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## CONCEPTUAL ARTICLE

### COLLABORATIVE MENTORING MODELS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A WIN-WIN-WIN STRATEGY FOR MENTOR, MENTEE, AND THE INSTITUTION

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**ABSTRACT:** Traditionally mentoring in higher education institutions was an informal one-to-one program where graduate students as well as junior/ fresh faculty are matched with experienced faculty and put under them for influencing and fostering the intellectual development amongst students and career aspirations amongst junior faculty respectively. While such informal one-to-one programs help the students and junior faculty but fail to create a collaborative atmosphere in higher education institutions. Alternative mentoring techniques/methods/processes like; group mentoring, mentoring circles (Just like quality circles), and network mentoring can be employed which will help in creating collaborative atmosphere in higher education settings wherein all the parties involved, i.e. mentor, mentee and institution derive benefit. The concept of the collaborative models of mentoring shifts the focus of mentoring from the top-down approach of institutions assigning mentors to mentees to a more independent approach with the focus on mentee. Mentees develop their own relationship networks in relation to their particular needs. Earlier notion of one to one mentor relationship (Dyadic model) being superior to a network of many developmental mentoring relationships has been proved wrong. There are many advantages of mentoring circles/group mentoring/network mentoring. Individuals gain access to networks, reduction in feelings of isolation, greater connectivity, increased confidence and commitment, career progression, knowledge acquisition, and better understanding of the culture. In spite of all the advantages (Mentioned above) associated with collaborative mentoring models, such as mentoring circle or network mentoring or group mentoring, the implementation of these models compared to traditional one-to-one model (Dyadic model) of mentoring is very rare. The critical success factors in implementing these innovative collaborative models include; a commitment from all the parties involved, mutual trust, confidentiality, rapport amongst circle or network members and voluntary attendance. It should be seen as one of the many developmental activities undertaken to strengthen higher education.

**KEYWORDS:** Collaborative mentoring, Group mentoring, Higher education institutions, Mentoring, mentoring circles, Network mentoring.

**INTRODUCTION:** As T. A. Scandura and R.E.Viator<sup>1</sup> postulate, mentoring has been a focus for individual career development since the mid - 1980s when researchers as well as human resource managers started paying attention to the benefits derived out of this whole exercise<sup>15</sup>. Research has shown that successful mentoring relationships can assist individuals in learning the ropes at an organization; increase career satisfaction, salaries and influence in the organization; and decrease turnover rates. But over the years, the concept and meaning of mentoring has changed dramatically due to dramatic changes in the job environment. The presumed meaning of mentoring in higher education institutions as a one-to-one relationship between a senior faculty and a junior faculty of the same institution has expanded to include different types of relationships. Researchers in higher



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education have linked mentoring to career advancement (Burke and McKeen),<sup>2</sup> increased self-confidence (De Vries),<sup>3</sup> and personal satisfaction and growth (Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent).<sup>4</sup> Both mentors and mentees benefit from the mentoring. Mentors reap benefits in the form of accelerated research productivity, greater networking and enlarged professional recognition while overall performance of the mentees increases (Ron Penner).<sup>5</sup>

There are challenges with the implementation of mentoring programs that require the matching of mentoring partners. Some researchers (De Janasz, Sullivan and Whiting)<sup>6</sup> argue that traditional mentoring programs limit participants to one person's point of view. Whereas aspiring academics and students must tap an intelligent network of multiple mentors in order to succeed in today's competitive and rapidly changing job environment. The protective functions inherent in the traditional mentoring relationship (Based on unchallenged assumptions about the knowledge and power) has become less important today as individuals take on personal responsibility for their own career development. Within such framework learning which is seen as a means of transmitting knowledge from mentor to mentee is no longer relevant in today's knowledge economy and moreover it limits transformation potential of mentee (Darwin, 2004).<sup>7</sup>

Effort has been made in this article to understand the scope of mentoring in the context of higher education and present diverse views (contemporary) about mentoring.

**What is Mentoring?:** The term mentor stems from Greek mythology in which Odysseus entrusted the care and education of his child to a friend named Mentor while he was away on his adventure trips. Mentoring is used to describe variety of relationships. Some of the synonyms used in conjunction with mentoring include; role model, coach, guide, sponsor, friend, adviser and so on. The person offering the mentoring is usually referred to as a mentor, while the recipient may be called as a mentee or protégé.

As Biehl<sup>8</sup> describes 'Mentoring is a lifelong relationship in which a mentor helps a protégé/mentee reach her or his god given potential'. According to Cunningham<sup>9</sup> 'mentoring provides, first, an instrumental or career function (e.g., sponsorship, coaching, corporate culture instruction), and second, an intrinsic or psychological function (e.g., serving as a role model, a friend, boosting confidence, a counselor, advisor). Mentoring according to Weinstein<sup>10</sup> is 'a power-free partnership between two individuals who desire mutual growth. One of the individuals usually has greater skills, experiences, and wisdom.'

### Elements of Mentoring:

1. **Time Frame:** The relationship may be time bound, lifelong or open ended.
2. **Reciprocity:** The relationship may be seen as primarily to benefit mentee or may be seen as mutually beneficial and power-free where-in both mentee and mentor derive benefit out of the relationship.
3. **Intensity:** Partners may meet occasionally or may meet very frequently according to a prescribed schedule.
4. **Initiation:** Relationship may be initiated by the mentee or by the mentor or by the third party like dean.
5. **Agenda:** The agenda for the relationship may be quite focused on professional matters or may be more holistic and include other aspects of life.
6. **Means of Communication:** Usually mentoring relationships are face to face. However other modes of communication like video conferencing, teleconferencing, etc. are also being used widely these days.



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**Myths about Mentoring:** Although mentoring points out a multitude of benefits to the mentee, mentor and the institution, mentoring is not a solution for all the problems in a department or institution.

**Following are some of the Myths Associated with Mentoring:**

1. Mentoring is reward in itself. While mentors do realize the benefits of mentoring, the truth is that organizations need to reward mentors for taking additional responsibility. Providing incentives in some form (Financial or reduced work load) turns mentoring in to a meaningful activity.
2. Any mentor and mentee can be paired. If either the mentor or mentee is unwilling or uncomfortable, the relationship is bound to fail. Volunteerism, compatibility, good chemistry, and mentoring style are some critical issues which need to be assessed before pairing.
3. Mentoring programs need to be controlled to be successful. Both the mentor and mentee have different needs and development considerations. Hence controlling may hamper the relationships. Whereas training and setting guidelines for the mentoring program can be considered.
4. Mentoring programs are panacea for difficult problems, such as problematic employees. Mentoring should be meant for developing human potential leading to meeting institutional goals and not for fixing problems.

**Mentoring Setups in Higher Education Institutions:**

1. Senior faculty with junior faculty: These relationships may be one to one or many to one (Team of experienced faculty will mentor the new faculty) or sometimes multidirectional just to facilitate networking and professional development.
2. Faculty with the student: These relationships are often advisory (mentor advice student in every possible area), especially in choosing the programs, courses and also the issues related to career development.
3. Senior student with junior student: Senior students play the role of peer mentor with the junior students.

**Mentoring and its Benefits:**

**For the Mentor:**

1. Enrichment in terms of knowledge and satisfaction through seeing someone else grow and succeed under one's mentorship.
2. Stimulate creativity in mentor while dealing with mentees of much lower age. Mentees or mentoring partners usually have new ideas and lots of questions. This stimulates creativity in mentor.
3. There is always a possibility that the mentoring relationship will develop in to friendship which may last forever.

**For the Mentee:**

1. Quicker adaptation to a new role and/or a new Institution and hence reduced likelihood of frustration and failure. This is true for both the new student as well as new faculty. Mentor acts as ready reckoner for all the issues bothering new student or new faculty and hence mentees feel safe and secured.



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- 2. Increased exposure to new ideas and new people. Mentee can tap the network of mentor once the relationship strengthens. Mentor being experienced can give lots of ideas and suggestions to mentees.
- 3. In the long run the mentoring relationship may turn in to friendship.

**For the Institution:**

- 1. Mentoring results in stronger individuals offering higher quality performance. Overall teaching quality of the junior faculty and student retention as well as performance of the new students' increases.
- 2. Faculty tends to enjoy working in caring and well-connected workplaces. Creating a network of good relationships among faculty raises the overall job environment in an Institution. Similarly students feel safe and secured.
- 3. Mentoring programs are not seen as substitute for orientation and training programs. However the mentoring relationships can be viewed as ongoing reinforcement program along with formal training and orientation program conducted at the time of entry.

**Features of Successful Mentoring Programs:** Mentoring like any other volunteer programs appears very fascinating win-win-win idea for the faculty, students, and institution at large but has difficulty in implementing. Below mentioned are some of the features of successful mentoring programs:

- 1. Support from the administration for the program.
- 2. Mentoring should be treated as part of comprehensive faculty development/ student development program.
- 3. Provision of training or orientation to all the parties involved for effective implementation of mentoring program.
- 4. Freedom to participants involved in shaping their mentoring relationship.
- 5. Participation should be voluntary for both mentor and mentee.
- 6. Screening process should be in place to check the readiness of both the parties involved.
- 7. Having a mentoring cell to determine progress and satisfaction of mentoring process at large.
- 8. Recognizing the efforts of mentors and compensating the same (Financial or in terms of reduced working load).
- 9. Mentees should be given a voice in selecting their mentor
- 10. Structuring the entire mentoring program.

| Organizational Skills                       | Interpersonal Skills                         |
|---|--|
| Structuring sessions                        | Giving and receiving feedback                |
| Evaluation and assessment                   | Intervention skills                          |
| Time management                             | Listening, questioning and motivating skills |
| Maintaining boundaries                      | Self-awareness and self-disclosure           |
| Contracting, recording, and action planning | Coaching/ advising/ facilitating skills      |

Table 1: Essential skills required for mentoring



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**Network Mentoring/Mentoring Circles/Group Mentoring: A Collaborative Win-Win-Win Strategy for Mentor, Mentee, and the Institution:** Mentoring circles typically involve one mentor working with a group of mentees or groups of people mentoring each other. They often have a facilitator to keep conversations focused and productive (Ann Darwin and Edward Palmer).<sup>11</sup> Circles generate many different perspectives, with group members combining energies and experiences beyond what individual members know or contribute (Ambrose).<sup>12</sup> The group shares experiences, challenges and opportunities for the purpose of creating solutions. Support comes from peers as well as senior organizational/institutional members.

In group mentoring, a number of mentees are brought together with a few mentors. The group meets on a regular basis and jointly chooses topics relevant to the mentees. Such group setting allows mentees to gain insight from more than one mentor, in addition to receiving peer mentoring from the other mentees (Marilu Goodyear).<sup>13</sup>

The concept of the collaborative models of mentoring shifts the focus of mentoring from the top-down approach of institutions assigning mentors to mentees to a more independent approach with the focus on mentee. Mentees develop their own relationship networks in relation to their particular needs. Mentees reach out to individuals around them to seek assistance in the functional areas where they need help. Their reach can include faculty (Senior and junior) from the same institute or other institutes, peers, students (Senior and junior) with experience, experts from industry, friends, and family members (Marilu Goodyear).<sup>13</sup>

Earlier notion of one to one mentor relationship (dyadic model) being superior to a network of many developmental mentoring relationships has been proved wrong. There are many advantages of mentoring circles or network mentoring. Individuals gain access to networks, reduction in feelings of isolation, greater connectivity, increased confidence and commitment, career progression, knowledge acquisition, and better understanding of the culture (Darwin, 2000).<sup>14</sup> Mentoring circles offer participants flexibility, diversity, knowledge creation, the ability to depend on more than one person and a system wide view of the organization. Other reported benefits include: building confidence in the work place; changing stereotypes in the organization; sharing personal and professional information; and closer and richer relationships (Limbert).<sup>15</sup>

For the Institutions, mentoring circles offer potential for sharing knowledge and engendering a diversity of opinion, expertise and relationship building that can better serve the constantly changing workplace. They have the potential to develop and transform the culture of workplaces, while assisting many employees with their personal development and career advancement (Darwin, 2007).<sup>16</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** In spite of all the advantages (Mentioned above) associated with collaborative mentoring models, such as mentoring circle or network mentoring or group mentoring, the implementation of these models compared to traditional one-to-one model (Dyadic model) of mentoring is very rare. May be higher education settings are not the places where collaborative models can be successful, given the amount of competition for research grants and publications. Academics are used to working alone and may see the benefit of collaborative models if there is senior management recognition.

The critical success factors in implementing these innovative collaborative models include; a commitment from all the parties involved, mutual trust, confidentiality, rapport amongst circle or network members and voluntary attendance. It should be seen as one of the many developmental activities undertaken to strengthen higher education.



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Further research in this area is the need of the hour, especially in Indian Higher Education Institutional environment.

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