Developing Robust Mentoring Relationships in a College of Agricultural Sciences Leadership Development Program

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Leadership Academy Model

Mentor Relationships

Rigor
Coursework

Relevance
Experiences
Literature Review of Mentoring Relationships

• Research within higher education has identified a number of positive outcomes from mentoring relationships, including:
  • Ability to overcome challenges (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000),
  • Academic success (Bettinger & Baker, 2011),
  • College persistence (Bettinger & Baker, 2011),
  • Professional skill attainment (Dunn & Moody, 1995), and
  • Satisfaction with postsecondary experience (Wallace et al., 2000).

• Although research exploring what structure(s) lead to an effective mentoring relationship is scarce; two emerging themes have been identified:
  • High personal commitment/engagement (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Raggins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000) and
  • A mutually respectful relationship (Dunn & Moody, 1995; Reiss, 2007; Wallace et al., 2000).
Our research objective was to identify characteristics of mentoring interactions that resulted in effective relationships and high personal engagement on the part of the student.
Methods

• **Data Collection**: one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted with 18 participants in the Leadership Academy.
  • Example Questions: What did you learn through interaction with your mentor? What benefits and challenges did you have with the mentor relationship?

• **Data Analysis**: initial inductive analysis of participants’ interviews. Follow-up analysis for common themes and distinguishing characteristics among the mentoring relationships.

• We make no attempt to generalize our findings beyond the participants in this study.
Introduction to Findings:
Types of Mentoring Relationships

- **Stimulator** (2)
- **Robust** (5)
- **Ineffective** (5)
- **Friend** (6)

Effectiveness of relationships

Personal engagement
Findings: Ineffective Mentoring Relationships

Characteristics of an ineffective mentoring relationship:

- Low engagement, low relationship
- Lacking rapport and professional connection
- An obligation rather than learning experience
- Irregular and infrequent contact
- Missed opportunities

Effectiveness of relationships

Personal engagement

Ineffective (5)
Findings: Ineffective Mentoring Relationships

What students said:

• “I didn’t utilize him as much as I should have, just because I didn’t want to bother him”  -Rebecca

• “We didn’t have a set schedule of meetings ... we decided it would work better if we just met when we needed to.”  -Haley

• “I just think that the communication wasn’t there, and I really, I’m sad about that, because I love to talk to people and learn from them.”  -Hilary

• “It’s just like okay, I do really have to do this, and I do really have to talk with her.”  -Lisa
Findings: Stimulator Mentoring Relationships

Characteristics of a stimulator mentoring relationship:

- High engagement, low relationship
- Identification of areas for growth
- Focus on skill development
- Value in learning from mentor
- Lack of personal connection and openness
Findings: Stimulator Mentoring Relationships

What students said:

• “I really do need to work on those skills and then he helped me out, work on those all year.” -Peter

• “The challenge, I think one of the challenges was kind of building a more personal relationship.” -Peter

• “Some other things that I learned from her, we worked a lot on communication.” -Laurie

• “I wasn’t able to open up maybe as much as I wanted to because, just because of that background and history with her.” -Laurie
Findings: Friend Mentoring Relationships

Characteristics of a friend mentoring relationship:

- Low engagement, high relationship
- Irregular meetings
- Lack of focus on skill development
- Positive, relaxed conversations
- Good rapport
Findings: Friend Mentoring Relationships

What students said:

• “I mean, I had such a good relationship with him, it was like, you know, one-on-one with a friend.” -Doug

• “Again, we had a really personable relationship; he is a really easy guy to get along with.” -Amanda

• “He was very open to talk about almost anything, so I felt really comfortable coming to him with different ideas, knowing that he was able to be a sounding board.” -James

• “I had a really busy schedule this year, but he was always willing to meet and visit.” -Frank
Findings: Robust Mentoring Relationships

Characteristics of a robust mentoring relationship:

- High engagement, high relationship
- Good rapport, encouragement
- Challenges to grow coupled with support when needed
- Skill development as well as friendly relationship
Findings: Robust Mentoring Relationships

What students said:

• “She just always had my back no matter what, and she would push me really hard but would also be there to support me in case I tripped.” - Elyse

• “He was a good friend, he was a good motivator, um, he’s a good role model for me.” - Vanessa

• “And he gave me good tips that I could use in pretty much any situation.” - Martha

• “The benefits of the mentoring relationship are endless. I think there are some that I still don’t know about, and I don’t think it’s going to end.” - Elyse
Conclusions

• Robust mentoring relationships require both personal engagement (e.g. investment of time, energy, and commitment) and a personal connection between mentor and mentee.

• Mentoring relationships lacking either personal investment and/or relationships will not yield the optimum outcome for the mentor and mentee.

• The method and model we utilized was useful for analyzing the efficacy of mentoring relationships in a leadership development setting.
Recommendations

• Mentors should be encouraged to spend initial time and energy building a personal connection with students. If a trusting relationship is built, mentors should utilize that relationship to offer insight, guidance, and recommendations for student leadership growth.

• Mentees should be empowered to professionally engage in a mentoring relationship through education on the importance of investing time in meeting preparation and maintaining a high standard of professionalism throughout the mentoring relationship.

• Program administrators should consider a trial period for mentoring partnerships so mentors/mentees who do not build a trusting relationship can be reassigned.

• Additional research utilizing our model of mentoring relationships within different contexts and programs is encouraged.
Thank you!

Questions?