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## **Mentoring as staff development strategy for effective programme implementation in Nigerian universities**

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### **Abstract**

Mentoring is a key element of staff development in educational institutions, especially in the university system. New and younger employees are encouraged to establish collaborative relationships with older and more experienced staff (mentors) for the purpose of getting the right orientation in the workplace. This paper examines the basic types and objectives of mentoring programmes in the university system. The role of mentoring for effective programme implementation in Nigerian universities is also espoused. The paper attempts to understudy the major challenges faced by mentors and mentees in the process of implementing mentoring programmes in Nigerian universities - ranging from poor funding to lack of stakeholders' support. The paper recommends that the university leadership should set up relevant working committees to assist faculties in the design and implementation of credible mentoring programmes for the overall sustainability of the system.

**Keywords:** Mentoring strategies; mentors; mentees; programme implementation; university sustainability; staff development; academic excellence; human capital; learning culture; capacity building.

### **1. Introduction**

The need for staff development, particularly academic staff, is hinged on the premise that the expansion and differentiation of higher education occur at the same time as the pace of knowledge creation is accelerating. Quality assurance by the faculties is critical to university education. The quality of staff in a university has great influence on its graduates' efficiency and effectiveness, since teachers can impart only what they know to their students. The university should ensure quality teaching and learning through recruiting and retaining quality staff, both teaching and non-teaching.

The purpose of staff development is to enhance the quality of human capital for maximum capacity utilization within and outside the university community. The university is committed to a working environment where professional improvement is seen as a continuous process which enables all members of staff to develop their professional skills and effectiveness in support of the goals and priorities of the university. Every university should recognize the value of staff development to achievement of academic excellence for the efficient and effective operation of the University. This equally applies to the work, career and personal development of individual members of staff. Staff development includes everything that is done to warrant and extend the knowledge and skills of staff so that they can contribute fully towards the achievement of the mission and vision of the university. Academic staff development supports the personal and professional improvement of academic staff as well as the organizational development needs of the university. Successful programme implementation in universities depends on individual and collective operational capacities of academic and non-academic staff of the university. Mentoring is a powerful personal development and empowerment tool. It is an effective way of helping people to progress in their careers and is becoming increasingly popular as its potential benefits are being realized. Mentoring is a collaborative relationship or partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences. It is a helpful relationship based upon mutual trust and respect. Mentoring programme is a great way to get involved and make a valuable contribution in the university community.

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Taking time to plan carefully before the programme begins can eliminate a lot of barriers during the implementation process. Effective mentoring programmes must be well-defined and structured. They must be goal oriented and should clearly identify the objectives to be met through the mentoring process. Mentoring strategies for effective programme implementation in Nigerian universities should be designed to integrate mentoring with skill development and employment equity plans.

### **The concept of mentoring**

According to Imam (2008), a mentor is simply someone who helps a mentee learn something he would otherwise have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all. It also involves a range of skills including listening, questioning, challenging and support. It has a timescale and in some contexts, is lifelong or short-term. Other scholars have given various definitions of mentoring as:

- the process in which an experienced colleague is assigned to an inexperienced individual and assists in a training or general support role;
- a form of teaching that includes walking alongside the person you are teaching and inviting him or her to learn from your example;
- when organizations have mentoring programmes designed to promote employee development.

Richard (2014), on the other hand, defines mentoring as a relationship between an experienced person and a less experienced person for the purpose of helping the one with less experience. The protégé, or mentee, seeks the advice and support of the more experienced person. Mentors assists in answering the questions concerning the tasks that their protégés need to succeed in reaching their goals. The mentor provides wisdom, guidance and counseling as mentees advance their lives, careers or education. Mentoring is seen to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be. Mentoring is an employee training system under which a senior more experienced individual (the mentor) is assigned to act as an advisor, counselor, or guide to a junior or trainee. The mentor is responsible for providing support to the individual in his or her charge.

### **Categories of mentoring**

As explained earlier, mentoring is a system for pairing an experienced person with a less experienced one for the purpose of having the less experienced person grow and develop the required competencies. This composite description can be implemented in many different ways — from the casual to the very specific, with different approaches for measuring progress.

#### **Formal mentoring**

Programmes that exist for the purpose of creating mentoring relationships encourage formal mentoring. Mentors and protégés (mentees) are grouped by a third party for a specific purpose. Formal mentoring programmes are often hampered by lack of funds and inability to adequately oversee the administration of the programme over time.

#### **Informal mentoring**

Informal mentoring develops in a one-on-one relationship, where one person approaches another and introduces the idea of forming a mentoring relationship. The relationship develops without the aid of a programme or without anyone overseeing the time spent or progress made.

#### **Traditional mentoring**

Whether informal or formal, traditional mentoring takes the form of a one-on-one, long-term relationship. Many times this type of mentoring is used in educational settings and pairs adults with students who need extra help in one or more subjects in school. Mentors not only assist staff or students with schoolwork, but also over time can provide a stable, encouraging relationship that students can depend on.

#### **Special project mentoring**

Some mentor-protégé relationships do not need to be a long-term commitment. Especially helpful in business settings, special project mentoring is best for a specific purpose. For example, an experienced project manager takes a younger manager with less experience under his wing and guides him throughout the project, offering advice and sharing experiences.

#### **Situational mentoring**

Situational mentoring applies to specific skills needed during short-term projects. For example, if your company has tenured employees that have done the annual company inventory before, then those employees can mentor newcomers to the inventory process to make sure it is done properly.

#### **Nurturing mentoring**

Nurturing mentoring is an informal mentoring programme that does not have a specific schedule or set of guidelines. New employees are introduced to experienced staff members who can act as a resource for hands-on training and daily job function information. The experienced employees are asked to monitor the new employees' progress and offer assistance when it is needed.

#### **Career mentoring**

Managers can act as career mentors to employees that have indicated that they have a career path in mind. The manager and the employee discuss the employee's career goals, and the two create a plan designed to help the employee reach those goals. Another form of career mentoring is offering internships to college students. The company benefits from having ambitious people with fresh points of view offering input, and the college student benefits by getting valuable career experience. Career mentoring is a chance for you to preserve your corporate culture by developing your staff's skill-set based on your company's policies. It is the chance to create your organization's future leaders that will help to grow your company based on the vision the company was founded on.

#### **Facilitated mentoring**

Some experts make a distinction between formal mentoring and facilitated mentoring. Murray (Wikipedia, 2014) in *Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring* defines facilitated mentoring as:

"A structure broken down into a series of processes designed to create supportive relationships, to guide the desired behavioural change of those involved, and to evaluate the results for protégés (mentees), mentors, and the organization."

#### **Mentoring new academic staff in Nigerian universities**

All new academic staff, regardless of seniority should have an appointed mentor to assist in the induction process. The rationale behind this is that even experienced academics need guidance on the procedures of both the faculty/school and the university. For new lecturers, the need for on-going support in all aspects of academic practice is particularly important. The best way to operate a mentoring system may vary from faculty to faculty and with each new member of staff. The most important thing about the mentoring system is that it should be a positive and helpful experience for the new members of staff. The role of a mentor is particularly crucial for new lecturers. The mentor has a central role to play in supporting new lecturers through the university's certificate in leadership courses, which should be compulsory for all staff and through other individual courses. Essentially the role is one of guidance - someone who is able to advise, encourage, support and help to develop individuals' ability to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own professional development. A mentor would not normally act as the appraiser under the university's performance management scheme.

#### **Objectives of mentoring in universities**

Mentoring in every university is designed to:

- To provide general induction support
- To provide a source of help and advice on all aspects of the professional role including teaching, research and administration
- To support the translation of skills, theories and ideas from the certificate in lecturership course into subject-based application
- To provide constructive feedback on teaching activities
- To help in identifying and planning personal development
- To provide a "critical friend" outside the management framework.

#### **Mentoring capacity and programme implementation**

Mentoring programme, either for career or interpersonal enhancement, is built on mutual trust and respect of the individuals involved. Much care should be given to its development and implementation while organizational mentoring programme takes different shapes and structures. There are certain critical steps that must be considered by any group embarking on establishing effective mentoring for effective programme implementation. Below are elements of effective practice that have proved effective in the management of programmes in Nigerian universities:

#### **Conduct needs assessment**

Any organization interested in developing a formal mentoring program needs to create a business case and address why this programme is needed, what the organization hopes to gain, and what components the programme should include. Needs Assessments can be conducted by the university's human resource office, training office, or a steering committee/working group via on-line or

paper surveys (e.g., organizational assessment surveys and exit surveys), focus groups, and interviews with staff and statistical data from research.

#### **Develop a mentoring programme road-map**

A mentoring programme roadmap should include a business case, project plan, and implementation plan. A roadmap should also include needs assessment findings, project plans with key milestones, and the programme description. The programme description should include:

- The goal(s) of the mentoring programme;
- Success factors and desired outcomes;
- Targeted population (e.g., all General Service employees, specific occupations, new employees, and new supervisors);
- Duration of the programme;
- How the university plans to market and recruit mentors and protégés;
- Benefits to mentors and protégés;
- Benefits to the university (e.g., increased morale, transfer of knowledge from one employee to another);
- Budget (including contractor cost if planning to use one);
- Matching process;
- Outline of the orientation session;
- Types of materials provided to mentors, protégés, and supervisors; and
- Potential mentoring and career development activities.

#### **Gain top management support and commitment**

A formal mentoring programme will succeed only if senior leadership supports the programme and makes it part of the learning culture. It is best to identify a champion, preferably a senior leader, of the programme who will play a major role in marketing the programme and recruiting mentors. Agencies currently operating successful formal mentoring programmes have support and commitment from leadership and management. Not only do these leaders pledge their support and commitment, they participate as mentors. When senior leaders participate as mentors it shows a true commitment to the programme and will encourage agency employees to participate. To help maintain commitment from senior leaders, it is advisable to ask senior leadership to define a "successful mentoring programme". After senior leaders have been able to define a successful mentoring programme, present them with continuous success stories and best practices contributing to their definition of a successful mentoring programme. When leadership and management see the programme is successful, they will continue to support it and possibly provide more resources.

#### **Commit a program manager**

Most successful programme implementations have a full-time employee dedicated to managing and administering the programme. The programme manager's role is crucial in making the programme a success. The role of the programme manager involves working with the steering committee or working group to assist in developing a needs assessment, building a business case, and implementing the goals and objectives of the programme, creating the road-map, developing and working with the budget; working with a contractor/vendor if services are acquired, marketing the programme and recruiting and following-up with mentors and protégés (mentees). The development of activities for the

programme including orientation, training workshops, and holistic evaluation are also imperative.

### **Create a steering committee or working group**

For effective implementation, the programme should be tied directly to the organization's leadership. To represent that leadership, a steering committee or working group should be guided to set the goals and objectives of the programme. This committee or group should consist of representatives from different offices of the university, not primarily from the human resource or human capital office. The committee members should be committed to creating a learning culture within the university. The committee or working group should establish a charter. The charter should contain the following:

- The purpose of the committee or working group and list of members,
- Roles and responsibilities (including hiring or designating a programme coordinator, reaching out to leadership and management for support and commitment);
- Tasks to complete (including building a business case);
- Outcomes; and,
- Programme evaluation.

### **Using benchmarks**

Without actually conducting an evaluation, programmes can sometimes draw on findings that have been linked to outcomes in similar programmes. In other words, findings from other studies can be used as benchmarks against which to gauge a programme's relative effectiveness. This approach is feasible when a programme has the following characteristics:

- It is targeting similar population to be evaluated;
- It is reasonably similar in terms of relationship structure and content; and
- It has met or exceeded the quality standards after evaluation.

### **Evaluation criteria and methods**

Du Bois (2002) and his colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of 55 evaluations of one-to-one youth mentoring programmes. The analysis summarized the results of each study and calculated effect sizes (the magnitude of impact) across the entire group of studies. Modest effects of mentoring programmes were found across fairly diverse programmes, but larger effect sizes emerged under the following conditions:

- Youth were somewhat vulnerable but had not yet succumbed to severe problems.
- Relationships characterized by
  - i. more frequent contact;
  - ii. emotional closeness; and
  - iii. A duration of six months or longer.

Programmes characterized by practices that increased relationship quality and longevity, including:

- i. intensive training for mentors;
- ii. structured activities for mentors and youth;
- iii. high expectations for frequency of contact;
- iv. greater support and involvement from parents; and
- v. monitoring of overall programme implementation. Since greater numbers of these practices predicted more positive outcomes for youth in mentoring programmes,

one-to-one programmes that have met these criteria can assume positive outcomes. Additionally, research by Roffman, Reddy and Rhodes on one-to-one programmes has provided two relatively simple benchmarks against which similar one-to-one mentoring programmes can measure themselves to ensure that relationships will have positive effects.

### **Factors impeding mentoring in Nigerian Universities**

As mentioned earlier,

mentoring is appealing as an intervention in part because it intuitively makes sense by providing young people with supportive adults. Mentoring has been seen as a major panacea for risks faced by new employees in the university. Innovation and expansion in employee mentoring in Nigerian universities have been seen as a positive trend in programme implementation process. It must be noted, however, that poorly designed mentoring programmes can have serious negative or harmful effects on young employees in the university system. Consequently, mentoring can be seen as both beneficial and risky intervention depending on its nature and management.

Five major obstacles to mentoring programmes in Nigerian universities have been identified. These include insufficient resources, inadequate infrastructure, lack of support, limited knowledge of mentoring best practices and unclear or unrealistic expectations. These five categories represent the most common obstacles to implementation of any mentoring programme, whether community or school-based, and reinforce the "risks" and nature of mentoring.

#### **Insufficient resources**

At the heart of staff mentoring programmes are volunteer mentors who choose to spend their time with younger employees and interested students. Some mentors sometimes get little stipends for their consultancy services and offering mentoring design models. The university should consider it imperative to pay for their travels, accommodation and other essential services. Some people erroneously believe that funds can always be made available by management or funders since the benefits of mentoring are considered apparent. The resources for effective mentoring designs are usually underestimated by programme managers. Undue assumptions that coordinated mentoring programmes exist in faculties have led to the shortage of resources for effective mentoring programmes in Nigerian universities.

#### **Inadequate infrastructure**

A solid infrastructure is essential to the success of any business or nonprofit organization. Unfortunately, many funders are reluctant to commit themselves financially to not only mentoring programmes but other non-profit activities in Nigerian universities due to unrealistic expectations and internal instability (Goggins & Howard, 2009). Programmes designed with best intentions for university sustainability have failed because of the inability of management to provide the necessary infrastructure for successful implementation.

### **Lack of support**

Mentoring is generally viewed as integral to the health and developmental wellbeing of individuals and organizations. This view underscores the need for the total integration of mentoring into the main fabric of the university system and making it everybody's responsibility (MENTOR 2006). Stakeholders support is always lacking especially in the university system. The programme is usually received with gross apathy and misconception. The implementation of such programmes ironically becomes challenging and daunting.

### **Unclear or unrealistic expectations**

The increasing popularity of mentoring as a sustainability index in the university system has generated a lot of interest in the evaluation of mentoring programmes. Accountability has become a major focus of funders who usually demand that their expectations must be met by client universities. Expectations are always unrealizable because stakeholders fail to understand the major aims and objectives of mentoring programmes. The focus is always on the number of mentees rather than on the quality of the mentoring programme and the positive results of implementation. This attitude has become a major obstacle to successful mentoring activities in Nigerian universities (Herrera, 2007; Fountain, 1999).

### **Recommendation**

In view of the foregoing discussion on the role of mentoring as a key element of capacity building in the university system, the following recommendations are considered pertinent:

- i. A Staff Professional Development Committee (SPDC) should be set up in every university to advise Vice-Chancellors on the central provision of professional development opportunities. Staff representatives on the SPDC are expected to play advisory roles in the annual process of setting priorities regarding central services.
- ii. The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) and the Staff Organization and Development Unit (SODU) in Human Resources Department should assist all staff to achieve high standards in key aspects of their work.
- iii. There must be a synergy between the Academic Planning Unit (APU) of the University and the relevant committees for effective supervision, evaluation and mentoring.

### **Conclusion**

Academic staff development is a key aspect of personnel administration in every university or organization. Professional development includes: technical skill development to help academic staff to teach or research more effectively; mentoring to provide staff with advice and support, and a sounding board for self-review and appraisal and work culture development. Professional development comprises both formal and informal programmes. The informal programmes include courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, retreat, research and study leave, etc. Informal development activities include but not limited to one-to-one support, informal peer review, work assignment, and inclusion in groups and networks. Essentially, academic staff development, and indeed any training programme enhances knowledge capital and intellectual relevance which are considered vital to the continuous existence of every

university that aspires to stand the test of time. Mentoring should in all ramifications be considered by Nigerian universities as a key strategy for sustainability through internal human capital development.

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