



MENTORSHIP OF NEWLY EMPLOYED LECTURERS IN SELECTED KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study set forth to explore the mentoring of newly employed university lecturers and the best practices that would enhance mentoring in Kenyan universities. To achieve this objective, 20 newly employed lecturers both men and women working in two Kenyan universities were interviewed. Two lecturers from each of the two universities and who had served for more than five years and a human resource manager were also interviewed. The principles of the Mentoring Theory (MT) were adopted for this study. The data collected were qualitatively analyzed. The general finding of the study is that Kenyan universities lack an explicit policy on the mentoring of newly employed lecturers. As a best practice, university managements should facilitate the development of policies that address the goals, the structure, benefits and challenges of mentoring newly employed lecturers. The study concludes that mentoring of newly employed lecturers is beneficial to both the mentees and mentors as it facilitates a mentee's psychological and academic adjustment. The study recommends that in order to enhance quality in education, a mentor and a mentee should work together to develop mutually agreed upon goals for the success of both the individuals and the university.

Key Words: Mentoring, mentees, lecturers, mentor, best practices.

Introduction

The term “mentoring” is derived from the word “mentor” (Brown, 2002). The word “mentor” originates from the Greek classical story, *The Odyssey*, in which King Odysseus called upon a “trusted friend named Mentor to act as the guide and advisor to his young son Telemachus when he left for another country to fight a war” (Brown, 2002, p.1747)¹. According to Kram (1985),

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¹ However, Simpson & Weiner (1989) argue that the word mentor relates to the Latin word ‘mens’ that is, pertaining to, or occurring in the mind (p.614).

therefore, the word “mentor” describes a “relationship between a younger adult and an older, more experienced adult [who] helps the younger individual learn to navigate the adult world and the world of work” (p. 2). The term has, therefore, evolved to signify a person who dedicates some of their time to help individuals to learn during their developmental years, to progress towards and achieve maturity and establish their identity.

Mentoring is not a new phenomenon and has been used for centuries as a way of helping mentees to advance in their professions (Brown, 2002). Various definitions of mentoring abound in literature (Hipes & Marinoni, 2005; Bhatta & Washington, 2003; Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, WA, 1996)². For example, according to Hipes and Marinoni (2005):

Mentoring is planned early intervention designed to provide timely instruction to mentees throughout their apprenticeship, to shorten the learning curve, reinforce positive work ethics and attitudes, and provide mentees with role models (p.1).

As the above quotation highlights, mentoring is at the forefront of strategies to improve workplace learning in order to achieve professional, personal and organisational goals. Bhatta and Washington (2003) argue that mentoring is a type of development intervention for the mentor and mentee or a socialization process in which individuals, such as managers, are socialised and inculcated into the norms and values of the organisation which they uphold. Mentoring has also been described as “as a catalyst for organisational culture change” (Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, WA, 1996, p.3). Further, Harris et al. (2001) argue that “... workplace mentoring is the most critical factor in worksite learning” (p.274) while Ehrich & Hansford (1999) note that the mentoring relationship is an invaluable learning and developmental process for beginners and experienced practitioners alike. Mentoring is sometimes classified into either informal or formal mentoring (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992)³ or “primary mentoring” and more ephemeral “secondary mentoring”⁴. However, formal and informal mentoring divisions which can also be internal or external are the commonest classifications (Ragins & Cotton, 1999)⁵. However, given the variety of mentoring programmes, the concern in this paper lies with the formal mentoring programmes.

² For more definitions of mentoring, read Aryee, Chay and Chew (1996), Darwin (2000), Gray and Smith, 2000 and Goran (2001).

³ Informal mentorships or natural mentorships occur spontaneously and are not managed or structured by organizations (Feist-Price, 1994). In contrast, formal mentorships or planned mentorships are those that are sponsored and sanctioned by the organization (Feist-Price, 1994).

⁴ Primary mentoring are more intense and of longer duration while secondary mentoring are more ephemeral (Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher, 1991).

⁵ Mentors within the same organization as the protégés are considered internal mentors and those employed outside of the organization are external mentors. On the one hand, internal mentors may be more physically accessible and may be able to buffer and protect protégés. External mentors, on the other hand, may be better poised to provide long-range career assistance and lateral career transitions (Ragins, 1997).

The relationship between a mentor and a mentee is a multifaceted collaboration with the primary goal of nurturing of the mentee's professional development (Ragins, 1997; Billett, 2003; Douglas, 1997). A mentoring collaboration is an excellent route towards ensuring not only a profession's vitality, but also growth of the workers within that profession. Levinson (1978) opines that the mentoring relationship is one of the most complex and developmentally important in a person's life. However, despite its importance, very few studies have endeavoured to synthesise the benefits of mentoring of newly employed lecturers in Kenyan universities. Thus, this paper attempts to do so by exploring the mentoring of newly employed university lecturers and the best practices that would enhance mentoring in Kenyan universities.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employed the key tenets of the Mentorship Theory (MT) to provide clear guidance on the inherently dyadic mentoring process. First, the MT examines the ways in which mentors and protégés influence one another by obeying the norms of reciprocity. For example, mentoring a mentee may provide a creative and rejuvenating life experience to the mentor (Levinson et al., 1978). Second, the MT also addresses the benefits of mentoring at the organizational level of analysis. This is because organizations are increasingly recognizing the value of mentoring relationships and attempt to reap the advantages through launching formal mentoring programmes. Clutter back (2004), for example, notes that mentoring benefits organizations by improving competencies. It is also important to note that the concept of time is an important component of the MT.

Although developmental relations such as mentoring vary in length, they generally proceed through four predictable phases (Kram, 1983). The relationship gets started in the *initiation phase* during which the mentor and the protégé start learning each other's personal style and work habits. If the relationship matures into a mentorship, it then progresses to the *cultivation phase* during which the protégé learns from the mentor and advances in his or her career. The mentor promotes the protégé through developing the protégé's performance, potential, and visibility within the organization (Chao, 1997). The protégé gains knowledge while the mentor gains loyalty and support of the protégé along with a sense of well-being from passing on knowledge to the next generation (Levinson et al., 1978). This is considered to be the stage of mentorship during which most benefits accrue to the mentor and the protégé (Hamilton & Scandura, 2002). As the protégé outgrows the relationship and becomes more independent, the structure of the relation begins to change. This signifies *the separation phase* which involves a structural and/or psychological disconnection between the mentor and the protégé. Often, the reason for separation is geographical separation (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Scandura, 1997). The protégé may move onto another position either through job rotation or promotion which begins to limit opportunities for continued interaction (Ragins & Scandura, 1997). The separation phase may be emotionally stressful as either one or both members perceive it with anxiety or defiance (Chao, 1997). After the separation phase, the existing mentoring relationship is no longer needed. In the final *redefinition phase*, a new relationship begins to form where it may either terminate or evolve into a peer-like friendship characterized by mutual support and informal

contact (Chao, 1997; Scandura, 1998). The aforementioned tenets make the MT a relevant theory of examining the mentoring process in Kenyan universities.

Methodology of the Study

The purpose of a research design is to provide a plan or “a blueprint for action” for answering the research questions (Brink & Wood, 1998, p.100). With this in mind, the study adopted a qualitative methodological approach which necessarily does not deal with discrete numerical data (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The researchers relied on the opinions of informants and analyzed them for themes in order to get an in depth understanding of the benefits of mentoring and the best practices to achieve a good mentor–protégé dyad. To achieve this objective, 20 newly employed lecturers both men and women working in two Kenyan universities were interviewed. Two lecturers from each of the two universities and who had served for more than five years and a human resource manager were also interviewed. The informants were purposively sampled. The underlying principle behind purposive sampling is that it involves identifying in advance the cases that have the required characteristics (Marshall, 1996; Rubin, 1987). Data analysis was done in form of content analyses, which is within the qualitative research paradigm. The reason for utilizing this method was that concepts and themes that are not noticeable using the descriptive approach may be seen by using the content analysis (Creswell, 2003).

Literature Review

There is a preponderance of literature on mentoring from different perspectives. Kram (1985), for example, conducts an in-depth qualitative examination of mentor–protégé dyads and, among other things, outlines the functions served by mentors. Kram also identifies two types of mentor functions: the career-related type of support and the psychosocial type of support. First, Kram notes that the career-related type of support enhances protégés’ advancement in the organization and comprises the mentor functions of sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. Second, the psychosocial type of support addresses interpersonal aspects of the relationship and refers to “those aspects of a relationship that enhance an individual’s sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role” (Kram, 1985, p. 32). According to Kram, the specific psychosocial functions comprise role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling and friendship.

In another perspective, Ragins and McFarlin (1990) suggest 11 mentor roles, including coaching, protection, sponsorship, exposure and visibility, challenging assignments, role-modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, friendship, social role and parent role. To date, only one published study tested the factor structure of the 11-dimension scale, and according to Castro and Scandura (2004), minimal support exists for the concurrent validity of this measure. However, Levinson et al. (1978) summarizes the mentor’s function as guide, counselor and sponsor.

In a study on challenges facing mentoring, Long (1997) identifies lack of time for mentoring; poor planning of the mentoring process; unsuccessful matching of mentors and mentees; a lack of understanding about the mentoring process; and lack of access to mentors from minority groups as the most dominant. Long also highlights the difficulties that mentoring poses for organizations if there is insufficient funding or termination of funding before the programme is established. In addition, Long highlights other weaknesses of mentoring from the organization's point of view as lack of support; the difficulties in coordinating programmes within organizational initiatives; and the costs and resources associated with mentoring. Douglas (1997) is also in consonance with Long's findings.

In another study, Jacobi (1991) notes that some programmes train mentors, while others do not; mentors are assigned to mentees and in other programmes the mentee selects the mentor; some programmes designate the location and frequency of meetings, while others leave it to the participants to agree. Further, Jacobi notes that some programmes are evaluated while others are not or are evaluated by vague and imprecise methods.

Ehrich and Hansford examine 25 research based papers published between 1991 and 2006 that report the outcomes of formalized mentoring programmes for public sector workers. The authors employ a structured review of the literature to reveal the focus of the programmes as well as the positive and negative outcomes of mentoring for the parties concerned. They note that the majority of programmes reported on outcomes for leaders. More positive outcomes than negative outcomes were attributed to mentoring. Further, Ehrich and Hansford noted that the commonly cited positive outcomes included improved skills / knowledge and increased confidence; and negative outcomes included lack of time and lack of mentor training and understanding.

In summary, apart from the above reviewed literature, there is also a considerable research that focus on the ways in which individual careers can benefit from mentoring (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, Lima, 2004; Fagenson, 1989; Noe, 1988), including women (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Ragins, 1989) and minorities (Ragins, 1997a; 1997b). Others studies on mentoring focus on the organization and develop ideas or findings aimed at improving organizational performance (Payne & Huffman, 2005; Singh, Bains, & Vinnicombe, 2002). Thus, there is a paucity of research that explore the mentoring of newly employed university lecturers and the best practices that would enhance mentoring in Kenyan universities. This is the lacuna that this paper intends to answer.

Research findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings of the study as collected from the interviews are exemplified and discussed. Literature that either concurs or is inconsistent with the present study is used for discussion. Further, best practices are enumerated. Figure 1 below highlights the views of newly employed male lecturers' views on whether they were mentored or not, Figure 2 highlights the views of newly employed female lecturers' views on whether they were mentored or not while Figure 3 highlights lecturers' view on whether they mentored the newly employed lecturers in their work station or not.

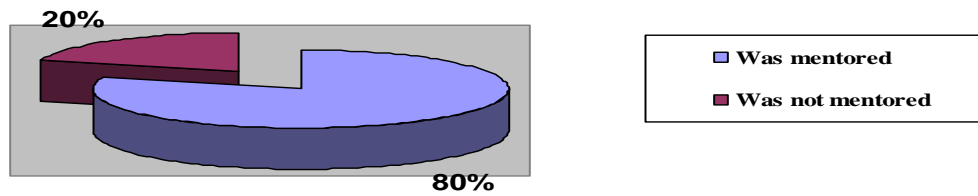


Figure 1: Newly employed male lecturers' views on mentoring

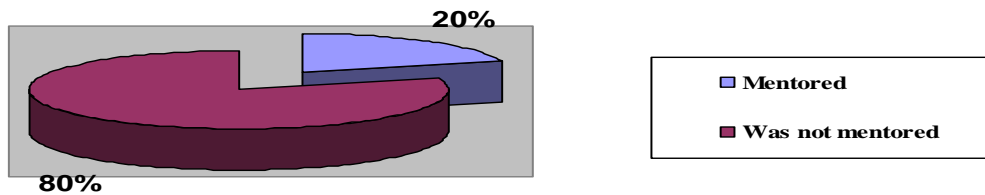


Figure 2: Newly employed female lecturers' views on mentoring

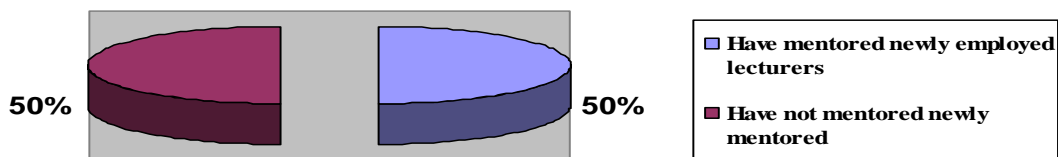


Figure 3: Lecturers' view on mentoring

The benefits of mentoring newly employed lecturers

From the interviews conducted on the informants of this study, various benefits of mentoring newly employed lecturers in Kenyan universities were identified irrespective of the gender. First, according to one of the lecturers who had served for more than five years in one of the two universities sampled in this study, it was noted that mentoring enhances organizational socialization and assimilation of newly employed lecturers into the university. The lecturer argued that a mentor should help the mentee grow into the university's culture and become a productive and effective member of the university. The lecturer opined:

I was employed in one of the constituent colleges immediately after my graduation. I did not understand the hierarchy of leadership in the university. I was not fully assimilated into my new work place and found myself addressing the Principal of the College as the Vice Chancellor. Were it not for one of the senior members of staff who acquainted me to the hierarchy of leadership in the College, I would either have looked ridiculous or made myself a laughing stock.

The lecturer's opinion as noted above concurs with Swap, Leonard, Shields and Abrams (2001) view that mentoring conveys knowledge about values, norms and routines of an organization. Further, as Weiss and Weiss (1999) point out that people who are mentored early, learn from guided practice rather than depend upon trial-and-error alone.

Second, since mentoring is a reciprocal process, it also provides benefits to mentors. The two lecturers sampled in this study noted that mentors experience career revitalization, social recognition, increased confidence and personal satisfaction when they engage in the mentoring process. The lecturers added that apart from rejuvenating mentors' careers, mentoring enables mentors to shape the professional and personal development of mentees. One of the lecturers recalled his experience:

I did not have the experience of any mentorship programme to introduce me into the lecturing profession. As a newly employed lecturer, I struggled through as I tried to get acclimatized to my new area of work. I felt intimidated by the more experienced lecturers. Afraid of appearing as if I did not know my responsibilities, I shied off. Looking back, I shudder to reflect upon my experience - unfamiliar teaching tasks only made worse by my lack of classroom management skills and pedagogical strategies. Working in such a big public university, I was hesitant to ask simple questions to my colleagues and instead tried to work them out on my own. It was baptism of fire. However, after I befriended one of the elderly professors, I learned from him about various pedagogies of teaching. This gave me confidence and esteem. My mentor was excited to guide me until I graduated with a doctorate degree.

This finding is in consonance with various theorists in mentoring (Allen, Poteet & Burroughs, 1997; Burke, McKeen & McKenna, 1994) who note that mentors experience personal satisfaction when their mentees succeed.

Third, mentoring others benefits the psychological and physical health of the mentor. The Human Resource Manager sampled in this study noted that "mentoring others may improve health since giving to others brings a sense of meaning and purpose to life, which increases happiness and decreases depression." This finding concurs with social health research which has shown that there are health benefits from both giving and receiving social support (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Taylor, Klein, Gruenewald, Gurung, & Fernandes-Taylor, 2003). Moreover, research examining other specific forms of helping relationships, such as adult volunteerism, show benefits such as reduced depression and greater physical health (Musick & Wilson, 2003; Oman, Thoresen & McMahan, 1999). In addition, according to social theorists,

mentoring improves the functioning of the autoimmune system by enhancing control and efficacy (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin & Schroeder, 2005).

Fourth, in relation to the benefits for the university, the Human Resource Manager argued that “peer mentoring offers the mentor and the mentee the opportunity for synergy and exchange of ideas and experience”. The Human Resource Manager noted that this synergy is beneficial for the growth of the university. In addition, mentoring improves the skills base of staff, improves the culture and climate of the university staff, improves the profile of the university and lowers absenteeism. Further, the Human Resource Manager Peer claimed that mentoring bridges organizational chasms and contributes to teamwork and improved performance. These findings are in consonance with Murray’s and Owen (1991) argument that formal mentoring programmes increase productivity, motivation of senior staff, and enhancement of services offered by any organization.

Fifth, according to one of the newly employed lecturers, mentoring provides psycho-social support, such as encouragement, friendship and advice to the mentee. That is, through friendship and counselling, the mentor helps the protégé develop the sense of professional competence needed to achieve career success. The newly employed lecturers noted that mentoring enabled them “develop their confidence and self esteem.” An example of support and friendship was provided by a newly employed lecturer who stated, “my mentor is one of my best friends”, while an example of advice given to one of the mentee was evident in her comments that “she was comfortable asking me about matters such as planning for a lecture, professional issues and any general concerns about the university”.

Best practices of mentoring newly employed lecturers

There are several best practices that this paper identified. For instance, according to the Human Resource Manager, he challenged universities to come up with a novel mentoring programme that takes care of the mentees’ needs and which plays a key role in the development of protégés’ self-esteem and work identity. Without naming the Kenyan university that had initiated such a mentorship programme, the Human Resource Manager noted that this mentoring programme had helped the university help in building the skills, abilities, and competences of mentees. Further, the Human Resource Manager noted that the Kenyan university that was implementing the mentoring programme had given the mentee the *carte blanche* to select the mentor that he/she desired. The Human Resource Manager noted that such a mentoring programme should be frequently evaluated to make sure that the mentorship of newly employed lecturers creates relational depth and intimacy in order to satisfy the dyadic relationships.

Second, as a best practice, mentors should provide two broad categories of mentor functions. First, mentors should provide *career development functions*, which help protégés, learn the expectations of the university and facilitate the protégé’s advancement. Second, mentors should provide *psychosocial functions* of mentor functions. Psychosocial functions address interpersonal aspects of the mentoring relationship and enhance the protégé’s sense of competence and

professional and personal development. Whereas career development functions depend on the mentor's power and position in the organization, psychosocial functions depend on the quality of the interpersonal relationship and the emotional bond that underlies the relationship. These broad categories, according to one of the senior lecturers interviewed in this study, act as a benchmark for mentoring process.

Third, the Human Resource Manager interviewed in this paper noted that as a best practice, university managements should facilitate the development of policies that address *the goals, the structure, benefits and challenges* of mentoring newly employed lecturers. The Human Resource Manager noted that this was being undertaken in an unnamed Kenyan University which has recently been chartered. The Human Resource Manager noted that the Kenyan University had explicit goals and expectations of the mentoring programme which are visible within the university and agreed upon by the parties involved. Further, the unnamed Kenyan University has strong organisational support for the programme and mentoring programmes which are currently subjected to refinement and evaluation in order to maximise benefits for all concerned. This has helped the university get rid of rigid organizational structures and unclear expectations which impede an effective mentoring process. The HR Manager noted:

A mentoring relationship is an inherently dyadic and complex process, with the mentor and the protégé each enacting different roles and responsibilities in the relationship. In that line, a policy that clearly indicates the mentor-mentee dyad is exactly what the doctor ordered.

Fifth, as a best practice, the relational model, where the learner is regarded as a valued equal who happens to have specific support needs, and where issues of respect and trust play a larger part should be embraced. The relational model is often regarded as the highest quality mentoring state (Chao, 1997). Relational model may take a parental approach to the relationship and provide considerable advice and instruction that the mentor expects the protégé to obediently follow. In other words, the relational model contrasts the functionalist model, where there is a formal distance between the learner and the mentor and where the focus is on learning outcomes rather than the learner as a whole person.

In addition, as the senior lecturers interviewed in this study noted, peer mentoring as interestingly practised in the two universities sampled is a best practice that should be embraced. The lecturers noted that peer mentoring helps in confidence building, mutual learning and the development of friendships. Similarly, the Human Resource Manager argued that peer mentoring offers the opportunity for synergy and exchange of ideas. The Human Resource Manager added that peer mentoring reduces conflicts and contributes to teamwork and improved performance.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that, first, in order to enhance quality in education, a mentor and a mentee should work together to develop mutually agreed upon goals for the success of both the individuals and the university. Thus, mentors may need to be particularly adept at

communicating information to protégés instead of leaving the protégés to learn on their own. Second, this paper recommends that since formal mentoring programmes are planned, structured and coordinated interventions within an organisation's human resource policies, it makes sense for those charged with the responsibility of implementing such programmes to endeavour to ensure that the goals of the programmes are clear and known to key parties; that mentors and mentees are well-matched; and that the university support and commitment are evident. Thus, universities should invest resources into mentoring programmes. It is also incumbent on the planners, such as educational administrators, to minimise potential problems that could be impediment to the mentoring process by embracing the best practices in other Kenyan universities and beyond.

Conclusions

The paper set forth to explore the mentoring of newly employed university lecturers and the best practices that would enhance mentoring in Kenyan universities. The findings of this paper reveal that, irrespective of gender, majority of the newly employed lecturers had not been mentored. In addition, 50% of the lecturers had not mentored the newly employed lecturers. The study also notes that of newly employed lectures offer many benefits for the mentor, mentee and the university. Thus, on the one hand, for newly employed lecturers, mentoring provides opportunities to develop competencies and skills, knowledge and improve performance. On the other hand, for mentors, mentoring promotes professional and personal development. However, for the mentoring process to be successful, at the very least, interest and commitment of mentors and mentees and support from the university is imperative.

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