

DSDM Mentor Guidelines

“The major lesson learnt for our management from the DSDM projects has been the benefits of using a mentor. This is an approach we shall definitely be using, whenever appropriate, in the future”

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1 Introduction

The original aim of the Mentor task group was to put together the framework for a DSDM Mentor accreditation. However, the current downturn in market conditions means that few organisations are currently supporting staff training and accreditation, and therefore it has been decided to put the introduction of any new accreditation on hold. However much useful information on the general subject of mentoring and on the specific issue of DSDM mentoring has been built up and it has therefore been decided to make this available as a White Paper.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this White Paper is to provide help, advice and guidance to individuals who want to develop as DSDM mentors, and to provide guidelines for organisations and managers who select staff to act in a DSDM mentor capacity.

1.2 Audience

The target audiences of this White Paper are:

- 1) DSDM individuals who want to work as DSDM mentors
- 2) DSDM organisations, either existing or new, who want to use DSDM mentors within their organisation

1.3 Contributors

The white paper was produced from contributions made by members of the DSDM Mentor Task Group.

The members of the DSDM Mentor Task Group were:

Barbara Roberts (Chair)	Independent Consultant
Steve Ash	Select Business Solutions/OO Training & Consultancy
Gary Auger	GACS Ltd
Andrew Craddock	RADTAC Ltd
Steve Messenger	NAPP Ltd
John Smith	Smith Business Solutions
Dot Tudor	TCC

2 Terminology

For the purposes of this paper, the term “mentor” is used to refer to the person providing the expertise and guidance. The term “mentee” is used to refer to the person (or group) taking on board the knowledge.

3 Why Use a DSDM Mentor

In an ideal world, DSDM is used in an environment where the team members are carefully chosen as having the right mix of technical and soft skills. DSDM also recommends that the DSDM should be properly trained in DSDM, before the start of the project. And in this perfect environment, DSDM is only applied to projects that score well on the DSDM Suitability/Risk List.

In the real world, putting together the DSDM project team is rarely this straightforward. All too often DSDM is introduced in difficult circumstances, on difficult (and sometimes business-critical) projects. In this type of project, although the team have been trained in DSDM, there is a huge learning curve between the safe DSDM environment of a training course and delivery of a short-timescale, business-critical, real-life project. And even where the project is a good “fit” for DSDM, an inexperienced team may be unsure where to start.

This is where the introduction of a DSDM Mentor can be invaluable – someone who has been through this before and understands the problems. With experience, it is easy to know what to do to get the DSDM project off to a good start. An experienced DSDM-er knows what is critical at each stage to ensure success at the later stages. With experience, it is easy to differentiate between a DSDM problem that can be overcome and a DSDM showstopper. Without this experience, all problems may seem daunting.

The introduction of a DSDM mentor gives the team, or an individual team member, access to the in-depth experience of someone who has done this (successfully) before. This, in itself, facilitates a safe on-project learning environment, without the worry that mistakes made through ignorance may cause project failure. A DSDM Mentor can give guidance on the right way forward, and at the same time s/he is in the position to look further ahead and to ensure potential future pitfalls are avoided.

4 When to Introduce a DSDM Mentor

The key issue about using a DSDM Mentor is that this should be a planned activity, and not a last resort. To get the maximum value from a DSDM Mentor, they should be introduced as early as possible in the lifecycle. For first DSDM projects, this should be no later than the start of the Business Study, but preferably at Feasibility Study stage. As DSDM experts will explain, the Business Study is the key stage that sets everything up for the iterative stages of the project.

If the Business Study is done badly, or if the Business Study products are skimped or missed, it is highly probable the project will fail. All too often a DSDM Mentor is brought in to a project in the later stages (FMI, DBI) when it is all but impossible to save the project. At this point, an undertaker would probably be more use, since no matter how expert the DSDM Mentor, the project is doomed to fail.

As a guide, if as an organisation you are new to DSDM, or you are using DSDM on a business critical project where lack of DSDM knowledge poses a business risk, consider the use of a DSDM Mentor right from the start. The cost of getting expert guidance from the start is generally far cheaper than the cost of project failure.

5 What is a DSDM mentor?

Mentoring may be carried out on a personal or project basis. On a personal basis, mentoring may be one-to-group – team mentoring. However mentoring is most often carried out on a one-to-one basis. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘buddy’ system. Project, group and individual mentoring are all applicable for the purposes of this paper.

5.1 *Mentor or Consultant?*

A mentor is seen as someone who assists in the competency development of an individual or team. This may take the form of nurturing, supporting, guiding, suggesting and/or reviewing. The success of a mentor is generally measured indirectly, by the success of the mentee. The key factor for the relationship is that the mentor and the mentee have a personal and mutual interest in achieving the agreed goal. The knowledge transfer from mentor to mentee is carried out directly, and is generally at a more personal level than the expertise provided by a Consultant.

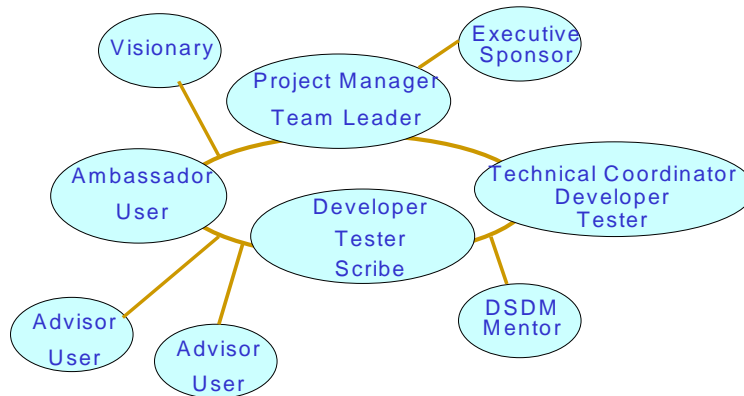
Generally a Consultant would be brought in as an external resource, to provide knowledge transfer to an organisation, or a functional area. A DSDM Consultant is expected to have a wider and much more detailed knowledge of DSDM, including working / using DSDM in more than one organisation. A mentor may be attached to one team / project (or one person) whereas a Consultant could be assigned to several projects.

5.2 Mentoring Models

5.2.1 One to one mentoring



5.2.2 Team Mentoring



5.3 What does a DSDM Mentor need?

A DSDM Mentor should be an accredited DSDM Practitioner or DSDM Project Manager who has been involved in several (at least 2) DSDM projects and is able to advise others less experienced in DSDM on the principles, framework and practice of a DSDM project. Using an accredited DSDM person will ensure that accurate and realistic DSDM advice and guidance is provided by someone who has been independently assessed as “knowing their DSDM” and with a track record of genuine experience. Typically a DSDM mentor is an internal person advising other in-house teams, although s/he may be an external resource, brought in to provide expertise missing within the organisation itself.

The use of a DSDM mentor may be applied at various levels within an organisation, and will sometimes be combined with other expertise. An excellent knowledge of DSDM is assumed. Examples of additional expertise could be:

- mentoring a DSDM Project Manager – this would require specific DSDM project management expertise, rather than just general (traditional) Project Management knowledge. As has been proved, managing successful DSDM projects is very different to managing traditional projects and frequently calls on a very different set of management skills.
- mentoring a DSDM tester – this would require a good knowledge and background of testing, as well as the knowledge and experience of DSDM’s integrated testing and testing principles.

The need for additional skills is highlighted here, since in both of these areas, the role is significantly different to the role as carried out in a traditional environment.

The level of expertise in the mentor needs to be higher than that of the mentee, in order to provide guidance and a way forward.

This is not suggesting a need for additional Mentor endorsements. It is intended simply to point out that additional knowledge (experience or accreditation) may be needed i.e. that a DSDM Mentor is not a “one size fits all” approach.

6 Mentor Characteristics

6.1 *General Mentor Characteristics*

These characteristics apply, whatever the situation.

A mentor **MUST**

- Be a good listener
- Be willing and able to spend time with mentee (which could be a whole team)
- Be able to gain a quick grasp of the problem
- Be able to communicate ideas clearly, whilst being flexible about the possible solution(s)
- Be pragmatic – able and willing to make the best of what is available (rather than insisting on the perfect environment, which rarely exists)
- Be able to build a good rapport with mentee – on the same wavelength, and able to interact as an equal
- Share a common goal with mentee i.e. success is achieved through the mentee, e.g. the mentee delivers a successful first DSDM project, or achieves Practitioner accreditation
- Be consultative in their approach, but in a personal way (hands-on, rather than hands-off)
- Be able to assess and mitigate risks

A mentor **SHOULD**

- Be an experienced Facilitator or have a facilitative style of communication
- Either be a teacher, guru or leader in their field, or be recognised as a local expert
- Either have coaching skills or demonstrate an understanding of the coaching mentality
- Have the ability to lead/guide without power (this is assuming a project manager cannot or should not be mentor of their own project).

6.2 DSDM Specific Mentor Characteristics

In order to mentor DSDM effectively, a mentor **MUST**

- Be competent in DSDM, with a proven track record of success
- Have demonstrable previous practical experience of making DSDM work, dealing with problems and finding ways forward
- Have experience of DSDM and non-DSDM approaches (to ensure good judgement and an understanding of alternatives)

A DSDM Mentor **SHOULD**

- Have experience (or understanding) of the optional paths through the DSDM lifecycle
- Have experience (or understanding) of mixed DSDM / traditional projects, and how to move between the two

6.3 Specific Assignment Characteristics

These characteristics will vary for each separate assignment, and will be applied differently, depending on the organisation / culture. This is especially important where a mentor is brought in from outside the organisation. For example, the mentor for a dot.com DSDM project team might not be the same person as the mentor for a large City financial organisation project team.

As well as the general mentor and DSDM specific characteristics detailed above, for each mentoring assignment the mentor **MUST**

- Be a good fit with the culture
- Be an expert in the relevant subject area(s) e.g. Project Management, Training, Development, Testing etc. with a proven and demonstrable track record of success

7 Full time or part time DSDM Mentor?

When considering the introduction of a DSDM Mentor, there are a number of options. At one extreme, the DSDM Mentor may be an accredited DSDM Practitioner who “buddies” another member of staff through their DSDM Practitioner accreditation. At the other extreme, in organisations where the move to DSDM has been a major process change for the entire business, whole teams of DSDM Mentors have been brought in and worked full time over a period of some months. And between these two extremes, there is a wide range of models. Full time or part time? One mentor shared across teams? Teams of mentors shared across the organisation? The choice will always depend on individual circumstances (and budgets). The only consistent factor is that the time of the DSDM Mentor should be front-loaded, since getting the basics in place as early as possible is so important for success.

8 Summary

The information contained in this White Paper provides useful guidelines, both for staff who are moving into a DSDM mentor role, and for employers and managers who are looking to appoint DSDM Mentors. Selecting staff with the appropriate DSDM qualification and the necessary level of experience, as well as aiming for the correct culture fit, should ensure the best possible environment for delivering successful DSDM. This also helps the growth and acceptance of DSDM itself.