Mentor Training
3 March 2004
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What is a Mentor?

The word "mentor" originates from the book The Odyssey. The character Odysseus had a close friend named Mentor who cared for Odysseus's son for ten years while Odysseus travelled. Mentor embodied male and female qualities such as being nurturing, supportive, protective, as well as aggressive and risk taking. Mentor acted in the role of parent, teacher, friend, guide, and protector to Odysseus's son.

The modern concept of mentoring

Defining mentoring is problematic as different schemes will prompt different purposes, and such may change over time. Stammers (1992) argues that there is no 'single animal' called a mentor, rather a group of tasks associated with the role.' Zey (1984) defines mentoring as a relationship, whereby the mentor 'oversees'; the career and development of another person, usually a junior. He posits a 'mutual benefit model' whereby the whole organisation gains from the mentoring relationship. Mentoring can thus be perceived as a helping process (Caruso, 1990), a teaching-learning process (Ardery, 1990), as an intentional, structural, nurturing, insightful process either developing along stages or rhythms, but not in series of events (Roberts, 2000). Bennetts (1996) adds a pedagogical, democratic dimension by stating that mentoring is learner-centred and progresses at the rate determined by the mentor and the mentee.

The spirit of modern mentoring in a modern, professionalised world is aptly captured by Roberts (2000) when he describes it as:

'a formalised process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that person's career and personal development.' (Roberts, 2000:162)

Activity 1

At this stage it would be helpful to consider a range of perspectives from which the mentor's role is described. How do you see the role of the mentor enacted in your own workplace? How does it compare with the statements below? Share your thoughts with the whole group.

1."A mentor points to doors – they don't open them. But they enable you to find the strength to open them yourself."
(Hospital consultant, SCOPME Report)

2."The mentor provides motivation and inspiration and helps you find ways to deal with immediate difficulties as well as help you plan a long-term career strategy."
(Industrial perspective, Sound Snacks - Impact Factory)

3. "The mentor's responsibilities include supporting the trainee throughout the training period, celebrating achievements and helping to overcome problems." (Initial Teacher Training, Graduate Registered Teacher Programme Mentor Handbook)

4. "I would expect them to be good teachers themselves. It simply goes back to the idea of a model, doesn't it? And being able to believe."
(Newly Qualified Teacher, Jones, M. (2001) 'Qualified to Become good teachers: A Case study of ten newly qualified teachers during their year of induction' unpublished Ed. D. thesis, University of Sheffield)

5. "The mentor should usually be an experienced, highly regarded, empathetic individual, often working in the same organisation or field as the mentee."
(SCOPME Report, September 1998, p. 10)

In considering the above question, it may be helpful to cast your mind back to when you started your first job or had just moved into a new post. Were you 'thrown in at the deep end'? Was it matter of 'sink or swim'? Or were you fortunate enough to enjoy the support and guidance of more experienced colleagues who you could trust and turn to in times of challenge and difficulty?

A rationale for mentoring: Why have a mentor?

In a literature review conducted by Roberts (2000) positive consequences of mentoring are listed as follows:

  * Latent abilities discovered
  * Performance improved
  * Retention of staff
  * Growth in mentee confidence
  * Personal growth of mentor and mentee
  * Increased awareness of role in the organisation
  * Increased effectiveness in the organisation
  * Self-actualisation
  * A resonating phenomenon; protégés becomes mentor themselves
    (Roberts, 2000: 160)

An examination of mentoring programmes suggests that there are three purposes emerging as central to their underpinning rationales:

  * To support training and induction - An individual new to a specific role may be the recipient of a specially structured staff development programme. Or, in some cases a mentor may be appointed to ensure that the process of learning about a new job or skill is efficiently carried out. It is an important aspect of ensuring the 'socialisation' process is a positive one.

  * To engage in peer evaluation of professional practice - The mentor may be the ideal person to review the effectiveness of the teaching. Advice can be given on the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee in a friendly and nurturing environment. This process can help in building individual confidence. Information can also be transferred relating to the more practical aspects of the teacher.

  * To assist in continuing professional development - This is an important aspect of mentoring. Courses relevant to the various teaching skills should be openly discussed with the mentee and access to any resources made available.

Sweeney (1994) suggests that mentoring is a professional development activity and advises a reliance 'on your own sense of purpose for mentoring to guide the ways which you might adapt and use this rich resource.'

He makes the following basic assumptions about the process:
   * New staff need and deserve an ongoing growth opportunity and support for that expectation.
   * Mentoring is an essential feature of a successful induction process.
   * Without mentoring, new staff focus on survival.
   * With mentoring, new staff can focus on professional development and on serving their students.
   * All participants in mentoring gain from the experience.

Finally, the purpose of mentoring should not be thought of as a one-way process, but, if it is to be successful in the long term, include an element of mutuality in terms of benefits gained by the mentee, mentor and the institution / organisation / establishment within which it occurs.

Activity 2

In your area of work, identify areas where mentoring is currently not taking place, but where it might be beneficial to individual colleagues or an entire team of professionals. Share your suggestions with the group.

Selecting a mentor

It is generally the case that the mentor will be more senior than the mentee and will not be directly responsible for the learner. However, the proliferation of modern, flexible training schemes has led to an increasingly diverse body of mentees in terms of age, gender, educational and vocational background as well as life experiences, facilitating access to professional training and development programmes that previously would have been denied to them. The often non-traditional backgrounds of mentees require mentors not only to be experts in their field, but to possess the appropriate professional and personal qualities as well as interpersonal skills to fulfil their role effectively.

Mentors could be either volunteers, they might be appointed from within the faculty or be selected by the mentee. Mentors should be interested in the development of others, be respected and trustworthy figures and be fully committed to their responsibility as mentor. There is no definitive list of selection criteria for appointing a mentor. However, Herald (1990) highlights a number of factors, which could enhance the recruitment and raise the status of mentors within the work place:

   * Mentoring relationships should be encouraged at both junior and senior levels.
   * Mentors should be well prepared and knowledgeable in the area of most interest to the mentee i.e. practice, academia, community related.
   * Recognition for those who do mentor should be awarded by the institution.
   * Mentoring should be encouraged as part of one's professional responsibilities. An incentive programme will help in this regard.
   * A group mentoring approach can also be considered when individual pairings have not yet developed. This might work particularly well among faculty levels.
   * Organisations and groups, and not just individuals, should position themselves to serve in an advisory / mentoring capacity.
   * From an organisational / institutional standpoint, time should be allocated and encouraged for mentoring.
   * Where appropriate, technology should be employed to assist in the process, i.e. video conferencing and email networks. Joint organisational efforts should also be encouraged.

Likewise there is no rigid definition regarding the personality type for becoming a mentor. Fields (1991) showed that the most successful mentors tend to have a versatility in terms of skills and enabling strategies.

Activity 3

You may wish to reflect upon how mentors should be selected; on a voluntary basis, by means of a formal application and selection procedure, as a senior management appointment or following negotiation between mentee and mentor? Share your thoughts with others and try to reach a consensus.

The multiplicity of the mentoring purpose

Depending on programme objectives, the purpose of mentoring will vary greatly, determining the parameters within which the mentor role is to be defined. It is therefore paramount to clarify and agree the purposes of mentoring as well as the practicalities to be confronted by those who are at the heart of the process – the mentor and mentee. Herald (1999) names these as 'career counselling, salary negotiations, job searches, curriculum vitae preparation, developing political savvy, gender (and racial) bias issues, professional obligations and responsibilities, organisational leadership / professional development issues, and personal / professional conflict issues.'

Mentoring can cover a wide range of activities ranging from 'helper functions' (Morton Cooper and Palmer, 1993) to that of assessment. The specific role, however, will be dictated by the objectives of a particular programme, the structural and cultural context within mentoring takes place and the personalities of those most directly involved, the mentor and mentee.

Sweeney (1994) lists the following common options for mentor programme purposes:

   * To speed up the learning of a new job and reduce the stress of transition

   * To improve instructional performance through modelling by a top performer.

   * To attract new staff in a very competitive recruitment environment.

   * To retain excellent veteran staff in a setting where their contributions are valued.

   * To respond to state, district, or contractual mandates, or to university programmes.

   * To promote the socialisation of new staff into the school 'family', values and traditions.

   * To alter the culture and the norms of the school by creating a collaborative sub-culture.

Accordingly the role of the mentor can be wide ranging and complex, focusing on induction, training, orientation, improvement of professional

practice, career development, a way of changing to a more collaborative environment or a combination of all of these.

Activity 4

With reference to your own experience of mentoring, consider the following roles (see below). Then identify those five roles you consider to be the most important aspects in mentoring and place them in rank order. Discard any roles you deem irrelevant and add any roles that you consider essential, but are not included in the box below. Give reasons for your choices.

Share your thoughts with others. Agree a list of mentor roles, which you consider to be the most important and not relevant and add any roles that were not included in the original list.

Mentor Roles

Adviser	Colleague	Protector
Model	Coordinator	Partner
Supporter	Trouble shooter	Listener
Counsellor Facilitator	Guide	
Teacher	Assessor	Agent provocateur
Trainer	Companion	Friend
Coach	Evaluator	Leader
Networker Organiser	Sounding board	
Administrator	Enabler	Manager

Mentoring perceived as a process

In the literature the notion of process is widely accepted as constituting one of the essential characteristics of mentoring rather than it being perceived as a series of unconnected events. If we subscribe to the view that 'process' can be defined as by Emmet (1998:720), as 'a course of change with a direction and internal order, where one stage leads to the next', it is legitimate to conceive mentoring which is embedded within a programme of professional and personal development as such a process. Mentoring can thus be conceived in terms of moving through progressive stages, which reflect the quality of mentor-mentee relationship as well as of learning. Roberts (2000) provides an apt illustration of this continuum.

'The mentoring process'

Establishing rapport
Initiation

Direction
Getting established

Progress making
Development

Moving on
Finishing/maintenance

(Roberts, 2000:152. Figure 1. The mentoring process)

Adopting a slightly different perspective, Caruso (1990:72) provides us with a model that describes the changing nature of the mentoring relationship defined in terms of the mentor's activities and the characteristics portrayed by the mentee.

Phase Main Theme	1. Prescriptive	2. Persuasive	3. Collaborative	4. Confirmative
Type of activity	Mentor directs the protégé	Mentor leads and guides the protégé	Mentor participates jointly with the protégé	Mentor delegates to the protégé
Protégé Characteristic	Lacks experience and organisational knowledge	Eager to learn more skill application in order to become independent and show initiative	Possesses ability to work jointly with mentor and to apply technical skills in problem solving	Possesses insight to apply skills and function independently, relying on mentor for confirmation

(Adapted from Caruso (1990) by Roberts, 2000:153)

Although these models may be helpful in understanding mentoring as a process, Collin (1986:45) warns against perceiving these stages as 'normative'. Instead we should take note of Klopf and Harrison's (1981) assertion that mentoring is a complex, growth-generating process which manifests itself in stages and rhythms. As such mentoring is inherently understood as a helping (Caruso, 1990) and teaching-learning process (Ardery, 1990).

Activity 5

On the basis of your personal experience as a mentor or mentee you may recognise some of the mentoring processes and stages described in the models above. Where would you position yourself? What were the challenges with which you were confronted in your role of the mentor or mentee? Please share your comments with others.

Key points to consider in quality mentoring

As mentoring is increasingly employed as a strategy within career and personal development process across a wide range of profession the process has become increasingly formalised. Informal mentoring will always have occurred, but in a less visible form. Both formal and informal, planned and natural processes of mentoring have pitfalls of which one needs to be aware. While in formal arrangements the 'goodness of fit' in the matching up of mentor and mentee may or may not be achieved, informal or natural mentoring is usually the result of freedom of choice. Zey (1984) maintains that the most productive mentoring relationships exist where both mentor and protégé are allowed to choose each other freely. However, this does not necessarily imply that the mentoring process is confined to a one-to-one relationship, but may be carried by a team of mentors, each of whom can provide the protégé with their expertise and support in relation to specific needs.

Before concluding I would like you to reflect upon the following key points made by Herald (1999) in relation to the mentorship process:

   * Education should be provided on identifying and recruiting mentors and taking full advantage of the mentoring relationship i.e. identifying formal and informal opportunities.
   * Where appropriate, individuals and groups should extend these mentoring services and reach out to communities / schools to promote medicine.
   * Mentoring activities should be closely linked with the nominations and appointments process. Promotion patterns should be monitored and analysed. Databases of potential leaders should be maintained and utilised. Mentors should be asked on an ongoing basis to identify such potential leaders.
   * There should be periodic and regular assessments by the organisation regarding the status and success of its mentoring programme in meeting its goals.
   * Most importantly, there must be unequivocal support of the mentoring concept from the senior management / faculty /administration. This must be demonstrated in an ongoing and enthusiastic manner and mentors should get 'credit' for their activities. Rewards and recognitions should be incorporated into the promotion and / or compensation criteria.
Herald, M. T. (1999) 'Mentoring' American Medical Association.(10.8.99)

In addition to the above listed points, Zey (1989) stresses the importance of including mentees in the training given to mentors to

maximise its overall effectiveness. Its purpose should be to reach a shared understanding of the aims and objectives to be achieved, as well as facilitate a familiarisation with mentoring techniques.

References

Ardery (1990)

Bennetts (1996)

Caruso (1990

Emmet (1998:720)

Fields (1991)

Herald (1990)

Roberts,(2000).

Stammers (1992

Sweeney (1994)

Zey (1984)