Hettie van der Merwe

Mentoring as a response to merit demands on account of equity

In a formal mentoring programme at the University of South Africa (Unisa), the mainly black newcomers are mentored by productive white academics. This article aims to determine how mentors perceived their mentoring task in this context. The findings revealed that mentors understand their mentoring task as pertaining exclusively to the development of research skills in order to sustain research outputs. No problems were encountered with cross-race mentoring. However, a lack of self-efficacy on the part of some of the *protégés* called for mentoring involving implicit goal-setting and affirming feedback, based on a radical humanist perspective on mentoring.

Mentorprogramme as antwoord op merietevereistes in die lig van gelykberegtiging

In 'n formele mentorprogram aan die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika (Unisa) word die oorwegend swart toetreders deur produktiewe wit akademici gementor. Die doel van die artikel is om die mentors se persepsie van hul mentortaak binne hierdie konteks te bepaal. Daar is bevind dat mentors hul mentortaak uitsluitlik as ontwikkeling van navorsingsvaardighede interpreteer ten einde navorsingsuitsetprestasie te handhaaf. Geen probleme is met tussenrasmentorskap ervaar nie. 'n Gebrek aan selfwerksaamheid onder sommige van die *protégés* het egter 'n spesifieke mentorstrategie vereis wat implisiete doelwitstelling en bevestigende terugvoering omvat, gebaseer op 'n radikale humanistiese perspektief op mentorskap.

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Although mentoring was initially defined as a workplace learning approach implemented and studied in business and corporate settings, it has now also been adopted by higher education organisations. Apart from a similar implicit obligation to develop their employees, higher education institutions have an explicit moral obligation to develop their students (Mertz 2004: 543) while adhering to merit imperatives of economic efficiency (Elliot 2005: 69).

Development obligations in the higher education sector are carried out in an environment characterised by its hierarchical and politicised nature, individualised values, changing agendas and its claim to authority and knowledge (Blunt & Conolly 2006: 196, Kirchmeyer 2005: 639). Individualised values, as reflected in an "insistent individualism" (Bennet 1998: 37), are deeply ingrained in academia. This prevails while the production of and access to knowledge are controlled by "naming" specific issues and ignoring others (Gravett & Petersen 2007: 194). However, knowledge not named is crucially important for full participation in the production of named knowledge. Mentors who assist with the unveiling of this named and not named knowledge are typically accredited members of academia who are committed to facilitating *protégés*' careers. The best-known outcomes of this commitment are *protégés*' research output successes (cf Gardiner *et al* 2007: 427, Kirchmeyer 2005: 638, Messmer 1998).

Over the past two decades a general trend with mentoring has been the introduction of formal mentoring programmes to sustain economic efficiency while adhering to affirmative action legislation (Ehrich *et al* 2004, Long 1997). This trend has also become popular in the South African higher education context. It is anticipated that the equity demand for staff profiles that represent demographic realities will be realised with the implementation of formal mentoring programmes to sustain merit imperatives relating to research outputs. Formal mentoring takes place in an environment in which new appointments are, increasingly, preferably black while the more senior staff who are expected to act as mentors are predominantly still white.

The purpose of this article is to understand how mentors at the University of South Africa (Unisa), where formal mentoring has been

implemented to sustain merit imperatives while complying with employment equity legislation, experience their contextual mentoring task.

1. Background

The South African post-apartheid government acknowledged the internationally competitive research and teaching capacities of the historically white universities and stressed the need to exploit their expertise and infrastructure by means of a restructuring process (DoE 1997: 8). As a dedicated distance education institution, Unisa was restructured to meet the imperative of equity through access while complying with the merit demands of economic efficiency (cf Elliot 2005: 69, Jansen 2003: 32, Ntshoe 2004: 142). Unisa's vision is to become "*the African university in the service of humanity*" (Unisa 2005: 6), in the process becoming an ideologically African university that is rooted in Africa, with an African history and aspirations, and drawing students from across the continent (Farrell 2009a: 1). This implies that the institution's demographics must reflect the demographic realities of the continent. Equity imperatives and demographic realities are being realised in that, for the 2009 academic year, the majority of the academic staff were black females aged 30-35 (Farrell 2009b: 2). Owing to the significant representation of young academics in the university's academic population, the proportion of academic staff with doctoral degrees has dropped from 71% for 2004 to 53% for 2009 (Farrell 2009b: 2). A formal mentoring programme has thus been envisioned for Unisa to fulfil the implicit obligation for redressed employee development and the explicit moral obligation for student development (Mertz 2004: 543), while at the same time meeting the merit demands of economic efficiency (Elliot 2005: 69, Jansen 2003: 32). Accordingly, new and younger black academics are being mentored with regard to research and tuition needs and encouraged to co-publish with experienced white academics who will retire from the system over the next decade (Farrell 2008: 6). It is therefore an officially stated, institutionally incorporated academic leadership duty of senior academics to help less experienced colleagues, in particular black and female colleagues,

to develop research skills (Unisa 2006: 8, 9, Integrated Performance Management System 2009).

In response to the institutionally steered effort to establish a committed mentoring culture at Unisa, the College of Human Sciences launched a formal mentoring programme in April 2009. The overriding goal is to develop and empower young black academics to improve their academic standing while fostering a culture of hard work, accountability and productivity (Reyneke 2009). As anticipated by senior management, mentoring should assist with the fast-tracking of mostly black, young, promising and talented academics in the areas of tuition, research and academic management with the aim of developing them into top researchers and managers within Unisa and on the global stage (Farrell 2009c: 6). The first group of potential mentors called upon to participate in mentoring was the senior professors, promoted to that rank on account of excellent research outputs. Using natural pairing as a basis, one-on-one mentorship dyads were arranged to embark on a formal mentoring programme structured over twelve months. Each twelve-month mentoring period starts with the mentor and *protégé* entering into a mentorship agreement whereby the *protégé*'s needs, as articulated to the mentor, are translated into goals and objectives. Progress is reported upon at quarterly intervals. It is envisaged that these goals and objectives relate to a concrete output for the *protégé* by way of a research proposal and/or a research-oriented career plan (Mtala 2009).

2. Methodology and design

To understand the meanings mentors construct around their mentoring task in the Unisa context, a qualitative inquiry employing interviewing was conducted in order to understand how mentors experience their participation in a formal mentoring relationship to address merit imperatives in a context of equity redress. The research sample was chosen with the express purpose of selecting participants with whom it would be most suitable to "wander" on the research journey (Henning 2004: 70) on account of the breadth and depth of their experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Johnson

2002: 106). A sample of nine professors (four women and five men) was purposefully selected on account of their outstanding research records and their active involvement in mentoring. As seasoned researchers they all met the expected output of 1.5 articles per year and their work experience as academics varied between fourteen and twenty-one years. All participants had entered into mentorship agreements, as required by the formal mentoring programme of Unisa's College of Human Sciences. With reference to the recommendations for a phenomenological study, Rossman & Rallis (2003: 138) state that three to five substantial interviews with information-rich participants provide intensive coverage of the data. This statement was corroborated by the researcher when saturation of information occurred after nine interviews and she realised that she was no longer learning anything new (Greef 2005: 294).

In-depth recursive interviews, in which participants were prompted through broad, open questions and probes to narrate and reflect on their mentoring experiences, provided the data for a thick description of the phenomenon (Henning 2004: 6). The open questions related to mentors' perceptions of the following: the institutional rationale for mentoring; mentors' reasons for participating in a formal mentoring programme; mentors' mentoring focus and planning of the mentoring process; mentoring outcomes anticipated by mentors; mentors' rewards for mentoring; race and gender issues in mentoring, and expected/unexpected issues encountered with mentoring so far. The interviews were audio-taped and the content was transcribed. Inductive analysis based on the Tesch model was used to ensure that all perspectives and issues arising from the data were included in the report (Poggenpoel 1998: 343). Guba's trustworthiness model was used to establish the validity and reliability of the qualitative research in terms of truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Poggenpoel 1998: 348-50). The anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their disclosures were guaranteed at all times.

The theory underlying the empirical investigation is discussed in the next section.

3. Mentoring in academia

New entrants to academia perceive their movement towards more intensive participation in the academic environment as contingent on concerted mentoring efforts. As knowledge-power brokers, mentors are expected to be open to analysing their mentoring roles and to accept the multiple realities of the newcomers (Gravett & Petersen 2007: 205) in order to assist them with constructive workplace learning. It is important first to reflect on the workplace environment in which such learning should take place.

4. Workplace environment

4.1 A community of practice as a basis for workplace learning

The workplace of a higher education institution relates to what Wenger (2000: 229) describes as a community of practice, which refers to the social "container" of the competences that are needed in the specific setting and which, through mutual discourse, is defined by the participants of the specific community. The discourse in the community of practice represents the framing of life in a particular way and encapsulates a specific history, culture and social identity (Pratt & Nesbit 2000: 118) caused by joint enterprise, mutual engagement and a shared repertoire (Wenger 2000: 229). A community of practice, with its specific discourse, develops from a convergent interplay of these three elements which is born of and based on purposeful learning (Lave & Wenger 1991: 96).

Within a specific community of practice, purposeful learning aims to achieve desirable outcomes for the individual and the organisation to ensure the sustained development of both parties (Mathews 2003: 321). This is possible through learning as interplay between social competence and personal experience, combining personal transformation with the evolution of social structures (Wenger 2000: 227). Social competence is contingent on social capital, which flows from the interest shown in an individual's initial development and the norms held and enforced by fellow community members who have shaped and

controlled the person's activities and approaches to life and relationships with others (Van Wyk & Lemmer 2007: 301). Apart from financial supplies, social capital resources comprise emotional, cognitive, spiritual, physical, support structure-related and relationship-oriented resources and resources relating to knowledge of a community's hidden rules (Kamper 2008: 1). The availability of these resources promotes learning, which takes place by employing aspects such as specific events, internal leadership, a rich fabric of connectivity, distinct membership, a unique set of artefacts and tailor-made learning projects (Wenger 2000: 230). The result is the equipping of newcomers with a learning process of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger 1991: 29), gradually leading them to more central participation within the specific community of practice.

Learning via legitimate peripheral participation is based on the underlying values of the specific workplace, which shapes how participants think and react (Wenger 2000). Traditionally this is linked to a functionalist perspective of mentoring (Darwin 2000) as containing an increasing understanding of "how, when, and about what old-timers collaborate, collude and collide, and what they enjoy, dislike, respect and admire" (Lave & Wenger 1991: 95). For Darwin (2000: 199) this implies a Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest process in which newcomers learn techniques for operating successfully within the specific community, thus placing them "ahead of the pack".

To be placed ahead of the pack, young academics must acquire techniques relating to competencies in research and publishing skills (Gardiner *et al* 2007: 427). The quantity of publications produced is a strong predictor of career advancement (Kirchmeyer 2005: 647) and a move to more central participation in the community of practice. Publishing techniques encompass skill at academic writing, turning research into journal articles, choosing the right journal, dealing with referees' and editors' comments, and engaging in networking (Mathews 2003: 328).

4.2 Mentoring functions and workplace learning

As a learning strategy to enhance workplace learning, mentoring involves the three components of the career advancement and pro-

fessional development of a *protégé* by a high-ranking member of the organisation with advanced experience and knowledge who is committed to act as a mentor.[1]

To advance the career and professional development of the *protégé*, career and psychosocial functions are presupposed (Kram 1983). The career function enables *protégés* to learn the ropes of the workplace and to prepare for advancement. This is linked to the mentoring roles of sponsorship, coaching and provision of learning opportunities which, for Mertz (2004: 551), hold a mentoring intent of brokering and advising. Psychosocial functions raise *protégés'* sense of competence, clarity of identity and professional effectiveness, and include the mentoring roles of counselling and friendship (Kram 1983: 613-4), which are based on a modelling intent from the mentor (Mertz 2004: 551). Mentoring relationships vary in emotional intensity (Kram 1983), and those characterised by intimacy and a strong interpersonal bond are best able to perform psychosocial functions. Task-specific skills and access to job-relevant knowledge may, however, be acquired adequately without the developer and *protégé* being emotionally close (Kirchmeyer 2005: 644).

Given that mentoring is linked to the historically common practice of assistance in vocational development, the career function of mentoring precedes the psychosocial function (Cunningham 1999: 443, Kram 1983: 616, Louw & Waghid 2008: 208). Although vocational development for academics addresses teaching as well as research competencies, it focuses in general on research or on managing teaching in order to produce more research with a view to career progression (Ewing *et al* 2008: 302). Apart from the added value of research-led teaching, research outputs are quantifiable (Kirchmeyer 2005, Gardiner *et al* 2007, Mertz 2004) and are thus valuable to the merit imperative of economic efficiency (Elliot 2005: 69) in terms of sustaining a successful and productive university (Gardiner *et al* 2007: 430, Kirchmeyer 2005: 640). According to Kirchmeyer (2005: 644), publication productivity is arranged through collegial relationships based on shared professional interests, whether or not

1   Cf Blake-Beard 2001, Bower 2007, Cunningham 1999, Darwin 2000, Kirchmeyer 2005, Kram 1983, Mertz 2004, Smith *et al* 2000.

the relationships are emotionally close. However, Thomas (2001: 5) believes that, if *protégés* do not experience their mentors as counsellors, they struggle to implement the coaching advice.

4.3 Mentoring effects

The means whereby mentoring achieves career advancement accounts for the nature of mentoring effects in terms of attitude, performance, promotion and compensation outcomes. Accordingly, two mutually inclusive but distinguishable perspectives on mentoring outcomes are identified, namely a performance and a political perspective (Kirchmeyer 2005: 640). Following the performance perspective, mentoring directly affects career advancement through performance. Aiding the acquisition of task-specific skills and job-relevant knowledge and providing access to information and resources that facilitate task accomplishment, connote a functionalist approach to mentoring (Darwin 2000). The entry of *protégés* into academia is eased by implicitly conserving and protecting the prevailing discursive practices within the community of academic discourse (Gravett & Petersen 2007: 203).

The political perspective on mentoring outcomes stresses that advancement is dependent on resources of power (Kirchmeyer 2005: 640) on account of social capital source provisioning (Kamper 2008: 1). The underlying argument is that the individual's contacts, social background and political skills should be improved as factors that will influence organisational productivity. Linked to a radical humanist approach, this holds that mentoring places social justice in the foreground, where power relations are challenged and worker subjectivity is respected. In a mentoring process in which social skills have to be acquired and contacts established, emotional closeness then becomes particularly important (Kirchmeyer 2005: 644), and a climate of risk-taking, dialogue and horizontal relationships is developed to create new knowledge (Darwin 2000). This is arranged by creating a space for new entrants to academia who were previously excluded from positions of power to appropriate the discourse of academia and to contribute to the development and transformation of the dominant discourse (Gravett & Petersen 2007: 203, Louw

& Waghid 2008: 219). By so doing, mentoring develops *protégés'* potential and optimal functioning and their conscious awareness of constructing their work-related realities so as to promote their own sense of control (Greyling & Du Toit 2008: 957). Schlosser & Foley (2008: 65) sensitise us, however, to the unattainable utopia of full equality in mentoring relationships where participants come from diverse backgrounds, and to the need for mentors to raise multicultural issues with their *protégés* to prevent the development of an atmosphere of denial and oppression.

4.4 Mentoring period

Following Kram's (1983) phase model, mentoring relationships in general last from three to six years, and goals evolve over time as the relationship moves through the phases of initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition. Each of these phases is characterised by particular affective experiences, developmental functions and interactional patterns that are shaped by the *protégé*'s needs and the organisational circumstances (Kram 1983). With regard to the career progression of minorities, Thomas (2001: 1) found that promising white professionals tend to enter a fast track early in their careers whereas high-potential minorities take off later. Such trajectory differences impact on the perseverance levels of high-potential minorities, who become discouraged when they fail to be fast-tracked early in their careers. Smith *et al* (2000: 259) found that additional amounts of mentoring make no significant impact on the affective commitment of minorities and their intention to job-hop. Both authors conclude that minorities need significantly more career and psychosocial mentoring than majority-group *protégés* to become committed to their organisations (Smith *et al* 2000: 259, Thomas 2001: 5).

4.5 Mentor and *protégé* qualities

As workplace learning responsibilities to junior colleagues involve many different and often overlapping tasks with different levels, frequency or intensity of interaction, the possibility exists for the creation of lateral learning groups or peer learning opportunities adjacent to mentoring dyads (Gravett & Petersen 2007: 204, Thomas

2001: 7). What distinguishes mentoring from other workplace learning relationships, however, is the intensity of involvement and trust required with mentoring and the degree to which career advancement is the primary focus (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero 2004: 11, Mathews 2003: 323, Mertz 2004: 555).

Owing to the importance of research competencies for career advancement, faculty mentors are, in the first instance, accredited professionals (Messmer 2000) with outstanding research records that distinguish them as "being competent" (Bower 2007: 78). They have a positive attitude towards their work and the capacity to engender enthusiasm among other employees, which implies strong leadership and good communication skills (Messmer 2000). Considered from a radical humanist perspective, faculty mentors are street-smart and politically astute, and they understand the "institutional canon" to move strategically through the workplace (Blunt & Conolly 2006: 203). In a multicultural context, faculty mentors are able and willing to work with the meanings *protégés* from other cultural groups assign to the world of work in order to tighten these meanings by way of cooperative meaning-making aimed at achieving measurable outputs (Greyling & Du Toit 2008: 976-7).

Protégé's qualities relate to emotional stability based on good self-awareness and high self-esteem (Huwe & Johnson 2003: 44). Competent *protégés* are coachable in that they are willing to learn from their mentors (Kram 1983: 615). They show evidence of an internal locus of control; in other words, a general sense that their performance and success during mentoring will be contingent upon their own choices and behaviour (Huwe & Johnson 2003: 45). They exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence and are able to modify their behaviour according to different environmental requirements (Smith *et al* 2000: 259). Competent *protégés* demonstrate a strong commitment to their profession and a pertinent need for independent functioning (Messmer 1998).

4.6 Mentors' willingness to mentor

In general, the polarity of generativity versus stagnation suggests the potential value of a mentoring relationship for the mentor. By

enabling others, the midlife academic satisfies important generative needs arising from being confronted with the challenge of readjusting future dreams and coming to terms with past accomplishments (Erikson 1983). Mentors are further motivated by their own experiences as satisfied *protégés* (Ewing *et al* 2008: 297). There is also an egoistic concern for self-preservation which Bower (2007: 80) explains as an engagement in mentoring to lighten one's own task so that fewer problems are experienced in the workplace.

Although mentoring is assumed to be inherently good and beneficial to the mentor, not all potential mentors are equally willing to commit to a mentoring relationship. As interpersonal relationship theories suggest, all kinds of relationships demonstrate some variation of a social and emotional cost-benefit analysis. Benefits are therefore what each person perceives to be valuable, and even if the relationship is mutually beneficial and satisfying, participants constantly seek the greatest rewards at the lowest cost (Homans 1961, Mertz 2004: 545). This implies that the cost of engaging in a relationship will be a consideration in an individual's willingness to do so, and that relationships and actions with different costs will have different levels of appeal.

Costs with regard to senior academics' willingness to participate in mentoring relate to aspects such as the ingrained, insistent individualism of academia (Bennet 1998: 37), a hesitance to mentor in a specifically assigned relationship (Johnson-Bailey 1999: 669), and the mentoring arrangements being experienced as "contrived collegiality" (Long 1997: 116). Costs of cross-race and cross-gender mentoring relationships are observed to be high in that mentoring is in general perceived to be homogeneous in nature, based on surface-level and deep-level similarities (Blake-Beard 2001: 337). Perceived similarity, identification and shared experience result in same-race and same-gender mentoring dyads experiencing higher comfort levels, easier communication and higher satisfaction.[2] Mertz (2004: 557) points out, however, that same-gender and same-social and cultural attributes such as race, religion and social class are factors that

2 Cf Johnson-Bailey 1999: 669, Johnson-Bailey & Cervero 2004: 11, Schlosser & Foley 2008: 67, Smith et al 2000: 259, Thomas 2001.

are not innate to relationships and are therefore not necessarily major components in defining and distinguishing relationships *per se*.

Another major cost of mentoring relates to time constraints, added to the high-performance demands made on senior staff (Cunningham 1999: 457, Ewing *et al* 2008: 300). Long (1997: 121) emphasises that if insufficient time was allowed for the development of the mentoring relationship, it could fall short of reaching its objectives or could even completely dissolve. Mentors' willingness to mentor also tends to wane when *protégés* are excessively insecure and needy (Huwe & Johnson 2003: 47) or when there is a lack of viable incentives for the mentor (Bower 2007: 80).

The above clearly shows that mentoring, with its career and psychosocial function to capacitate junior staff to move from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation, is contingent on sufficient time, a natural pairing process and acknowledgement of the contribution of the mentor. Equally contingent is the awareness of multicultural and social justice issues which, if not considered, may blunt the impact of mentoring, resulting in failure to sustain the research outputs demanded by the need for economic efficiency.

All these issues were considered in the empirical investigation which determined mentors' interpretations of their contextual mentoring task. These interpretations are discussed below.

5. Findings

Mentors' perceptions of their mentoring task, as described earlier, are presented according to six themes. The discussions are substantiated by *verbatim* excerpts from the interviews. For the sake of confidentiality and to distinguish them from one another, participants are referred to as participants A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I.

5.1 The institutional rationale for the formal mentoring programme

There was consensus among participants on the merit-oriented reason for the formal mentoring programme at Unisa. It was accepted that, for the sake of the institution's financial survival, research

outputs were paramount, and the fact that the pool of productive researchers were "in the second half of their 50s and nearly retiring" (participant A) placed research outputs in jeopardy. A concerted effort was therefore needed "to get the black people ready for the takeover" (participant D), that is, as the productive white researchers retired. Participant E emphasised that, in a scenario where affirmative action legislation required that staff profiles should reflect the country's demographic realities, "you get people in the system who won't probably be there if it wasn't for the transformation situation", hence the necessity for a concerted effort "to increase the outputs of black colleagues" (participant E).

From a political perspective, formal mentoring is interpreted as an initiative to shift the research-oriented power base into the hands of the previously disadvantaged. Participant B explained the supremacy and bargaining capacity associated with publishing successes as follows: "We that publish have money to go overseas, we have influence, we have standing in the university". Developing *protégés'* research capacities therefore enhances their sense of control and their conscious awareness of constructing their own work-related realities (Greyling & Du Toit 2008) and moving to and enjoying full membership of the community of practice with all its privileges (Wenger 2000).

5.2 The *protégé* corps

As mentioned earlier, new and young black academics should be mentored with regard to research and tuition needs and be encouraged to co-publish with the experienced white academics who are approaching retirement (Farrell 2008: 6, Unisa 2006: 8, 9). The term "young academic" appeared to be a moot concept among participants. Some interpreted it as defining academics who were novice researchers in that "they do not reach the expected outputs of 1,5 articles per year, regardless of age" (participant A). Others expressed concern about the feasibility of mentoring academics who had been at Unisa for a significant period of time and had already reached the middle management level. As pointed out by participant B, "many of the people that we are mentoring are bosses, as it were, and they

have been at Unisa anything between 10 and 15 years". This probably relates to the slower trajectories associated with the fast-tracking of minorities (Smith *et al* 2000, Thomas 2001). There was, however, consensus that *protégés* were, in the first instance, recently employed young black female academics. Related to the Unisa Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) arrangements, it is officially stated on the 2009 Performance Agreement form for professors that they should mentor especially black young women (BYW) "as the black females as a group is the most unproductive group with regard to research" (participant H).

5.3   Mentoring focus

Mentoring is in general expected to provide assistance with research, tuition and leadership needs. However, unquestionable consensus prevailed among participants that the institutional demands of mentoring at Unisa related primarily to a merit imperative of empowering *protégés* with research-oriented skills to sustain research outputs and, therefore, institutional survival. Participant C emphasised the internationally accepted understanding that the concept of outputs did not refer to "your study guides or your tutorial letters, but to your research outputs". The research-focused example used in a mentorship workshop to highlight what was expected of mentors, albeit regarded as absurd, was recalled. Participant C pointed out: "In the examples they used to demonstrate our task they said we should help the protégé to publish three articles in a year … absolutely ridiculous". Many participants therefore perceived "fast-tracking" as a negative concept associated with the creation of a superficial ambience in which the emphasis was on "developing steroid-fed academics" (participant E). It was felt that some *protégés* might, as a result, develop unrealistic expectations about the research outputs they would be able to deliver after participating in the formal mentoring programme. Participants maintained that the most important research skill for *protégés* to acquire was "academic writing, making the selection of what is going to go into the article, doing the literature study" (participant B), all for the sake of delivering research outputs (Ewing *et al* 2008, Gardiner *et al* 2007, Kirchmeyer 2005) and

placing *protégés* with ideal *protégé* qualities ahead of the pack (Darwin 2000, Huwe & Johnson 2003).

5.4 Rewards for the mentor

With reference to generativity (Erikson 1983), the intrinsic satisfaction of helping and supporting colleagues was something that the majority of the participants identified as a major reason for their willingness to mentor. On the general wellbeing of the *protégé*, participant D declared: "If I see my protégé happy that makes me tick, I get energy from that". Another participant with good memories of having been a *protégé* added that "to feel that you've made a difference to someone's life – like my mentor did to mine – adds value to your own life" (participant F). However, one participant who was also steered by intrinsic satisfaction expressed concern about the cost of mentoring when engaging with *protégés* who were not really motivated, but "that are only there because they feel that they are supposed to ask to be mentored, but they do not keep to closing dates" (participant A).

Extrinsic incentives related to incremental salary benefits in that the 2009 Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) agreement for professors lists mentoring as an official duty of professors. Linked to "mentoring (that) is on the IPMS for 2009" (participant D), the privilege granted to professors to work from home if their research outputs were intact and if they were actively involved in mentoring was regarded as a further significant incentive for mentoring. Participant A commented on this as follows: "The message is clear, you will not be allowed to work from home if you don't mentor formally, and working from home is a *huge* privilege". Joint publications also served as an extrinsic motivation for mentoring. With regard to mentors' solo publication initiatives, however, judged against the backdrop of a cost-benefit analysis of every action/decision taken (Mertz 2004), the alarming tendency among some proven researchers of bringing their own research outputs to a halt two years prior to retirement was pointed out. The reason for this was that "then there's no incentive for them any more as the university does not pay out retired academics for their research outputs" (participant C). Given

the importance of research outputs for sustained economic efficiency, it was suggested that such tendencies be counteracted by undertaking to pay out academics for their research outputs after retirement "so that at least the university gets the number of publications and it's for the benefit of the institution" (participant C).

5.5   The formal mentoring programme

Although participants pointed to the lack of spontaneity and mutual consent with a formal mentoring programme, they acknowledged the value of a formal mentoring arrangement to rectify capacity problems and sustain adherence to merit imperatives. As pointed out by participant A, by formalising the mentoring programme "you get people to sign contracts, you get them together, you furnish them with material, you send them on workshops and you ask them on a quarterly basis to report back", all for the sake of concertedly delivering desired outcomes. It was emphasised, though, that the formal approach, with its focus on a specific corps of *protégés*, was concerned only with coaching and ignored psychosocial features relating to friendship and a modelling intent. Participant C opined: "For me it's not mentoring, it's coaching of a certain group of people". According to the radical humanist approach to mentoring, the virtue of deploying wise mentors who act as strategists in assisting *protégés* to plot out and plan their careers and choose opportunities that will benefit and empower them, should ultimately result in the delivery of independent researchers. Participants agreed that the success of the mentoring programme depended on the development of independent researchers so that, as participant B put it, "when the props are taken away (with retirement) there is still an output". Whether this is feasible if coaching is not accompanied by counselling (Thomas 2001) depends on shared professional interests (Kirchmeyer 2005) as pursued by a formal mentoring approach. The need for shared professional interests was acknowledged by participant I, who pointed out that the formal mentoring programme at Unisa "is something which has been professionally put together … which can stand protégé and mentor in good stead in terms of their career development".

5.6 Multicultural mentoring

None of the participants had any concerns about cross-race mentoring, which confirmed that race and ethnicity are not innate to such relationships (Mertz 2004). Cross-gender mentoring and the prospect of spending long periods of time with a man was, however, a concern for some female mentors. Participant B pointed out, however, that with Unisa's cross-race environment, cross-gender mentoring should not be a problem "because of the racial thing which structures it in a different way".

In examining the issue of social capital (Kamper 2008, Van Wyk & Lemmer 2007) and *protégé* qualities (Huwe & Johnson 2003), a participant with vast experience in mentoring in multicultural situations emphasised the need for a different kind of approach when mentoring academics from disadvantaged environments. Due to a history of insufficient social capital, such *protégés* developed "a learned helplessness of sitting passively and helpless" (participant A). In terms of a radical humanist approach to mentoring, such *protégés* needed constructive mentoring "to stimulate their self-efficacy" which, linked to social justice, involved a continuous focus on "what did they do well, how did they contribute" (participant A). On the other hand, *protégés* with self-efficacy "only want to know what is wrong, what can they do to improve because they believe in themselves" (participant A), justifying a functionalist approach to mentoring in order to yield efficiency (Darwin 2000).

Balancing mentoring support with developing self-efficacy through goal-setting and continuous constructive feedback is expected to achieve self-efficacy and belief in one's own abilities. It is evident, however, that the mentoring of *protégés* who have little or no self-efficacy will have to be carried out over a longer period of time. Notwithstanding that "making an academic is a long-term thing" (participant G), the general consensus among participants was that research capacities could be acquired by anyone. Success was, however, regarded as contingent on "hard work" (participant B), "perseverance" (participant C) and not being "de-motivated by failure" (participant A). It was also believed that the goals of mentoring were optimally realised in a radical humanist environment in which "she (the *protégé*) tells me about

things because I would like to have suggestions from her" (participant B), confirming the viability of contributing to the development and transformation of the dominant discourse (Gravett & Petersen 2007). The success of all mentoring initiatives and approaches was, however, as Elliot (2005) contends, contingent on adhering to the merit imperative of sustained research outputs.

6.   Conclusion

The formal mentoring programme implemented at the University of South Africa (Unisa), in which new and younger black academics are empowered by productive but ageing white academics, is understood to have been initiated in response to the merit imperative of sustainable research outputs. Although the programme is mainly cross-race in nature, mentors interviewed encountered no race-related problems. In addition to intrinsic motivation relating to generativity inspirations, participants identified extrinsic incentives associated with incremental salary benefits, the opportunity to work from home and co-publication possibilities. While spontaneity and modelling intent were forfeited with a formal mentoring approach, the mentors interviewed understood the need for a structured mentoring approach as a coaching strategy to ensure that the institution continued to comply with the merit imperatives in terms of research outputs. Fast-tracking of academic capacities was, however, perceived as superficial, particularly in the face of the self-efficacy problems with which some previously disadvantaged protégés grappled. Steered by democratic principles grounded in a radical humanist approach of social justice, mentoring with a view to increasing self-efficacy was characterised by goal-setting and continuous feedback. In this paradigm, mentors' feedback was constructive and affirming and inputs from *protégés* were invited and accommodated.

The formal mentoring programme has only been implemented for six months and the findings of the study are therefore limited. However, the findings represent the perceptions of senior academics at the start of their formal mentoring task, the purpose of which is to contribute to institutional survival by complying with merit imperatives

while satisfying the demands of equity. Follow-up studies in the form of impact investigations will be undertaken to evaluate the success of the programme in terms of quantifiable outcomes. The experiences and perceptions of *protégés* will be included in these studies.

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