An Analysis of Learning Outcomes within Formal Mentoring Relationships

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Abstract

This study is an investigation into what mentees and mentors perceive they are learning and what factors contribute to this learning, within formal mentoring relationships. A qualitative case study approach was taken to review mentors' and mentees' learning at regular intervals throughout a pilot formal mentoring programme, within a West Midlands Healthcare Trust. The results are presented within four categories of learning: cognitive, skill-based, affective-related learning and social networks. They demonstrate the changing scope of learning as process and product, and the impact of moderating factors on the mentoring relationships. These findings have practical implications for the development and design of formal mentoring programmes elsewhere.

Key Words: learning, mentoring, formal relationships, healthcare.

Introduction

Despite the increasing popularity of formal mentoring programmes, this area is currently under researched (Wanberg, Welsh & Heslett, 2003; Eby & Lockwood 2005; Allen, Ebby & Lentz, 2006; Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007; Parise & Forret 2008). In particular, there is limited research on actual outcomes in relation to personal learning and formal mentoring (Hezlett 2005; Hezlett & Gibson 2005; Lankau & Scandura 2007). Wanberg *et al.* (2003) state that there are 'black box' gaps in terms of exactly what and how learning is achieved for both mentors and mentees and what factors contribute (or not) to this. Allen *et al.* (2006) even suggest that 'as organizations continue to adopt formal mentoring programs, it is imperative that researchers continue work that will close the scientist-practitioner gap with respect to the design and delivery of this important personnel management intervention' (2006, p.150). So, in order for mentoring to be taken seriously as a valuable personal development tool, it is important to be able to prove the learning benefits for both parties and the sponsoring organisation.

There has been research in relation to formal mentoring in terms of mentoring programme design (Allen *et al.*, 2006), within women-only groups (Devos, 2007), in relation to career outcomes (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge 2008) and within different cultures and contexts (Liu, Liu, Kwan & Mao, 2009). Furthermore, research has been carried out in relation to formal learning and dual-career couples (Harvey, Napier, Moeller & Williams, 2010), the role of perceived organisational support (Baranik, Roling & Eby, 2010) and attachment theory (Germain, 2011). However, there is relatively little research specifically on formal mentoring and learning, and the key research questions still to be addressed is what both parties learn from each other (Hezlett and Gibson, 2005).

The purpose of the research on which this article is based, is to contribute to an understanding of formal mentoring relationships; what learning happens and what factors contribute to this learning. As Ragins and Kram (2007) put it: "'Scholars continue to struggle with understanding the complexity of this life-altering relationship. In a nutshell, we know it works; we are grappling with why, when, and how" (p. 4).

This 'why, when and how' were addressed in the current qualitative research study on formal mentoring dyads in a West Midlands Healthcare Trust. Forty-eight interviews were held with

five postgraduate students and their mentors, during the beginning, middle and end stages of their mentoring relationship, in order to gain an understanding of what mentors and mentees perceived they were learning through mentoring.

This article starts with an overview of the key concepts in a literature review. It is then followed by a description of the research context and the methodology. The findings outline the different domains in which the mentors and mentees perceived they learnt, with a discussion of the enabling and hindering factors of the context. Finally, the article ends with a discussion including recommendations for future practice.

Literature

Three areas of literature were reviewed: formal mentoring, learning and moderating factors:

Formal mentoring

Attempts at a universal definition of mentoring have become a quagmire (Merriam, 1983; Hagerty, 1986; Daloz, 1986; D'Abate, Eddy & Tannenbaum, 2003; Clutterbuck 2004). This is partly due to disagreement of the core purpose and meaning of mentoring (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995; D'Abate *et al.*, 2003), differences between countries and cultures (Bright, 2005; Liu, 2009), differing perceptions from differing disciplines or contexts (Allen *et al..* 2008) and perceived overlap (by some) with other workplace relationships, for instance coaching and mentoring (D'Abate *et al.*, 2003; Tyler, 2004).

The approach to mentoring adopted in this article is that of a formal learning relationship within an organisational context. Its purpose is for mentors to support and challenge the mentees to recognise their career potential and to work towards their personal and professional goals (Connor and Pokora, 2007.) In short, mentoring is a developmental process that supports and facilitates learning (Parsloe and Wray, 2004).

Formal mentoring can be seen as a strategy, a formalised scheme, ranging from relationships that provide advice and sponsorship to those that are highly intense, career focussed and developmental (Kram, 1985; Gibson, 2004). D'Abate *et al.* (2003) propose that formal mentoring can be defined by how it is constructed with as key dimensions the dyadic nature, the downward direction, the internal location, the purpose of long-term development and the formality of the supporting structure and matching process. These help to distinguish formal mentoring not only from informal or unstructured mentoring but also from other developmental interactions such as coaching and action learning.

Learning

There are many different theories about how individuals learn but for the purpose of the study; adult learning theory (Knowles, Swanson, & Elwood, 2011) was adopted as the key learning theory. For instance, adults need a chance for self-diagnosis of their needs, they must take responsibility for their own learning, and they prefer to be facilitated and self-directed (Rogers, 2002).

Learning can be defined as either a product or a process (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). A product is where emphasis is on the outcome of that learning, i.e. a change in behaviour (Gagne, 1965); it is a process when we focus on what happens when the learning takes place (Kolb, 1984). This research is concerned with the outcomes of learning, i.e. learning as product. Kram (1996) defined personal learning as the acquisition of knowledge, skills or competencies that contribute to an individual's personal development.

Based on the classification of learning outcomes (Kraiger, Ford & Salas, 1993) and work by Podolny and Baron (1997) in social networks, Wanberg *et al.* (2003) suggest that the four potential areas for learning or change for the mentee are: cognitive learning, skill-based learning, affective-related learning and social networks. They suggest that higher levels of learning through these different mechanisms will greater influence successful intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes for a mentee. This was confirmed by research conducted by Hezlett (2005) who also concluded that mentees learned from both positive and negative experiences. An earlier quantitative study by Eby, Butts, Lockwood & Simon, (2004) based at a large US University also showed a positive correlation between mentoring relationships and learning. This study showed that mentees perceived themselves as learning more when their mentors provided more support and learning, and less when mentors had less positive attributes i.e. distancing behaviour, lack of mentoring expertise etc. Other research suggests that lack of learning in the mentoring relationship will inevitably contribute to the collapse of the relationship (Hezlett 2005.)

An earlier quantitative US study by Lankau and Scandura (2002) showed that additional benefits beyond personal learning may be fostered by mentoring relationships, for instance, mentees understanding their role/responsibilities better, and job satisfaction, which may in turn influence extrinsic outcomes. This research suggested that 'learning may not be the only outcome of mentoring relationships but may also serve as a catalyst for other benefits that have been linked to mentoring' (Hezlett 2005, 507), for instance increased career opportunities and promotion.

Social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) is an interesting theoretical lens in which to view the exchanges within a mentoring relationship. It proposes that individuals develop, maintain and exit relationships depending on the perceived benefits or otherwise to them (Young & Perrewe, 2000; Eby & Lockwood 2004; Baranik *et al.*, 2010.) Relationships can be seen as a positive or negative experience or both, but people tend to maintain those that they perceive are beneficial to them. Throughout any mentoring relationship, a series of exchanges will take place (for instance encouragement, support) and people are more likely to maintain these relationships (by committing to meeting up, doing actions agreed) where the benefits outweigh the costs, for instance the cost of their own effort. So in terms of mentoring, the suggestion is that as long as both parties perceive they are learning and gaining from the relationship, they are more likely to continue the mentoring exchange.

Moderating factors
Mentoring is one type of intervention to facilitate workplace learning but it does not exist in isolation, in any form. It is influenced by other workplace learning activities (D'Abate *et al.,* 2003) and also by a variety of other factors, internal and external to the individual and organisation involved, e.g. organisational structure and context (Lee *et al.*, 2004).

Kram (1988) suggested that an open systems perspective; that relationships are significantly affected by the context in which they evolve and by the expectations, needs, and skills that individuals bring to them, shows how the organisational context (the larger system) and the developmental relationship (the smaller system) influence which developmental functions are provided and supported. She suggested that the interaction of these two forces created the relationship dynamics that will make a difference (positive or negative) to an individual's development. Hegstad and Wentling (2005) cited facilitating and hindering factors for mentoring. These included top-level management support and effective communication as some facilitating factors and management priorities and time constraints as hindering moderators. A study by Stok-Koch, Bolhuis & Koopmans (2007) cited two key characteristics that impeded workplace learning: an excessive workload and an unstable organisation, and these factors are discussed in the findings of this study later on too.

Eraut (2004) and his study into factors which influence learning in the workplace, concluded that "people's learning at work is greatly affected by the personality, interpersonal skills and learning orientation of their manager" (Eraut 2004: 271). Building on this, Eddy, Tannenbaum, Lorenzet & Smith-Jentsch (2005) discuss the potential factors which can impact the effectiveness of developmental interactions and they distinguish between personal factors, relationship factors (including those with managers) and communication factors.

Eby *et al.*'s (2006) study showed that mentors who felt that managers were supporting the mentoring programme were more likely to see the benefits and rewards of being involved. Allen *et al.* (2006) agreed that "immediate supervisor support for the mentoring program may impact the extent that even the best designed programs will be perceived as effective." (Allen *et al.* 2006, p.148). Parise and Forret's study (2008) showed that perceived management support is a critical factor that will influence motivation and willingness to participate in mentoring programmes. If managers are supportive and can see the value in it, then mentors feel that their involvement will be recognised and valued too, and so are more likely to get involved.

In short, it would not be possible to research the 'lived experience of mentoring' (Cohen & Manion 1989) without recognising the context, and its influence on the mentors, mentees and the whole mentoring process. As this study is set in the Healthcare Sector in the United Kingdom, it is important to recognise that this is a work environment that is ever changing and is currently undergoing intense reform and is under extensive external pressure.

Methodology

The overall objectives of this research were to gather information to understand the learning that happens for both mentors and mentees (the learning outcomes) and which factors contribute to this learning (the moderators). Having a better understanding of what is learnt and what factors contribute to this learning, will enhance understanding of formal mentoring and will hopefully make it easier to deploy as a tool for learning in organisations (Hezlett & Gibson 2005).

From a methodological perspective, it has been recognised that mentoring research needs to address gaps in qualitative studies, longitudinal investigations and perspectives from both sides of the dyad (Wanberg *et al.* 2003, Lankau & Scandura 2007). Allen *et al.* (2008) further underpin this with their comprehensive review of 200 published mentoring articles. They state that they could "characterize mentoring research as primarily adopting quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional research designs in field settings where data are collected from a single source (typically the protégé) using a single method of data collection" (p.355).

This research seeks to address the gap by using qualitative methods, involving both parties of the dyad and paying attention to the context through a longitudinal case study approach. As key research questions were set around mentors' and mentees' differing perceptions and experiences within their real-life context, this research relates well to a qualitative research rationale (Flick, 2006). From the different interpretations or perceptions of the mentors and the mentees, there may be patterns, similarities or relationships which may help to explain some of the 'unknowns' within mentoring and learning.

An in-depth case study approach was taken (Yin, 1994; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). The intention was to locate the 'story' (of mentoring) and the factors influencing this, so that themes, topics, or key variables may be isolated and discussed (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 214). It was felt that interviewing a small, discreet group of mentors and mentees regularly over time was an

appropriate approach to take in order to investigate the story of formal mentoring in its real life context.

A pilot formal mentoring programme was about to be launched within a West Midlands Healthcare Trust and the researcher was invited to evaluate the programme from the beginning to the end. This formal programme was set up to support non-clinical members of staff in their part-time study for a postgraduate management qualification. Importantly, mentors were experienced managers and most had been previous students, doing the same qualification too. All mentors and mentees were volunteers. Mentors received three days training from an external provider before starting, although some had mentored or been mentored before. Mentors and mentees met beforehand to discuss their expectations. The purpose of this mentoring programme was to help employees to recognise and work towards their personal and professional goals.

The mentoring pilot started with six dyads but only five dyads stayed actively involved throughout. Having a small homogeneous sample allowed the researcher to build a relationship with the mentors and mentees over time and so gain a richer picture of their experiences and thus allowed some logical generalisations to be made (Silverman 2005.)

The study was carried out over a seventeen month period (October 2009 to February 2011). The data were collected at five points; the baseline (before the mentoring started), after three to six months, after another three months, after another three months and then a follow-up approximately six months, after the mentoring finished. In total, five semi-structured interviews were carried out with each mentor and mentee (except one mentor was working abroad for the last two sessions) making an overall total of 48 interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Open coding (Saunders *et al.* 2003) was used initially to help disentangle the information into the two key categories of the investigation; learning outcomes and moderators. Then the four areas for learning, previously discussed by Wanberg *et al.*, (2003) and used by Hezlett (2005), were used to categorise what mentors and mentees felt they were learning as cognitive, skill-based, affective-related or social networks. The moderating categories were based on the study of facilitating and hindering factors by Hegstad and Wentling (2005). Taking this deductive approach by using categories from the existing theory and literature (Bryman & Bell 2007) helped to uncover themes and patterns across all the dyads.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher was not part of the organisation studied or involved in the mentoring programme. However as a supporter of mentoring, the research was conscious of possible personal bias in terms of recording the information and analysing it. Cross-checking the notes taken with the transcribed interviews helped to ensure that a more accurate record was provided (Sacks 1992 as cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2003.) Also, the transcribed recordings were emailed to the participants to give them an opportunity to check for inconsistencies in the information too. This 'respondent validation' (Silverman 2005) allowed at least two mentors to reply with some additional thoughts.

In order to limit issues with reliability, the same semi-structured questions were asked to all mentors and mentees each time. It may have been beneficial to take a multi-method approach to gathering the information to triangulate the results (Lin 1976). For instance through observations or documentation used, to avoid issues with common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003) but due to the confidential nature of these mentoring relationships, this was not deemed appropriate.

Findings

The four key areas for learning, previously discussed by Wanberg *et al..,*(2003) and used by Hezlett (2005), were used to categorise what mentors and mentees felt they were learning as cognitive, skill-based, affective-related or social networks.

Cognitive learning

Cognitive learning is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge about the organisation, the politics and the culture of the workplace. Before the mentoring started, mentees and mentors were asked what they expected to learn. Cognitive aspects they stated would involve some new ideas and methods, understanding different perspectives and new ways of doing things and how to channel their energy in the right direction. For instance, mentee A stated that "*It will be good to talk to someone with a neutral opinion, to help with work issues.*" Mentee B agreed "*It will be a very different way of learning than before. I'm looking for new ideas and someone to share their experiences.*" Mentor A said *"I expect mentees will want to be kept on the right track and will be looking for ideas and examples. I expect to share learning. I like hearing others' views."*

Throughout the beginning, middle and end stages of the formal mentoring programme, cognitive learning was mentioned by both mentors and mentees. Mentors expressed that they were getting an increased clarity about the organisation and their own departments and were also increasing their understanding about mentoring and the boundaries involved. Mentees expressed that they were getting some practical postgraduate study skills type support, some insights into organisational strategy and they were valuing gaining an insight into a different perspective from a higher level. For example, mentee A said *'I'm learning from my mentors experience on how to deal with some of my staff issues.'* With her mentor saying *'I'm learning all about a whole new department and how they are managed.'*

Skill-based learning

Skill-based learning is concerned with developing new skills, for instance interpersonal skills (i.e. working with others, managing relationships, communication skills etc.). Mentees expected to develop their self-confidence and cited some specific study skills that they wished to develop too.

As this mentoring programme was set up to support those studying for a qualification and the mentors had studied this previously, it is not surprising that they expected to and did gain some direct support with this, in terms of content and ideas on how to study and cope. For instance, Mentee D said: "*It's helping me organise my studies around my life. It's giving me advice on how to balance things.*" Mentor B, in terms of early expectations, was quite specific about which mentoring skills: *"I'd like to improve my questioning and listening skills. I'd like to understand the mentees needs but also gain new skills and techniques."*
The same mentor said later on; *"I'm learning when to stop talking and when to carry on. I'm learning how to ask questions that unlock some different thinking."*

Throughout the beginning, middle and end stages of the formal mentoring programme, skills-based learning was mentioned by both mentors and mentees. Over time, mentees continued to cite study skills as key learning but also communication skills, reflection skills and having raised awareness of their new skills. Mentors were very clear about the skills they were developing including questioning, listening, showing sensitivities and refreshing their mentoring toolkit. One mentor (Mentor C) in relation to listening skills mentions: *"I'm still learning about listening constructively. What is she actually saying and what can I feedback?"*

Affective-related learning

Affective-related learning is concerned with deeper more personal learning, often involving some mention of motivational change i.e. following personal goals, taking the initiative, not being too hard on oneself. Mentees expected to learn how to channel their energy in the right direction and to understand the organisational pitfalls in order to develop their self-confidence within their personal and professional lives. Mentors were more specific in terms of how they hoped to develop their self-confidence, particularly within mentoring, to develop more patience with others and a better understanding of how they do things.

Throughout the beginning, middle and end stages of the mentoring programme the affective-related learning became greater for both parties and mentors and mentees were able to articulate their learning more specifically in this area over time. Specifically, mentees were learning how to balance things, how to stay calm, an increased focus, feeling more positive and an increased self-awareness. Mentors cited increased patience with others, positivity, increase in their own reflective practice and learning when to/when not to take action for themselves and others. Both parties clearly stressed an increase in self confidence throughout the mentoring relationship.   Mentee E articulated the learning by stating that "*I've made lots of observations about myself and it's learning how to put them in practice…it's helping to boost my confidence and my self-esteem on a very personal level.*" Mentee   D   agreed:

> *My mentor can see me getting more confident and I'm possibly enjoying my job a bit more…I used to be terrified at the thought of going to meetings but I'm getting more used to that now.*

Mentor E made a statement along similar lines stating how this has helped in their job too: *"I feel a lot more confident in speaking to people in my own team. I feel that I'm a lot more positive with them as I'm a lot more confident now."*

Social networks

Social networks are concerned with expanding connections inside and outside the workplace. Neither mentors nor mentees expected to learn anything about or through networks. However, once the mentoring had started, there was much learning for mentees, and some for mentors, in this domain. For instance, mentees mentioned their mentors encouraging them to talk to others that they might not have before, making contact with those of different disciplines inside and outside work, and mentees ultimately learning for themselves where to go when they need more direction. Mentee A said about her mentor that:

> *Her experience tells you to look at different avenues. Her job is different and her   approach is different but sometimes applying that to your own work situation, just   widens   your thought processes really…she'll say why you don't ask Pete in my office   about that…it's the networks and contacts that are so important.*

Mentee B agreed that "*getting to know the right contacts and using the right people to get your point across, that's the important thing.*"

However, mentors did not seem to gain improved contacts from their mentees but they did gain clearer insights into other areas of the business and how they work, and so made some connections that impacted their own departments. Mentor D said:

> *I know a lot more about their department than I ever would have known before. I also have learnt some things about working with other departments, which are good to know   in my own job.*

Therefore, it can be clearly seen that there was much learning across all four learning domains for both parties but some unexpected learning, particularly for mentees within the social network arena.

Learning changes over time

By August 2010, most mentoring relationships were coming to an end, so both parties were asked if they had perceived anything had changed over time for them personally. They were both asked the same question after the mentoring had finished (in Jan/Feb 2011). Table 1 illustrates some of the responses:

Changes according to mentees (August 2010)	Changes according to mentees (Jan/Feb 2011)
• Realised had to chill out/it's only a job • Realised how best to tackle things/not to taken things too personally • Possibly enjoying the job a bit more • Less terrified before meetings as know my stuff • Looking into things a bit more/I don't just say yes, I try to think about who is affected • In-depth conversations about myself • Mentor not just someone I know at work…become a very valued colleague…we've become friends • Helped to mentor my mentor; read his work and asked him questions, as my tutor would do for me. He took my advice • Considering bringing in a buddying/mentoring scheme into my own department	• Relationship not changed (ongoing support offered) • Now looking at improvements in my job • More confident in ability to do the job • Learnt what boundaries not to cross • Making changes at work; communication etc • Feel more comfortable with myself • Increased confidence levels • Better links with other departments

Changes according to mentors (August 2010)	Changes according to mentors (Jan/Feb 2011)
• 'I feel like she is a totally different person' • Mentee has achieved a few things • Mentee seems brighter and more enthusiastic • Mentee feels more confident to me • Mentee feels like she is up for it a bit more • Mentee a lot more comfortable in what she is doing with her studies • Mentee has a lot more confidence about what is going on • Mentee is a lot happier • Mentee has the confidence to believe in what she is doing now/self confidence • Mentee feels she can contact me anytime/not have to formally agree it now • Focus has moved and is becoming more effective now; focussing on bigger things • Mentee so positive about were she is • Mentee goes out of comfort zone now	• Mentee confidence levels • Improved listening skills • At the start, mentoring was not a key topic for me. It has opened my eyes • Standing up for myself more (being more forceful) • Using now in other parts of my job; will go and approach others/gives me more confidence to offer • Will use mentoring more • Established informal relationship now; a sounding board for me in return • Have referred others to look for mentors since • Have new mentee now (I am being more formal with this one)

Table 1 – What did mentees and mentors perceive had changed over time?

Mentees emphasised aspects in relation to the affective-related domain more, for instance enjoying the job more and feeling more comfortable with themselves. However, no real mention is made about increased knowledge or skills learnt. It is also interesting to note that mentors in August 2010 discussed the changes to mentees only, with no mention of change for themselves. But in Jan/Feb 2011, they mostly mention their own changes and improvements. They mention mentoring has opened their eyes, that they are using it elsewhere and encouraging others to get involved. Again, little is mentioned of them learning new skills or knowledge.

Confidence is mentioned again for both parties and both mention how their learning has made a difference within their jobs. For instance, they are making changes at work, standing up for themselves more and have an increased ability to do the job better.

The moderators

In all the interviews, both parties were asked what factors were enabling and hindering their mentoring relationships - see Table 2. This Table clearly shows that mentoring is affected both positively and negatively by internal and external factors, some within and some outside of the mentors' and mentees' control. The moderating categories were based on the study of facilitating and hindering factors by Hegstad and Wentling (2005).

Line Managers seem to be key to enabling and hindering the learning for both parties. Location and effective matching is key, as are satisfaction and commitment from those involved. Hindering factors seem to relate mostly to Line Managers again, in relation to them not seeing mentoring as a priority, not helping those involved to protect their time, not being supportive and adding increased workload, together with issues of time constraints and miscommunication. Mentee A stated that;

> *Only recently my Manager has got involved. She has been very busy and she mentioned a few months ago that she kind of felt guilty that she hadn't been asking enough questions and shown enough interest.*

Yet mentee C said; *"My Manager has been supportive and has told me to go off track when I want to".*

It seems clear that Mentors have had pressure from above which has affected their available mentoring time, with one saying; *"I have had to cancel some meetings as they clashed with demands from the Chief Executive."* Similarly, mentor D suggests that there needs to be wider senior management acceptance of mentoring within the organisation and stated that;

> *I'm not sure there is much emphasis within the Trust on mentoring and its value. I think there's a willingness but as an organisation, I'm not sure how much… My Manager does not see mentoring as a priority in my diary, but I do.*

Enabling/Facilitating factors according to mentees and mentors	Hindering factors according to mentees and mentors
Line management support • supportive Manager • no pressure from Manager (did not know about it) • my manager discusses work-related things and my mentor offers me emotional/general support Effective matching strategy • similar location helps	Not always a line management priority • manager's not supportive • manager does not encourage me to protect mentoring time • mentor training not seen as a priority in my diary • mentoring is not seen as a priority by some and so it is not always easy to protect it in your diary • senior people don't know I'm on a course

- if work in same department helps
- not being in same department helps
- helped that knew each other beforehand/previous friendship (meant we could be honest from the outset)
- both quite direct people
- similar interests outside of work
- similar backgrounds

Alignment of program and organisational missions
- nothing mentioned

Effective, ongoing communication
- monthly meetings fixed in the diary
- meeting outside own offices

Coordinator/mentoring team commitment
- good relationship with Tutor
- chatting about it helps my reflections

Design/structure of process
- mentor training
- supporting documentation has been very helpful

Participant satisfaction and commitment
- mentor flexibility
- if I need to speak to my mentor and he's free, I go and chat to him
- my mentor said the right things at the right time
- when I'm doing a good job, mentor says well done

Participant empowerment
- managing own diary

Thorough development
- nothing mentioned

Confidentiality/trust
- nothing mentioned

Other (not part of categories)
- helpful colleagues
- previous colleagues
- having own external mentor
- study groups/other people on the course
- library helpful

Time constraints
- an increased workload
- time pressures/juggling time
- had to change a few meetings due to other work pressures
- cancelling meetings

Organizational changes
- awareness of pending organisational change
- new NHS White Paper/changes coming

Distance/locations of pairs
- nothing mentioned (only in enabling)

Human Resources challenges
- manager leaving/delayed appraisal
- not sure there is much emphasis within the NHS on mentoring and its value

Communication difficulties
- difficult to manage interruptions at work
- interrupted when in the office
- issues between Tutor and mentor – differing advice

Design/development issues
- there is a willingness from LandD etc but it is not embedded

Corporate structure/size
- nothing mentioned

Mentor recruitment
- mentor doesn't discuss wider career, focuses on qualification only
- mentor too supportive/needed more challenge

Other (not part of categories)
- not being well
- family pressure

Table 2 – Moderators; enabling and hindering factors
(Categories taken from the study of facilitating and hindering factors by Hegstad and Wentling, 2005)

Areas not part of the categories in Table 2, which also seem to be helpful, are other relationships within work, for instance helpful colleagues and other networks. Other hindering factors not categorised were personal and related to illness and family pressures.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of some of the 'unknowns' of formal mentoring and learning. Certainly, there does seem to be a huge amount of personal learning across the various learning outcome categories, for both parties. This helps to emphasise that mentoring is a 'two-way street.' (McCullum 2010:19) The learning was much greater than expected at the outset for both parties. Knowledge and skills were the areas where mentees and mentors expected to gain the most learning but the deeper more personal learning was greater in scope than was expected. Mentees did not have any expectations about social networks and making new connections but this has been an area of learning for them. It seems mentors did not expect to learn so much about other departments and other areas, nor perhaps so much about their interpersonal skills and their own mentoring skills too. Both parties did expect to improve their listening skills and self confidence and there are many examples of where mentoring has delivered to these expectations. In short, both parties have gained a huge amount of raised self awareness and their knowledge, skills and attitudes have improved in more ways than they expected.

It seems clear that some of the learning has had successful extrinsic outcomes i.e. a direct impact within their job (relational job learning) and successful intrinsic outcomes i.e. increased confidence, happiness etc (personal skills development) for both parties. Increased confidence is a key theme for both mentors and mentees throughout the various stages, as well as the increased ability to reflect. Also, there has been increased clarity (Higgins and Kram, 2001) from mentors about how they see their mentoring skills and how they might approach mentoring in the future. Mentors (and mentees) have clearly benefited from being involved in mentoring, including self-satisfaction, improved perspective and personal identity (Hegstad and Wentling, 2005; Harvey *et al.*, 2010.)

In summary, personal development and change has occurred for both parties and the depth of this has increased and changed over time. It also seems that some mentees and some mentors had very supportive managers and others did not. Having top management and stakeholder commitment is one of the key elements to formal mentoring success (Clutterbuck 2004) and the data shows mixed reviews about this. With time constraints and lack of management support, some pairings have had issues with meeting up, but each mentoring relationship had met at least six times, so this happened despite these hindering factors.

Other support has been helpful too, including that of tutors, colleagues and other students, which shows that wider networks have been used by mentees and mentors (Jones, 2009). It is interesting to see that a mentee thinks that being in the same department helps, yet another mentee thinks that not being in the same department helps! Some other pressures are discussed including time constraints, volume of work and pending organisational change. None of these aspects seem to have prevented mentors and mentees from meeting up nor from learning taking place. From a social exchange theory perspective, these relationships have been maintained despite internal and external pressures, as the benefits or learning outcomes to both mentee and mentor are perceived to outweigh the costs in effort and time to meet up (Baranik *et al.*. 2010). Although there seem to be some features that have encouraged these relationships and some which have impeded them (Kram, 1988), overall it seems that the context was not overtly restrictive and that mentoring found a way to survive, even in this difficult and pressured context.

It is hoped that these insights will help to explain why mentoring is a popular intervention and help to inform practice in terms of learning outcomes. Recognising the deeper, personal learning that can be gained from mentoring for both parties and how this can be carried over into the workplace, should help to demonstrate to less supportive line managers the wider implications of the intervention on job satisfaction, morale and ultimately productivity. This research may also seek to

demonstrate to more senior managers in an organisation that formal mentoring can provide far reaching personal learning opportunities, which may be difficult to imagine could come from other more traditional training settings (Hale 2000).

Also, there are some practical implications for the development and design of formal mentoring programmes, recognising the importance of recruiting mentors, matching mentors and mentees and promoting the scheme within the organisation to ensure management commitment. Also, this study has given some clarity about the impact of the wider context, which may enhance our understanding of learning within other developmental relationships further too. Hegstad and Wentling (2005) state that there is little empirical evidence in relation to the corporate environment required for mentoring success, so attention to some of the key facilitating and hindering factors, particularly in relation to gaining key management support, when designing a mentoring programme will be key.

All who participated in this study seemed keen to see it progressing and some mentees requested to be mentors in the future. So it has been important learning for the organisation and for the sponsoring of Learning and Development professionals who now have some more evidence on the benefits of formal mentoring relationships.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations to this study should be recognised and could be addressed in future research. A lot of information has been gathered from 48 interviews with the same respondents over time, which gives confidence in the results that the information collected represents the characteristics of this particular population. However, it would not be possible to make assumptions from these results to generalise about formal mentoring programmes in other Healthcare Trusts or indeed in other parts of the same organisation.

As this was a pilot mentoring programme, there may have been restrictions in the initial management engagement and organisational commitment given, as this was not seen yet as a permanent programme. In turn, this may have affected some of the enabling and hindering contextual factors. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare the findings with a more established mentoring programme and/or carry out research into mentoring in other areas of the organisation, for instance clinical personnel as this would give another valuable perspective into the impact of mentoring within a different environment. Also, alternative methods could be used for gathering the information, for instance open forum/supervision discussions, observations and personal development diaries to help avoid issues with common method bias. Finally, it is worth reiterating the researcher's own positive bias towards mentoring as this may have had an impact on how the questions were worded and explored, as it is not always possible to extract yourself completely from such an on-going personal study (Bryman and Bell 2007).

It is not possible to say that all of this learning can be attributed directly to mentoring alone (Kram, 1985). McCauley and Young (1993) would state that 'maximising development requires a mix of relationships.' (p.226) More recently, researchers (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009; Jones, 2009) have recognised that people are part of a wider learning network and that mentoring is only one of these key roles. Although the research questions were geared towards the impact of mentoring on their learning, it may have been difficult for both parties to distinguish between the learning and support from mentoring and tutors, colleagues, managers and general development within their job role. In fact, some of these were mentioned as enabling factors to their learning. Also, as this mentoring was specifically linked to the mentees' qualifications, it is very likely that some of the learning would have been developed directly through their studies too. Also, perhaps as the managers seem to have such an impact (positive and negative) on the mentoring experiences, perhaps a more triadic relational approach

could have been taken to broaden and extend our understanding of the learning theatre of mentoring.(Grace and Holloway, 2010). Therefore, in future studies, it would be interesting to collect information from the other influencing relationships too. Higgins and Kram (2001) argue that mentoring is a multiple relationships phenomenon and that we should be aware of all relationship 'constellations' that occur simultaneously for the mentee as they may all have an impact on their learning.

Notwithstanding the limitations, this study is important as it is clear that within this small number of formal mentoring relationships, mentoring has helped to support, develop and consolidate job related and personal learning for both parties. Mentoring has clearly been a forum for interactive learning between mentors and mentees (Liu *et al.*, 2009) as learning has been achieved on all four domains (Wanberg *et al,.* 2003). Mentoring has addressed some of the key expectations of both parties but unexpected learning has occurred too; notably social networks (for mentees) and wider perspectives about the organisation (for mentors). Both parties now have a deeper understanding of themselves and their learning is being applied outside of the mentoring relationships, within their jobs and other mentoring activities too. The context has played an important part too, particularly the support from managers, but this has not overtly restricted both parties meeting up and continuing to receive the benefits of mentoring.

It seems clear that in this small case study, at a very difficult time of change within the Healthcare sector, mentoring has been a benefit to all those who were involved. It has helped them to realise and work towards their personal and professional goals, in order to enhance their career potential but most importantly to gain a huge amount of personal learning, beyond their expectations.

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