



OPERATIONAL  
PROCESSES, SYSTEMS  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

TOOLKIT

- Good knowledge of the social problem you address
- Understand the environment you are working in
- Clear purpose
- Strong public narrative
- Good governance
- Collective leadership
- Organisational structure for effectiveness and agility
- Marketing strategy and communication plan
- Human Resources
- Financial sustainability planning
- Financial management & analysis
- **Operational processes, systems and infrastructure**
- Create dynamic partnerships
- Quality of mentoring-to-work
- Social impact

## OPERATIONAL PROCESSES, SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In the early stages of your mentoring to work initiative your attention for and investment in efficient and effective operational structures might have been minimal. However, once you are growing, have a larger amount of mentors and mentees, more partnerships, more funders who want you to show them your impact, the need to have transparent processes, effective operational systems and structures rises. The need to document your processes might also rise because you might have to prove your (social) impact, you don't want to lose energy and time at non efficient procedures, and you want to keep the quality of your mentoring programme high.

### Processes

A process defines your approach to completing a particular activity. Even the smallest organisation will have a number of activities that take place concurrently, based on their own time cycles. While most day-to-day activities do not need to be documented as a formal process, once you start planning to operate in the long term, it is worth thinking about whether the major activities that are critical to your on-going success should be articulated and written down clearly. Of course, the main aspect of this is hiring new staff members to carry out some of the activities that you did while starting up. Defining processes enables you to get what you've learnt about best practices out of your head and onto a piece of paper. The emphasis should be on formalising the things that help drive excellent quality of mentoring and coaching of the duos, at the same time giving staff the ability to respond to specific circumstances as they do their jobs (UnLtd, 2019).

Some typical areas around which you might think about defining and documenting some processes: databases of mentors and mentees, matching of mentors and mentees, monitoring and evaluation of the duos, capturing and reporting impact, financial planning and monitoring, strategy and marketing planning.

### Systems

As you reach operational stability, you are also likely to start identifying areas where systems (usually IT-based systems) can help make your operations more effective and/or efficient. During the startup phase most organisations work with simple, cheap, stand-alone systems (e.g. webmail, website hosting, etc.), once you start thinking about operating in the long term it may be worth investing in more functional systems. Many of these systems take a much more integrated approach to information management and will address a range of operational functions (UnLtd, 2019). Some examples are customer relationship and stakeholder management systems, financial book-keeping, accounting and reporting systems, a well-designed website that provides a more integrated and interactive 'touch point' for engaging and communicating with stakeholders, in particular mentors, mentees, companies, monitoring and evaluation systems. In several mentoring to work initiatives we notice that companies support the mentoring to work initiative with the development of these instruments as a way to professionalise the operational systems. As we know, Accenture and the Bertelmansstiftung have been supporting the field of mentoring to work initiatives with the development of tools.

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**Infrastructure**

In the early period of operation, the issue of office space may be difficult to manage since the size of your organisation in terms of staff may fluctuate and/or be increasing in an unpredictable manner. To avoid the need to relocate too frequently, many organisations will rent premises that provide 'growing space' for the future. This may be a costly option and one alternative is to use serviced office space where you can rent a space that reflects your current needs (e.g. a certain number of desk spaces) and add further space as you grow (UnLtd, 2019). Mentoring to work initiatives need infrastructure and spaces not only for their staff, but also to receive and meet mentors and mentees and to give trainings for mentors and mentees. Several mentoring to work initiatives offer also meeting spaces for the duos of mentor and mentee to meet each other. It is an asset when you can offer this at the place you are located. Having an infrastructure that can hold space for meeting each other can be seen as an element of perceived quality by staff, mentors and mentees.

It might also be necessary to establish partnerships with organisations in the neighbourhood or in villages in the surroundings to offer additional places to meet. As you start to think about operating in the longer term, it is likely that investing in your own assets may be attractive or even essential versus short-term options such as informally borrowing the assets of friends and supporters, sharing assets with other organisations or hiring/leasing. Operating assets generally need to last for more than a year and purchasing assets can be more cost effective than hiring them from one year to the next. The basic rule is to 'spread' the cost of the asset across its useful life to consider an effective annual cost and compare that to the cost of an alternative such as hiring or leasing. However, don't forget to think about additional costs that are likely to go hand in hand with owning your assets outright, such as insurance, maintenance and repair costs – these should be factored in to your cost-benefit analysis (UnLtd, 2019).



Introduction

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**Stepping stones for wiser action**

What are the key learnings?

What are the actions to take?

Who is responsible?

What is the deadline for the first step?

Who will notice the difference?

How will we notice and evaluate the difference?

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**REFERENCES**

**Literature**

- UnLtd (2019). Operational processes, systems and infrastructure. [www.unltd.org.uk/our-support/learning-area/operational-porcesses-systems-and-infrastrcuture](http://www.unltd.org.uk/our-support/learning-area/operational-porcesses-systems-and-infrastrcuture)

**Websites**

- [www.duoforajob.be](http://www.duoforajob.be)