

Developing Future Black Minority, Ethnic (BME) Leader's Self-Efficacy through Mentoring and Coaching

A research working paper by Lizana Oberholzer

Abstract:

The aim of the study is to explore how aspirational BME Leaders can be supported to develop self-efficacy and confidence to progress to leadership roles. The study will map out how mentors and coaches for aspirational leaders were developed and how they engaged with their mentees over a three week period, and what the impact was of their mentoring support. The study makes use of qualitative research methods to evaluate how the initial training of mentors, and the further engagement with mentees helped develop mentees' self-efficacy and confidence. The study will focus on the mentee's perspective and experiences more specifically. In addition, the study will explore what the impact of the three week mentor support was on the participants.

Introduction:

Coalter (2018) highlights the importance of diverse teams, and that these teams bring with them a variety of experiences and approaches to enrich the schools they work in. However, it is often the case that school

leadership teams do not reflect a diverse team or mirror the diverse communities they serve. In turn, the lack of BME leaders in senior leadership roles in the United Kingdom (UK), not only has a negative impact on the effectiveness of the way in which the leadership team function, it also has an impact on how learners perceive their ability to achieve and excel. 3.1% of heads in schools are from BME backgrounds compared to the pupil population of 31.4% in primary and 27.9% of secondary (DfE, 2016).

It is noted that learners often feel that they are not able to progress or achieve as there are no aspirational role models for them to look up to in their education contexts (Garner, 2015). It is therefore imperative to continue to develop BME leaders and prepare them well for their leadership roles.

However, apart from the challenges faced by aspirational leaders when trying to get promoted as described by Elonga Mboyo (2019), BME leaders, experience a lack of confidence and self-efficacy, similar to women in education, as outlined by Kay and Shipman, (2014) to even apply for senior leadership



roles. Future BME leaders often feel that they are not worthy, and therefore don't even attempt to apply for these roles.

Johnson (2007) highlights the benefits and effectiveness of informal mentoring, and how it can help others to grow and develop. After discussions with aspirational BME school leaders in a University in London regarding their needs, it was decided that based on Johnson's (2007) work, a mentoring and coaching programme was to be rolled out for aspirational leaders, to offer them with support in developing their self-efficacy to progress as future leaders.

It was decided that it was important to develop mentors well to ensure that they were well-versed as mentors to draw both on mentoring and coaching skills to support their mentees well. They were trained prior to pairing them with future leaders to ensure that they too were effective and confident in their roles.

Aim of the Study:

The study focuses on both how mentors are developed to support future leaders, and what the impact of their mentoring was on increasing future leaders' self-efficacy to progress to leadership roles.

Methodology:

The study takes the form of an action research approach. Mentors were provided with a full day of mentoring and coaching training to ensure that they were clear on the different strategies they are able to make use of. The training ensured that mentors were aware of Blanchard et al's (2018) theory regarding development phases of mentees, to ensure that mentees were appropriately supported throughout the engagement. Mentors engaged with critical race theory discussions and reflected on the challenges BME mentees might face to ensure that mentors were well prepared for possible scenarios that might be shared with them during the mentoring sessions. Mentors reflected on the mentor journey as outlined by Clutterbuck (1992) alongside Blanchard et al's (2018) model. The training focused on the importance of listening too. Mentors were also provided with resources to enable them to offer career advice, support with personal application forms, and interview support.

In addition, they were paired up with aspirational BME leaders who contacted the programme lead for the initiative. Mentors and mentees were required to engage with 3 formalised meetings, over a period of 6 weeks.



Qualitative research methods were used to evaluate the impact of the mentoring. Semi-structured interviews were used to evaluate the impact of the mentoring experience based on a small sample of mentees who took part in the study. The sample size is proportionate to the number of mentors and mentees who were engaged in this small-scale study. The initial group who engaged with the programme was small and treated as a pilot. The sample is a random sample of participants, after a request was sent to participants to invite them to engage in the study. 5 mentors took part, and 8 mentees in the mentoring programme. Two mentees engaged in the semi-structured interviews to enable them to provide feedback on their experiences, and what the impact of their mentoring and coaching engagement were. All participants gave permission for the study to take place, and the full BERA (2018) guidance regarding ethics were followed to ensure that candidates were fully aware that they could withdraw at any point, and that all information will be treated in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act (2018). All information was anonymised.

The questions used for the study were carefully developed, to ensure that it offers an opportunity for participants to respond as openly as possible to the questions. Questions

were designed to ensure that bias was avoided. In addition, careful consideration was made to be mindful of candidates' perceptions of their situation and role to ensure that they were confident to respond to questions in an open and confident way (Oppenheim, 1998).

The two mentees were interviewed to evaluate how the mentoring support impacted on their development and how they progressed in relation to their aspirations.

Findings and Evaluation:

During the semi-structured interviews, mentees were asked to reflect on their experiences of the mentor sessions. Mentees, highlighted that the initial session was challenging at first, as they often don't find themselves in a position where they can openly discuss the challenges they face with like-minded colleagues. They shared that they opened up about institutional racism they have experienced, how they had to cope with unconscious bias, and at times situations where they were told they did not achieve simply because they were BME colleagues. One participant shared that she applied for a Head of English role, and was informed that she was not suited to the role, as she was not 'English enough'.



The second participant shared that she was asked to wait outside the school gate, for someone to see her about her documentation for her new role as governor. She waited for nearly 45 minutes, until she shared she was the new governor. Suddenly, she was invited into the building and offered refreshments. She reflected on how she felt that if she did not share what her new role was she would have been shown away, like any other BME colleague. However, her mentor conversations helped her to be braver, and insist on the appropriate support by staff the school.

Mentees greatly valued the opportunity to share their stories. These rare moments where they were able to open up, and find common ground was invaluable to them. One colleague shared, how she felt she had to be 'over qualified' for the roles she had to apply for to prepare for future headships. Fear of failure was another key concern that was highlighted during the initial conversations. Feelings of not belonging and not feeling that aspirational leaders are not entitled to leadership roles were explored too.

Participants also shared how they were viewed by other BME colleagues when they aired their ambitions to succeed. Views such as 'you are joining them' and 'you are going

over to the other side' were shared, which left mentees feeling torn, and unsure whether they are doing the right thing, by applying for future leadership roles. By having an impartial mentor to support them, to listen to their concerns, helped them to continue to focus on their goals and targets to apply for leadership roles. One participant noted, that her mentor started using questions more often, which helped her to reflect on her learning more effectively. She explained how their meetings changes for where her mentor gave advice to starting to listen and ask good questions which helped her to make sense of her experiences (Blanchard et al, 2018).

From the feedback provided regarding the first meeting, it seems like the meeting provided an important opportunity for the mentee to 'let off steam' first, before they were able to focus on next steps.

During the interviews, it was shared that the second meeting shaped into a more focused and formal discussion regarding goals and aspirations, and next steps. From this feedback it seems like more than 3 meetings are needed, an introductory meeting might be a useful starting point, not only to contract the relationship, but to allow mentees to set the context, and to share their stories. This initial meeting helps to develop trust, limbic



calmness and a strong platform for the future mentor relationship (Rock, 2010). However, both mentees highlighted how the mentor relationships developed into sessions, where more questions were asked, and this enabled them to find solutions for themselves.

Mentees were asked to share how many mentor sessions they engaged with.

Participants shared that their mentors offered more than the required 3 meetings, to enable them to apply for future roles, provide guidance on application forms, and offered support via mock interviews too. Career and Image coaching was also used to provide mentees with guidance to ensure that they were well prepared for their interviews.

Mentees were asked to reflect on how the mentor relationship helped them to move their ambitions forward. Participant 1, stated that she would never applied for a leadership role, if she did not talk it through with her mentor, and had the necessary support to see it through. Participant 2, highlighted how she drew on mentor conversations when she was doubting herself, when attending the recruitment day. The conversations and stories provided a focus, and motivation to help her see it through.

Both mentees highlighted how they felt that mentors were able to identify their personal

needs and were able to support when needed or ask good questions, and move towards a coaching approach to challenge their thinking more when needed too.

From the participants who engaged in the project – 6 applied for leadership roles, and will be progressing to their next role in September. The 2 others decided to engage with a masters in Leaders to extend and develop their leadership roles further.

Conclusion:

The small-scale study highlighted the importance of supporting aspirational BME leaders to enable them to progress. The investigation deliberately focused on the mentees' experiences rather than the mentor to evaluate what the impact of the mentoring process was on their progress and experience. The participants interviewed for the study shared that their learning was positive, as their mentors were skilled in understanding when to mentor and when to coach as outlined by Blanchard et al (2018). The study highlighted the importance of investing enough time into developing mentors well to ensure that they are able to offer the effective support.

Mentees were able to draw on their mentor support to develop their own confidence and



self-efficacy to apply for leadership roles, and engage with recruitment days. They shared how mentors went beyond the remit of their roles to offer career coaching and image coaching to prepare them for these days. In this small study the success of the mentoring relationship, led to positive outcomes for the mentees. Mentees did not report any challenges faced during the mentor relationships, which does happen from time to time.

Mentees reported that mentors were highly skills and supportive which in turn motivated them to do well and progress. From this study it highlights the important need for effective mentoring, the importance of developing mentors well to understand their mentees and their contexts well. The study, though small highlights that mentoring can have an extremely positive impact on mentees. However, more time and resources are required to role similar projects out on a larger scale to ensure that it is well structured, coordinated and impacts positively.

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