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Design fundamentals of mentoring programs for pharmacy professionals (Part 2): Considerations for mentors and mentees

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ABSTRACT

Developing a mentoring program is multifactorial, and organizations developing such programs must be reflective in considering their own organizational culture to determine the goals and outcomes assessment of a mentoring program that aligns with the organization's mission and values. Part 1 of this series of papers on devising mentoring programs for pharmacy professionals paid mind to their structure, logistical concerns, and basic design consideration. Designing a program, though, cannot be successful without consideration of the people involved, and the very human process that is mentoring and being mentored. This Part 2 paper takes into account the human needs of mentors and mentees, both independently and as pairs or groups involved in a potentially intimate and caring relationship that lasts anywhere from several months, to potentially a lifetime should the relationship be successful, thus paying careful attention to the evolving roles each person plays and what this means to administrators overseeing or assessing the results and implications from such a program so as to strive for maximum organizational effectiveness for employing institutions and self-actualization for persons involved in the program.

Keywords: mentoring, pharmacy, pharmacist, mentor, mentee, professional development, professional identity

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the second in a series aiming to leverage the knowledge that can be acquired from the literature to designing, implementing, and sustaining a mentoring program for professionals, particularly health professionals like pharmacists. The papers provide context for mentoring programs within organizations and across various organizations, such as through a regional or nationwide professional association or guild. The recommendations made are done so within the context of a rapidly evolving profession fueled by the need for singular voice, unity and camaraderie in providing more direct patient care services. Thus, the authors proffer that mentorship serves as the basis for much needed gains in professional identity to move the profession forward in a way that unifies its members yet still promotes professional autonomy.

In the first paper of the series, we adopted a scholarly approach to evaluate the literature around the mentoring concept, identified a range of key mentoring program components and synthesized them into themes presenting design fundamental considerations for organizations.¹ Mentoring models and relationships were highlighted as the first theme, describing the nature of mentoring relationships in terms of mentoring models, considering mentors within and outside of an organization, and selectivity

in matching dyads. The second theme was delivery of schemes, encompassing the balance between formal and informal schemes, the need for administrative support, role of technology, minimum communication requirements, cost, and mentoring culture within the organization. Consideration 3 was goals, discussing overall perspective of the program and tailored goals for individuals, as well as benefits for employers when employing holistic mentoring, which focuses on the well-being of mentors and mentees, and not merely gains in just one or more specific skills. The fourth theme uncovered was development of mentors and mentees from an organization's point of view, both at the preparation stage and role and types of on-going support. The final theme was evaluation for the program itself, considering parameters to measure effectiveness, and opportunities for the mentees to evaluate their experience, incorporating structured reflection.

Developing a mentoring program is hence multifactorial, and organizations developing such programs must on the one hand look toward the literature for best practices while at the same time be reflective in considering its own organizational culture to determine the goals and outcomes assessment of a mentoring program that aligns with the organization's mission and values. Equally important to these factors on considerations for organizations, are considerations for issues impacting on the relationship between mentors and mentees. The goals of a mentoring program will focus on what the organization is trying to achieve but do so through what is helping its employees/internal constituents to achieve. As such, paramount to the success of a mentoring program are the persons comprising the program (mentors and mentees) and the relationships occurring between these two parties, and even across various mentorship teams. This paper will focus in turn on mentors, mentees, and the mentor-mentee relationship in guiding them and mentorship program coordinators/administrators through these potentially challenging yet prosperous and edifying relationships to maximize the benefit for everyone involved. Key mentoring program components have been identified from the literature and synthesized into themes presenting considerations, completing the reflective framework that was initiated in Part 1 of this series of papers on mentoring (Figure 1).¹

CONSIDERATION 1: INHERENT MENTORING BEHAVIOURS AND CHARACTERISTICS

It is not surprising that behaviours and characteristics of mentors and mentees differ, considering their objectives coming into a mentoring relationship: mentees 'seek', whereas mentors are there to 'deliver', 'support' and 'coach'.

Mentors

Much has been written about the ideal qualities a mentor should possess or that which they should continue developing themselves through the process of being a mentor. In examining these qualities, it is beneficial to even further explicate the very concept of mentoring. Definitions have been provided here and elsewhere. More comprehensively, Tepper et al conducted a study among 568 full-time employees of various industries to examine mentoring and other development activities having been experienced.² The research produced a 16-item instrument measuring mentoring prowess across 3 domains: (1) mentor/mentee domain, (2) collegial /task domain, and (3) collegial/social domain. In the

mentor/mentee domain were items such as taking personal interest, modeling behavior, coaching about office politics, providing advice on job promotion, helping to develop a network, helping to coordinate personal goals, teaching strategies to influence groups, and exchanging constructive criticism. The collegial/task domain consisted of exchanging professional ideas, co-leading on projects, and making joint presentations. The collegial/social domain devoting extra time, exchanging confidences, and sharing personal problems. Even prior to that study, Erkut and Mokros identified mentoring behaviors in which more people excel and others in which many often fall short.³ In ascending order of difficulty, they found providing feedback on the quality of the mentee's work "easiest" and most prevalent, followed by showing interest in the mentee's personal growth, demonstrating technical expertise, and providing moral support. Most challenging behaviors were seeking opportunities to work together on a project and most of all, helping the mentee to establish connections. Similarly, a study of medical residents found that mentees were least satisfied with the effect of the mentorship program on their visibility and reputation.⁴

Again, ideal mentor qualities and behaviors are found in a number of resources. Burke and Johnson et al both proffered rather exhaustive lists that seemed to have stood the test of time, as these papers are well-cited and their suggestions are generally not refuted, at least not among any papers the current authors could find.^{5,6} Box 1 provides a list of mentor behaviors and characteristics gleaned from these sources. All are noteworthy, although perhaps a few of these are worth additional comment. As one might expect, there are a cluster of these characteristics related to effectiveness in the nature of the work, such as experience, high standards of performance, recognition within and appreciation for one's field, and technical competence. There are additional characteristics such as being sensitive, patient, articulate, generous with time, and being a voracious learner. Mullen and Noe argue that the best mentors are those who seek further knowledge, wisdom, and development themselves.⁷ This appetite for learning is not only infectious, but signals to the mentee a willingness to share ideas and eschew a more paternalistic model in the dyadic exchange. Openness to new ideas and an appetite for learning will also promote collegiality and productivity by both the mentor and mentee and that setting the stage for such an invitational learning environment enlivens the intellectual arena for mentors.⁸ It has been argued that the most effective mentoring is underway after the mentee has begun to provide knowledge and even development back to the mentor. A group of consultant pharmacists were involved in "reverse mentoring" when mentees provided them with experience on how to leverage technology for more effective practice.⁹ Another quality, taking an interest in the development of others might appear almost as an afterthought. However, there are persons who truly take an interest and actually see development of others as one of their more intrinsic goals and sense of accomplishment. These are the persons around which an organization/association might initially build a program as well as avidly seek their input.¹⁰

Seeing the mentee as a gift rather than possession, inspiring confidence, and not being competitive with the mentee is in line with the concept of "rational mentoring" proposed by Johnson et al.⁶ In rational mentoring, mentors avoid a number of pernicious behaviors that can sometimes easily manifest if one is not careful. The more obvious include not keeping commitments and attempting to take credit for the mentee's work or accomplishments. Perhaps more subtle is when the mentor has difficulty letting go

when the mentee is ready to spread their wings, becoming possessive of the mentee's time, and cloning and coercion. While coercion is more obviously malevolent, cloning appears when the mentor is overly ego-invested and aims to have the mentee see everything the way they see it, perform/ behave exactly the same way they do, and even have similar preferences that they do. Rather, the mentor who has divested themselves of ego are the ones who facilitate the mentee's independence. The selfless mentor avoids "irrational thinking" in assuming that: they must be successful with all of their mentees all of the time; they must be greatly respected and adored by all of their mentees; all of their mentees must be equally hard-working, high-achieving, and always eager to do what is recommended; and that they must reap tremendous benefit and always enjoy each and every mentoring relationship. Recommended strategies to avoid just irrational thinking have been around for quite some time. Holloran found that the most beneficial mentor behavior reported by nursing executives who had been mentored previously was that the mentor recognized their potential.¹¹ Doing so was further described as a selfless act among persons who were actively seeking to find strengths among peers and junior practitioners so as to effectively build teams rather than looking to mark their territory.

These recommendations comport with the notion of the mentor being a good organizational citizen and contributing to a positive and strong culture of an organization or association.¹² Citizenship behaviors should be role modeled for the mentee. A recent study on citizenship behaviors in academic pharmacy produced a list of 26 such behaviors to perform or avoid.¹³ These behaviors were comprised within 5 domains of altruism, conscientiousness, civic virtue, sportsmanship, and courtesy. Some of them (both positive and negative) include: creating negative energy by gossiping or bullying, voluntarily helping others who have heavy workloads, taking personal interest in the well-being of peers, returning communications in a timely fashion, being disrespectful to persons in position of authority, keeping confidence with information when asked to, sharing information that will benefit others, and going out of their way to help others.

Comporting with these behaviors and divesting one's self of ego requires not only selflessness but solid ethical decision-making. There has consistently been reported an ethical component to effective mentoring.¹⁴ Shapira-Lishchinsky examined ethical dilemmas faced by mentors in education and professional practice.¹⁵ Their interviews were coded into five main themes: discretion, caring, accountability, autonomy, and distributive justice. Mentor discretion involves both maintaining confidence about mentees' private matters and their past failings not germane to organizational development. Matters of distributive justice arise when mentors compete with mentees for scarce resources and utilize their mentoring activity exclusively for self-promotion.

Mentees

The majority of findings and opinions from the literature center upon the desired characteristics of mentors. However, there are some things to be said about the responsibilities of mentees. A mentee is essentially a learner and, as such, shares characteristics with other types of learners. Learners have the responsibility of desire and engagement, even while those can be facilitated by teachers-mentors. Mentees have similar responsibilities as mentors in maintaining confidence, sharing information, being collegial, acting with professionalism and integrity, keeping an open mind to new ideas and experiences,

demonstrating citizenship, and showing gratitude. Learners have to take responsibility at least to a great extent for their own learning outcomes and to be conscientious about the learning endeavor.¹⁶ Phatak and Kao outline specific responsibilities of mentees, include an initial focus on getting acquainted, building the relationship, sharing goals and expectations openly, then continuing to build the relationship, and continually engage in reflection.¹⁷ Haines suggests that mentees should be aware of their own perceived growth needs, have a record of seeking and accepting challenging assignments, be receptive to feedback and coach, be willing to assume responsibility for developing, and have the capability to perform in more than one skill area.¹⁸ This reflective practice is essential to support them to stimulate thought processes and achieve personal growth, in both educational and healthcare settings, and hence empower mentees to achieve best practice.¹⁹

Van Ast created a mentee checklist to “manage up” for productive mentoring relationships.²⁰ These include identify your values, clarify your work ethic, identify knowledge and skills gaps, be warm to any assigned mentor and seek additional mentors, be open about the type of mentor you seek, agree on structure and terms of the relationship, ask questions, actively listen, follow through on assigned tasks, be committed to a meeting schedule, and discuss when the mentoring relationship should end. Daresh and Playko (1995) emphasize the critical nature of mentee commitment in the relationship.²¹ Cranwell-Ward et al that mentees must place trust into the mentor, seek advice but also seek information from other sources so as not to overburden the mentor, share information about their strengths and weaknesses with the mentor, take responsibility for development, return communications and be respectful in initiating communications, and not attempt to undermine the mentor to a program coordinator or work supervisor.²²

CONSIDERATION 2: EVOLVING MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

In addition to each partner in the mentor-mentee relationship, the relationship itself should be considered in the context of optimization. In what has been arguably cited as a seminal paper on mentoring, Kram identified the various phases of the mentor-mentee relationship and responsibilities of all parties involved during each (Figure 2).²³ The Initial Phase is characterized by an attraction; that is, the attraction of persons with mutual interests, their recognition of synergy, the potential that awaits leveraging for mutual productivity and social esteem. There is a “spark” that should be recognized by program coordinators and organizational managers. The mentor and mentee must act on this spark but temper any unrealistic expectations. Capitalizing on the spark might mean to begin working immediately on common tasks. The Cultivation Phase, which might be approximately 2-5 years in length depending on a variety of factors, the mentor provides coaching, exposure and visibility, protection, sponsorship, and if possible, challenging work for the mentee. The mentor must continually challenge yet recognize gains made by the mentee and describe how the mentee is moving forward toward independence and further growth. The mentee continues to improve upon vulnerabilities but acknowledges a reduction or complete absence of ambiguity in the relationship with the mentor, should that indeed be the case. The organization provides resources to the extent those are promised for that everyone in the relationship and the organization can thrive. The Separation Phase might be characterized to an extent by some level

of turmoil, anxiety, and feelings of loss. Separation occurs both structurally and psychologically. If the structural separation is timely, it stimulates an emotional separation that enables the mentee to test their ability to function without close guidance and support. If too early or too late, then separation can be problematic and result in resentment. Mutual respect and clarity of expectations is absolutely critical during this phase. Organizations must monitor relationships to determine that they are occurring at the proper times. The Redefinition Phase is one in which the relationship becomes a friendship and one that allows the former mentor and mentee to reconnect on a professional basis. Perhaps the latter is now at a similar career position as is the former mentor, and this allows for them to work together as peers on an entirely different types of endeavors and yet still derive similar if not even greater satisfaction than before. A bond is formed that might last throughout the remainder of their careers, both professionally and socially.

CONSIDERATION 3: ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Literature describes different ways by which an organization can support and facilitate a positive mentoring relationship, mainly in terms of training and creating a culture of personal safety and support.

Training

As described in considerations for organizations when developing a mentoring program,¹ it is paramount to have the right mentors properly trained to mentor the development of other professionals. Many persons likely overestimate their ability to effectively mentor another, often assuming that is but a matter of giving proper advice.¹⁸ To that end, Emmerik et al found that many employees volunteer to be a mentor almost solely for their own personal gain and often lack commitment to their organization and seldom demonstrate exemplary behaviors in extra-role or in networking capacities.²⁴ They recommend a careful “screening” process of potential mentors when establishing a formal program along with regular reflection training opportunities wherein all employees are asked to examine possible egocentrism. Those recommendations are corroborated by Johnson (2003), who offers a triangular model of mentor character virtues, intellectual/emotional ability, and knowledge and skills (competencies) seen as expressions of training and experience. Johnson acknowledges that while some characteristics have innate aspects, such as caring, there is a learned aspect to many of these such as integrity, prudence, and emotional intelligence. Likewise, he recommends that organizations promote reflective practice to ameliorate sources of mentorship dysfunction.²⁵ In any event, it is more widely recognized that not only must mentors and mentees be trained, but part of that training must be taken up in pairs with one another on their dyadic exchange and blossoming their networks jointly.²⁶

Creating a culture of personal safety and support

Bennetts describes the mentoring relationship as an intimate one in the sense that both parties are giving of themselves and exposing vulnerabilities to one another.²⁷ In that sense, those taking part are more likely to perceive less risk in such a relationship. Not only does ego stand in the way of productive relationships, but so does insecurity. Insecurity often breeds acts of malevolence, including and perhaps

even more prominently among persons in positional power. While insecurity as a personal trait might be difficult to tame by others, organizations can help to create a culture of personal safety by valuing trust, helping employees feel confident in their job security, and helping employees understand the value of their contributions to the organization. Organizations can also be supportive rather than eschew the intimate nature of mentor-mentee relationships so long as the proper transference and countertransference are taking place. Allen and Poteet state that the organization's culture should be taken into account when designing a mentoring program, making sure to capitalize on the strengths and resources of an organization (e.g. extensive experience among senior colleagues, past history of human capital investments) but recognizing any limitations (e.g. few external relationships with persons who could serve as external mentors/key resources, general lack of trust or negative ethos).²⁸ This will help determine how to structure the mentoring program, be it mandatory or voluntary, dyadic or constellation, level of autonomy, level of coordination, and so forth. At the same time, a mentoring program can help strengthen an organization's culture, yet not be thought of as a panacea to an organization's problems in doing so.

Noe, one of the pioneers in research on mentoring identified determinants of successful mentor-mentee relationships.²⁹ This multivariate study found variance in success related to a host of factors, including level of formality, amount of time and resources devoted, job involvement, participant locus of control, perceived relationship importance, and the prevalence of career planning opportunities that pervade the organization. Gender also played a role, as females reported receiving more psychosocial benefits from participating as a mentee than did males. Noe notes that job attitudes along with immutable characteristics of participants cannot be configured by the organization; however, the organization and participants in the mentoring program should be aware of the relevance of these characteristics and take them into account during design of the program and in carrying out the respective relationships). Adding to this, Owens et al found that organizational support can mitigate possible dysfunction in mentor-mentee dyads and that the experiences of such dyads need not be a function of an exact "match"; rather, that institutional support, active participation, and equal responsibility among those pairs who otherwise might not have much in common serve as the backbone for productivity.³⁰

CONSIDERATION 4: SOURCES OF DYSFUNCTION

Mentoring program coordinators, supervisors, and fellow peers in a mentoring program must be prepared to manage the potential "dark side" of mentoring, knowing that even in spite of training, some level of dysfunction will manifest among some dyads and that some mentors indeed will attempt to use mentees as shields and as pawns.³¹

Transference and countertransference

The phases of an evolving mentor-mentee relationship described above and ultimately the life-long bond formed during redefinition will occur only if the relationship was tended to and remained healthy throughout. Mcauley described the presence of transference and countertransference as "ghosts" in the mentoring process (see Box 2).³² Mcauley characterizes mentoring from a Foucaultian perspective where

power, control, and resistance are inextricably intertwined. He adds that transference and countertransference are characteristics of the psychoanalytic encounter that occur in everyday situations as part of a “natural” ebb and flow. From the mentee’s perspective, functional and positive transference occurs with respect for the mentor’s experience and skills. That positive transference becomes dysfunctional when the mentee is over-awed by the mentor, and the mentor takes on a paternalistic role. Functional negative transference occurs as the mentee asserts their own personal identity; however, this negative transference occurs when the mentee consumes all of the mentor’s time and energy then complains bitterly after doing so. From the mentor’s perspective, positive countertransference is positive with their benevolent desire to be associated with the mentee’s development but becomes dysfunctional when making the mentee stay overawed and colluding with them against others in the organization. Negative countertransference is a function when the mentor is able to express negative emotions and to let go of the mentee in a reliable manner but becomes dysfunctional when the mentor victimizes the mentee.

Equality, diversity and inclusivity

A potential source of dysfunction occurs when mentors take for granted inherent challenges of mentees of a different race/ethnicity, sex, or age. So-called cross-cultural mentoring can be one of several tools to promote dialogue, understanding, and acceptance of diversity; however, the mere act of interacting with others does not assure positive outcomes.³³ Excellent cross-cultural mentors work diligently at overcoming negative stereotypes and understand the lack of a formal networking and power structure assumed by many ethnic minorities and many females, depending on the occupation and field. Thomas shares that these employees often suffer from marginalization and isolation.³⁴ Employees from ethnic minorities might suffer self-efficacy deficits due to low numbers in their respective fields, particularly science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs.³⁵ Women might carry an extra challenge in work-home balance beyond that of most men. A systematic review of mentorship programs for women working in academic medical centers revealed positive outcomes, including organizational retention and career advancement.³⁶ As such, it is recommended that mentors be culturally competent and seek to empathize with and empower women and mentees from racial minority backgrounds rather than simply express sympathy for them. The use of a more specific and tailored “matching” index for prospective mentors and mentees to help discern the particular needs of women and minority participants has become that much more salient and thus is highly recommended, as described above, in most, if not all programs.³⁷ The presence of effective mentoring programs more commonplace among clinical professions might help to diversify the workforce.³⁸ Additionally, it is recognized that participant age might be a factor in terms of mentors and mentees relating to one another. It has been noted that millennials as a whole are socially responsible and strive to promote diversity and work-life integration, which are important considerations when tailoring mentoring programs for them.³⁹ It is recommended that content on interactions between mentors and mentees varying in age, gender, race/ethnicity and other factors deemed appropriate be included in the initial orientation process and in subsequent training and workshops provided for mentors and mentees.⁴⁰

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

While this paper focuses its efforts on behaviors that can be shaped, there is a fair amount of research on personality characteristics that should not be ignored entirely. Research on personality often revolves around what has been called the “Big Five” personality traits. The findings of Goldner corroborated previous research that mentees’ agreeableness, extraversion, and openness were associated with the positive expectations for a mentoring relationship.⁴¹ Their agreeableness was positively associated with the quality of the relationship, and their conscientiousness was associated with adjustment following conclusion of the mentoring relationship. The study emphasizes that we cannot change an individual’s personality, but we can consider how different personalities might affect the mentoring relationship, the outcomes of the mentoring relationship, and thus to provide appropriate counsel on these issues as well as temper outcomes expectations.

CONCLUSION

Healthy mentoring relationships are borne from an initial “attraction” of mentor and mentee, whether formally assigned or through self-discovery. However, maintaining the health of that relationship requires empathy, humility, a voracious desire to learn and develop, and consideration of the needs for other parties, including organizational members outside the mentor-mentee dyad. Effective mentoring and development are more likely when both parties demonstrate commitment, understand the intimacy and evolving nature of the relationship, and help each other meet basic needs of belonging, professional identity, camaraderie, and others. Understanding the relationships and basic needs of individuals comprising a mentoring relationship and program will help one another and also program administrators to improve the likelihood of successful ventures.

Figure 1: Synthesis of key literature into a reflective framework of four themes presenting considerations for mentors, mentees, and the mentor-mentee relationship in guiding them, pharmacy organizations and professional bodies to enhance mentoring culture and maximize the benefit for everyone involved.

Figure 2: Example of typical timelines of the four phases of mentoring relationships, as described by Kram.²³ These timelines might differ, depending upon the mentor-mentee relationship and organizations involved in the mentoring schemes.

Box 2. Transference and countertransference in the mentoring process from the perspective of mentor and mentee, as presented by Mcauley et al.³²

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Box 1. List of optimal mentor characteristics and behaviors.

- High standards performance
- Willingness to expend time and effort
- Open-mindedness
- Appreciation of diversity in perspective
- Experienced
- Enthusiasm for one's professional field
- Takes interest in developing others
- Articulate
- Sensitivity
- Voracious learner
- Self-aware, non-defensive, self-reflecting, empathic, compassionate
- Technical competence/expertise
- Knowledge of one's organization
- Status/prestige within the organization and profession
- Ability to share credit
- Patience
- Sees mentee as a gift, not a possession
- Inspires confidence, vision
- Does not keep score or attempt to manipulate
- Challenges mentee to grow
- Can cope with their own disturbances (not hostile, depressed, anxious, self-pitying)
- Acts professionally and appropriately but is able to maintain humanness, spontaneity, and personal enjoyment in mentoring
- Encourages independence and is willing to confront dependence
- Accepts that mentor relationships end without becoming distraught, angry, passive-aggressive, or sabotaging of their protégé's success