

Activity 5 Mentoring & Coaching



Mentoring and coaching relationships were encouraged across both stages of the project. The purpose of these relationships was to enhance the growth and development of the scholar in regard to their leadership and personal maturity.

This growth and development was fostered by reflective practices and dialogue that transpired in the formal and informal mentoring and coaching meetings. These relationships also enabled scholars to gain a deeper understanding of leadership in the higher education context.

Context

The mentoring relationship was not intended as an instructional exercise rather it was presented as an opportunity for scholars to engage in informal dialogue with a person they trusted and felt safe confiding in. The mentoring relationship was proposed as an opportunity to focus on reflection and clarification of leadership development and plan for the future growth of leadership potential.

The coaching relationship was seen as more strategic and related to improving scholars' knowledge and understanding of leadership in the higher education context with an ultimate goal of enhancing their leadership practice.

Program of Activities

A range of mentoring and coaching relationships were embraced by scholars including:

- Strategic coaching with a leader from the senior executive in each institution;
- Mentoring relationships with institutional leaders; and
- Peer mentoring through the institutional and cross-institutional networks.

It is noteworthy that some scholars established mentoring relationships outside of those promoted in the DLP, these were typically with friends or trusted colleagues.

“My mentor was excellent she picked up straight away if there was something that I needed to talk about, reflect on and work through, she didn't ever do that hand patting; she always addressed my question and not by giving me a straight answer but by telling me about an experience she'd had or a reflection she'd undertaken or just a very gentle and open discussion. This helped in dealing with the challenges I was experiencing throughout the project.”
(2007 Scholar)

Success Factors of this Activity as Reported by Scholars

Whilst this activity was intended as an informal and needs based one, some scholars indicated they would prefer to see it formalised. Some suggested ensuring meetings with the strategic leadership coach and mentors were structured, that is they should have a clear goal and purpose, an idea of the desired outcomes for the meeting and where possible an agenda.

The ability to choose own mentor was seen as essential.

Having a mentor from the same institution, who is trusted and respected, encouraging, willing to learn and share constructive comments.

“We [mentor and scholar] had regular meetings where I could raise specific issues with my project but what was even more valuable was her advice in relation to other issues that I was dealing with in my faculty as we were going through the curriculum and administrative changes. She even provided really good advice as I prepared for an interview for a leadership position within my faculty. I have continued the mentor-mentee relationship even though the project has finished.” (2008 Scholar)

Having guidelines on how to make good use of these coaching and mentoring relationships.

Resources developed to support mentoring are presented on the GREEN website:

www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership

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Key Challenges Experienced by Scholars

Scheduling of mentoring meetings. This was the responsibility of the scholar but in many instances this was not managed and consequently the mentoring relationship did not eventuate. Some scholars indicated they found it daunting to approach and establish a relationship with a senior person.

Appropriate and suitable matching of scholar and mentor.

“I found it easier to find a mentor who was more at my level but just a little ahead of me than someone who was more senior to me.” (2008 Scholar)

Finding the time to engage in mentoring and the institutional and cross-institutional meetings.

Staff turn over, in a couple of instances a mentor either left the institution or went on extended leave which ceased the mentoring relationship.

“Perhaps a bigger stable of mentors so if one drops out you can get another one.” (2007 Scholar)

Review and Improvement

It was suggested that it may have been worthwhile to have had training for mentors.

Another proposition presented was that if the mentoring and/or coaching relationships were significant in the development of leadership capacity then there should be a session at the retreat that focused on these constructs and presented strategies for the effective facilitation of them.

At times the seniority of the assigned mentor intimidated the scholar, as a result the scholar would often feel like they were imposing asking for a meeting and thus wouldn't approach or 'bother' their mentor. Conducting an orientation for all the scholars and their mentors that concludes with the scheduling of meeting dates for the duration of the program would address this shortcoming.

“I just couldn't bring myself to impose on them ... I'm just too shy and it seemed a bit fake to me to be approaching these more senior people.” (2008 Scholar)

A further suggestion was to provide the mentors with a synopsis of the benefits for them of engaging in a mentoring relationship.

The possibility of interviewing mentors as part of the project evaluation process was also suggested as a useful means of generating important insights that could assist in progressing the mentoring and coaching activity.

Links and Resources

Resources and materials to support mentoring and coaching are presented on the GREEN website:

www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership