

ACADEMIC MENTORING – NEED OF AN HOUR

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Abstract

There can be noticed a growing pressure on universities to become learning organizations. In order to become flexible and adaptable, universities have to seek for innovations, new fields of studies, new methods of building relationships with students and knowledge transfer. One way to achieve that is by mentoring, understood as one on one interactive process of developmental learning based on the premise that the participants will have reasonable frequent contact and sufficient interactive time together. Mentoring is a one to one relationship between a more experienced and less experienced person, which gives people the opportunity to share their professional and personal skills and experiences, and to grow and develop in the process. Typically based on the encouragement, constructive comments, openness, mutual trust, respect and a willingness to learn and share. In the recent years, mentoring is fast becoming one of the easiest ways of developing the skills and talents of individuals in many different organizations, including universities. This paper sought to address the need of mentoring in academic settings as a pedagogical tool to enhance student education in local community management and animation.

Keywords: Mentoring, Mentee, Mentor, Learning Organization.

Introduction

A mentor's role involves providing support and resources to mentee through regular one-to-one meetings. They are expected to facilitate a supportive and developmental relationship with the mentee in his/her own areas of expertise. Mentoring is a relationship within which a mentor fosters the academic growth and development of a mentee, primarily through dialogue and reflection. This may include sharing perspectives and expertise on teaching, tutoring, supporting students, preparation of materials, administrative roles and processes, research strategies and skills, attracting and managing contracts and consultancies, networking and introductions.

Who can be mentor?

It could be said that the best mentors are born, not made! Some people seem to have an innate talent for providing the informal, yet authoritative support that is most useful to less-experienced colleagues. Let's think of the case of Mentor support for new teaching staff in a university or college. There are several options regarding who should do the mentoring. Each option has its own pros and cons, some of which may be included in the comments already presented here, but more important ideas will be coming from you we hope!

The role of the mentor

1. Induction The mentor will be the first point of contact in the induction process. Rather than requiring the mentor to set up a formal induction programme, new members of staff will be provided with a checklist of the things they will need to find out about their role, systems and procedures at various stages during their first year. The first meeting with the mentor will involve the mentor recommending suitable contacts in each of the areas himself/herself, but if he/she is suggesting other people as contacts he/she should monitor progress in subsequent meetings and assist with introductions if necessary.

2. Coaching Although formal training programmes are provided for new staff and advice on these is available from the Assistant Director of HR for Staff Development, mentees may well ask for more informal assistance in certain aspects of their role. It is part of the mentor's role to give such coaching or information if requested or to identify someone more appropriate to assist.

Areas which may be included are:

1. Teaching: advice on lecture construction, material available, teaching methods, styles and strategies, marking. This can include observation of and feedback on the teaching and learning process if requested.
2. Research: advice on content of research applications, sources of funding, research methods, supervision of research students.
3. Personal tutoring: structuring sessions, giving advice, dealing with problems and knowing when to refer.
4. Administration: understanding systems, advance preparation for specific administrative roles, e.g. admissions tutors, secretary to Boards of Studies, committee work.
5. External contracts: consultancy arrangements, external lectures.

3. Reflecting Mentors are not expected to solve mentee's problems for them but part of the role is to act as a sounding board for discussion of problems identified by the mentee. Through a confidential process of listening and questioning, mentors should help mentees to reflect upon their own progress, clarify issues and help them towards resolving their own problems.

4. Facilitating This particular role is concerned with 'smoothing the path' for new staff. The mentor should take the lead in helping the mentee to some understanding of the informal systems and work relationships which operate in every department. They should also arrange introductions to useful contacts inside and outside the department to enable the mentee to begin to develop his/her own net worth. Hence, the generally recognised goals of an academic mentoring scheme include:

1. Assist new-to - academic staff to become familiar with the university culture.
2. Support new and inexperienced academics in the development of their teaching.
3. Increase faculty and school retention.
4. Assist academic staff with career development.
5. Support academics in their role as researchers.
6. Improve student evaluation of teaching through academic development mentoring.
7. Promote the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning.
8. Develop a sense of belonging in an academic community of practice.

The extensive review of literature reveals and suggests that the following benefits may emerge from a mentoring scheme: Among the benefits to the individual staff member are:

- (a) Individual recognition and encouragement,
- (b) Honest criticism and feedback,
- (c) Advice on responsibilities and professional priorities,
- (d) Long-range career planning,
- (e) Support and advocacy from colleagues, and
- (f) Opportunities for collaborative projects.

Mentors Gain:

- (a) Satisfaction of helping with the professional growth and development of staff member,
- (b) Collaboration, feedback and interaction with another colleague,
- (c) A network of former mentees, and
- (d) Expanded networks of colleagues and collaborators.

A Faculty committed to mentoring will benefit by:

- (a) Increased productivity and commitment among the staff,
- (b) Increased collaboration among colleagues,
- (c) Increased understanding and respect among staff, and
- (d) The encouragement of a Faculty environment that promotes collegiality.

Table 1: Key Individuals and Roles within the Mentoring Process

Key elements in the Mentoring process	Commonly related terms	Role(s) performed in the Mentoring process
Mentor	Expert, coach, counsellor, tutor, guide	An individual with the experience, knowledge, and/or skills of a specific content area who is able, willing, and available to share this information with another individual.
Mentee	Protégé, novice, apprentice, trainee, student, learner	An individual who lacks experience, knowledge and/or skills in a specific area and who looks to another individual(s) to gain that which is lacking.
Relationship between the Mentor and Mentee	Association, pairing	A dynamic association between an individual who needs to learn and another who is willing to help and guide the learner.

Source: Newby & Corner, 1997, p. 12.

The core purpose of academic mentoring in academe is to support the development of academics in the three key aspects of teaching, research and administration. This purpose will be weakened significantly in any scheme which fails to also acknowledge and support the humanistic and collegial aspects of academic work.

Elements of Mentoring

The elements of a mentoring relationship have numerous permutations:

1. Initiation such a relationship may be initiated by a mentor, the mentee, or a third party such as Academic dean.
2. Time frame the relationship may be time limited, lifelong or open-ended.
3. Formality the relationship may be quite informal or may involve an articulated, jointly forged formal agreement.
4. Intensity Participants may connect only occasionally or meet regularly according to a prescribed schedule.
5. Reciprocity the relationship may be viewed as substantially in place to benefit the mentee or ... be seen as mutually beneficial and power-free.
6. Agenda the agenda for the relationship may be quite focused on professional matters or more holistically include other aspects of life. Generally, the mentee's agenda is considered primary, but in cases of a more reciprocal relationship, there will be more balance in agenda focus.
7. Medium Most often, mentoring relationships are face to face. However, there is an emergence of mediated connection via telephone and email.

Mentoring Styles

Mentoring styles may vary greatly depending on the individuals involved, the setting in which the mentoring occurs, eg, basic laboratory versus clinical science experiences, whether the persons involved are physicians or paramedical personnel, and the goals of the mentoring. Styles also vary depending on the stage of the career of both individuals; the expectations and style a mentor applies to a junior faculty may differ from those for a medical student. There are several possible models.

In the first model, the mentor questions the mentee about a broad and diverse group of topics relating to specific clinical or research matters or to the broader field as a whole. This style of mentoring creates an environment that exposes the mentee to new knowledge and to the uncertainties of accepted knowledge; it also expects answers from the mentee, which are then followed up with additional questions.¹¹ Such a mentoring style brings with it the responsibility of the mentee to embrace a broad platform of ideas, the stimulation to observe the patterns of patient and peer interaction, and the challenge to accept that not all lessons that are well accepted are valid.

A second model involves a mentor who mentors by assigning specific tasks. The task may be to design a new experimental process, to design an approach to a new aspect of patient care, or to identify a new approach to delivery of that care. This model requires mentors to understand their mentees' capabilities, to be prepared to spend considerable time as a sounding board for new approaches, and to have the ability to try some of the approaches that mentees develop.

A third approach has been used since the founding of modern American scientific tradition. Lewis Agassiz, a renowned teacher and a founding member of the National Academy of Sciences in the mid-1800s, had a specific unique approach. Agassiz's field was the study of fish; he would assign his students the task of spending several hours observing and describing a fish. He would then meet with the students, learn their observations, and send them away to observe and describe the fish more fully (one can only imagine the ambiance of dead fish, formalin, and closed windows without air conditioning in summertime). This very effective process achieved its aim of having students express their own ideas rather than be directed toward a specific line of thought.

The process of mentoring thus involves several essential steps, including learning effective communication, identifying the needs of the learner, observing what works in different settings, acquiring techniques that are effective, and paying attention to technical details. That process changes over time as mentees grow in the relationship.

There are other considerations regarding mentoring styles. They may relate to the group being mentored or to the sex or minority status of the mentee. Although the literature about mentoring is significant, it has limitations. It is widely dispersed across disciplines from nursing to law to engineering. Within medicine, mentoring programs exist to meet the needs of a variety of therapeutic areas, of women, and of minorities. Virtually all of the available data about mentoring in these situations are qualitative; the need for quantitative data points out a fruitful area for research.

The literature contains numerous reports on the importance of mentorship in helping facilitate the future success of trainees, documenting benefits such as more productive research careers, greater career satisfaction, better preparation in making career decisions, networking within a profession, and aiding in stress management. This Commentary describes several key points of advice both for individuals who mentor and those who receive mentoring mentees. In some places, a mentor is an individual who is not the student's direct clinical, academic, or research supervisor. This advice applies to those kinds of mentors as well as the more traditional direct supervisors. Mentoring in universities is not new.

Mentoring – Theoretical Background

The literature on mentoring in an academic setting provides no single or generic definition. The idea of academic mentoring has developed over several decades, in varying contexts. But there are similarities of theme perceivable in the literature around this concept. Moore and Salimbene (1981) defined mentoring as an intense, lasting and professionally centred relationship between two individuals in which the more experienced and powerful individual, the mentor, guides, advises, and assists in any number of ways the career of the less experienced, often younger, upwardly mobile protégé. Linda Johnsrud (1990) argues that there is ambiguity surrounding the functions of mentoring – patron, role model, sponsor, coach and adviser are terms used to refer to persons who have provided some sort of career assistance. But Johnsrud comments that 'essentially, mentors enhance the position of the protégé by enabling the development of their skill and competence in a supportive environment'.

Victoria University of Wellington trialled an academic mentoring project in 1999, and adopted the following definition:

“A complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise which incorporates interpersonal or psychosocial, career and/or educational development, and socialisation functions into the relationship ...”

There is a lack of consensus on one single or standard definition of *mentoring* (Halai, 2006, p.792; Wunsch, 1994, p. 12). It can be defined as an “intense interpersonal exchange between a senior experienced colleague (mentor) and a less experienced junior colleague (protégé or mentee) in which the mentor provides support, direction, and feedback regarding career plans and personal development” (Russell & Adams, 1997, p. 2). Mentoring is also viewed as an important field of education (Johnson et al., 1991, p. 385) and/or counseling (Gregson, 1994, p. 26) where mentors are old men who have wisdom and can be trusted to educate young men who have little experience (Kram, 1985, p. 15; Russell & Adams, 1997, p. 3; Wanguri, 1996, p. 445).

The most prevailing definitions, such as Eby’s, (2010, p. 506) considers mentoring as developmentally oriented interpersonal relationship that is typically between a more experienced individual and a less experienced individual. It is important to acknowledge that the term “mentor” is borrowed from the male guide, Mentor, in Greek mythology, and this historical context has informed traditional manifestations of mentoring. According to Donaldson mentoring refers to dyadic, face-to-face, long-term relationship between a supervisory adult and a novice student that fosters the mentee’s professional, academic, or personal development (Donaldson, Ensher & Grant-Vallone, 2000, p. 235). Gehrke (1988, p.91) defines it as a complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise, which incorporate interpersonal or psychosocial development, career or educational development and socialization function of relationship. She describes this one to one relationship as developmental process, which proceeds through a series of stages that help to determine both the conditions affecting and the outcomes of the process. Mentoring could also be described as a management process, styles and techniques, which aim at entrenching organizational culture and philosophy (Cox, 1997, p. 53). Reed et al. (2002, p. 105) simply define mentoring as “a process of coaching a person both personally and professionally” (p. 103), while Raggins and Cotton (1999, p. 535) argue that mentoring relationship is highly beneficial by providing career development aid and facilitating the mentee’s personal growth and professional development. Mentoring process is also often a part of talent management and is addressed to various groups, such as key employees, newly hired graduates, high potentials and future leaders.

There are two sides involved in the process of mentoring. Mentee is an individual or group of people who is/are committed to expanding their capabilities, open and receptive to new ways of learning and trying new ideas. According to Schlee mentee is a less experienced employee who is offered special guidance and support by a respected and trusted person with more experience (2000, p. 324). A mentor is a trusted counselor or guide who is referred to as influential individual with advanced experience and knowledge who provide support and mobility to their mentee’s career (Fagenson, 1989, p. 312; Noe, 1988, p. 66). Mentors are traditionally seen as individuals with advanced experience, knowledge, wisdom, skills and influence who provide support to and promote the career development of their protégés through an interactive relationship (Allen, 2003, p. 135; Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005, p. 941; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007, p. 720; Gibson, 2004, p. 135; Jacobi, 1991, p. 505; Sosik & Godshalk, 2005, p. 41). A primary role of mentors is to provide psychosocial support to protégés, helping them to diagnose their prior actions, cast those actions in a positive light, and to serve as a source of validation for the protégé (Kram, 1985, p. 2). What is more, they help the student learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work and provide protégés with advice and instruction about jobs; career planning guidance; orientation to an industry; direction regarding interpersonal development; achievement-related help and role modeling; and support, coaching, encouragement, feedback, and guidance to enhance the learner’s growth (Allen & Poteet, 1999, p. 62; Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005, p. 942; Gibson, 2004, p. 135; Hansford, Tennent, & Ehrich, 2002, p. 105; Mullen, 1998, p. 322). Existing literature on mentoring identifies a number of key roles of mentors, such as serving as a guide, offering support (Ganser, 1996, p. 47), and acting as adviser, trainer, or partner (Jones, 2001, p. 80), as well as nurturer to the mentee. However, Kochan and Trimble (2000, p. 22) warn not to perceive mentoring as a relationship where the mentee is viewed as subservient. On one hand, mentor provides counsel, insight and guidance to the mentee. But on the other hand he is given the opportunity to invest in the lives of others and to contribute to the mentee’s future goals and aspirations (Bozeman, and Feerley, 2007, p. 727). The table below summarizes the key individuals and roles within the

mentoring process.

The mentoring literature suggests that developmental relationships benefit both the protégé and the mentor (Eby & Lockwood, 2005, p. 445; Kram, 1985, p. 5) and there is a sense of satisfaction as the mentor watches the mentee grow (Reed et al., 2002, p. 105). Other research has shown that mentoring has a number of benefits for protégés, mentors and organizations (Russel & Addams, 1997, p.8). To the organization, mentoring has the benefit of succession planning, more effective management development, faster induction of new employees, improved communications, reduced training costs and increased productivity (Carter & Lewis, 1999, p. 22). The above mentioned attributes of mentoring proves that it may play a vital role in learning organisation.

Mentoring and Academic Achievement

Research on the impact of mentoring on the academic achievement of at-risk youth has been conducted with conflicting results. Torrance (1984) conducted a longitudinal study of 220 students and found that those with mentors completed more years of education. More specifically, men with a mentor completed 17.8 years compared to 15.8 years of education for men without a mentor. Women with a mentor completed 18.1 years compared to 14.9 years for women without a mentor. A major limitation of this study was that the participants were mostly middle class and would not be defined as at-risk. Slicker and Palmer (1993) evaluated the impact of a school-based mentoring program on 86 at-risk tenth grade students. The initial results indicated no differences in the dropout rate or grade point average between the treatment and control groups. When the differences between those students who were effectively mentored versus those who were ineffectively mentored were evaluated, they found that effectively mentored students had a lower dropout rate than ineffectively mentored students. Effective mentoring was defined by self-report from the student receiving the mentoring. Although differences were found in dropout rates, they were not found for grade point averages. McPartland and Nettles (1991) evaluated the academic outcomes of middle school students who were involved in Project Raise, a well financed, multi-faeted, structured program in Baltimore, Maryland, designed to provide mentors and advocates to very high risk children. One of the major goals of the program was improving academic progress. The researchers compared participants in Project Raise with non-participants from the same school. They found two statistically significant positive effects for students involved in the program. First, there was a reduction of nearly 3% in the school absence rate of youths involved in the program when compared to students in the same school, who did not have a mentor.

Mentees The role and responsibilities of the mentee will depend to an extent on school/faculty policy, and on the particular role and stage of career he/she is at. But there will be common elements as outlined by the Australian Catholic University suggestions below:

Characteristics of a Mentee Characteristics of a mentee include,

1. Eagerness to learn and a respect and desire to learn from the person selected as the mentor;
2. Seriousness in the relationship;
3. Taking the initiative in the relationship, especially in the beginning — be politely insistent about your desire for a mentor;
4. Flexibility and an understanding of this senior professional's demanding schedule (you'll be there one day);
5. Promptness for all appointments;
6. Feedback, even if nothing is requested;
7. Interest: your mentor will ask questions about your personal and professional life in an effort to get to know you as a whole person — do the same with your mentor. He or she also has a life outside of the institution and knowing something about it can help you communicate better;
8. Respect: your mentor is there to help you in your career by pointing out the stepping stones, not being one; never forget the time and effort this person is taking to offer you a smoother path on the way to success.

Suggestions for Mentees

1. Ask for advice and welcome constructive criticism. Do not assume that advice will be offered if it is not solicited. Be as specific as possible when asking for advice. A good mentor will offer both criticism and suggestions for your work. Be open to both.
2. Be considerate of your mentor's time. Return phone calls promptly and arrive on time for meetings. On any specific occasion, ask how much time your mentor has to spend with you and abide by that request. Let your mentor suggest taking extra time if needed.
3. Listen to what your mentor has to say. Although sometimes advice may seem irrelevant to you, often the information will prove useful at some future point.
4. Seriously consider the advice given to you by your mentor, even if your immediate reaction is not positive. Beginning a response to advice or criticism with the words "Yes, but..." is a bad start.
5. At your next meeting with your mentor, share how you used your last conversation as a means of solving a problem or progressing your work.
6. Show appreciation for the time and assistance given to you by your mentor.
7. Ask for advice and welcome constructive criticism. Do not assume that advice will be offered if it is not solicited. Be as specific as possible when asking for advice. A good mentor will offer both criticism and suggestions for your work. Be open to both.
8. Be considerate of your mentor's time. Return phone calls promptly and arrive on time for meetings. On any specific occasion, ask how much time your mentor has to spend with you and abide by that request. Let your mentor suggest taking extra time if needed.
9. Listen to what your mentor has to say. Although sometimes advice may seem irrelevant to you, often the information will prove useful at some future point.
10. Seriously consider the advice given to you by your mentor, even if your immediate reaction is not positive. Beginning a response to advice or criticism with the words "Yes, but..." is a bad start. At your next meeting with your mentor, share how you used your last conversation as a means of solving a problem or progressing your work. Show appreciation for the time and assistance given to you by your mentor.
11. Make only positive or neutral comments about your mentor to others. If you believe you have a fundamental difference with your mentor, let him/her know. Work it out or suggest that the relationship end.
12. Review your mentoring relationship agreement regularly.
13. Respect any confidential information.
14. Recognise that if any personal problems are raised, the mentor may only refer you to other resources.
15. Keep the doors open with your mentor. You may need advice at some point in the future.
16. Probably the greatest challenge faced by mentors/mentees is finding enough time and energy to meet. Use phone calls and email as a way of staying in touch when your schedules are the busiest.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- a. Only a handful of new hires found useful mentoring on their own (initiative). They also tended to teach cautiously by emphasizing facts and principles over active student involvement.
- b. It was not necessary to pair new faculty members only with senior members from the same department. The pairing of junior faculty members and mentors from other departments was equally effective.
- c. Useful mentoring did not depend on pairs picking each other. Assigning mentors was equally effective. It was often necessary, however, to prompt pairs to meet regularly until meeting became habitual.
- d. Although mentoring was generally beneficial, many mentors were reluctant to give advice to new faculty on teaching, scholarly productivity, and time management. Thus, mentoring was not without its

deficiencies.

- e. Certainly, mentoring has been known for its ability to develop the learning of students in effective, skill-based, and cognitive ways (Hezlett, 2005, p. 510). As it stems from research results, mentoring programme implemented at the University X has proven to be successful and measures up to expectations. Also in this case, it has shown to be an effective and innovative developmental tool in educational institutions (Mehlman & Glickauf-Hughes, 1994, p. 41; Mullen, 2008, pp. 52–60),
- f. Helping students build a link between academic life and life after college, showing students that the business world includes people who are interested in fostering their development, providing networking opportunities, and helping students develop the skills they will need in the real world (Barker & Pitts, 1997, p. 223; Schlee, 2000, p. 325), which has been pointed out by respondent. It is crucial to remember that in learning organization's there exists a need to be self reflective, honest and open to changes and learning new things. That is why mentoring is an important source of individual learning and development, which can help reflective practice flourish. This paper sought to address to a gap in the literature on mentoring in academic settings (Girves, Zepeda & Gwathmey, 2005, p. 452; Schlee, 2000, p. 330) by contributing a case study on mentoring as a pedagogical tool to enhance student education in local community management and animation. It is worth remembering, that mentoring offers students' a glimpse at life in a business setting' (Schlee, 2000, p. 332), and can reduce stress (Allen, McManus & Russell, 1999, p. 455), enhance career success (e.g. productivity), and increase satisfaction (Tenenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001, p. 330). Obviously, there still exists a need to continue carrying out researches on mentoring as a vital tool of organisational learning. It also has to be noted that, apart from visible advantages, mentoring has also some limitations.
- g. Conducted research has shown that not every academic is capable of taking on the role of mentor. Some respondents has pointed out some problems regarding *mentorials*, connected mainly to availability of mentors, imposing objectives or simple mismatch between mentor and mentee. It is therefore important to encourage academics to not only share their knowledge but also to empower students. It also should be pointed out that mentoring programmes are also expensive and often require huge organisational effort.

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