The Effect of Mentoring on the Career/Performance of Probationary Lecturing Staff in Higher Institutions of Learning

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Abstract
This paper examines the concept of academic mentoring and how it can go a long way in boosting the morale and confidence of newly recruited teaching staff in tertiary institutions as well as discuss the importance of this concept on the institution, the mentor and the mentee. The challenges of mentoring programmes are discussed and recommendations were given as a way forward to sustaining this laudable programme. It is recommended that formal mentoring programmes should be introduced in all departments of every tertiary institution and this should be made mandatory to all probationary staff by the department Heads. It is also recommended that faculty and departmental Heads give proper attention to the mentoring programme by monitoring the activities of the mentors as well as the mentees to achieve the goals for which the programme was set up, peer mentoring is also recommended as a form of mentoring that can have a vast advantage to the mentoring programme and the paper concludes by encouraging probationary staff to take full advantage of the mentoring programme for self-development.

Introduction
In recent times, there has been an influx of fresh graduates who are not very experienced into the teaching profession. Some of them would be facing a crowded classroom to teach for the first time. As such, they entered this noble profession with fear and anxiety – fear of failure and anxiety about not being able to deliver. Therefore, assistance given to this new staff, otherwise referred to as 'probationary staff' in this paper, will go a long way in developing them academically to face the challenges of the teaching profession. This academic development can be in the form of mentoring them by their senior colleagues.
Research shows that newly employed youths who enter into the adult workplace encounter a variety of developmental tasks that are effectively facilitated by a good mentor relationship (Kram, 1985). Mentoring is regarded as one of the best tools for “reducing stress for novice teachers, orientation to curriculum and promoting the creation of better norms of collegiality and collaboration” (Sweeney, 2004 cited in Okurame, 2008:46). It helps in the resolution of challenges and predicaments, making it more likely that an individual attains his career goals and growth. Mentoring enables staff to acquire skills needed to progress successfully in their work environments. The process does not require a complex bureaucracy, however, it is undeniable that those colleagues who act as mentors will have to put aside time to train their mentees if the process is to be successful.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is not a new concept or practice. In ancient Greek literature, mentoring was first highlighted in the epic story of ‘The Odyssey' written by Homer. In this story, Odysseus told his loyal and experienced friend, Mentor, (a person of great wisdom and trustworthiness) to teach his son, Telemachus, (a mentee or protégé with less experience) about the tips of handling challenging lifestyles before he left for the Trojan War (Edlind & Haensly, 1985; Merriam, 1993). Based on this story, mentoring was traditionally viewed as an important field of education (Johnson et al., 1991) and/or counselling (Gregson, 1994), where a mentor was regarded as an old man who possessed wisdom and could be trusted to educate young men who had little experience (Johnson et al., 1991; Kram, 1985; Russell & Adams, 1997; Wanguri, 1996).

In recent times, mentoring is used as an avenue where young and inexperienced employees into the workforce are given guidance and assistance to develop in their career by a senior and more experienced member of staff. Thus, the word 'mentor' has become synonymous with trusted advisor, friend, teacher and wise person (Berk et al., 2005:66).

Mentoring has been regarded as one of the learning methods used to enhance individual’s learning and development in all spheres of life (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002). In today's work environment it has been described as a process whereby an experienced senior employee helps to develop a less experienced employee (Noe RA, Hollenbeck JR, Gerhard B, Wright PM (2006); Mackey and Livsey, 2006).
Mentoring in higher educational institutions is defined as “a process whereby an experienced senior faculty member helps to develop a less experienced junior faculty member” (Dawn and Palmer, 2009:126). This definition is apt and provides the frame for this paper. Mentoring is not a new concept in the academic circles (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005) but it has recently been revived in Nigerian higher institutions of learning as there is a growing concern about raising academic standards and a desire for Nigerian higher institutions of learning to compete favourably with their counterparts in other parts of the world (Okurame, 2008).

However, not all universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are carried along in effectively mentoring their probationary staff. Mentoring at the moment appears to be a favourite topical policy and has become the subject of intense academic study, research and experimentation (Clutterbuck, 2000). It is currently being implemented and used across all educational sectors: from peer mentoring in schools to aid problems with bullying, to professional development for teachers, management and support staff. Mentoring refers to a process whereby a senior staff member assists a junior member to understand the codes or behaviour within academia and further supports and encourages him/her in developing a career as an academic.

Mentoring as a process helps people to manage their own learning in order for them to maximize their potentials, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be (Parsloe and Wray, 2000). It is an off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995). In this use, mentoring can be seen as a scheme to improve organisational effectiveness through increased motivation, support change, improve staff retention, better recruitment and increase overall learning and training. Indeed research suggests that individuals, who hold roles as mentors advance more rapidly in an organisation, earn higher salaries, have a favourable work attitude and are more retainable (Allen and Eby, 2004).

The purpose of mentoring in higher educational institutions is to help in “understanding the underlying values, traditions and unwritten behavioural codes of academics; effectively managing a productive career in academics and establishing and maintaining a network of professional colleagues” (Leslie K, Lingard L, Whyte S. 2005:693). Within an academic institution, mentoring can also be used ‘to support non-academic staff to settle into their new jobs and to give them feedback on how to improve their work performance’ (Bryant and Terborg, 2008:13).
There are formal and informal mentoring programmes in higher educational institutions (Leslie et al., 2005; Dawn and Palmer, 2009). Informal mentoring refers to mentoring that takes place when mentor and mentee meet on an “ad hoc” basis to give each other guidance and advice (Leslie et al., 2005:693). However, in recent times, the status quo has changed, and higher educational institutions are making mentoring more comprehensive and reachable by introducing formal mentoring programmes (Dawn and Palmer, 2009:126). This makes it possible for aspiring academics to receive mentoring support from a number of different people within the institution (Dawn and Palmer, 2009: 126).

The Role of the Mentor

The mentor has a lot of role to play in the mentor/mentee relationship. He advises, guides, teaches, inspires, challenges, corrects and serves as a role model to a new member of staff for that individual's professional development (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002; Harvard Business Essentials, 2004; Berk et al., 2005; Megginson et al., 2006). A survey, which was conducted by Rose (2003) concerning enhancement of mentor selection by using an ideal mentor scale, discovered that 75% of respondents would prefer someone that is approachable and who can give clear, open and effective feedback. However, 87% of respondents noted that they would prefer someone who can give them honest feedback, whether positive or negative, regarding their job performance. Hence, it is the role of the mentor to be an unbiased evaluator whenever he is called upon to do so.

The Qualities of an Exemplary Mentor

It has been established from the foregoing discussion that the issue of mentor did not start today, it has been in existence for a very long time, however, not everyone who is ascribed the role of a mentor actually do the work of mentoring. Hence, an exemplary mentor is one who devote his time and energy as well as resources in the mentor/mentee relationship and who becomes truly effective in reaching his goal. Generally, a good mentor should be an easy person to approach, he should be willing to give honest evaluation of his mentee and be open in discussing their areas of strength and weakness. In the absence of such characteristics, the potential for conflict in mentoring relationships could increase (Leslie et al., 2005). Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) argued that, for the relationship to be successful both the mentee and mentor
must possess a certain set of qualities, skills and attributes. The key competencies that the mentor should possess are 'communications skills, genuine belief in the mentees' potential, self-awareness and knowledge and experience in the area he or she mentors' (Clutterbuck 2004, cited by Karallis and Sandelands, 2008:446). Abraham, (2009) noted that an effective mentor should be someone who manages the partnership; encourages and empowers; nurtures; teaches the mentee; offers mutual trust and respect and responds to the needs of the mentee.

Moreover, it is important for the mentor to find out if the mentee has an internal locus of control (that is people who see themselves as being in control of their environment and their life) or external locus of control (that is people who believe that everything happens to them is beyond their influence) in order to know how to approach the mentoring relationship (Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002). The mentor should find out whether the mentee has the desire to be mentored, once this is established then the relationship will evolve smoothly (Wing, 2009).

**Benefit of Mentoring**

The benefit of mentoring in academic development of new staff cannot be over-emphasized. It leads to an increase in career success, retention of quality staff, and knowledge creation and sharing. It offers great commitment to work/teaching; facilitate increased research income; and publication rate (Leslie et al., 2005; Bryant and Terborg, 2008; Gardiner, 2005 cited in Dawn and Palmer, 2009). The key advantages as described by Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002: 29) are also as follows: it is an integrated approach for customised development on a broader scale; it encourages continuous self-managed learning, it inspires employees to consistently improve their performance in their duties and it is a cost-effective method of training than sending staff on formal and short-term course.

The mentor enjoys extrinsic benefits such as enhanced professional recognition when mentees perform well, acquires new knowledge and skills in the area of human management; and also develops leadership qualities as the work of mentoring involves some aspect of leadership and followership.

The mentee is not left out in enjoying the benefits of a mentor/mentee relationship. It provides a great opportunity for networking; career opportunity and advancement; improved knowledge and skills; greater
confidence and well being and improved performance and productivity (Lesslie et al., 2005; Megginson et al., 2006). Furthermore, studies conducted by Garvey and Garrett-Harris (2005 cited in Megginson et al., 2006) concerning benefits from mentorship revealed that the mentee received 40% benefits, the institution 33% and mentor 27%, this shows that all stakeholders benefit from the existence of mentoring programmes. Therefore, mentees should take ownership of the mentoring process, because they are the ones that mostly benefits from it (Karallis and Sandalands, 2009).

Taylor (2009) cited by Karallis and Sandelands, (2009) noted that mentoring inspires individuals to improve their learning beyond their potential performance, philosophy and personality. This demonstrates that mentoring has a long lasting benefit, when implemented correctly and if people in the mentoring relationship are committed in order to ensure its success (Karallis and Sandalands, 2009).

The benefits are not exhaustive. Okurame (2008) opines that mentoring helps in the resolution of challenges and predicaments, making it more likely that an individual attains his career goals and growth. The benefits of mentoring are explained by the developmental social learning theory which posits that behaviour is learned in interaction with others, especially when they serve as models (Sarason et al, 1991; Baldwin, 1992). In this regard, mentoring is especially valuable for the transmission of positive attitudes as mentors provide invaluable information on the mission and philosophies of the organisation, help employees cope with career stress and give proper orientation towards workplace values (Murray, 1995; Gilley & Boughton, 1996; Payne, 2006).

In addition, mentoring facilitates the transfer of skills which mentees/protégés can apply in diverse professional circumstances, promotes productive use of knowledge, clarity of goals and roles, career success, career growth, salary increase and promotions, career and job satisfaction (Levinson et al, 1978; Kram, 1985; Scandura, 1992; Okurame, 2002; Okurame & Balogun, 2005). Mentoring relationships are also useful even to the senior partner in the union, as it provides an opportunity for them to develop a base of technical support and power which can be readily summoned in the future (Hunt & Michael, 1983). For example, when a senior lecturer in a higher institution mentors a graduate assistant or an assistant lecturer, it will be easy for the senior lecturer to ask the graduate assistant to help him in teaching his class where he is not going to be available, or to even organise tutorials for his class in order to help
them with revision. The senior lecturer has confidence in the person he has mentored and that is why it is easy for him to fall back to the mentee to do his job effectively. Also, being recognised as the mentor of a successful protégé enhances the reputation of the senior academic/partner among his or her peers.

Formal mentoring will increase retention and knowledge creation and sharing amongst staff members. Those identified as mentors will also benefit from mentoring through gaining mentoring experience, although it will require time and effort. Effective mentoring programmes will go a long way in developing the educational sector in the country and it will encourage young people to join the academic environment and become researchers.

From the foregoing, the positive outcomes of mentoring are capable of fostering a satisfied and 'well-groomed' professional workforce. It can also go a long way in helping probationary staff in a higher institutions to scale through their early years of teaching and become a qualified academic. Mentoring relationship can therefore be summed up as the professional development of employees and institutional effectiveness.

**Challenges of Implementing Mentoring Programmes**

Mentoring like every other programme is not without its challenges. Clutterbuck (2000) shows that it is rife with its own unique challenges. He opines that mentoring can be 'a dangerous process that can amplify favouritism and exclusive networks within the corporation' (2000:1). This shows that there are challenges when implementing mentoring programmes, most especially when the mentor occupies an important position in the department or faculty, for example, a Head of Department, the Dean of the Faculty or even the Examination Officer of the department/faculty. In such situation, the tendency to give the mentee preferential treatment, sometimes undeserved, to the detriment of other more qualified staff will be there.

More so, there could also exist the challenge of finding competent mentoring partners, because not everyone identified as mentors are competent (Dawn and Palmer, 2009). On the other hand, those who are qualified senior colleagues might see the allocation of a junior lecturer to him as an insult, and may out rightly reject the relationship. There could be cross cultural issues, especially when the mentoring programme adopts a traditional approach (Kalamas and Kalamas, 2004), which is talking, listening and receiving career related support from only one person(the mentor) who may likely want to
impose his cultural idiosyncrasies on the mentee. Lecturing staff in most higher institutions of learning in Nigeria are usually from different states of the federation, each state has its unique cultures and traditions and these influence to some extent their beliefs and behaviours. Therefore, when a mentee is assigned to a mentor who is deeply engrossed in his traditional or cultural idiosyncrasies, he might want to impose such traits on the younger one. There is also the challenge of time factor. Senior colleagues are always saddled with lots of responsibilities that they will hardly find time to be actively involved in the mentoring programme.

There may also arise the challenge of power tussle between the Head of Department and some of the senior colleagues in the department, if this exist, then the mentees assigned to the concerned senior colleague will suffer transfer of aggression. The mentors may also turn their mentees to their servants, assigning them duties which they (the senior colleagues) are meant to do, thereby frustrating the mentee out of the programme.

**Recommendations/Way Forward**

In order to ease the setbacks that characterize informal mentoring programmes, most institutions of higher learning have established mentoring circles and introduced formal mentoring programmes. Formal mentoring programmes encourage the achievement of objectives much better than informal programmes (Klassen and Clutterbuck, 2002). Formal mentoring programmes should be adopted because it provides balance benefits to both mentor, mentee and the institution compared to the informal programmes that normally only benefit the mentee.

To cross the hurdle of favourism, there should be the random selection and allocation of mentors to the probationary lecturing staff. Staff from the same state and probably same local government should not be paired as this will also lead to preferential treatment. Mentors should also be open minded and not be biased in the treatment they give to all probationary staff. Mentoring circles has been recommended for use in university environments (Spenser, 2005 cited in Dawn and Palmer, 2009: 127). Mentoring circles involve groups of probationary staff/mentees who mentor each other. Group members will share their experiences, challenges and opportunities for the purpose of solving a problem. This is also known as peer-to-peer mentoring. In discussing the advantages of this sort of mentoring, Harvard Business Essential (2004: 123) states that 'young ambitious people can learn from each other because
they share the same experience and they can empathize and provide mutual support for each other'. This is why peer mentoring is essential and recommended.

To ameliorate the challenge of cross cultural conflicts, there should be a clear matching of mentor and mentee and the roles of both parties should be clearly stated (Megginson et al., 2006). Mentors should be able to assist the mentees in shaping their careers in a manner that is beneficial to both the faculty/department and the mentee. There should be no transfer of aggression from the mentor to the mentee. Squabbles between the senior members of the faculty/department should not be allowed to ruin the good purpose for which the mentoring program is established. Individuals should take ownership of their careers by planning in ahead what they can do to benefit maximally from the mentoring programme because they are the masters of their own careers and they should utilise opportunities that are offered by the institution. Mentees should create career opportunities through networking with other members of the faculty and making themselves visible in the faculty/department. Individuals, who take initiative in planning and developing their careers, have a strategy and become more successful than those who do not (De Vos et al., 2006). They are likely to benefit more from training and development opportunities, which are offered because they know what they want. Benefits that can be gained from career development efforts include increased retention of knowledge, improved performance, employee satisfaction, and creation of loyalty and institutional commitment to employees (De Vos et al., 2008). Mentoring has been identified as one of the strategies that can be used to retain high potential employees and graduates (Karallis and Sandelands, 2008; Strategic Finance, 2007).

Head of Departments and sectional heads should make it a goal to ensure that any new staff member that is sent to his/her department is placed under the mentorship of a senior member of staff. This will motivate the new hands to become better in their career and to take their work seriously. Mentoring programmes should also be used as a platform at which probationary staff members would ask questions, express their concerns to senior staff members and deal with fears and anxieties as they arise in order to improve their work performance. Moreover, senior staffs that are identified as mentors should attend mentor training courses and should also be willing to be mentors. Those identified as mentors should be open, honest and approachable. They should also create time for their mentees and should not view their mentees as
'errand boys' who should do their menial jobs, if this is done, the mentee will be frustrated out of the programme.

The objectives, roles and responsibilities of a mentoring programme should be made clear to the mentor and mentee, and they should both agree to it. Effective formal mentoring programmes should be used to help staff members to settle in, and to offer them with work performance improvement feedback. The mentoring process can span over three to six months, with two visits per week between the mentee to mentor. The mentoring process must be monitored to ensure desired goals are achieved. The aim of monitoring should be to keep abreast of what is going on, to make the necessary adjustments when needed and to evaluate the programme on a continuous basis using feedback either verbal and written reports and annual surveys or questionnaires (Megglinson et al., 2006). This monitoring will also afford the mentee the opportunity to complain when they are being taken advantage of by their mentors.

Conclusion

Mentoring relationship is very useful in higher institutions because it will lead to self-development, work satisfaction, trust, self-efficacy, and achievement of career goals. These on the other hand will lead to better performance and encouraged individuals for higher commitment to the institutional development. Hence, probationary staff who really wants to leave a permanent footprint in the teaching profession should take full advantage of the mentoring programme to build their career and should leave themselves opened to correction and supervision by the assigned mentor.

References


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