An Exploration of Mentoring Program Models and Best Practices

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Abstract

This manuscript reviews the current literature and importance of mentoring. The manuscript explores different models/typologies and points toward the utility and benefit of mentoring and sponsorship for academics and practitioners. In the end, research notes provide the foundation for discussion about the various models that can be used in the development of a mentoring program.

Keywords: Mentoring program; Criminology; Current literature; Sponsorship; Mentors; Criminal justice

Introduction

The benefit of mentoring has been established for some time, including contributing to "improved faculty morale, higher career satisfaction, and increased self-confidence in professional development" ([1] p. 7). Research has also focused on strategies designed to ensure success in higher education. There is widespread and documented belief that mentoring women and minority group members within the discipline of criminology and criminal justice will have an impact upon publication rates, teaching and equally, mentors can provide information on how to navigate the fault lines and departmental politics [2]. Further, faculty who have been mentored have the potential to be awarded more grants and promoted faster. It has been said that "institutions providing mentoring programs experience increased retention and improved sense of community and professional identity ([1] p. 7).

Mentoring Models

A cursory look at the literature and Internet sites revealed different models and best practices for mentoring. According to Michigan State University's Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development, "a mentor model should be chosen or developed to meet the needs of a specific unit or individual." Below are examples of potential models identified by scholars [3-5].

Kunselman, Hensley and Tewksbury [2] identified three models for consideration:

i. Model One: Continuing with mentor from graduate school.

ii. Model Two: Developing a new mentoring relationship at the academic institution, where one receives a faculty position.

iii. Model Three: Developing a new mentoring relationship with an academic in the same field, but at a different institution. Unlike the first two models, the emphasis should be based upon mutual respect and the maintenance of a professional relationship.

Michigan State University's Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development created a more expansive list of mentor models for consideration:

i. Intentional informal mentoring

a. Recognizing and supporting ways in which colleagues within a unit or professional network can serve as unassigned mentors.

ii. Mentor/mentee dyad

a. More traditional model. Top-down model that involves assigning a single senior academic to mentor someone early in their career.

iii. Multiple mentors

a. The mentee has multiple formal mentors for different

roles (e.g., one for advancing teaching skills, one for research skills).

iv. Mentoring networks

a. Similar to multiple mentors.

b. It does consider, however, the strategic creation of a diverse network of mentors who can meet the multiple needs of mentees. This includes drawing mentors from varying places, both internal and external.

v. Mutual mentoring

a. Academics are encouraged to build a network of support of a variety of mentoring "partners," including peers, near-peers, senior individuals in similar roles, chairs, administrators, external mentors, librarians, writing coaches, etc.

vi. Career advising

a. Focuses on facilitating career success, and may include mentoring related to, but not limited to leadership, teaching, scholarship, and external funding.

vii. Peer mentoring

a. Usually done across units and disciplines.

viii. Virtual mentoring or e-mentoring

a. Developed and/or maintained through online media.

b. Provides the opportunity to connect with individuals across the state/country.

Mentoring Best Practices

There is information available on best practices of mentoring programs, for academic and corporate settings.

Mentoring in corporate settings

An organization that focuses on coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning in the corporate arena provides eight (8) best practices to build a successful mentoring program [6]. While not necessarily focusing on academia, these best practices could be useful as we work to develop our mentoring program:

Identify goals for the program: Establishing clear goals will help you determine the design, format, and overall direction of your mentoring program.

i. What do we want to achieve with this mentoring program?

ii. What problems are we hoping to address?

iii. What does success look like for participants and the company?

Mentor selection: Identifying mentors internally is good because they're familiar with the organization. On the other hand, internal mentors may bring more subjectivity into their relationships, which can be harmful to the mentee. By contrast, external mentors bring objectivity into the relationship. They're also a great option for organizations that don't have enough leaders to support their mentoring program.

Be thoughtful about the matching process: Matching mentors and mentees is a process that, if not approached with care, can be prone to biases. If you allow people to identify their own mentors or mentees, they're likely to select someone that looks like themselves, which might limit growth opportunities for the mentee.

Provide guidelines: These questions should be answered:

i. Frequency of meeting between mentors and mentees

ii. How to track progress

iii. Expectations of both mentors and mentees

iv. How to navigate potential challenges

Ensure program is equitable: There are a lot of biases that can trickle into mentoring programs. Every effort should be made to ensure that applicants have equal access. It is also recommended that the workforce is regularly surveyed to identify any biases in the program.

Plan a successful launch: A successful launch is critical to getting the program off on the right foot. Engage the help of leadership and marketing teams to come up with an announcement strategy for the mentoring program.

Measure the impact of your program: Collect data to evaluate program effectiveness.

Mentoring in academic settings

Drawing from various sources, Michigan State University's Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development outlines best practices for mentoring in academic settings. Once more, the importance of developing strong relationships, and identifying expectations emerge as important best practices for mentors and mentees. These best practices are based largely upon how mentors and mentees should proceed once paired. These best practices include:

a. Identify your strengths, weaknesses, and biases

b. Assess and build your communication and listening skills

c. Build productive mentor/mentee relationships

d. For mentors: Assess and address concerns about mentoring

e. For mentors: Fostering mentee career advancement

f. For mentees: Fostering own career advancement

Nick et al. [1] provided guidance regarding academic mentoring programs for nursing faculty, but it could be translated to our discipline as we develop the mentoring program for ACJS. These guidelines were informed by what they found in prior literature on mentoring programs. They reviewed prior research and identified the following six categories for establishing a formal mentoring program:

a. achieve appropriately matched dyads,

b. establish clear mentorship purpose and goals

c. solidify the dyad relationship

d. advocate for and guide the protégé

e. integrate the protégé into the academic culture,

f. mobilize institutional resources. In their discussions, they included the following Figure 1. This figure also includes four responsibilities and outcomes tied to mentoring. According to Nick et al. (2012), "Attending to these six themes will help mentors achieve the four mentoring outcome pillars" (p.

g. Please see https://ofasd.msu.edu/mentoring/best-practices-for-menNexttors-and-mentees-in-academicsettings/ for detailed description of each of the best practices identified above.
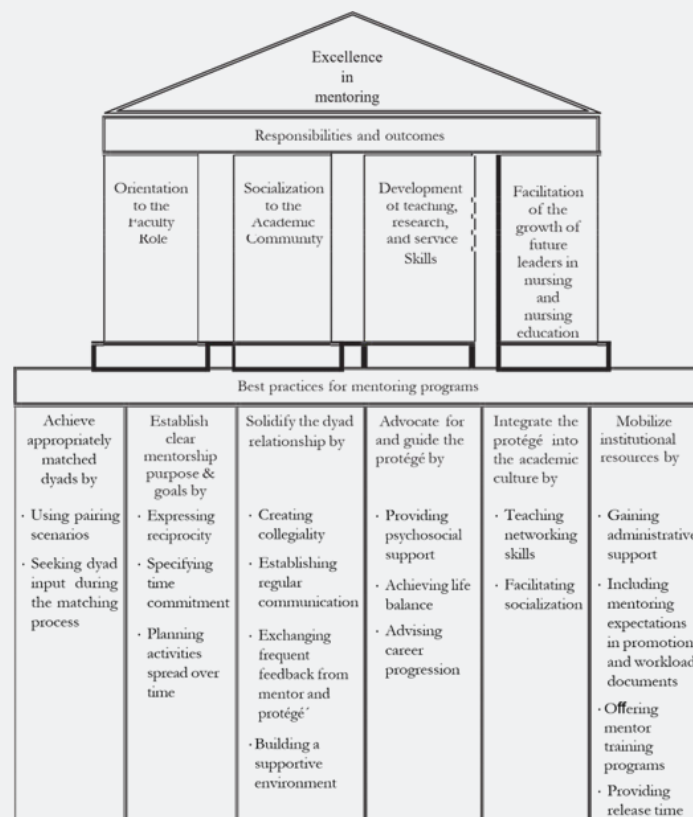

Figure 1: The model: Best Practices in Academic Mentoring: A Model for Excellence. Fourth Cohort, NLN/Johnson & Johnson Faculty Leadership and Mentoring Program ([1] p. 3).

Lumpkin ([7] p.365) developed a similar mentoring model for academics, displayed as a puzzle that lays out the pieces necessary for a mentoring program (Figure 2).

Characteristics of mentoring programs found to be successful include developing a formal mentor/mentee relationship that includes and allows for the mentor and mentee to meet regularly [7,8]. In addition, "the fit between the mentor and protégé" has been found to be an important aspect of successful programs [7]. These programs may also include opportunities for faculty mentors to meet as a group [8]. This could allow them to share information about successful tactics, frustrations, etc. If mentor meetings are held, however, confidentiality should be sure the mentee's privacy is protected. In addition, mentor training may need to be included in the program because it should not be assumed that one's experience(s) translate to effective mentoring skills. Providing both the mentor and mentee with administrative support as well as time to develop their relationship have also been recognized as features of successful mentoring programs. Further, "Many successful mentoring programs allow flexibility without retribution to either the mentor or protégé, as may be necessary when a protégé develops an informal relationship with another mentor" ([8] p. 5).
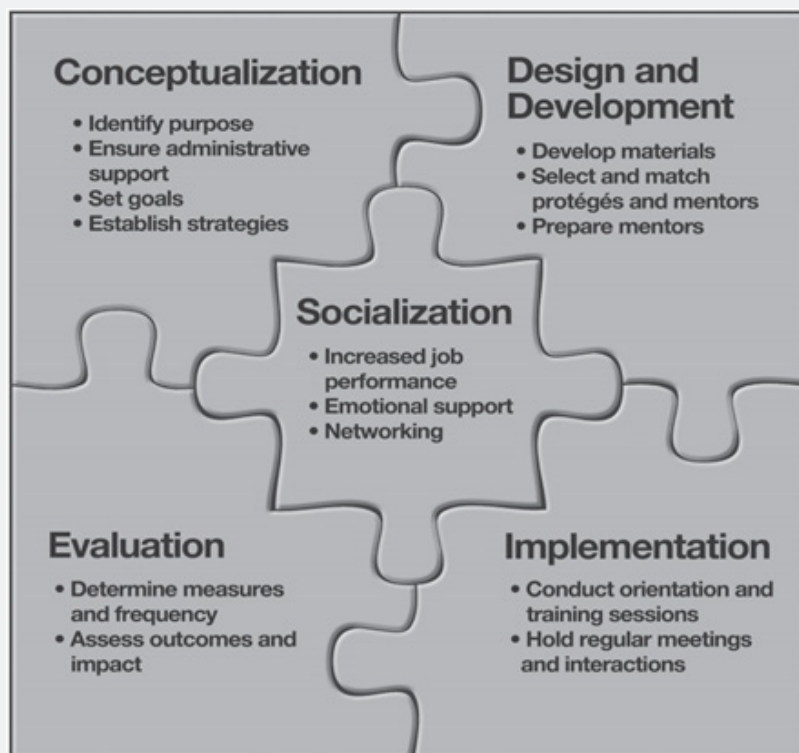
Figure 2: Lumpkin's model for academics for a mentoring program: ([7] p. 365).

Last, in terms of best practices, feedback from participants is important [8,9]. It has been suggested that periodic assessments be conducted to determine the success of, or issues associated with these programs—"qualitative indicators include job satisfaction, organization commitment, and worker self-esteem, whereas quantitative outcomes include promotions, research publications, and grant funding received" ([8] p. 5).

Gender, Ethnicity and Race

In the search for models and best practices, we found many themes, but highlight one that pertained to race, ethnicity, and gender; see below:

Some articles discussed the need for females to mentor other females; similarly, that blacks should mentor blacks. In response to these observations, Brown, Davis & McClendon [9] "make the point that it is an erroneous belief that minority students can only be mentored by faculty of color essentially restricting mentoring to a caste-like system" (p. 108). The literature suggests an effective mentor can be of any race or gender if they are committed to the task of recruiting and nurturing students.

In an opinion piece discussing academic mentoring, Stanley & Lincoln [10] address the importance of majority faculty awareness of barriers that typically impact, female and minority faculty [11-17].

Conclusion

Since many students graduate from doctoral programs with inadequate sponsorship, the development of a mentoring program is one way to assist newly minted academics. And this research note provides the foundation for discussion about the various models that can be used in the development of a mentoring program.

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