

# A great way to give back

There aren't many opportunities to give back in our profession, but we have skills and expertise that can change the world, **PETER MARLOW** explains

**Having worked in a project management role in the development sector** for five years, Kavita Rajah was at a point where she wanted to take a step back and figure out the next move in her career. Becoming a mentee has proved to be a positive step for her, she says: "My mentor worked with me to help me understand the various tiers of management in the development sector and plan what I needed to do to transition to the next stage."

As others who have benefited from in-house schemes will know, mentoring is a great way to share expertise and knowledge. It involves a confidential, one-to-one relationship in which an individual (mentee) uses a more experienced person (mentor) outside of their management chain as a sounding board and for guidance. Based on a non-judgemental relationship, that offers a wide range of learning, experimentation and development, mentoring encourages the mentee to take charge of their own development and increase their professional competence, independence, self-confidence and desire to improve.

The benefits for both sides are clear. For the mentor, there is the satisfaction of giving back experience and expertise to the profession and seeing someone else grow. It develops their interpersonal skills and counts towards CPD hours – both important aspects of building a career.

For a new project manager, being mentored can have huge benefits. It can prevent basic mistakes and any attempts to 'reinvent the wheel'. A mentor is a source of guidance and perspective – a positive role model. Mentoring can enhance a mentee's existing skills, count towards their CPD, act as a catalyst to develop new skills and have a positive effect on their career.

For organisations, mentoring assists with the recruitment, retention and progression of employees, and helps maximise the potential of their workforce.

## MENTORING IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

While many organisations with a culture of programme and project management have, for some time, been offering mentoring schemes drawing on the wide experience of their staff, this concept is relatively new within the international development sector, and can even be controversial.

In 2015, the UK government spent £12.2bn of public money on foreign aid and has now committed to a target

of 0.7 per cent of GDP being spent on aid. The EU is the world's largest humanitarian donor, and this is just part of a bigger picture of public and private donations being spent on trying to improve the lives of people in the developing world.

Much of this investment ends up in projects, being managed by international, national or local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charities. Such organisations have project managers and project teams, and manage many of the same challenges that you do: delivering on time, on scope and within budget.

The context, however, is very different. Project managers may be managing food distribution in a refugee camp, enabling farmers to access markets, helping populations trapped by conflict, or improving the lives of people living in slums. The communities they serve trust the projects to deliver often life-changing benefits.

In the context of NGOs, two skills are critical: stakeholder management and resource management. It is vital for project managers to be able to reassure and prove to donors that their money has been spent wisely and the benefits delivered. Likewise, development work requires project managers to take on functions such as finance management and supply-chain management, often in difficult circumstances.

Given these challenges, development organisations tend to focus on the technical areas of their projects and recruit specialists with appropriate in-depth technical knowledge, such as health or water and sanitation. As a consequence, the quality of project management can be variable. There may not be a culture of improvement to embed good practice. Managers can be understandably reluctant to admit mistakes, as this can lead to the loss of donor funding, so learning opportunities are often missed.

## DEVELOPING SKILLS

In 2010, Project Management for Development Professionals (PMD Pro) was launched, along with free online learning tools and resources. A new independent NGO – PM4NGOs – was established to own the certification, and APMG-International agreed to administer the exams online. To date, there are more than 13,000 certified PMD Pro professionals.

## THE SKILLS GAP

In 2007, recognising this issue, a number of NGOs, including Save the Children, Oxfam, CARE, World Vision, Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Relief Services, Plan International and Mercy Corps, asked LINGOs, a capacity-building organisation that specialises in NGO development, to develop appropriate project management learning materials for the NGO sector.



## E-MENTORING SCHEME FROM PMAP

■ Project Managers Against Poverty (PMAP) is providing a no-cost e-mentoring platform from MentorNet, initially for 100 users.

Prospective mentors and mentees can sign up through the PMAP website.

■ Ideally, mentors would be members of a project management professional organisation, such as APM, and have an awareness of Project Management for

Development Professionals (PMD Pro – see box, page 56). There is a short guide on the PMAP website.

■ Mentees should be currently involved in development projects, and it is desirable, but not essential, for them to have successfully completed PMD Pro Level 1. The average length of relationship would be three or more months, meeting virtually every one to two weeks.

■ Visit [projectmanagersagainstopoverty.org](http://projectmanagersagainstopoverty.org) or [pmapmentoring.org](http://pmapmentoring.org) for more information about the mentoring scheme for project managers in international development.

For further reading, see *The Good Mentoring Guide* by Zulfi Hussain at [bit.ly/1wiPlud](http://bit.ly/1wiPlud)

■ If you'd like to become a mentor or be mentored, please visit [pmapmentoring.org](http://pmapmentoring.org) or email [peter@pmap.email](mailto:peter@pmap.email)

LINGOs set up a working group of NGO specialists, and concluded that current ways of working across the sector were inadequate. The group tested ideas and approaches, identified learning objectives and developed an outline curriculum for a new project management course. This would set standards and a common language for project management in the NGO sector around the world. It would build on established methodologies to provide practical guidance for running development projects.

### KNOWLEDGE SHARING

LINGOs receive a constant stream of enquiries from project managers in all sectors about how they can help with development projects. So, in 2015, in partnership with LINGOs, Project Managers Against Poverty (PMAP) was set up as a not-for-profit organisation to look at ways of giving back, and in particular to research the idea of setting up a voluntary mentoring programme. It would also benefit project managers working in small organisations without the depth of expertise to call on.

But how could it work? With development projects scattered all over the world, face-to-face meetings would seldom be possible. This has led to the development of a new and effective form of mentoring at a distance, e-mentoring, using software packages such as MentorNet.

### POSITIVE FEEDBACK

At PMAP, we started a small pilot scheme to test the idea and were delighted to find that our mentors and mentees come from countries all over the world. For Malcolm Madelon, being a mentor was a great opportunity to pay back those who helped him in his own career.

He says: "It was a good experience sharing with her, and we rapidly found out that NGOs face the same challenges in

the various parts of the world. In the first session, we laid the ground rules, then set up a weekly Skype meeting for learning and sharing sessions. As the sessions continued, we came to the conclusion that she needed to answer the question of whether to stay in an NGO or go to a corporate. We had some interesting sessions, and then she took time to make her decisions.

"It was really nice sharing my experience and helping her grow and find her own way. I always remember the words of the song 'Circle of Life' from *The Lion King* – 'you should never take more than you give.' Mentoring is a way for me to keep that balance in the circle of life."

"The mentoring programme at PMAP has been really helpful for me," says Kavita. "Most of the issues that arise when working in international development can be quite complex, and the answers aren't written in a book, so it was fantastic to have a sounding board to talk through possible root causes and solutions with someone who works in a similar field and had been through the same experiences.

"I would highly recommend this mentoring programme to anyone doing management in development. It's a great support system for sharing best practice, lessons learned and, most importantly, perspectives." ■



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