Deciding how to structure engagements can be one of the more challenging steps in implementing a mentoring program. The purpose of this document is to help you understand your options and make a decision. Structure is a sliding scale, but can be grouped into three categories:

- Low structure—Topical consultation
- Medium structure—Growth on Goals
- High structure—Facilitated training

When choosing an engagement strategy, consider a few things:

- How much activity is required—and what activities will you NEED to know about?
- How much guidance will participants need?
- Are participants intrinsically motivated to track their participation in the software?

This document will describe the three categories, explain key considerations with pros and cons, and cover common ways to track engagement.

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ABOUT THE THREE LEVELS

LOW STRUCTURE: TOPICAL CONSULTATION
Low structure engagements are characterized by a simple set of required tasks tracking meeting sessions, or a set of optional tasks to provide guidance. Facilitation messages are often used to drop guidance to participants. In some cases, participants aren’t expected to log in often, but participants must confirm satisfaction via periodic surveys or focus groups. Topical consultations are often relatively short term, ranging from 1-3 months. Low structure can also be used with long-term supportive relationships, as long as outcomes aren’t regimented.

✓ WHEN TO USE: If it is most important that the partners simply connect and build a relationship on their own terms, with actual outcomes and duration varying.

MEDIUM STRUCTURE: GROWTH ON GOALS

To add in some structure, you may incorporate the Goal Plan feature in Chronus Mentor, allowing participants to set their own goals and tasks. You can also add required tasks to guide mentees in structuring and pursuing goals methodically. Milestones are also often used to provide extra guidance in a medium-structure engagement.

If you need to track on goals, be sure to train continuously on the importance of goal setting, send reminders, and provide examples of solid goals & tasks. Hold people accountable to put in the effort. If benefits are not clear and expectations are low, the added structure of goal tracking may be perceived as a burden and you may see low engagement. However, built-in goal tracking can be very helpful for the right audience when used well.

✓ WHEN TO USE: If expectations are set high with mentees that they will set targeted goals, and/or if mentees and mentors need a lot of help to be successful.
HIGH STRUCTURE: FACILITATED TRAINING

If any outcomes should be identical across partnerships, increase structure by adding in program-wide goals. Add tasks that correspond to goals. Facilitated training programs tend to be very step-by-step and require participants to track every movement.

✓ WHEN TO USE: Tailored programs that get mentees from A to B, where B is measurable, such as role-specific training or development of a specific competency.

PROS AND CONS

INCREASING STRUCTURE: PROS AND CONS

Pros:
✓ Works well for facilitated training models, such as structured onboarding scenarios with required outcomes
✓ Works well if mentoring outcomes are relatively standardized and specific
✓ Motivated mentees may get more out of partnerships if they respond well to a step-by-step recipe for success.

Cons:
✓ Can make mentoring seem intimidating or time-consuming in optional, open-ended programs where there is little incentive for the mentee to thoroughly track progress
✓ Less flexibility for relationships

DECREASING STRUCTURE: PROS AND CONS

Pros:
✓ Minimizes the expectations of participants. For open programs, this may increase the chances that people will track progress (if tracking is your metric for success)
✓ Good when outcomes vary significantly from mentee to mentee, or when mentoring process varies significantly (e.g., some participants just meet and talk, other participants create structured goal plans)
✓ Streamlines your metrics for success (e.g., mentees must simply report they have met 8 times over a 6 month period)
✓ Good for those that excel at making their own plans and goals

Cons:
✓ May reduce the success of mentees/mentors who respond better to step-by-step instructions.
✓ Lack of enforcement reduces the pressure to be deliberate in mentoring.
TRACKING ENGAGEMENT

Carefully consider what will really tell you the success of your program. Sometimes, what really matters is that you successfully match and provide guidance to mentees. This requires only minimal tracking. For example, if your program is optional and the goal is happy, satisfied participants, then why worry about detailed, comprehensive tracking? Participants in optional, self-driven programs tend to vary in needs and outcomes, with some taking advantage of structure, and others unwilling to follow a heavy approach. In these cases, automated guidance drives engagement, but checkpoints should be sparing and focus on satisfaction.

Below are the three common styles of engagement tracking.

**Simple metrics**
- Need to know: Pairs meet regularly or report they are satisfied with mentoring
- Participants have option to track other types of progress if they find it helpful

**Detailed metrics**
- Need to know: Participants use software regularly
- Participants track goal-setting and progress on goals
- Admins monitor general activity such as logins, messaging frequency, or task completion

**Play-by-play metrics**
- Need to know: Participants complete specific sequence of activities
- General activity level may be tracked too--logins, messaging frequency, etc.

Your metric style does not need to be a perfect match with your level of structure. You can mix simple metrics with medium structure, for instance, by providing optional guidance.

CONCLUSION

As a final note, some find it helpful to consider the amount of external motivation needed. If the group shares high or intrinsic motivation, they may engage and succeed regardless of structure level—you can give mentees more flexibility to come up with their own mentoring paths, or you can provide a step-by-step checklist as they try to achieve a predefined goal. An example is programs that serve high potentials, succession planning, or new managers. For optional programs serving a broader audience, you may see lower engagement in general, because motivation levels will vary drastically.

This structural decision is not black and white. Have an honest discussion with internal stakeholders about the group of individuals you are serving with mentoring and what they need. Your job is to figure out the appropriate
incentives to encourage engagement. Are mentees required to complete a list of activities toward a specific outcome, or is this really all about mentees’ personal self-betterment? Let your organizational objectives guide you: what will tell you the impact of mentoring?