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From Supervisor to Mentor: Transformations in a Collaborative Partnership

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Presentation to the Asia-Pacific Conference on Education, Social Studies and Psychology (APCESP), Bangkok, 19-21 March 2019

Outline

- Background & Literature
- Methodology
- Main Findings
- Conclusions

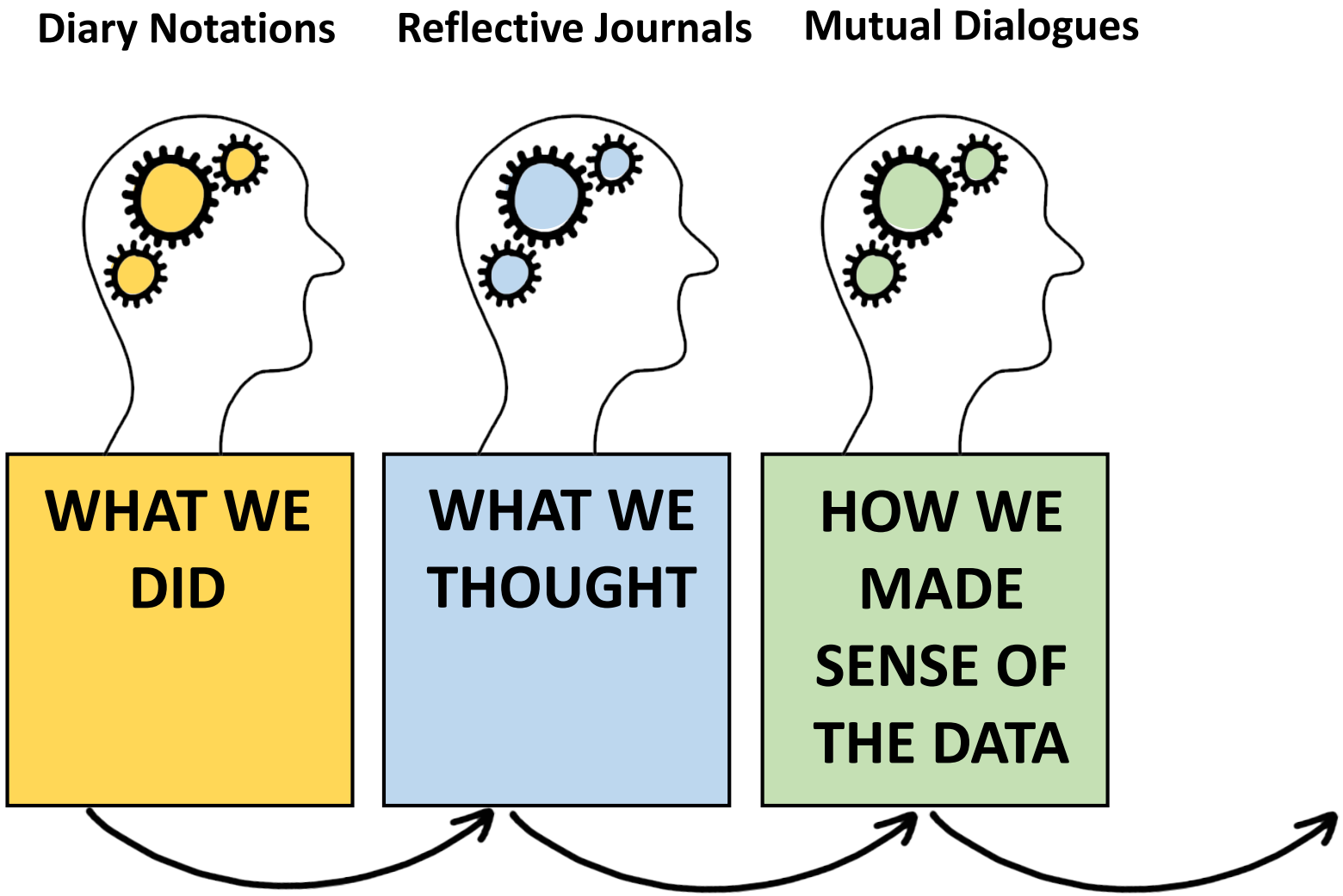
BACKGROUND

- Mentoring is widely seen as an effective learning strategy for industry, business, education, and across many professions for the passing on of knowledge and skills.
- It is now employed in a range of organizations, with considerable expenditure in providing programs that are more formalized and structured.
- Its definition is somewhat nebulous as it means many things to many different people – from transference of skills, role modeling, emotional support, career assistance, to networking.
- There is a variety of traditional and emergent models reflecting both formal and informal processes including developmental, peer, reverse, reciprocal, intergenerational, and dynamic.
- Ultimately, they are personalized and individual dyadic relationships drawing on a long history of patronage, that are becoming more ubiquitous, and now with evidence from the empirical research.

RESEARCH LITERATURE

- The scholarly literature has expanded in the past three decades, but remains overwhelmingly positive, and indeed, celebratory.
- Contemporary works focus on the benefits to mentors and host institutions, as well as to the “recipient” mentees.
- Some critiques have emerged regarding the potential for “toxic” partnerships, negative outcomes, and inflexibility of formal programs.
- Greater attention is afforded to mentoring for women with the view that female pairings can improve career trajectories.
- Universities have long been associated with having mentor relationships but such practices now include more formal guidance, the setting of performance goals, accountability requirements, and direct training.

METHODOLOGY



- case study design
- naturalistic experiment
- auto-ethnographic
- longitudinal trajectory
- female dyad
- adult pairing
- university setting
- intergenerational element
- research, teaching, service & engagement
- vocationally-directed & emotionally-oriented
- iterative procedure

KEY SETS OF VARIABLES

Vocationally-Oriented

job skills, career-related advice, practical assistance, digital technology help, networking, joint projects

Emotionally-Directed

friendship, psychological supports, psychosocial aspects, fun/play, problem-solving

MAIN FINDINGS

TEMPORAL PHASES

HIERARCHICAL CANDIDATE-SUPERVISOR (18 mths)		• forced • involuntary • instructional • uni-directional • goal-specific
EXCHANGE MENTEE-MENTOR (12 mths)		• egalitarian • voluntary • interdependent • personal and emotional • project planning
COLLABORATIVE PEER-PARTNERSHIP (9+ mths)		• lateral partnership • peer equality • shared goals • multiple mentor network

CONCEPTUAL FINDINGS

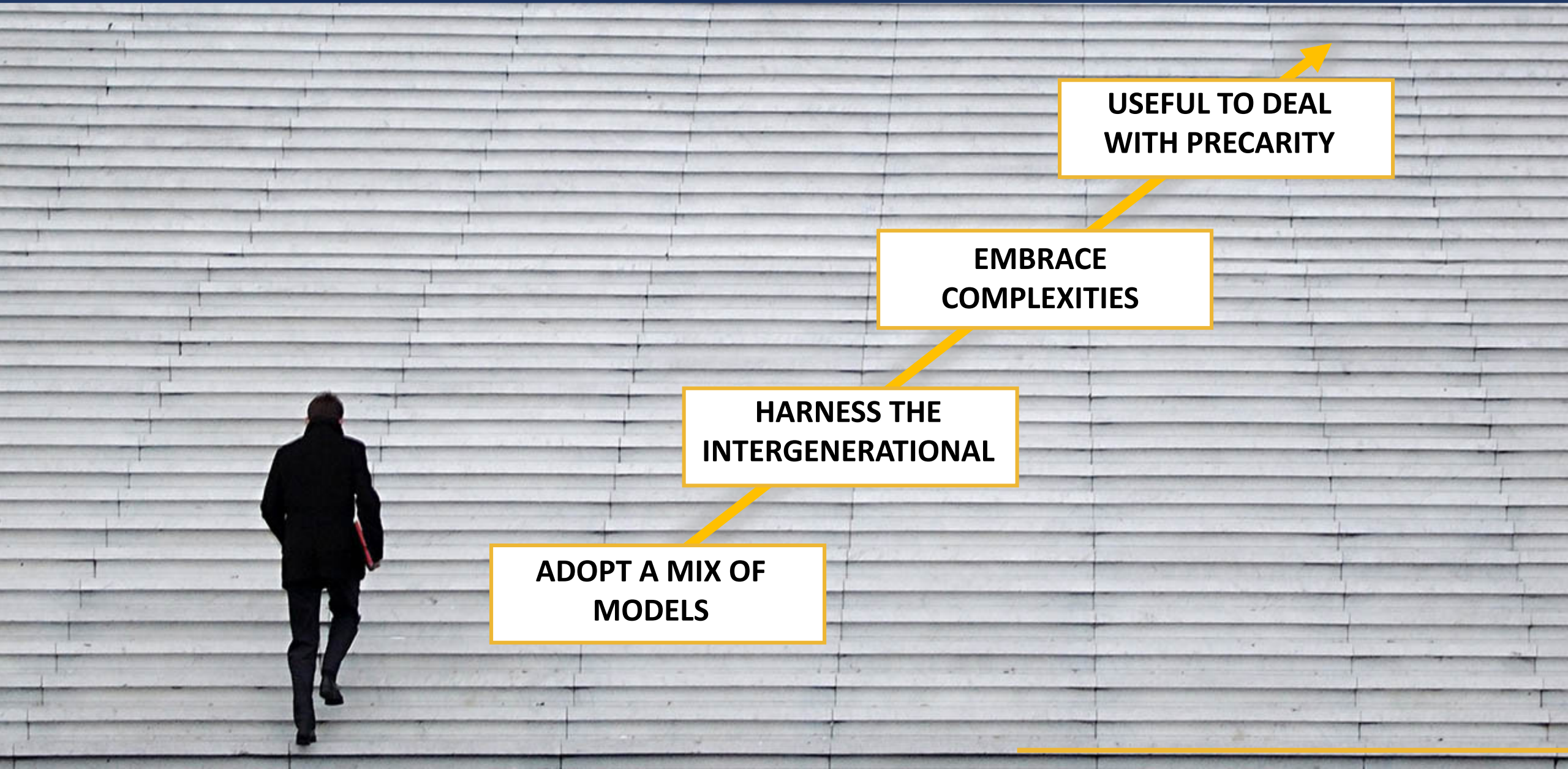
INVESTMENT	An invested relationship that demonstrates commitment by both partners to the mentoring process.	• energy & passion • time commitment & availability • accessible & approachable • generous, not overly-self-oriented
PERSONALIZATION	The relationship is highly personal and individualistic with shared goal-setting.	• good fit with commonalities • shared interests & background • celebrate the differences • personalized connection with boundaries
RECIPROCITY	A collaborative process with benefits flowing in both directions and extending beyond the dyad.	• bi-directional nurturing & care • encouragement & empathy • embrace intergenerational challenges • joint enterprises as focus

OBSERVATIONS

The power of two:

unpredictable	rewarding	dynamic
complex	productive	enduring
flexible	joint endeavours	innovative

CONCLUSIONS



LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Internal Challenges

- No non-mentees or other dyads for comparison
- Female pairing only
- Evidence difficult to capture and quantify

External Challenges

- Private university culture
- Even longer timeframe to measure “success”
- Evidence of host organization benefits are obscure

EFFECTIVE MENTORING STRATEGIES

- We preference informal mentoring schemes, but there should be personal evidence-gathering and accountability (diaries, goal-setting).
- We endorse engaging in critical and reflective practices throughout the process to thwart challenges and ensure the mentorship is on track.
- We stress the importance of flexibility and adaptability, and the maintaining of porous boundaries around the partnership.
- We concur that they are formidable sites of learning (and teaching) and can be truly transformative.

TRANSFERABLE LESSONS FOR BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- ✔ More case studies so that the fine detail of mentorships can be fully appreciated.
- ✔ Studies where non-mentees are incorporated in a comparative analysis.
- ✔ Attention to the intergenerational elements with savvy millennials teaching digital skills and technological knowledge.
- ✔ Cross-over studies between education, professions, business, and industry.

Questions or comments please!

Thank you!