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**THREE P'S FOR THE MENTORING OF WOMEN EDUCATORS:
PURPOSE, POWER, PROPRIETY**

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THREE P'S FOR THE MENTORING OF WOMEN EDUCATORS: PURPOSE, POWER, PROPRIETY

Abstract

Much has been written about mentoring and its potential to support the learning and career development of individuals. This paper is a review of some of the literature and research in the field that explores the nature, focus and purpose of mentoring arrangements. It begins by providing a background discussion about the meaning of mentoring and some different categorisations. It then presents some initial arguments that were used to promote mentoring as a career strategy for women. The next and final part of the paper considers three issues that have the potential to shape the dynamics of mentoring relationships. These issues are purpose, power, and propriety.

THREE P'S FOR THE MENTORING OF WOMEN EDUCATORS: PURPOSE, POWER, PROPRIETY

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, mentoring has received a great deal of attention in the literature and research not only in education but across a variety of disciplines such as business and a range of professions. It has been found that persons who are mentored receive higher incomes, greater job satisfaction and promotion (Chao, Waltz & Gardiner, 1992; Dreher & Ash, 1990). For mentors, it is said to revitalise their career and to bring personal satisfaction (Douglas, 1997; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McPhee, 1978). Organisations are said to benefit in a number of ways such as increased commitment by staff and increased organisational communication (Antal 1993; Douglas, 1997; Fagan 1988). Overwhelmingly, much of the writing and research has viewed mentoring in positive terms. The contribution of this paper is that it reviews some of the literature and research in the field of mentoring as it pertains to women educators. It explores some of the initial arguments that were used to promote mentoring as a career strategy for women and it examines three issues that are deemed important in shaping the dynamics of mentoring dyads. These issues - purpose, power, and propriety - are discussed and implications for women educators who find themselves either being mentored or mentoring others, are identified.

DEFINITIONAL VAGUENESS SURROUNDING MENTORING

Because of its widespread usage across a diversity of contexts, a number of authors (Gibb, 1999; Jacobi 1991) have argued that there is definitional vagueness about the term mentoring. For instance, Gibb (1999) maintains that the reason for the confusion is due in part to the reluctance on the part of authors to acknowledge the theoretical position that informs the view of mentoring that they take. Another problem is that there is much diversity in the types of theories that are utilised to explain mentoring. My colleagues and I came to this conclusion when we examined over 300 research based papers on mentoring in education and business contexts to determine the range of theoretical frameworks / models underpinning them (Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent, 2001). We identified several different theories explaining the mentoring process and we categorised them into adult learning theories, economic theories, coaching and skill development theories, selection process theories, theories relating to leadership and those that emphasised power, organisational theories and interpersonal theories (Ehrich et al., 2001). These theories were drawn from disciplines as diverse as economics, sociology, psychology and philosophy. Depending on the theoretical perspective utilised in the particular research based paper, the definition of mentoring differed greatly. For example, according to social exchange theory, mentoring is based on social costs and reciprocity where mentors and mentees evaluate the costs and benefits to determine if a relationship is viable. In contrast, according to developmental theories, mentoring is defined as an important developmental phase that enhances a mentor's and a mentee's personal and professional life. The exercise of examining the theories underpinning the research based papers in our sample highlighted the diversity of ways mentoring can be construed.

Developmental Vs sponsorship mentoring

Another way of conceptualising mentoring is to consider whether it falls within the 'sponsorship' or 'developmental' mentoring camp. Clutterbuck (2004a, 2004b) maintains that mentoring can be conceptualised as either a developmental activity (akin to the perspective proposed in many developmental theories) or as a sponsorship activity. If mentoring is developmental, it is seen as a process that has learning at its focus and is based on power sharing where both parties (ie. Mentors and mentees) are seen to benefit by the experience. This view of mentoring is said to be prominent in Europe, Australasia, Canada and southern Africa (Clutterbuck 2004b). The other version of mentoring is 'sponsorship' mentoring which focuses on the power and position of the mentor to bring about positive career gains for those who are mentored. This version of mentoring is more prevalent in the United States (Clutterbuck 2004b). According to Clutterbuck (2004b), the learning tends to flow one-way toward the mentee and the relationship is based on an unequal power relation.

Sponsorship mentoring is akin to traditional mentoring. Historically mentors were significant others who used their power and prestige to 'open doors' for their protégés. In the arts, sciences, and other fields, mentors have played the role of sponsor, guide and protector and utilised their influence to further the career development of their protégés (Byrne, 1991). It was due to the exclusionary nature of informal mentoring arrangements that organisations developed 'formal mentoring programs'.

Formal vs informal mentoring

Today formal mentoring programs are commonplace and they have been used to support graduates and new staff, new and aspiring leaders, and members of target groups, including women. In contrast to informal arrangements, formal mentoring, as an organisational interventionist strategy, tends to be more focused and structured. It also has specific goals that are deemed important for the parties to achieve. An important advantage of formal programs is that they are more accessible than informal mentoring relationships, while a downside is that they do not always provide choice to the parties regarding their participation or choice of partner with whom the individual might like to work. Thus, formal mentoring relationships can take more time to develop (Clutterbuck, 2004a).

At this juncture it important to state that it is not always clear-cut to categorise mentoring relationships as either formal or informal or developmental or sponsorship. It is possible that some informal mentoring relationships are based on power sharing between the two parties and not based on the sponsorship role of the mentor. Informal mentoring can sometimes emerge due to the interests of both parties to work and learn together. Similarly, some formal programs provide parties with choice regarding the person with whom they will work and for this reason they may be considered 'semi-formal' rather than formal. Clutterbuck (2004c, http://wwwmentorcanada.ca/en/en_keynote/dclutterbuck2.doc). The point is that due to the diversity in purpose and focus of mentoring relationships, it becomes very difficult to provide clear categorisations.

WHY MENTORING FOR WOMEN?

It was in the late 1970s and 1980s that mentoring began to be recognised as a significant process for women and most of the early research focused on women in managerial contexts. For example, Missirian's (1982) study of 100 senior women in corporate positions in the USA confirmed that mentorship is absolutely vital for women's career development. Dodgson's (1986) study of Canadian women educators also found that mentorship is a crucial career tool with positive implications for women.

Yet much of this early research (e.g. Byrne, 1989; Clarke 1985; Kanter, 1977; Marshall 1985) pointed out the difficulties that women face in being selected to participate in informal / sponsorship type mentoring dyads. Kanter's (1977) ethnographic study of corporations in the USA showed clearly how male managers sponsored and chose to develop the careers of male protégés. Networking has been associated with this type of mentoring in that informal networks have been used to exclude particular groups of people. The 'old boy's network' is a classic example of males helping other males and sharing information with them. In addition to Kanter's (1977) watershed findings, research in the 1980s confirmed the difficulties that women educators faced in acquiring traditional mentors or informal mentors (Clarke, 1985; Marshall, 1985; Sampson 1987). For instance, Sampson (1987) referred to the difficulties faced by women interested in the principalship due to the lack of apprenticeship activities and mentoring roles available to them.

The question of whether women are now in a better position to access mentors than they did in the 1980s is not known. Some recent research, however, has shown that women are as likely as men to have informal mentors (such as Ragins & Cotton, 1991 in Ragins, 1999) or, in some cases, more likely than men to have informal and/or formal mentors (Bhatta & Washington, 2003). It would appear that mentoring has become more widespread over the last decade than previously. According to a couple of sources (quoted in Ellinger, 2002), over one-third of major corporations in the United States have established mentoring programs which indicates the extent to which they have become mainstream and widespread. Furthermore, there appears to be a proliferation of government websites and other websites that advertise mentoring programs for women. There are many examples of programs that have been offered and continue to be offered to women educators in schools (see Brennan & Crawford, 1996; May, 2004; Villella, 2004) and women academics in universities (see Australian Technology Network, 1998; Gardiner, 2005; Kulisa & Cooper, 2003; Devos, Wilcox & Penfold 2004). There remains a dominant discourse that access to a mentor (either through an informal or formal relationships) is important to support women's career and professional development.

A key argument for promoting mentoring for women in the 1980s and up until the current day is the fact that women remain under-represented in senior management positions in Australia and elsewhere. Although statistics have improved over the last decade, the change has been very slow. As an example, women constituted 20% of the principalship in Queensland government schools in 1993 (in Ehrich, 1995); that figure had increased to 38% by 2001 (Department of Education and the Arts, 2001). In 1992, women constituted 22% of executive staff positions (director general – superintendents) and by 2006 (March) the figure had increased by 16%, with women

constituting 38% of these positions (Department of Education and the Arts, 2006). Whether or not mentoring can be attributed to the improvement in these statistics is not known. Lingard and Limerick (1995) maintain that cultural change will be required to bring about greater numbers of women to occupy educational management roles. As a number of authors have argued, mentoring is but one strategy that might have positive implications to enhance women's career development. Longitudinal research is required to determine the extent to which mentoring is a factor in redressing women's under-representation in leadership positions in education and other fields.

My interest in the rest of this paper is to identify and discuss three issues that have implications for women educators who may find themselves in mentoring relationships either as mentors or mentees. These have been described as the three P's: purpose, power, and propriety.

'Purpose' of Mentoring

As stated previously, there can be much diversity in mentoring relationships in terms of their focus and whether they are informal or formal, developmental or sponsorship focused. Furthermore, the outcomes for mentors and mentees can vary enormously depending on the purpose and focus of the relationships. On the one hand, mentoring relationships can be intense and develop strong emotional attachments between the parties concerned (i.e. Levinson et al., 1978) and, on the other, can be routine and based on the sharing basic information. Some mentoring relationships can be very hierarchical while others may be more developmental and egalitarian. There are mentoring relationships that can yield promotion, increased salaries, and fast track career advancement, while others may provide emotional support, friendship and sharing information. While the latter type of relationships can be valuable and affirming, they are less likely to bring about career advancement than the former.

It becomes important, then, that there is some recognition by women of the type of mentoring relationship in which they are participating. Formal programs tend to be more structured and focused on set goals. Even so, some writers (e.g. Blake-beard, 2001; Tovey, 1998) recommend that further negotiation and discussion is needed so both parties have a clear understanding of expectations, roles, outcomes and the parameters of the relationship. A commonly cited problem in many formal programs is a lack of clarity about expectations (Hansford, Tennent & Ehrich, 2003). For this reason, early discussions might help to allay later disappointments.

Regarding informal mentoring arrangements which simply evolve, it is likely that both parties would engage in some discussion about the activities on which they are going to work and how they are going to work. A key implication for women educators, then, is to realise that the nature, type and focus of mentoring relationships will vary greatly. So too will the outcomes. For this reason, it is incumbent on them to have realistic expectations about the types of outcomes that may or may not emerge.

It was argued earlier that sponsorship mentoring tends not to be as available to women as it has to men. When it does, though, it identifies a dilemma for women. On the one hand, these types of mentoring arrangements may be very valuable in helping women access career advancement and promotional opportunities. Yet, on the other, these

relationships are said to reproduce an organisational culture that promotes hierarchy and elitism (Grogan, 2002; Limerick et al. 1994; Olson & Ashton-Jones 1992). A key expectation of this paradoxical situation for women is that once they become part of the hierarchy they will exercise solidarity towards other women. But will they? Mavin (2008) puts forward a counter-argument and states that in this situation, women will 'struggle to operate within this 'masculine' context and so adopt masculinities' (Mavin, 2008, p.76). It is argued here that women who are 'sponsored' do not necessarily have to accept uncritically the practices that have enabled them to enter senior management nor do they need to emulate masculine models of management once they are in a position to exercise management. With this said, however, the point Mavin (2008) has made is valuable as it illustrates the complexity and dilemmas faced by women who enter senior managerial positions.

'Power' in the mentoring relationship

Schramm (2000) argues that mentoring relationships are problematic for women in academia because of the power dynamics that underpin such relationships. She gives the example of cross-gender relationships which can foster stereotypical behaviours in men and women, where men as mentors are reinforced as all knowing and powerful and women are obedient and compliant others. Here she is referring to the dyad of male mentor – female mentee / protégé which is more commonplace than the female mentor – male mentee dyad because there are more males occupying senior positions than females and therefore more males in a position to mentor females than otherwise.

Some writers (e.g. Clutterbuck 2004a; Grogan, 2002; Schramm 2000) have depicted mentoring as a process that is heavily reliant on the use of power, i.e. the mentor's power to open doors for the mentee and the mentor's power to share resources such as valuable and exclusive information with the mentee. Yet within any type of mentoring relationship, whether it is developmental or sponsorship based, power is an important issue. For example, Clutterbuck (2004a) asks the following questions: who controls the power in a mentoring relationship? Who should control the power? Who should set the goals and lead the conversations? Who is the active subject? All of these questions are pertinent. Clutterbuck's (2004a) view of mentoring, favouring a more developmental approach, is that it is a two-way learning process where mentors as well as mentees can benefit if they are open to the relationship. He maintains that in both formal and informal mentoring situations, there is scope to negotiate issues of power. His preference is for a type of mentoring where the mentee has choice about the setting the agenda and where he or she directs and manages the relationship (i.e. the mentee is in control) rather than a mentor who comes to the relationship with a pre-determined agenda, determines the processes of the relationship and provides only one-way information (i.e. the mentor is in control).

Two important implications that arise from Clutterbuck's (2004a) work are firstly the need for mentors to be conscious of the extent to which they are directing or non-directing the mentoring relationship; and secondly, the more didactic the mentor is, the less empowering it will be for the mentee and the less likely the mentee will become independent and autonomous. With this said, however, it is likely there will be occasions when both positions will be required. In her study of a woman academic's experience of mentoring, Devos (2004) demonstrates how the academic

moved between two subject positions (i.e. mentee as active subject and mentee as subject who was acted upon by mentors). Devos (2004) says:

[m]entoring is a site where we act upon ourselves and invite and allow another to act upon us. It is a site of intersection of techniques of the self and of control by others, a site of governmentality. It is a site where we assume simultaneously subject positions of she who is in control and career oriented, and she who is to be taken in hand and who may be needy at times (p.78)

This quote underscores that mentoring is a reciprocal and dynamic power based relationship between a mentor and a mentee.

‘Propriety’ in mentoring relationships

The final issue raised in this paper is the need for propriety. Propriety in this context refers to ethical practice that should underpin mentoring relationships. Related to the issue of ethical practice is the appropriate use of power (discussed previously) and ‘attention to obligations’ (Samier in Sherman 2002, p.42). The latter point refers to the need for mentors to fulfil their function as supportive others, those who care, provide timely advice and wise counsel. However, mentoring is a two-way relationship and ethical practice is also a requirement of mentees as well as mentors.

What might ethical practice look like? According to Clutterbuck (2004a), formal programs in some organisations follow a set of ethical guidelines or a code of practice for mentors and mentees that stipulate the parameters of the relationship. An excerpt from the Ethical Code of Practice designed for the National Standards in the United Kingdom is below:

The mentor’s role is to respond to the mentee’s development needs and agenda; it is not to impose his or her own agenda;
Mentors must work within the current agreement with the mentee about confidentiality that is appropriate within the context;
The mentor will not intrude into areas the mentee wishes to keep private until invited to do so. ...
Mentors and mentees should aim to be open and truthful with each other and themselves about the relationship itself....
The mentoring relationship must not be exploitative in any way ...
... the mentor should empower them [mentees] ... and must generally promote the mentee’s autonomy (Clutterbuck 2004a, pp.90-91).

As illustrated above, the guidelines reveal the importance of truthfulness, confidentiality; a relationship that is not based on any type of exploitation or manipulation and one that should empower the mentee to become autonomous and independent. While such guidelines might be useful to help people think about the mentoring process and may provide some direction regarding appropriate practice in formal mentoring programs, they are unlikely to be part of discussions between the parties in informal relationships since informal mentoring is *ad hoc*, unstructured and idiosyncratic (Byrne, 1991). Even so, it is argued that consideration of these principles is important for parties involved in all types of mentoring relationships.

CONCLUSION

This paper began by clarifying mentoring and it achieved this by exploring some of the different categorisations used to explain mentoring. It reviewed some of the early arguments for mentoring as a strategy to enhance women's career development and finished with a discussion of three key issues: purpose, power and propriety that are considered important for mentoring relationships.

A final thought for conceptualising and practising mentoring is to borrow from feminist theory that supports equitable, just and supportive ways to work with women. Schramm (2000) describes mentoring with feminist values as:

focusing on the primacy of interpersonal relationships; empowerment and personal development of members; building of self-esteem; the promotion of enhanced knowledge, skills and political awareness; personal autonomy; and the politics of gender within ... patriarchal bureaucracies. Feminist values also serve to enable mentors to conceptualise service as a social relationship rather than a technological transfer of expertise... (p.10)

Such as an approach to mentoring would minimise difficulties inherent in: (i) purpose because the purpose would be developmental and supportive; (ii) power, because power would be shared and mentoring would be empowering; and (iii) misuse of propriety because ethical practice would underpin such relationships.

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