

Supporting women's mentoring in higher education: a literature review 2010



Acknowledgments

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A literature review 2010

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Introduction

This review highlights the main concepts behind mentoring and the key factors to take into consideration when implementing mentoring schemes for women in higher education institutions (HEIs).

Mentoring has been widely used across the globe in several settings, including for young people and academics, and has recently seen an increase in the workplace as a feasible and popular form of career support and development.

ECU's *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2011* shows that, despite a slight female majority in the staff make-up of HEIs – 53.8 per cent in 2009/10 – women are underrepresented in senior positions. Women made up 44 per cent of all academic staff in 2009/10, yet only 19.1 per cent of professors were women (ECU, 2011). There have been many arguments put forward to explain this, including a lack of role-models or mentors. Subsequently, over recent years a number of institutions have developed mentoring initiatives to help address this discrepancy.

This literature review was commissioned as part of a project to support institutional change by exploring the impact of women's mentoring initiatives on women's career progression. Practical guidance has been developed as a result of the project to assist staff in HEIs. The guidance is available at www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/womens-mentoring

Method

A literature search was performed on the following bibliographic databases:

- = Abi/Inform Global
- = Database of Research on International Education
- = FRANCIS
- = MEDLINE
- = PsycINFO
- = Web of Science

Keywords

- = mentor, mentors, mentoring or mentee
- = academia
- = career mobility
- = career success
- = coaching
- = female, females or women

Articles have been included in this literature review if deemed relevant to the aims after three stages of reading:

- = titles
- = abstracts
- = full articles

References of reviewed articles were searched and contact was made with fellow experts in the field of mentoring to elicit further articles for this review.

Analysis of the literature was then conducted to identify key themes for the purpose of this review.

The initial focus for the review is on research related to the UK higher education sector for both academic and professional or support staff. However, as little research has been undertaken in this area, literature from other countries and sectors has also been included. Much of the literature is concerned with the state of academic research on mentoring and thus provides recommendations for future research questions and methods in this field as opposed to identifying factors for successful mentoring schemes.

What is mentoring?

The concept of mentoring has become familiar in a variety of contexts from business, to apprenticeships, to the military.

The first critical review of mentoring was published in 1983, at which time mentoring was believed to benefit the career of the mentee alone. Mentoring studies were scattered across disciplines and had not been examined to identify common findings and trends (Merriam, 1983).

The original meaning of the word 'mentor' was a father figure who sponsors, guides and develops a younger person (Ehrich *et al*, 2004). In Homer's *The Odyssey*, Ulysses entrusted his son, Telemachus, into the care of Mentor, who was old and wise and took charge of Telemachus' education, helping him to mature, learn courage, honesty and a commitment to serving others (Clutterbuck, 1991). Since then, the word 'mentor' has been used in the title of books that aimed to help young people in certain areas of learning, such as the naval arts or medicine (Woodd, 1997).

Mentoring has continued to be popular in business and education with mentoring in the workplace becoming increasingly common (Underhill, 2006). Findings from studies on mentoring participation indicate that up to two-thirds of employees (executives in small to medium-sized organisations in the United States) had participated in some type of mentoring relationship (Egan and Song, 2008; Ragins and Scandura, 1994). In the UK, Davies and Taylor (2004) state that over a quarter of the Inner City 100 firms (Britain's fastest growing businesses from a range of sectors across UK inner cities) are engaged in mentoring.

The following definitions of mentoring have been put forward in the research:

- = Megginson (2006) – off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking, either through sponsorship (the mentor actively champions the client with the primary motive of career or professional success) or developmental mentoring (the mentor may be experienced but not necessarily more senior and the aim is to facilitate learning rather than provide answers)
- = Connor and Pokora (2007) – support the above definition, maintaining that mentoring is a learning relationship that helps people to take charge of their own development, release their potential and achieve results they value

- = Parsloe and Wray (2000) – a process that supports learning and development, and thus performance improvements, either for an individual, team or business, which is usually understood as a special kind of relationship where objectivity, credibility, honesty, trustworthiness and confidentiality are all critical

All definitions share the notion that mentoring consists of a relationship with a more experienced individual supporting their mentee to enhance their learning and development.

Why is mentoring used?

There is a general acceptance that mentoring is beneficial for mentors, mentees and their institutions.

Mentoring has been found to have a variety of benefits for participants (Allen *et al*, 2004), including career advancement (Kram, 1985), career success, job satisfaction, improved self-esteem and other psychosocial benefits (Allen *et al*, 2004; Noe *et al*, 2002), and for organisations by improving retention and organisational success.

Kram (1985) identifies career advancement and psychosocial support as important outcomes of mentoring for the mentee. In terms of career advancement, mentees benefit from the mentor's sponsorship and coaching, helping them to learn and obtain promotion as well as to gain career satisfaction.

In a study of 1250 top executives mentioned in the 'Who's News' column of the *Wall Street Journal* in 1977 in the United States, Roche (1979) found that 75 per cent had been mentored. The salaries of those that had been mentored were 28 per cent higher than the salaries of those that had not been mentored, and mentees were also more likely to be happy with their career progress (Ehrich *et al*, 2004).

As women are underrepresented at senior levels in many professions, women-only mentoring programmes are being implemented to support women with career development and encourage the upward mobility of women into higher levels. The psychosocial support provided by mentors, including encouragement, advice and feedback on performance at work, can also help mentees enhance their sense of competence and self-efficacy (Kram, 1985).

Given the reciprocal nature of mentoring, mentors also benefit from the relationship.

In a study of 40 American men aged 35–45 years working as either biology professors, novelists, business executives or industrial labourers, Levinson *et al* (1978) noted that mentoring rejuvenates mentors' careers by enabling them to assist and shape the professional and personal development of their mentees. Pololi and Knight (2005) reported similar experiences in mentoring programmes funded through the National Center of Leadership in Academic Medicine, in the United States.

Douglas (1997) identifies other benefits for mentors as part of a summary of 80 books and articles selected from the practical and academic literature on mentoring worldwide, including increased confidence, personal fulfilment and assistance with their own work projects.

In an examination of facilitated formal mentoring programmes in US organisations (including American College, AT&T, California Women in Government, General Motors, Merrill Lynch and New York University), Murray and Owen (1991) identified several benefits of mentoring for the organisation. These include increased productivity, improved recruitment efforts, motivation of senior staff, increased organisational communication and enhancement of services offered by the organisation. Rosenbach (1993) reported that mentoring schemes led to reduced turnover, increased organisational commitment, and the strengthening and continuance of corporate culture.

Mentoring in higher education

Mentoring schemes in higher education tend to share common goals including the socialisation of employees into the organisational culture and provision of support for career development.

Peer mentoring

Common in higher education, peer mentoring schemes are used to support new employees in the development of task and relationship effectiveness. Shapiro *et al* (1978) define a peer mentor as a mentor at the same level as the mentee with whom to share information and strategy, and provide mutual support for mutual benefit (Woodd, 1997). The lack of hierarchy in peer mentoring facilitates the communication and collaboration that is necessary for effective learning, enabling the information sharing, emotional support and friendship that may be critical for a new member of staff when settling into a new role (Kram and Isabella, 1985; Smith, 1990).

Informal mentoring

Most mentoring for the purpose of career development in higher education takes place informally. Historically the most common type of mentoring occurs when a senior colleague selects a junior member of staff to sponsor or coach, and enables exposure to various work opportunities and influential individuals. In informal mentoring, relationships emerge largely through mutual initiation and ongoing connections between mentee and mentor (Ragins and Cotton, 1991), with mentor and mentee spontaneously forming a relationship with the purpose of assisting the mentee in developing career-relevant skills (Kram, 1985). Uniquely to informal mentoring, relationships occur over time without external intervention, planning or management by an institution (Egan and Song, 2008).

Formal mentoring

Formal mentoring is often instigated and led by internal organisational facilitators. As noted by Ehrich *et al* (2004) some formal mentoring schemes may require participation in introductory sessions and ongoing training whereas others do not; mentors are assigned to mentees in some programmes yet in other programmes the mentee selects the mentor; some programmes designate the location, duration and frequency of meetings between mentor and mentee, whereas others leave it to the participants. Although there has been an increase in the

use of formal mentoring programmes, the facilitation of such programmes can vary greatly in nature, focus, goals, structure and outcomes. Single and Muller (2001) highlight varying levels of facilitation in formal mentoring schemes, from low-level-facilitated mentoring programmes that do not provide support for the mentoring pair beyond matching them and providing introductory information, to high-level-facilitated programmes involving ongoing support throughout the programme to strengthen the mentoring relationship and accomplish specific goals.

The impact of mentoring on women's career progression in HE

Evidence shows that men have engaged in informal mentoring in the workplace for a long time (Kanter, 1977).

Women have reported difficulty in finding mentors in this way (Sambunjak *et al*, 2006) and black and minority ethnic women are even less likely to find suitable mentors or role models (Lewellen-Williams *et al*, 2006).

Formal mentoring schemes have been introduced to address the underrepresentation of women in academia, particularly within the United States and Australia. Over recent years the UK higher education sector has embraced similar schemes.

The impact of mentoring initiatives on women's career progression in higher education is poorly documented in the literature. Despite the existence of schemes to benefit all staff across a range of levels, where schemes have been evaluated, they tend to be schemes that focus on academic staff rather than professional or support staff.

For academics, mentoring can contribute to an individual's career development in the field, particularly in areas of research, publications and promotion, by providing junior academics with a means to find out more about career management and institutional networking (Pololi and Knight, 2005; Allen *et al*, 2004).

Gardiner *et al* (2007) carried out an analysis of data collected from a mentoring scheme running from 1998 to 2004 at Flinders University, Australia. The scheme was introduced to address the issue of gender inequality in senior academic positions. The analysis revealed that, in comparison with staff members who had not received formal mentoring, mentees:

- = were more likely to stay at the university – 14 per cent of mentees left by 2004 compared with 33 per cent of controls
- = had a higher rate of promotion – 68 per cent of mentees had been promoted at least once since the commencement of the scheme compared with 43 per cent of the controls
- = were more successful in receiving external research grants and were more productive in terms of publications

Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine implemented a range of initiatives to address the underrepresentation of women in senior academia from 1990 to 1995. This multi-faceted intervention is perhaps the most notable and included mentoring, leadership development, education of faculty to the nature of gender-based obstacles and motivation for change, and academic rewards (Fried *et al*, 1996). Results showed more junior women being retained and promoted with a 550 per cent increase in the number of women at the associate professor rank over five years (from four in 1990 to 26 in 1995). Furthermore, between a half and two-thirds of female faculty members reported improvements in the timeliness of promotions, manifestations of gender bias, access to information needed for faculty development, isolation, and salary equity.

Similarly, Levinson *et al* (1991) found in a study of female academics in the United States that women with mentors had more publications and spent more time on research than women without mentors. Women with a role model also reported higher overall career satisfaction. Additionally, Wasserstein *et al* (2007) reported that in a cross-sectional self-administered survey of 1046 faculty members at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine mentoring was strongly correlated with overall job satisfaction.

Key factors to consider to ensure a successful mentoring scheme

There are common reasons why some schemes fail to confer a benefit. By being aware of these issues and adjusting schemes appropriately, mentoring initiatives can be implemented with a greater chance of producing positive outcomes.

Potential issues

In a structural analysis on research-based articles of mentoring across three disciplines (education, business and medicine), Ehrich *et al* (2004) identified problematic outcomes of mentoring for the mentor, mentee, and the organisation that would need to be addressed to ensure a successful mentoring scheme.

Evidence from all three settings highlights a number of problems experienced during mentoring that ultimately had an effect on the mentoring programmes.

For mentors, lack of time and training resulted in mentoring becoming a burden or an addition to their workload that went unnoticed by others (particularly senior management). Incompatibility with mentees, as a result of personality, differences in ideology or expertise, or undesirable mentee attitudes (eg, lack of commitment and unrealistic expectations of mentoring outcomes) were also issues that caused problems for mentors with their mentoring practice.

Similarly, mentees were concerned by a lack of interest shown by their mentors, mentors that were unable to find the time for mentoring sessions, and lack of training that gave rise to mentors being too harsh or too critical towards their mentees. Mentees also noted personal or professional incompatibility with their mentors, but identified this as a result of race or gender (eg, matching female mentees with male mentors). As evidenced by Brown *et al* (2003) in their conjoint analysis of focus groups and questionnaires with women at Duke University Medical Center, women identified a lack of female mentors and stated that advice from male colleagues was often inadequate. Bickel (2004) further develops this in her commentary on women in academic psychiatry, suggesting that some men are ineffective mentors for women because they lack experience with career-oriented women or because they find it easier to relate to women in social roles rather than professional roles.

For the organisation, problems with mentoring programmes arose with high staff turnover which prevents the development of long-term mentoring relationships. In addition, lack of commitment from the organisation in terms of funding, programme facilitation and support of senior management, organisational culture and attitudinal barriers can lead to both mentors and mentees having a negative experience of mentoring.

Factors for success

Understanding the possible negative outcomes of mentoring can allow for formal mentoring schemes to be structured appropriately to avoid or overcome such problems. A number of studies (Connor and Pokora, 2007; Megginson *et al*, 2006; Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2001; Underhill, 2006; Ehrich *et al*, 2004) have suggested that the following are key components of a successful mentoring scheme:

- = organisational support
- = well-defined programme goals, expectations and roles
- = selection and matching of participants
- = monitoring and evaluation

Organisational support

Organisational support systems are an important factor in the effectiveness of mentoring programmes. Where mentoring programmes are the result of a hasty decision they tend to be poorly planned and inadequately resourced. Therefore by establishing mentoring as part of a strategic business need, programmes are more easily accepted and supported (Kram and Bragar, 1991).

Visible support from top management in the organisation is a frequently cited characteristic for successful mentoring programmes, particularly when they involve formal pairing of senior managers acting as mentors to junior staff (Noe, 1991; Rosenbach, 1993; Zey, 1991).

Finally, adequate resources need to be provided by the organisation for any mentoring programme to be successful.

Well-defined programme goals, expectations and roles

Several studies identify the need for clear goals in successful mentoring programmes and the communication of these goals within the organisation and to programme participants (Kram and Bragar, 1991; Murray and Owen, 1991; Zey, 1991).

Newby and Heide (1992) note that goals indicate levels of performance and resources needed, and that from a motivational perspective, participants are encouraged by highlighting the expected outcomes of the programme. In relation to programme expectations, it is essential that both mentors and mentees have realistic ideas of the outcomes of mentoring, both positive and negative. Unmet expectations, particularly in relation to career advancement, frequency of contact, and responsibilities have been cited as a major factor in the failure of mentoring programmes (Kram and Bragar, 1991; Murray and Owen, 1991; Noe, 1991). Roles and responsibilities of all participants in the mentoring programme need to be clearly outlined and communicated, and this can be done through mentor training sessions.

Training for both mentors and mentees is commonly cited as a key to the success of mentoring programmes. There are a number of decisions to make around training, including:

- = whether training should be delivered in-house or by external consultants
- = how long training should last
- = whether training should be ongoing throughout a programme
- = whether there should be an assessment of skills

The evidence base is clear that without training, mentoring schemes are likely to be less successful (Clutterbuck, 1998). Training helps to direct, support, and enhance the potential for positive mentoring experiences. It helps people understand their roles better and what is expected from them so that they can contribute to the programme's success and gain more in return.

Selection and matching of participants

Evidence from successful mentoring programmes shows that participation should be voluntary for both mentors and mentees, and participants should be allowed to withdraw from the programme at any time with no negative consequences (Kram and Bragar, 1991; Zey, 1985).

There are a number of methods for selection of participants, including self-nomination, nomination by other programme participants, and nomination by other organisational members. Once selected there needs to be a careful matching process; if participants are being matched by the programme co-ordinators then evidence shows that matches are more likely to be effective when data on participants is used as part of the process, including position, professional interests and personality (Gaskill, 1993).

There is also evidence suggesting that mentoring relationships formed through self-selection are more successful as these partnerships are based on mutual interests, for example (Forret, 1996; Kogler Hill and Gant, 2000). Self-selection can occur through day-to-day work, seeing people present at conferences or meetings, through other work activities, or when mentors and mentees meet as part of the mentoring scheme training or programme design, such as social events for participants.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is essential for the overall effectiveness of any mentoring programme, and is critical for identifying:

- = good practice
- = any problems with mentoring relationships and the mentoring process itself
- = whether the programme has been successful in terms of outcomes and goal attainment

(Gaskil, 1993; Kram and Bragar, 1991; Murray and Owen, 1991)

Given that mentoring programmes should be implemented as part of a strategic business need, it is important that results of monitoring and evaluation should be communicated with participants of the programme, senior management, and to staff across the organisation.

Measuring the impact of a mentoring scheme

When and how to evaluate

It is important to assess the effectiveness of any initiative and make any necessary improvements to the mentoring programme. Kram and Bragar (1991) argue that embedding evaluation into the design of the programme from the outset helps to identify the goals and possible outcomes of the mentoring. This study suggests that periodic assessments should be made throughout the mentoring programme through focus groups, interviews and surveys to evaluate its effectiveness and make improvements.

Kram (1985) identifies mentoring relationships developing through stages over time, each marked with unique issues and challenges. Therefore, a longitudinal evaluation would be essential to fully understand the dynamic of mentoring and how mentoring relationships have changed over time in a particular programme.

Who to evaluate

As mentors and mentees have different roles and responsibilities and experience different benefits from the process (Eby *et al*, 2006), it is necessary to seek feedback from both sides of the partnership in order to get a true representation of the mentoring experience. Evaluation can also be carried out with non-participants in order to assess whether those taking part in the programme have benefited from the experience. Similarly, it would be important to gain feedback from senior members of staff at the organisation to understand the organisational benefits of mentoring schemes.

What to evaluate

Gardiner *et al* (2007) report that mentoring outcomes can be divided into three groups:

- = perceptions of mentoring, such as the effectiveness of the scheme in terms of support, encouragement and personal satisfaction
- = subjective outcomes, linked to career satisfaction and stress at work
- = objective outcomes, such as career advancement, salary progression, retention, work productivity and research grants

Gardiner argues that a substantial weakness of the current evidence base for mentoring is that most evaluations of mentoring programmes focus solely on the first group of outcomes measuring subjective perceptions of mentoring, relying on testimonials and opinions of outcomes rather than objective measures of change.

While qualitative evaluation is necessary and desirable, particularly when evaluating pilot schemes, evaluating objective outcomes of mentoring is also crucial. In academia, this means looking at the impact of mentoring on promotion, productivity, and retention.

It has been acknowledged that mentees can benefit from mentoring through career advancement and psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). It would therefore be important to measure the extent of this as part of any evaluation of mentoring and there are established measures for assessing both psychosocial and career outcomes (Noe, 1988; Scandura, 1992; Scandura and Ragins, 1993).

Conclusion

Mentoring – when a more experienced individual (not necessarily more senior) supports a colleague to enhance their learning and development – has been shown to benefit mentees, mentors and institutions, and can be widely used to address the underrepresentation of women in senior positions in higher education.

The historical model of informal mentoring, most predominantly used by men, is being adapted and complemented by formal mentoring programmes to provide equal career advancement opportunities and support for women. Evaluation of existing programmes in higher education shows that among academic mentees, mentoring has contributed to career development in areas of research, publications and promotion, and provides a range of psychosocial benefits from the increased level of professional support.

This review highlights key factors for successful mentoring schemes including organisational support and resources, the need for clear goals and expectations (particularly in relation to career advancement and frequency of contact), and the selection and matching of participants. It also highlights the importance of periodic monitoring and evaluation to take into account the longitudinal nature of mentoring, and enable greater understanding of the benefits for both mentors and mentees, as well as the positive impact such a scheme can have on the institution as a whole.

The majority of existing studies in higher education focus on mentoring for academics, however the findings will, in most cases, be transferable to professional and support staff.

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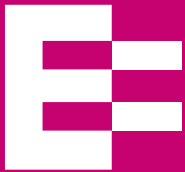
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Providing a central source of expertise, research, advice and leadership, we support institutions in building a culture that provides equality of both opportunity and outcome, promotes good relations, values the benefits of diversity and provides a model of equality for the wider UK society.



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