Taking Charge of your LIS Career: Personal Strategies, Institutional Programs, Strong Libraries
12 -14 August 2015
Cape Town, South Africa

Being a mentor

Ulrike Lang

Education and Training Department, State and University Library, Hamburg, Germany.
lang@sub.uni-hamburg.de

Abstract:

In 2009 one of the German library associations, the "Professional Library and Information Body" (Berufsverband Information Bibliothek (BIB)) started a mentoring programme for its members to promote their personal development. The author applied to become a mentor and the BIB looked for a matching mentee. The paper describes the start of the programme as well as the process, and concludes with results and the errors which should be avoided. It presents useful materials and describes the chosen communication methods of the teams of mentors and mentees.

Keywords: mentoring, Germany, librarians, continuing professional development.

Introduction

> **Mentorship** is a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. The mentor may be older or younger, but possesses a certain area and level of expertise. It is a learning and development partnership between someone with vast experience and someone who wants to learn (Wikipedia).

In practice, as this paper shows, there may be learning and strengthening of experiences for both participants.

The German Library Landscape

Germany is characterized by a decentralised federal system, especially in the field of culture and education. This system is reflected in the equally strong decentralization of the German library landscape which has about 8,200 libraries with more than 10,000 service points, with a wide range of libraries, organisations and associations, all for the benefit of the library user. The majority are run by professionally educated staff.

The landscape of library associations in Germany may be rather confusing for foreign librarians:

1. The **German Library Association** (dbv) is an association of institutions. The representative members are usually the directors or head librarians of the institutions and also representatives of relevant cities and towns, such as lord mayors or their deputies.

2. For personal membership there is the **Association of German Librarians** (VDB), the oldest association, founded in 1900 for librarians with university degrees working at academic libraries.

3. Librarians from public libraries, staff of academic libraries and the staff of other types of libraries and information organizations, with lower levels of qualifications, found their home in the **Professional Library and Information Body** (BIB). This body, following several mergers with previous associations, now has more than 6300 members, and is home for librarians, information professionals, library assistants and students of library sciences, independent of the institution they are working for. The BIB has a professional business administration unit which organizes the membership and finances and runs a very good library journal. The managing board comprises volunteers. All members are well trained librarians or information professionals with long experience.

There are also other library and librarian associations in Germany, and links to information regarding these are given in the References at the end of the paper.

The BIB Mentoring programme Bib@mento

"My" library association, the BIB, set up a programme called BIB@mento , to find and match in pairs experienced professionals as mentors and less experienced professionals as mentees.

The organizers anticipated that members of these paired teams would not be located in the same city or library system, and therefore created a small budget so that the teams would be able to meet at least once a year in person at the German library conference. The project manager for this initiative within the association was one of the governing board members and also professor at the Stuttgart library school, so is well qualified and also familiar with teaching skills.

This programme was slightly different from what one usually has in mind when thinking about mentorship because the mentor and mentee did not belong to the same institution or organization. They were not part of the same work team and did not plan to work together in the future. The BIB thought this project would be successful and that it would be much easier to find matches than if we had to look in the same library or even city for a partner. As a former Governing Board member of the BIB I felt a responsibility to support new professionals and agreed to participate as a mentor.

From a personal point of view it was very promising that the mentors and mentees could freely talk about problems with people like supervisors, managers or other team managers because the mentor would not know them personally or already have a picture of actions and reactions in mind.

The BIB organizers provided a very good beginning to this project by initiating the programme at a start-up meeting during the German Library Conference 2010 in Leipzig. Using their social media presentations and website, newsletter and monthly journal, BIB has since published information about the planned programme and recruited participants.

BIB provided an agreement and some guidelines to start with. The documents can be found in translation at the end of this paper. The programme started with four teams and there were four female mentors, three female mentees and one male mentee. (This is not an accurate representation of the gender distribution across German libraries.)

As mentioned above, the BIB provided mentees with financial support for travel expenses to participate in the initial meeting as well as for visiting the mentors during the year of mentorship.

At the start-up meeting in Leipzig during the German Library Conference the vice-chairperson of the BIB gave some input, including a round of introductions and some idea of why participants were there, what their expectations were, and so on. PowerPoint slides were prepared so that the audience could follow the most important regulations.

BIB itself described its role in the mentoring process:
- BIB was the initiator of the programme
- BIB was prepared to give organisational help in the background
- BIB was a partner for questions and problems during the year of the programme
- BIB gave financial support for the mentees for example at the beginning for travel expenses to the German Library Conference, for visits to mentors and similar expenses
- BIB committed to responsibility for evaluation and the development of the programme
- BIB would organize the final meeting at the following year's conference
- BIB organizers offered help in all critical situations (as described below in the section on challenges and obstacles).

Goals of the programme

- BIB believed that junior staff development is a central task of a personal professional association and wanted to support newcomers in their professional and personal development.
- BIB wanted to link the competencies and experiences of committed members to the development of more junior members.

The framework

- Mentees should be students or trainees, that is, new professionals.
- Mentors should be professionally educated and skilled personnel with knowledge of and actual experience in library work. Several years of responsible positions in librarianship would be required.
- The BIB would look for matching teams, that is, matching in the professional area, professional interests and goals, and with some geographical proximity if possible.
- Teams would work together for one year. After that mentor and mentee would have to decide if they still wanted to work together outside the regulations of the BIB.

- The start of the programme would always take place at the annual German Library Conference.

The BIB gave also a brief description of what it means by mentoring:
- It is a time-limited personal relationship of two persons;
- It gives knowledge and experiences of experts to young colleagues;
- It focus on learning with commitment to the professional context;
- It requires self-reflection on personal the actions on both sides; and
- It will support networks.

Opportunities and values of mentoring for mentees

1. Mentoring should support daily life especially working life. It is a consulting process with a benevolent and independent executive. If people talk together about professional topics it is knowledge transfer and also the transfer of informal knowledge, strategies, experiences and so-called work "rules of the game".
2. Social and communicative competencies might also be improved, so mentoring is individual support of the personality and the skills of the mentee.
3. It will also develop the leadership skills of mentees while discussing a variety of leadership situations and supporting inter-departmental thinking and identification of responsibilities.
4. To be mentored is to 'Think "beyond one`s own nose" to get new stimulation through a view of cultures of organizations different from one's own.
5. Also important for young librarians are the development of networks and the awareness of the meaning of networks. It is important to start as early as possible with building these networks because it is hard to create them out of nowhere when they are urgently needed.

Values for mentors

For mentors there is the satisfaction that their own experiences will be useful for juniors, and there might be stimulation for their own leadership skills as well. Taking a fresh look at professional processes from the perspective of juniors might bring different conclusions for their own leadership approach. Usually we don`t have the time to reflect on our own experiences and leadership competencies but the mentoring process allows us to do so. In addition, the view inside another organization is interesting and inspiring for mentors. Having information about the mentee`s workplace and regulations might be helpful for developing one's own institution. Finally, it is always helpful to widen one's own network. This programme was also able to connect more experts and mentees.

Requirements for, and the role of, mentees

Mentees should be interested in personal development, including reflection on their own attitudes and activities. The mentee has to be ready to learn and get feedback and be willing to implement skills and to consider seriously if implementation is possible. She or he plays an active part in the process of mentoring, needs to be really interested in results and needs to take individual responsibility while respecting the engagement of the mentor.

From the other side, the mentor provides an insight into her or his field of activity, shares experiences and points out a variety of approaches. The decision however will ultimately be

made by the mentee. That could sometimes be difficult if the mentor "knows exactly" what to do but the mentee decides to take different action because she or he knows the circumstances of her/his own work environment better than the mentor or has some personal misgivings about the suggested solutions. So the role of the mentor is more than a counsellor, door opener, "broadcaster" of knowledge or even a sparring partner to test some circumstances, and the mentor has to accept this situation.

There are of course some limitations to mentoring. Nobody should feel they are being taken advantage of, and mentoring also has to take place on a voluntary basis. But mentoring is not a miracle cure. Mentees should not expect too much and should be patient with the process. They should also not expect too much of the pairing. The mentor might be very well educated and have considerable experience but the problem the mentee is talking about might never have been encountered by the mentor before and therefore never been addressed. It should be kept in mind that problems inherent in the personality of the mentee and his/her work counterparts cannot simply be solved by a mentor. The mentor can help to educate and build the skills of the mentee to reach professional goals but the conversation is always focused on the mentee`s own personal goals.

Finally, there may sometimes be private personal problems that are the greatest obstacles to reaching achieving professional goals and changes. In professional mentoring the mentor has to leave these aside and concentrate on the professional topics. For personal problems the mentee may need other professional support.

The BIB Library Association organizers suggested that the mentoring process be organized around virtual contacts on a regular basis. The use of electronic support like email, chat, skype and similar means is very helpful. If possible the opportunity for job shadowing should be included. This means the mentee would have the chance to accompany the mentor to meetings and professional workshops where the mentor has to be active. Here the mentee would observe whether the performance of the mentor was successful in a specific professional situation. The feedback given by the mentee is of interest to the mentor, too, because this kind of feedback is not normally available.

The mentoring team should themselves determine the amount of time to be spent together so both are able to plan the time available. The very important preparation and wrap-up of meetings is the responsibility of the mentee, preferably with protocols and a to-do list. The meeting should never consist of only informal conversation; there should be an agenda and some topics that require solutions. If there are not, the mentee will not need a professional mentor to talk to but just anybody who will listen. The need for preparation also provides the mentee with the opportunity to think hard about the goal she or he wants to reach and the means by which the goal shall be reached.

Topics in mentoring

To organize the mentoring the pair should agree on the topics in mentoring. A great variety is possible and probably not everything would be relevant in every process. Topics might include:
- naming the professional goals and how they can be reached;
- describing e the mentor's strategies on how to reach goals;
- approaches to applications and job interviews;
- planning of internships;
- informal "rules of the game" in professional experiences;

- exchange of information about professional experiences;
- compatibility of family and profession. In some cultures work/life-balance is a growing topic especially for women;
- personal skills and weaknesses;
- negotiation, dealing with conflicts and problems; and
- appearing in front of groups for presentations and talks.

It is important to keep in mind that some goals and some strategies might change during the process of mentoring.

In the first meeting it is helpful to settle the structure of future contacts together. The BIB encourages agreement about rules of the mentoring partnership but the mentor and mentee should develop their individual mentoring agreement together. For this the BIB has created an interview guide which is included at the end of this paper. The mentoring agreement provides a structure to which the team can add. It is very important to clarify the expectations on both sides: the mentoring team should talk about the goals of the mentoring process and reflect together if and how they would be able to reach these goals. They should also discuss possible barriers.

Phases of the mentoring process

At the beginning there needs to be a focus on developing confidence and clarifying the expectations of both partners. That will provide the opportunity to talk about fears and so will build security. The written agreement will also support the sense of security. The team members should each see their own opportunities in the process of the mentoring relationship and be very clear about their own role and the role of their partner.

During the process of mentoring it will be important to find some kind of relationship that supports the sense of security and trust mentioned above, which is necessary for the process. That in turn will promote the growth of the mentee and the self-reflection of the mentor. This will also support the possibility of feedback and reflection about the relationship and a review of skills development on a regular base.

The official BIB-supported mentoring programme would end after one year. At this time the mentoring pair should meet for assessment and acknowledgement, and appraise and identify the goals which have been attained. Together they should decide if they want to end the mentoring relationship or continue. If they want to continue they should together define the new relationship outside the rules of the Library Association. If the agreement was successful up to this point, it would of course make sense to continue under the same rules; if not, the team would have to discuss what needed to be changed.

Challenges and obstacles

- It was the Library Association that matched the team members not the individuals themselves, so it was possible that mentor and mentee did not fit.
- Joint agreements could have been neglected.
- A mentor might have been too dominant, might have limited time available.
- Mentees might have been too passive, not able to get feedback.
- There are problems which do not have a mentoring solution (like being dissatisfied

with responsibilities, not being equitably paid). Here the mentoring process can only support the development of the ability to talk about these problems with the senior or manager of the mentee but not solve the problem itself.

- Criticism and advice had to be articulated very carefully because the individuals did not know each other very well. In many cases before the mentoring started they had never met before and the first workshop was the first time they had met in person and could start to get an impressions of one other.

- Care had to be taken to avoid a mother-child-relationship due to the age difference. Experience of life is important but not always the solution.

- How the mentee should negotiate in different situations can be planned and discussed but the mentor cannot jump into the real situation. And a mentor in the role of the manager or senior is always acting in some way because she/he does not know the person and his or her reactions. For the mentee it is therefore very theoretical and sometimes not realistic. Nevertheless it could be helpful just to face situations and reactions like these.

- Telephone calls can be a difficult medium for planning these activities if there is not an opportunity to check facial expressions and gestures. Media like skype or something similar are therefore recommended because if the body language is conveying something different from the speech the message has a different meaning for each participant.

- Urgent issues of concern regarding the professional situation of the mentee (like meeting with a senior for discussing a difficult matter) might require a meeting of the mentor and mentee outside the prearranged time frame and this requires flexibility. It is however necessary to be very careful that this relationship does not become one of stand-by support.

- It is very important to recognise the "point of no return", the moment that is the end of a discussion, when the mentee has to take action alone. It should be hoped that the moment for mentor and mentee is the same.

- Finally, the mentor-mentee pair needs to recognise that there are topics which do not need professional encouragement or that cannot be resolved in the context of profession but need skilled psychological support.

A personal account of a specific mentoring situation

My mentee was not happy with her duties. She had to act in place of the secretary if the secretary was not at the office (for example, answering the phone for the general manager). This was not professional library business, but rather administrative work. She had also a chronic illness. There were problems with her boyfriend because she was thinking about obtaining a qualification to reach a higher level at work and he was afraid that there would not be enough time for personal activities. This mentee had too many personal problems and almost no way to start, instead of considering for herself where she wanted to prioritise. From a personal point of view my role in mentoring was to listen to what she was considering and carefully give her advice in a particular direction.

Personally, as a mentor, it was very inspiring and interesting to realize how my social skills and competencies developed during this process. One is asked to give advice and support and what does this mean for the mentee? And what is she doing with it?

Conclusion: further mentoring activity

Unfortunately, after this first year of mentoring, duties in the BIB changed and finding new partnerships was not a top priority for the new team.

There is however a new example of mentoring taking place in Hamburg, Germany, at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW). The University offers a programme for post-graduate students and alumni who are just starting in their professions. More than 80 mentors are available for all students of all faculties and this year they have looked for a mentor in library sciences. The mentoring period is limited to nine months. The topics include potentials in gender and diversity on the way to a professional career; intercultural training; and building networks with other mentees.

Another wonderful example for mentoring is the support for first timers at conferences. The IFLA Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning (CPDWL) Section has offered support for creating posters and presentations for the satellite conference. Time is very limited and so is the field of work. For this mentoring activity one does not need much knowledge about one's partner and one is communicating on a very high professional level, usually without meeting in person at all before the presentation. In addition, the mentee is really interested in the help of the mentor because the mentee has asked for the contact and help -- <u>and</u> you don`t have to face difficult work situations or managers!

As a final example, a centre of competence for mentoring in science, the **Mentoring Forum,** was founded in 2006 in Germany. The aim of this organisation is to achieve equal opportunities in science and research. It serves the networking and support of gender- and diversity-friendly mentoring initiatives, with specific consideration of women already in academic studies, science and research as well as on their way towards these fields. The Forum supports the development of mentoring services and gears up the initiation, development, institutionalization and quality assurance of mentoring. Nationwide, the following working groups in Germany are currently working on the goal-oriented implementation of mentoring programmes that include International Conference Mentoring in Medicine; High Potentials; Diversity; Evaluation; and Newcomers.

Sources and links

Association of German Librarians (VDB)
http://www.vdb-online.org/verein/info-en.php

Federal association for mentoring in science (Forum Mentoring)
www.forum-mentoring.de

German Library Association (dbv).
http://www.bibliotheksverband.de/metamenue/english.html

German Library portal
http://www.bibliotheksportal.de/english.html

Hamburg Univ. of Applied Sciences mentoring programme
http://www.haw-hamburg.de/gleichstellung/angebote/mentoring.html

IFLA. Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section (CPDWL)
http://www.ifla.org/cpdwl or CPDWL blog or FB page

Jong, Ella de: Solution focused mentoring. Five steps to bring out the best in your mentee and yourself
http://bookboon.com/en/solution-focused-mentoring-ebook?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=2015-w25-fallback-1-a&utm_content=006&email=ulrike%40lang-site.de&segment=a89fe67bffade011b81722a08ed629e5

Professional Library and Information Body (BIB)
http://www.bib-info.de/index.html

Appendix

BIB@Mento

General agreement

Mentee, Name	
Address	
Phone	
Mobile	
E-Mail	

and

Mentor	
Address	
Phone	
Mobile	
E-Mail	

Regulations with regard to content

Goals of mentoring:

Basic topics:

B@Mento
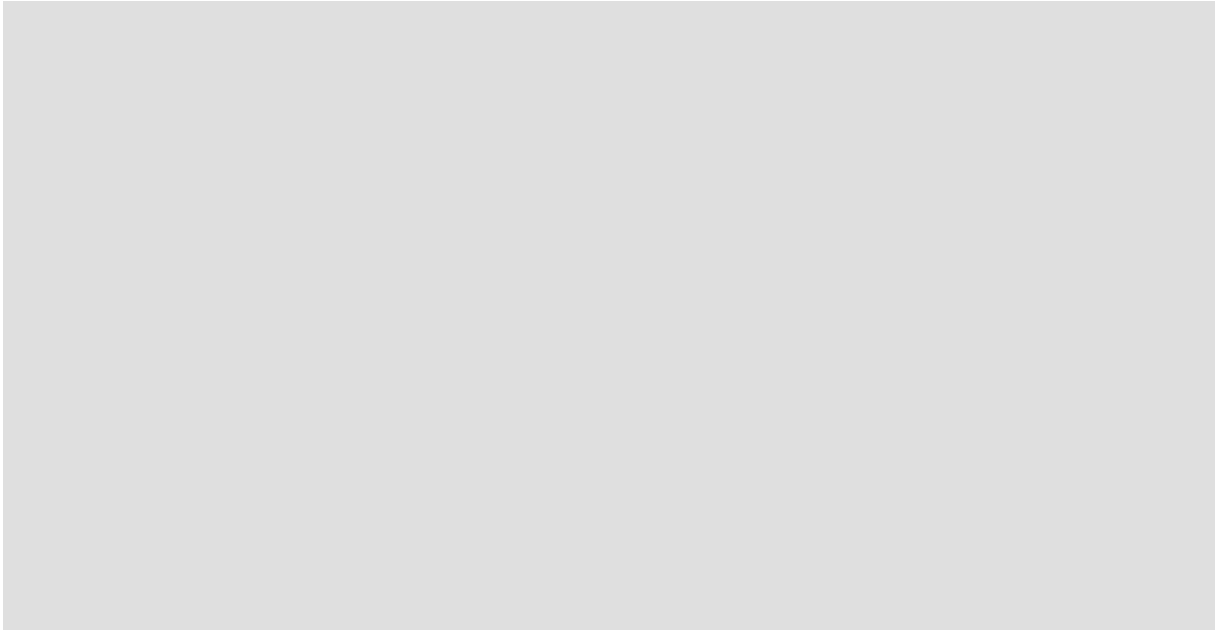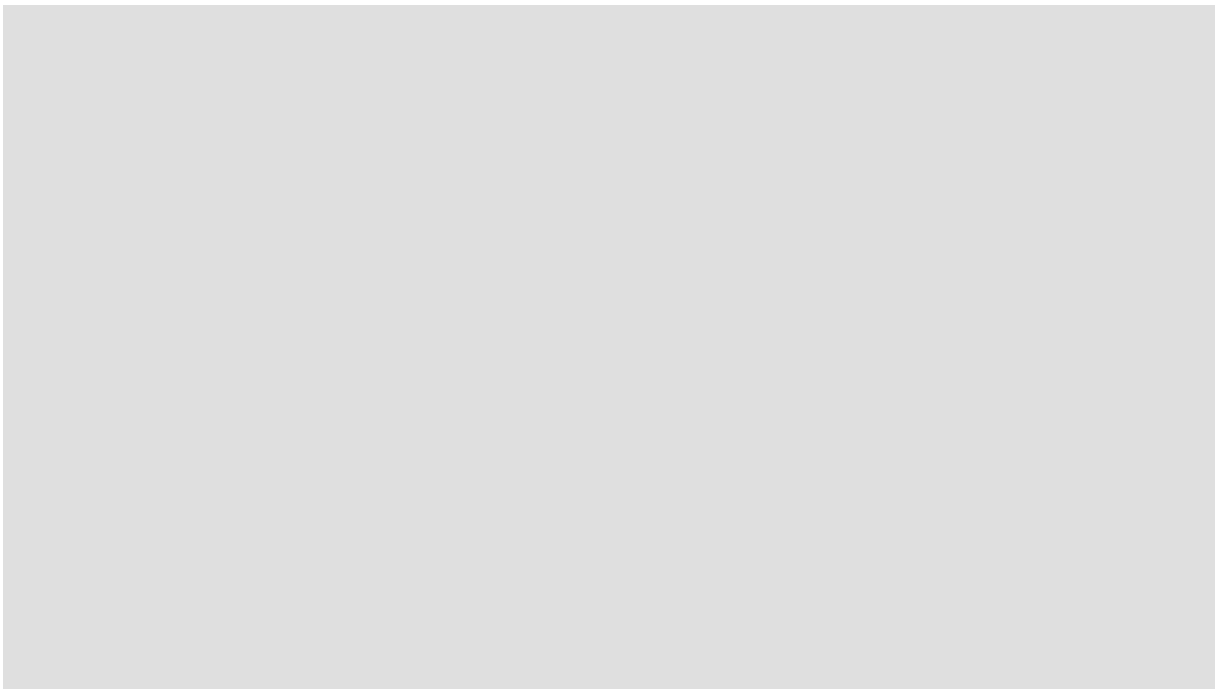
Formal regulations

How to meet / how to contact

By phone by e-Mail postal more	
Time lag between meetings / contacts	
Duration of the meetings / contacts	
More arrangements	

Statement

The fixed arrangements were agreed at the first meeting and are considered to the duration of the mentorship as obligatory. We commit to undertaking the mentorship constructively and responsibly and to participating in our organization continuously and being engaged. We undertake to treat all contents which are exchanged within the framework of the mentorship programme confidentially and to transmit nothing - without explicit agreement – to others. The programme lasts for a year and will end in March, 20..

.

....

Signature mentee   Signature mentor

....

Place and date

To start with a structure: Interview guidelines

I. Start: Clearing of content and goals

What   are   the   expectations   you   have?
What should definitely happen? (Mentor & Mentee)

Which   concerns   do   you   have   related   to   the   mentoring   process?
What should definitely not happen? (Mentor & Mentee)

These topics have the highest priorities for me (Mentee):

These goals I want to reach (Mentor & Mentee)

What exactly are you willing to do to reach the goals? (Mentor & Mentee)

What obstacles do you have to face? (Mentee)

What forces you to be efficient? (Mentee)

I`m 100% satisfied after one year of mentorship if the result is… (Mentor & Mentee)

I`m 50% satisfied after one year of mentorship if the result is… (Mentor & Mentee)
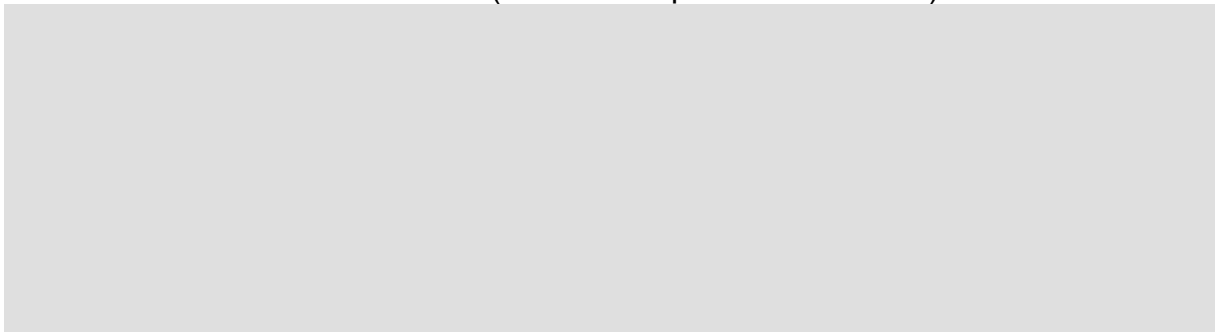
I`m not at all satisfied after one year of mentorship if the result is… (Mentor & Mentee)

II. Implementation: The formal scope

(Time, topic, rules etc. Mentor & Mentee)

- How much time do I have? / How much time do I need?

- How do we limit the topics?

- What are the formal rules? ('Never disrupt a weekend' etc.)

III. Fix the results

Follow up the content in keywords:

Fix together who is responsible for what, when and with which goal (measurable result) and feedback to whom

Fix the date when you will come back on what