,” Hoskins said.

This led Northern Trust to look more closely at how deeply it digs for talent in the organizational hierarchy and helped it gain a better understanding of the bench strength it has for talent across the enterprise. “Mentoring has allowed us to develop more robust talent profiles, which inform the decision to buy versus build talent,” Hoskins said. “We are on a journey to educate and recognize those leaders who build talent for the organization, and mentoring can be an effective tool to measure success over time.”

Northern Trust sees mentoring playing a key role in accelerating its talent pipeline. For example, building that pipeline in India, where the average employee age is 23, looks vastly different from the talent pipeline it might build in London or Chicago, where the average employee age is 42. Mentoring is helping Northern Trust identify talent gaps and close them in real time and in turn accelerating its talent development and making it a more agile organization.

### Unifying and Exchanging Culture

Within many multinational enterprises, the number of international workers is equal to or exceeds the number of employees located at headquarters.

For a company such as Aon, which was built on hundreds of acquisitions, creating a unified culture is essential. “We want to engage our clients as a united firm,” Crisanti said. Connecting people across cultures allows for an exchange of both knowledge and culture at the same time, helping the company retain organizational expertise while encouraging a curiosity to learn about other cultures and backgrounds.

At Northern Trust, the global mentoring program helps create and promote a more inclusive and unified culture. Mentoring helps employees share knowledge and best practices across the enterprise and at the same time promotes good cultural aspects of the Chicago headquarters outward to all of its global locations.

For example, Northern Trust is active in philanthropic efforts and community projects. The mentoring program helps it not only spread this cultural value of giving back through service as a global corporate citizen, but also identify people’s passions and talent that may be suited to service in their own communities. This keeps the organizational drive for philanthropy alive but expressed in ways that are appropriate and unique to local cultures.

“We don’t want to lose this as we expand our footprint globally,” Hoskins said. Using mentoring to perpetually spread the organization’s culture to all employees reinforces the value of relationships across all locations.



## ➔ Group Mentoring

### Impact on Individuals

**75%**

indicated an increase in productivity/effectiveness

#### Areas of Improvement

- Interpersonal effectiveness
- Expanding my network
- Leadership skills

### Impact on Organization

**96%**

are able to apply their learning directly to their role

#### Organizational Impact Areas

- Understand a different point of view
- Improving relationship with leadership
- Assisting in the development of another
- Providing or receiving encouragement/support

Source: Triple Creek 2011

This is critical for the company because it wants to be sure that people feel like they are a part of the same organization, regardless of where they sit. “Our career development philosophy of ‘individually driven, manager enabled and organizationally supported’ should transcend location,” Hoskins said. “That would be a cultural measure of success for us.”

#### Accelerating Global Learning and Competency

The use of mentoring in the corporate world is nothing new, but the way in which mentoring is leveraged has changed dramatically over the years. People today are looking for ways to have immediate learning needs met so that they can solve real issues they face on the job. It’s no longer just about being groomed for that high-profile job with the corner office. Mentoring is now about connecting with people to share skills and knowledge throughout all echelons of the organization.

Speed to competency is the key to agility in the ever-changing global marketplace, and it will be what sets apart organizations that have the ability to lead in the future. “Mentoring helps promote rapid learning,” Crisanti said. “At Aon, we encourage colleagues to be both learners and advisers within mentoring so that they gain insights and inspire innovation. There are many rapid changes going on in the world and in our industry, and using mentoring helps us build deep expertise within the firm that we can leverage and support.”

Connection-based learning through mentoring streamlines the process of finding people who can share insights and helps accelerate learning. By tapping into the wisdom and experience of the global workforce, every employee can use mentoring as a targeted approach that allows people to find the right knowledge sources at the right moment to meet a learning need. The immediacy of this approach impacts people’s ability to do their jobs and do them well.

“We need ways to promote learning, and distance mentoring is a great opportunity for people to communicate and share knowledge,” Crisanti said. “People are using so many different forms of social media today, but mentoring is one way to address learning needs, something social media just can’t do.”

Although social networking has opened the door to many possibilities for global connections, Web-based mentoring adds focus and intentional learning to the equation. It functions more like a neighborhood street market than a water cooler. People can come and shop for the learning they need and personally interact with artists, chefs and importers from all over the world. They can sample their wisdom, learn a bit about different cultures and go home with a basket full of new ideas. «

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