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Year VII, v.1 2026 | Submission: 02/06/2026 | Accepted: 05/06/2026 | Publication: 08/06/2026

Mentoring and professional development: developing the next generation of communicators in a constantly changing technological landscape.
Mentoring and professional evolution: developing the next generation of communicators in an ever-changing technological landscape
Mentoring and professional development: developing the next generation of communicators in a constantly changing technological landscape

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SUMMARY
This article examines, from a historical, scientific, and epistemological perspective, the processes of talent development in the field of social communication, with an emphasis on mentoring practice as a structuring mechanism for professional development. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach anchored in the theories of situated learning (LAVE; WENGER, 1991), distributed cognition (HUTCHINS, 1995), and critical journalism studies (TRAQUINA, 2004), the work investigates how mentor-learner relationships are reconfigured in the face of the technological, ethical, and epistemological transformations that mark contemporary media. The phenomenon of the so-called "new generation of communicators," characterized by the need to master multiple languages, digital platforms, and real-time data verification methodologies, is analyzed. The results indicate that structured mentoring, when integrated with innovative pedagogical practices and the development of digital skills, constitutes a central vector for the training of professionals capable of articulating journalistic rigor, ethical responsibility, and technological agility.

Keywords: Mentoring. Communication training. Digital skills. Journalism. Epistemology of communication.

ABSTRACT
This article examines, from historical, scientific, and epistemological perspectives, the processes of talent development in the field of social communication, with an emphasis on mentoring practices as a structuring mechanism for professional development. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach grounded in situated learning theory (LAVE; WENGER, 1991), distributed cognition (HUTCHINS, 1995), and critical journalism studies (TRAQUINA, 2004), the paper investigates how mentor-apprentice relationships are reconfigured amid technological, ethical, and epistemological transformations that characterize contemporary media. The phenomenon of the so-called "new generation of communicators" is analyzed, characterized by the need to master multiple languages, digital platforms, and real-time data verification methodologies. Results indicate that structured mentoring, when integrated with innovative pedagogical practices and digital competence development, constitutes a central vector for forming professionals capable of articulating journalistic rigor, ethical responsibility, and technological agility.
Keywords: Mentoring. Communication training. Digital competencies. Journalism. Communication epistemology.

1 INTRODUCTION

The technological acceleration of recent decades has imposed a disruption on social communication.

A paradigmatic and unprecedented shift. If 20th-century journalism was structured around platforms

While the traditional media—print, radio, and television—are stable, the contemporary communicator operates within a

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A dynamic, polyphonic, and algorithmically mediated ecosystem, in which production and circulation and the consumption of information is being reconfigured in increasingly shorter cycles (JENKINS; FORD; GREEN, 2013).

In this context, professional training ceases to be a terminal event — limited to the years Graduation — and becomes a continuous, permanent, and dialogical process.

Mentoring thus emerges not only as a complementary pedagogical practice, but also as a fundamental epistemic device in the construction of the professional's identity and competence. communication (MERRIAM; CAFFARELLA; BAUMGARTNER, 2007).

This article starts from a central problem: how have mentoring relationships, historically... Practices found in newsrooms and professional communication environments need to reinvent themselves. to meet the demands of a market marked by digital convergence, by hyperproduction of content and the structural crisis of traditional financing models. journalistic?

To answer this question, a qualitative methodology based on bibliographic research is adopted and reflective, anchored in a systematic review of the scientific literature on mentoring and training. Professionalism and digital skills in journalism, combined with critical analysis of experiences. Practices in the development of communicators in editorial and academic environments.

The central hypothesis guiding this work is that structured mentoring — understood as an intentional, reflective, and theoretically grounded practice — it constitutes the most effective link. between the tacit knowledge accumulated by experienced professionals and emerging demands of a new generation of communicators, for whom technology, ethics, and speed are not Isolated variables, but inseparable dimensions of professional practice.

2. HISTORICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MENTORING IN COMMUNICATION

2.1 Writing as spaces for informal learning

The practice of mentoring in journalism predates academic discussions on the subject by a long way. Since the 19th century, in major European and North American newsrooms, the learning of The profession was acquired predominantly through observation, imitation, and direct instruction. From the most experienced to the beginners — a model that resembles, in many respects, the medieval master-apprentice system of craft guilds (ZELIZER, 2004).

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In Brazil, this informal model of transmitting professional knowledge has persisted, with variations, up until the mid-20th century. The major newspaper newsrooms, such as O Estado de S. Paulo, O Globo and Jornal do Brasil functioned as veritable practical schools, in which veteran reporters — often without any formal university education in communication — they transmitted to beginners not only research and writing techniques, but also values, ethical stances and worldviews (RIBEIRO, 2003).

This informal tradition, however, should not be romanticized. Immersion learning in The writing frequently reproduced biases, exclusionary practices, and epistemological limitations. which would only be questioned with the institutionalization of journalism education in universities. Brazilian women, especially since the profession was regulated in 1969 (SILVA, 2000).

2.2 The institutionalization of training and the emergence of a scientific field

The creation of the first journalism courses in Brazil — the Cásper Líbero School of Journalism, in 1947, and the Journalism Course at the University of Brazil, in 1948 — marked the beginning of a productive tension between academic training and professional practice that still structures today debates on the field of communication (MEDINA, 2001).

It was only from the 1990s onwards, however, with the consolidation of postgraduate programs... A degree in communication and the arrival of digital technologies in newsrooms, which mentoring It began to be studied systematically as a scientific object. Researchers like Sherry Merriam and Rosemary Caffarella (2007), in the field of adult education, and Nelson Traquina (2004), in journalistic studies, contributed to the understanding that learning Professional life is fundamentally social, situated within, and mediated by, interpersonal relationships.

The situated learning theory, developed by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger (1991), offers a particularly fertile framework for understanding mentoring in communication. According to According to these authors, knowledge is not something that is acquired abstractly and then applied in practice. practice; on the contrary, it is inseparable from the activities, contexts, and cultures in which it is carried out. developed. Learning to be a journalist, therefore, means progressively participating in a Community of practice, and the mentor is the agent who facilitates this legitimate participation from the periphery. Legitimate peripheral participation is a way of being situated in the social world and, at the same time time, a way of viewing learning, which implies becoming a practitioner, not simply learn about the practice (LAVE; WENGER, 1991, p. 29, our translation).

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3. THE NEW GENERATION OF COMMUNICATORS: PROFILE, DEMANDS AND CHALLENGES

3.1 Skills of the 21st-century communicator

Recent literature on the profile of the contemporary communicator points to a configuration radically different from that which prevailed in previous decades. If the 20th-century journalist He was predominantly a specialist in one platform — the print reporter, the anchor. television announcer, radio announcer The professional of the 21st century is called upon to be, simultaneously multimedia, multiplatform and multi-skilled (PAVLIK, 2014).

Research conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (NEWMAN et al., 2023) indicate that contemporary newsrooms demand professionals capable of: (a) producing content in multiple formats and media; (b) mastering data analysis tools and visualization of information; (c) understanding the algorithms that determine the distribution of content on digital platforms; (d) verify information in real time, using techniques fact-checking and verification; and (e) managing social media and interacting with active audiences and participatory.

In addition to these technical and operational skills, there is an ethical dimension that assumes growing relevance in a context of proliferating misinformation and eroding trust. public in the media. The communicator of the 21st century needs to be not only Technically skilled, but also ethically sound — capable of making morally sound decisions. complex under pressure, at high speed and with informational ambiguity (KOVACH; ROSENSTIEL, 2014).

3.2 The impact of artificial intelligence and digital platforms

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence as a tool for the production and distribution of Content represents the most recent and disruptive challenge for the training of communicators. Tools such as large-scale language models (LLMs), generation systems Automated image processing and personalized recommendation algorithms are reshaping to deeply impact journalistic production processes, creating new opportunities, but also new epistemological and ethical risks (DIAKOPOULOS, 2019).

In this scenario, mentoring takes on an additional function: that of a critical mediator between the The technological enthusiasm of younger generations and the epistemological prudence necessary for its exercise.

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The person in charge of journalism. The mentor cannot be a Luddite who rejects new tools.
Nor is it an uncritical tech enthusiast who adopts them without reflection. Its function is to cultivate in
apprentice a dialectical relationship with technology — valuing it as an instrument, but
always subordinating it to editorial rigor and ethical responsibility (WAISBORD, 2019).
Recent research in the field of digital communication suggests that the most skilled professionals
Those who have developed, over time, the skills best suited to navigate this complex environment are those who are prepared to do so.
their training, which Pappert and Harel (1991) termed "computational thinking"
articulated with humanistic sensibility — a combination of procedural logic, creativity
A narrative and social awareness that does not develop spontaneously, but requires guidance.
intentional and systematic.

4. Structured Mentoring: Model, Methodology, and Applications PRACTICES

4.1 Distinction between informal and structured mentoring

The scientific literature on mentoring frequently distinguishes between informal mentoring and informal mentoring.
— that which occurs spontaneously, unplanned, and without explicitly stated objectives.
defined — and structured mentoring, which is characterized by intentionality, by
systematization and orientation towards clearly established learning objectives
(JOHNSON; RIDLEY, 2004).
In the context of newsrooms and journalism training programs, this distinction has
relevant practical implications. Informal mentoring, while valuable as a space for
The transmission of professional culture and tacit knowledge presents significant limitations: it tends
to reproduce the biases of mentors, to favor apprentices who are most similar to them, and to
lacking systematic evaluation and feedback mechanisms (KRAM, 1985).
Structured mentoring, in turn, involves the prior definition of learning objectives,
adoption of specific monitoring and evaluation methodologies, the creation of spaces
regular and protected spaces for dialogue and reflection, and the development of skills
metacognitive skills — the learner's ability to reflect on their own learning processes
learning and self-regulating their professional development (MERRIAM; CAFFARELLA;
BAUMGARTNER, 2007).

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4.2 Dimensions of effective mentoring in communication

Based on a literature review and analysis of practical training experiences
For communicators, it is possible to identify four fundamental dimensions of effective mentoring in
field of contemporary communication:
The first dimension is the technical-narrative one, which encompasses the development of skills in
Research, writing, editing, and multimedia production. This is the core of the training.
journalistic — the mastery of the tools and discursive genres that allow the
A communicator's role is to transform facts into narratives that are understandable and relevant to the audience.
The second dimension is the ethical-deontological one, which involves the internalization of values and...
Standards governing the responsible practice of journalism: the pursuit of truth,
Editorial independence, harm minimization, loyalty to the public, and accountability.
(KOVACH; ROSENSTIEL, 2014). This dimension cannot be taught only in a way
It is not theoretical; it needs to be experienced and debated in concrete situations of ethical dilemma.
The third dimension is the technological-critical one, which implies the development of the capacity to
to evaluate, select, and critically utilize the technological tools available for production.
journalistic — including content management platforms, verification systems
information, data analysis tools and, increasingly, artificial intelligence systems.
generative.
The fourth dimension is metacognitive and identity-related, which refers to the process of constructing...
The communicator's professional identity — the development of a clear self-understanding of
their social role, their values, their limits, and their responsibilities as a producer of
Information in a democracy (ZELIZER, 2004).

4.3 The mentor as a figure of epistemic and affective authority

One of the most relevant contributions of recent research on mentoring is the recognition
that the effectiveness of the mentoring process is not limited to the mere transmission of knowledge.
Technical and theoretical aspects. The affective and relational dimension of mentoring — trust, mutual respect,
Emotional availability and genuine care for the development of others—this is essential.
essential for effective learning to occur (JOHNSON; RIDLEY, 2004).
Research in the field of professional development psychology demonstrates that...
communicators who have benefited from meaningful mentoring relationships throughout their careers.

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Careers consistently demonstrate greater resilience in the face of market adversity.
greater clarity about their professional values and a greater capacity to innovate without losing rigor.
editorial (KRAM, 1985).

This implies that an effective communication mentor is one who can articulate, in their practice,
Epistemic authority — a deep command of the field, which confers credibility and
legitimacy to guide — with the necessary affective openness to create an environment of
Psychologically safe learning, in which the learner can question, make mistakes, and experiment.
and grow.

A true mentor is not one who transmits certainties, but one who shares uncertainties.
in a productive way — showing the learner not only what they know, but also how they learn.
and how one unlearns in the face of a world that changes faster than any expert can keep up with (SCHÖN, 1983, p. 49, our translation).

5 Contemporary Challenges of Mentoring Training in COMMUNICATION

5.1 The crisis of business models and its impacts on training

The structural crisis of traditional models of journalistic funding — accelerated by
The migration of advertising revenue to large digital platforms has imposed a...
A logic of downsizing that directly affects the conditions of possibility for mentoring. In a
The environment of smaller newsrooms, with overworked journalists subjected to ever-increasing deadlines.
Shorter periods mean that the time required for the systematic monitoring of younger people becomes...
a luxury that is difficult to afford (PAVLIK, 2014).

This structural pressure creates the risk that mentoring will regress to its most superficial form and
informal — the "learn by observing" approach devoid of pedagogical intent — precisely in
a time when the training demands of new communicators become more complex.
and urgent. Overcoming this paradox requires both the creation of favorable organizational conditions
Regarding mentoring — protected time, institutional recognition, adequate resources — as well as
developing innovative models that make the mentoring process more efficient and
scalable.

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5.2 The generational issue and the reversal of roles

One particularly interesting phenomenon of the current moment of technological transformation is...
The emergence of what some researchers call "reverse mentoring"—situations in which...
Younger professionals, digital natives, teach more experienced professionals skills.
technological skills that they do not master (MURPHY, 2012). This role reversal, although
Productive when managed in a healthy way, it can generate tensions and ambiguities that need to be...
carefully administered.

The key to dealing with this complexity lies in recognizing that experience and
Novelty and innovation are not mutually exclusive values, but rather complementary. The communicator
An experienced individual brings with them an irreplaceable wealth of editorial judgment and historical memory.
and ethical awareness — skills that technological speed tends to atrophy in most people.
Young people. The young communicator, in turn, brings digital fluency, platform-based creativity, and
sensitivity to new communicational grammars — skills that the most experienced
They need to incorporate it to maintain relevance.

Effective mentoring, in this context, is that which transforms this asymmetry into a partnership — creating
spaces for mutual learning where different generations enrich each other reciprocally,
without the younger generation losing the benefit of accumulated experience and without the older generation losing the benefit of accumulated experience.
Experienced individuals lose their openness to new things.

5.3 Diversity, inclusion and decolonization of training practices

Feminist and postcolonial criticism of communication has consistently demonstrated that
Traditional mentoring models in Brazilian and Latin American newsrooms reproduce
power structures that privilege certain profiles — typically white men, of
middle class, educated at prestigious institutions — to the detriment of communicators from
historically marginalized groups (MOREIRA; SOARES, 2019).

A contemporary agenda for responsible mentoring training must therefore incorporate the
A perspective of diversity and inclusion not as rhetorical flourish, but as a principle.
structural. This implies questioning who has access to mentoring relationships, what knowledge and
Perspectives are legitimized in these relationships, and how can formative processes be used?
to contribute to building a journalism that is more representative of the diversity of society.
Brazilian.

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FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analytical approach developed in this article shows that mentoring in communication is not...
a marginal or complementary practice to professional training, but a central device in
building the skills, values, and identities that define the communicator of the century.
XXI. In a scenario of technological acceleration, crisis of traditional models and growing
In the context of ethical complexity, the mentor-apprentice relationship emerges as the privileged space for
transmission and recreation of the journalistic ethos.

The analysis conducted allows us to formulate three central propositions. First: structured mentoring.
— intentional, reflective, and methodologically sound — is significantly more effective.
than informal mentoring in developing complex skills required by
The contemporary market of communication. Second: the effectiveness of mentoring in communication.
It depends on the balanced articulation of four dimensions — technical-narrative, ethical-deontological,
Technological-critical and metacognitive—and an imbalance in any of them compromises the
Quality of training. Third: effective mentoring requires not only technical competence and
The mentor's theoretical knowledge, but also emotional availability, openness to intergenerational dialogue and
commitment to building more diverse, inclusive and educational practices
epistemically plural.

The practical implications of these findings for newsrooms, universities, and professional communication
training programs are significant. Investment in [this area] is necessary.
development of structured mentoring programs that allocate time and resources to
Systematic monitoring of communicators in training. It is also necessary to create spaces
ongoing training for the mentors themselves, recognizing that mentoring competence
It, in turn, is a skill that is learned, practiced, and perfected over time.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this work. The predominantly theoretical approach and
The adopted bibliographical framework requires supplementation with empirical research that investigates, in
systematically, concrete mentoring practices in different editorial contexts and
Brazilian institutions. This is, without a doubt, a fertile agenda for future research in the field.
of communication.

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