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Making It Happen; Operational, Coordination and Strategic Concerns In Mentoring Schemes

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Abstract

The theoretical and practice concerns of mentoring service performance in mentoring research have been neglected. In comparison with studies into the effects of mentoring there have been few studies that seek to explore these. Mentoring Service Performance (MSP) can be thought of in theoretical terms as including some 'hard' features and some 'softer' features. In practice it involves generating a strategy and vision, co-ordinating activities and operational practices. Research was conducted using a survey of mentoring schemes, and case study data on six mentoring schemes. These provide evidence for identifying aspects of an MSP agenda, with operational, coordinative and strategic development challenges.

In the 'hard' domain there are diverse manifestations, but also a striking common factor; a situation where MSP is under-delivering numbers of active participants yet there are ambitions to expand as those involved perceive it to be a successful intervention. The softer issues about MSP are about strategic vision, scheme control and evaluation. Evolving effective MSP, better operational, coordination and strategic management of mentoring schemes, depends on recognising and handling these.

Introduction

One thing is clear from both theory and practice of mentoring, that many kinds of role and relationship are potentially involved. Literature reviews aiming to provide meta-analysis (D'Abate et al 2003) show this clearly. There is no agreement on core characteristics to differentiate mentoring, or one kind of mentoring from another, or mentoring from any other developmental interaction in studies. In the corporate training context mentoring may overlap with and yet need to be differentiated from coaching (Hegstad 1999, Aryee et al 2004, Clutterbuck & Megginson 2004, Hegstad & Wentling 2004). In the social inclusion context it may overlap with and yet need to be differentiated from befriending. (Harley & Smith 2004, Clayden & Stein 2005). As a result there are case studies accumulating but these may not be assimilated into a coherent picture for organisations to draw on. In the former there is more often a focus on demonstrating that mentoring works, comparing people not mentored with those mentored (Chao et al 1992). In the latter there has been a concern about the lack of

clarity regarding the term 'mentoring' and the purposes of the work across both voluntary and statutory sectors.

While attention devoted to this has resulted in many studies the underlying reality has been neglected; that mentoring is a service being delivered. Mentoring Service Performance (MSP) in this diverse and complex context may involve consideration of all kinds of functions (see Figure 1) in diverse settings with very varied kinds of people to form a particular role in a specific context. In this MSP can be thought of as involving features that span the following;

Hard	Soft
Above the surface	Below the surface
Simple	Complex
Tangible	Intangible
Real People	Social Capital Networks
Sound-bites	Lengthy Dialogues

Figure 1 Hard and Soft Features of MSP

'Above the surface' are the hard MSP concerns faced by individual schemes, tangible and involving all the parties directly concerned with the specific type of mentoring being used . These are easy to identify, and form the focus of much control and evaluation activity for many stakeholders; including mentors, mentees and funders. Below the surface are the soft MSP concerns. These are more difficult to see and make sense of, but it is these which can have a big impact on success, and be a challenge for certain key stakeholders, including scheme co-ordinators and researchers. They are also significant as they are common for all mentoring schemes.

By analogy understanding MSP in its hard and soft features is to be modelled using an iceberg analogy. Case study research exploring the mentoring service delivery of the 'tips', individual mentoring schemes, is of some interest and fairly common (Megginson et al 2006). But studies that stick to mapping the surfaces of mentoring policies and espoused practices cannot get at the underlying aims, operational, and management factors affecting MSP. We suspected that when that surface was broken, MSP challenges would be essentially the same across diverse schemes, even though mentoring itself was diverse, as an essentially hybrid relationship shaped above the surface by the participants, stakeholders and environment.

Hard MSP Features; Mentoring schemes rules and participants

The Surface; What limits what can be easily seed
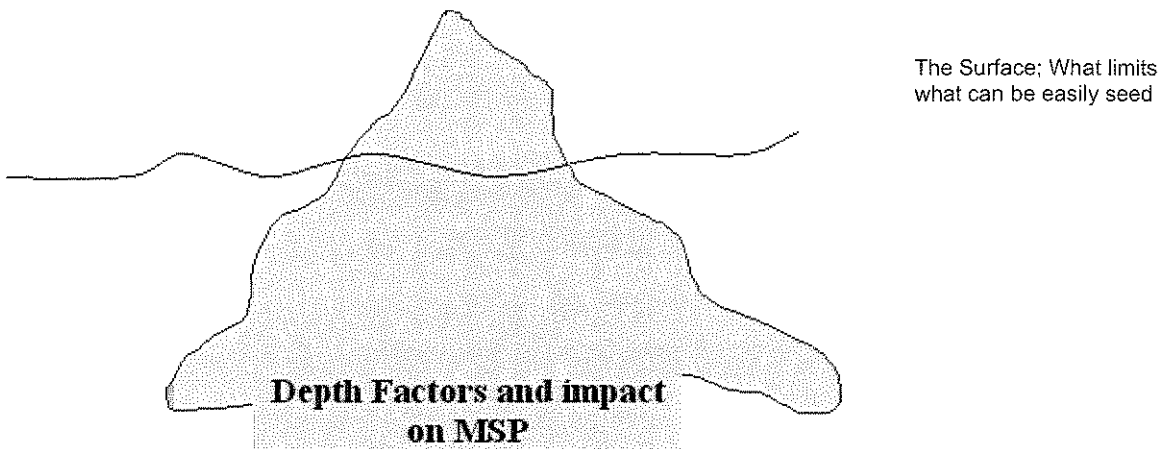
Depth Factors and impact on MSP

Figure 2 Mentoring Schemes- Above the Surface Issues and Depth Issues in MSP

There are two big issues here. The first is that there is a continuing lack of agreement between stakeholders about what constitutes the best focus on hard MSP. The operationalisation of mentoring remains a challenge. The second is that, even if this is agreed we might end up stuck with trying to find and describe and analyse common above the surface MSP features and the processes and techniques associated with them. To move beyond that is to seek to identify and research MSP challenges, the operational and management concerns common to schemes, both in the hard and the soft senses.

Literature Review; Hard and Soft Features

Some insight beyond the surface into potential depth mentoring service issues can be got by a literature review. Above the surface in this case, that which limits what we see and what we need to get down below to explore, is the detail of who is doing what with whom in mentoring schemes. The literature on different hybrid types of mentoring and associated relationships and roles is a starting point for exploring this. A literature review focussed on MSP issues rather than operationalising, questioning impact and effectiveness or mapping roles, provides one way to get beneath the surface, to identifying possible common concerns around mentoring service delivery and operational, management and strategic factors affecting the characteristics of mentoring in formal schemes.

Smith et al (2005), for example, present a study into the operation and management of mentoring schemes in the US within a variety of sectors. They looked at mentoring schemes present in academic, business and military organisations. They noted the importance of providing 'customised approaches to formal mentoring' and compare graduates entering a politically charged organisation, who may need developmental connections, to young academics who might prefer psychosocial development. They found differences between mentoring schemes within different organisation in a number of areas. These including that while respectability and wisdom were mentor characteristics ranked highly by military mentors they were not so ranked by 'academic' and 'business' mentors, who rated the need for sensitivity more highly.

The matching process is inherent to the success of the relationship, a view shared by Wilson & Elman (1990). They identify trust as a fundamental attribute of a successful relationship, and argue that formal matching processes are preferable and go as far to recommend the drawing of contracts to formalise the arrangements. They detail preferred characteristics of the mentor and protégé partnership, the mentor should be significantly more experienced than the protégé as this will benefit both parties. However, Mullen (1998) observes that specific hierarchical gap does not influence the effectiveness of a mentor in terms of their ability to deliver a combination of vocational and psychosocial benefits to their protégé. Arnold and Johnson (1997) recorded mixed findings regarding the association between hierarchical gap and benefits experienced.

Arnold & Johnson (1997) identified seven attributes that are characteristic of successful graduate mentoring programmes. The most significant attribute was regular and scheduled contact between mentor and mentee, and that the mentors have and are perceived as having high status within the organisation. The other attributes consisted of there being clear aims and objectives that are consistent with the organisational aims and that both mentor and mentee are briefed on, that the mentors are accountable and rewarded and that the benefits aimed for can't easily be achieved through other sources.

Clutterbuck & Megginson (o cit) looked at mentoring relationships at a more senior organisational level and identified the increased requirement for executive mentors as including the intensified pressure of work for executives. The role of the executive mentor varies considerably, they categorises these roles into three typographies, the "executive coach", the "elder statesman" and the "reflective mentor".

Harley and Smith (op cit) concentrate on the mentoring of disadvantaged and socially excluded young people. They did this through interviews with 13 project coordinators from mentoring projects throughout the area concerned, Scotland, as well as 26 mentors and 19 mentees from these projects. The study provides recommendations on best practice indicators for the process of mentoring young mentees coming from deprived and vulnerable backgrounds. Best practice indicators were identified for issues such as the matching process, length of relationship, how the relationship is reviewed, training and developing the mentors and monitoring and evaluating the process amongst others.

The matching process was seen as essential and although formal aspects were recommended such as producing a questionnaire or a matching application to ensure individuals skills, interests and aspirations were well suited, informal aspects were also recommended to compliment the formal aspects. Informal matching was encouraged by setting up initial meetings between the parties to ensure personalities were compatible before a long term relationship was established.

Clear and detailed recommendations on the length and frequency of the meetings were not provided as it was seen as important to treat each relationship as individual and therefore the formalities of the relationship should remain flexible, although it was recommended that meetings should last long enough to incorporate a catch up (a minimum of one hour was seen as sufficient). It was also recommended that the length of the relationship be seen as flexible, but should not last less than three or four months and not more than one year.

Reviewing the relationship was also identified as fundamental to the success of the schemes and it was recommended that a consistent, regular and formal review process should take place at least quarterly to monitor the progress of the mentee. While the review process is

focused on ensuring the safety and effectiveness of individual mentoring matched pairs , a monitoring and evaluation process should also be used to determine the current (and document the past) performance of the scheme as a whole. The monitoring and evaluation process should also be carried out consistently, regularly and be documented formally in order to improve future funding prospects as well as maintaining and improving performance.

The training and development of the mentors was seen as important to maintaining the performance of the scheme as a whole and Smith et al recommend that after a full induction, mentors should be involved in a structured training scheme that continually develops mentors as individuals. A range of conclusions were drawn on these issues with particular attention paid to the monitoring and evaluation and strategic considerations. The range of differing definition found stems from the variety of applications of mentoring, with definitions being tailored for different domains, ranging from corporate training to social inclusion. While the fundamentals of mentoring remain constant in any setting, the details are heavily affected by factors ranging from the easily identifiable such as age of the mentee to less tangible factors such as motivation of the scheme coordinator to fulfil the objectives set.

As well as presenting best practice indicators Harley & Smith et al present a continuum seeking to make sense of the overlap and difference between mentoring and befriending (see Figure 1). Befriending, at one end of the spectrum, has the sole goal of developing a trusting relationship over time in order to alleviate social isolation; mentoring, at the other end of the spectrum is about working towards agreed goals and objectives, with any social relationship achieved being incidental. Between these two lie a range of developmental interactions differentiated by the relative importance attributed to the relationship and the goal orientation.

Befriending………………………………………………..Mentoring

Figure 3 Befriending/Mentoring Continuum

The appropriate interaction for a particular young person depends on factors including the level of stability and continuity in their lives, the level of motivation to move towards "self-actualisation" and the extent of existing networks of support. For many young people experiencing disadvantage and exclusion, the most effective interaction is one that encompasses elements of both mentoring and befriending and which is flexible enough to move along the spectrum in response to the need at any given point in time.

One characteristic of a mentoring scheme that is commonly agreed on, especially when dealing with young people, is that the relationship between mentor and mentee should be flexible and should, where possible, be defined uniquely by the mentor and mentee. A slightly more contentious characteristic of a mentoring relationship is whether it should be a formal or informal arrangement and while much of the literature advocates the informal arrangement, many convincing arguments exist for the formalisation of relationships in order to maximise both safety and effectiveness for participants.

So, below the surface of diversity we can uncover potential operational, management and strategic factors affecting the characteristics of mentoring in formal schemes. The existing literature identified a range of factors worthy of exploration (see boxes one through to four). It is always important to recognise and keep in mind that the complexity of the environment a mentoring scheme exists in is such that it is very difficult to draw up a set of patterns

indicating best practice that govern different types of schemes. But the management of schemes may be improved as the result of better informed decisions about service delivery.

Section 1   Mentoring Service Performance; Aims and Purposes

- How do you define 'mentoring' in your mentoring scheme?
- How long has your scheme been established?
- Detail the financial support you receive.
- How many active mentors is your programme designed to have, i.e. mentors who are available to be matched to a mentee?
- How many 'active' mentors do you have, i.e. mentors currently matched to a mentee?
- How many other 'inactive' mentors do you have (not currently matched, on training, etc.)?
- What is the primary source of those who act as mentors in your scheme?
- How many people would you like to have being mentored as part of your scheme?
- How many people do you currently have being mentored?
- Do you provide your mentors with any training?

Section 2   Mentoring Service Performance; Operational Matters

- Frequency of meetings
- Duration of relations
- Length of sessions
- Mode of communication

Section 3   Mentoring Service Performance; Managing Mentoring

Reasons for introducing mentoring

- People in help and guidance roles in our organisation were over-stretched and we needed to introduce additional support
- There was evidence that introducing mentoring would help us respond to recognised performance problems our organisation faced
- There was funding available/senior support for initiating a mentoring scheme
- Mentoring was introduced to complement existing services on offer
- Mentoring was introduced as part of a wider change in our organisation
- There was a need to 'refresh' and/or 'rebrand' helper and development roles in our organisation
- Mentoring was introduced as a means of promoting social inclusion

Benefits have arisen as your mentoring scheme has been implemented

- Tangible improvements in outcomes for those mentored
- Bringing on line a good supply of high quality mentors
- Mentors being able to transfer learning from their experiences
- Other stakeholders valuing mentoring
- Feedback from mentors is used for improving organisational practices
- Mentors feeling they are fulfilling a need to 'give something' back

Section 4   Mentoring Service Performance; Strategic Concerns

How important are the following to your organisation as aims of your mentoring scheme?
- Instrumental aims; helping targeted individuals to grow and change in specific ways
- Empowering aims; providing a resource which a client group can make use of for various needs
- Organisational aims; raising the performance throughout the organisation or service
- Adding Value aims; providing an inexpensive contribution to learning and development I
- Involvement aims; bringing new kinds of people into development roles

What controls do you maintain over the mentoring process and what evidence is gathered to help ensure that these aims are achieved?
- Plans to expand the numbers of people mentoring as part of your scheme?
- Outline what is driving/limiting any plans for expansion.
- How long do you see mentoring continuing in your organisation?
- What is the best aspect of your scheme?

Methodology

Research Design

A survey was designed to gain evidence for these potential hard and soft MSP factors. A pilot version was produced and the questions revised, then a survey was published online. An internet-based survey was considered appropriate as production cost and administration, time to complete and time taken to input and analyse results are all reduced while the convenience to the respondent is increased through the ability to save responses and complete at a suitable time. The main negative consequence of using an online survey was the reduced response rate that can be expected.

The population approached was the membership of the Scottish Mentoring Network (SMN), an organisation with a database containing circa 350 email contact details. This was considered large enough to justify using online surveys. The majority of professionals registered with the SMN were from public sector organisations or the voluntary/ not for profit sector. To avoid skewing of the results, it was agreed that approaches would also be made to individuals in the

private and corporate sectors. These were not fruitful. For this reason it must be considered that the sample was generated from a single source and that the distribution of organisation types or areas of interest was not representative of the mentoring profession in Scotland.

However, the samples limitations were outweighed by the fact that the individuals represented had a specific interest in mentoring and were sufficiently interested in and affected by recent developments in the field to associate themselves with an organisation such as the SMN, and that for this reason could be expected to provide informed, unique and specific contributions to the research.

Although the potential for a low response rate was identified, it must be assumed that the use of an internet survey facility was a contributing factor to the low response rate of 6 usable responses. 4 respondents were mentoring scheme coordinators, 2 of these full-time. The others were scheme coordinators as part of a broader role in their organisations. The organisations were of varying size, but in the public or voluntary sector, with different interests in mentoring (see Table 1). Data from the survey is given first in the next section. However, each response was followed up. This opportunity to probe and clarify aspects of scheme operation remains a distinct advantage (Huselid and Becker 2000 and Gerhart et al 2000). The follow up was telephone interviews , semi structured, using the initial responses as a basis for further questioning. Six cases are therefore presented.

Survey Data

Number of employees in the organisation	No.	Type of organisation		Organisation's primary interest group with regards to mentoring	
1 to 9 employees	1	Private sector	0	Mentoring in the workplace	2
10 to 49 employees	2	Public sector	1	Mentoring in education	0
50 to 149 employees	0	Voluntary or not-for-profit sector	5	Mentoring as a service	3
150 to 249 employees	0			Other	1
250 to 499 employees	1				
More than 500 employees	2				
Total	6				

Table 1 Respondents Organisation Details

The common factors in the background to these schemes is that most were well established and were based on only short training support for mentors (see table 2). It was found that the schemes were of diverse scales (see Table 3). In most schemes there were shortfalls of mentors in the scheme compared with the desired levels of activity; but in most cases it was still an intention to expand the scheme.

Time Established	No.	Training For mentors	No.
Less than 6 months	1	A short induction	4
Between 6 months and 1 year	0	Our own short internal training course	4
More than 1 year but less than 2 years	3	A short external/specialist training course on mentoring	2
More than 2 years but less than 5 years	2	Longer training courses on mentoring that are accredited	1
More than 5 years	0	No training given	0

Table 2 Scheme Details

No. of mentors designed to have	No. of mentors currently matched	No. of inactive mentors	No. would like to have mentored	No. currently being mentored
10	6	0	10	6
>30	12	25	50	20
1000+	300 app	10	Up to 1500 per year	600 app
15	14	1	40	35
12 (more if funding available)	10	2	50 per year if there was enough	16
30	12	6	30	12

Table 3 Activity levels

The features of successful mentoring relationships in these schemes were seen to be either weekly or monthly meetings, with varying durations, usually taking 1-2 hours and mainly face-to-face but not exclusively so. (see Table 4)

Ideal frequency of meetings	No.	Ideal duration of relationship	No	Ideal duration of an individual session	No	Ideal modes of communication	No
Biannually	0	1-5 meetings	0	less than one hour	0	Face-to-face only	1
Quarterly	0	6-15 meetings	2	1-2 hours	5	Telephone/email only	0
Monthly	3	16-30 meetings	2	2-3 hours	1	Mainly face-to-face with some phone/ email	5
Weekly	3	31-60 meetings	1	more than 3 hours	0	Mainly phone/ email with some face-to-face	0
Irregularly	0	more than 60 meetings	1			Activity based	4

Table 4 Successful Scheme Characteristics

In relation to the reasons mentoring was used the following were strongly present:

- mentoring was introduced to complement existing services on offer
- there was funding available for initiating a mentoring scheme
- there was senior support for mentoring
- mentoring was introduced as a means of promoting social inclusion

The factors which were less important or not present were:

- a need to 'refresh' and/or 'rebrand' helper and development roles in the organisation
- evidence that introducing mentoring would help them respond to recognised performance problems in their organisations

All benefits were seen as major gains. In addition senior managers being mentored were able to operate in their leadership position for longer than those who had not had mentoring. For others, confidence and self esteem of mentees and mentors has improved. Mentees realised they had choices and were not destined to "have no future". The benefits, for one respondent, were based on anecdotal rather than scientific evaluation, as their scheme was in its early stages.

Control in schemes was managed in various ways:
- Supervision sessions with Mentors and evaluation received from mentors, mentees, referring agencies, parents/guardians
- Each meeting that took place was recorded and good communication between Mentors and Support Workers
- Ongoing communication with mentors with evaluation questionnaires to mentors and mentees
- Contracts with mentee, and financially with mentor. Regular monitoring, with annual evaluations and overall reviews of scheme. Client feedback was gathered separately
- Regular reviews with mentees, mentors, schools, parent/guardians, and other relevant parties
- A dedicated coordinator whom participants, mentors or mentees, can approach to discuss concerns at any time. This provides a lot of the anecdotal 'success' evidence.

Coordinators identified the following successful characteristics in their schemes:

- The level of support being offered to young people
- Watching people move on and recognizing their achievements
- Variety in terms of activities of mentees, it enriches the experience for all involved
- Being hosted within a whole set of organisational development services adds huge value to the mentoring, as there are other resources that senior managers can use to help implement the actions they want to take
- Qualitative improvements are much harder to measure but are key to the success of the project
- It is voluntary rather than prescriptive and the control at all stages is passed to the participants.
- All decisions are truly non-judgemental
- Advice and assistance is offered by the co-ordinator, however final decisions are always the participants to make.

Six Case Studies

The data from the survey provides one broad level of analysis; further analysis of each scheme was possible based on interviews with the respondents.

Case One

The first respondent was a mentoring scheme coordinator/manager within the voluntary/not for profit sector. They employed between 10 and 49 employees where mentoring was introduced as a compliment to an existing service. The organisations primary interest is coordinating volunteers for various projects and the respondent was responsible for coordinating a mentoring facility for these mentors.

The scheme had been established for between one and two years. The funding for this was secured internally and over a period of more than five years. The advantages of long term funding include a better ability to plan for the future and the confidence to offer long term mentoring relationships if required, although in this case they are rarely required due to the nature of the volunteer working with the organisation. The respondent believes that a mentoring scheme of this scale could not be offered if long term funding was not available.

The scheme is designed to coordinate over 1000 mentors with up to 1500 mentees catered for. However, currently the scheme has 300 mentors in relationships with approximately 600 mentees. The number of individuals requiring mentoring is set to grow, so the number of mentors will have to grow in line with this. Although the scheme has been established for over a year, it is still considered relatively new and the respondent believes that although the scheme is running at roughly half the capacity the initial matching process has been successful. The focus of mentoring in this organisation is a supporting and nurturing role where 'personal growth is encouraged' and where the mentee is encouraged to perform as an individual.

Currently no external training is offered by the scheme with existing training for mentors taking the form of an initial short induction and internal training courses with additional short courses provided ad hoc. An induction is seen as essential as the mentors involved in this scheme have limited or no experience of being a mentor and the induction is deemed essential to make sure

they share the same values as the organisation. Although a structured training programme would arguably be an advantage in this case, the respondent cites lack of resources and time as the main reasons for not implementing a training structure on a large enough scale to facilitate this organisations needs. The main training needs that are identified for the mentors on the scheme are goal setting and mentoring dialogue coaching, which the respondent believes are basic mentoring skills.

The respondent shared the opinion of two other respondents that meetings between mentors and mentees should be held monthly and believed that the relationship should last for more than six but less than sixteen meetings and agreed with the vast majority of respondents that an individual session should last for between one and two hours and believes that meetings should be held face to face (with some phone or email). The respondent cited honesty and a good matching process as important to the success of the relationship.

The scheme claims to make use of evaluation questionnaires to evaluate and control the mentor and the mentees performance and progress. However, the respondent admitted that it is incredibly challenging to control such a large scale mentoring operation and believes that, although useful, the evaluation questionnaires are not a significant measure of control.

Case Two

The second case is an organisation with over 500 employees again working in the voluntary or not for profit sector. This organisation provides mentoring as a service to vulnerable families. The respondent works as a mentoring support officer on a part time basis and coordinates the mentoring operation as part of this role. The scheme has been established for more than 2 but less than 5 years which reflects the funding period (which comes from an external source) of 3 to 5 years. The respondent does not see an end to the use of mentoring in this organisation and believes that mentoring is a 'vision for the future'. The respondent sees mentoring as an initial support programme for the mentors to take the first steps to moving on.

A common theme in the voluntary and not for profit sector is the inflexibility of the organisations providing funding in terms of the evidence of success they require. The second respondent believes that the funding organisations requirement of statistical evidence and the provision of funding with conditions attached means the support offered by the scheme is restricted and not flexible enough. While the respondent appreciated the need for evidence to be provided for the funding organisation to allocate funds, they also believe that it is too difficult to quantify the value of what is being achieved as part of this scheme.

The mentoring scheme is provided on a much smaller scale than the first scheme discussed and is designed to have 30 mentors and 50 mentees but like the first scheme, this scheme is working below capacity with only 12 mentors 'active' and 20 mentees currently in a relationship. However, like the first scheme, there are plans to expand but the respondent has concerns about the support staff and funding available to facilitate this expansion. Although in this case there are no concerns about the supply of mentors available, the respondent recognises the need to maintain healthy support mechanisms for the mentors in order to sustain success. The source of mentors in this organisation is primarily previous mentees as they are seen as having the best experience although mentors from a wider range of sources are also accepted.

Although this respondent's scheme is the only one that provides longer courses that are accredited, it is one of two that don't offer a formal induction. However, the respondent does not feel the need to provide an induction as the majority of mentors have previously been part of the scheme, so they share its values. The respondent firmly believes that accredited training for the mentors not only makes them better mentors, but in this case provides the previous mentees amongst them with a further step to social inclusion and an incentive for those who have been/are being successfully mentored to become a mentor, thus maintaining a healthy pool of mentors for the scheme. The respondent is happy with the training provided but would like to provide further accredited training to a higher level.

The opinions of the respondent on the characteristics of the relationship between mentor and mentee are slightly stronger than other respondents, ie. that meetings should be held weekly and relationships should last for more than 31 meetings but less than 60 meetings. A session should last for one to two hours and should be in the form of face to face correspondence. The respondent also cites trust and the ability to deliver promises as a major factor contributing to the success of a relationship. This is characteristic of a relationship with vulnerable individuals being mentored.

Of the reasons for introducing mentoring, the most pertinent were as a means to promote social inclusion and as a means to target a specific group of mentees that are not catered for by the other more general mentoring schemes. Meetings are recorded and support workers maintain good communication with the mentors as a means of controlling the relationship. While the respondent accepts that this may not be adequate control for some schemes, in this case they are believed to be suitable considering the source of mentors.

Case Three

The third case involves an organisation where a full time mentoring scheme coordinator in a mentoring project primarily concerned with the education sector. The organisation provides mentoring as a service and has between 10 and 49 employees. The funding has been externally provided and is unique in that no time limit is currently set on the funding. The project has existed for between 2 and 5 years and mentoring will be used for the foreseeable future, a prediction that is shared by most respondents, but in this case is more likely to be accurate rather than wishful thinking considering the 'unlimited' term of funding. The respondent saw mentoring as providing a positive role model for mentees and where goals are set and achieved which is reflected in the fact that (in this case) mentoring was introduced to, amongst other things, promote social inclusion.

The number of mentors used by this scheme varies depending on the level of funding available at the time but is approximately 12 and the scheme is working close to capacity with 10 mentors in relationships with the 16 mentees the scheme caters for. Although the categories for recruiting mentors are not overly restrictive, finding individuals with significant experience and 'perspective on life' is currently proving difficult. Although the scheme has plans for expansion, the main barrier to furthering these plans (apart from recruitment of good mentors) is the level of funding. This highlights the fact that just because funding is not limited in terms of time, it is important to achieve other successful factors to provide a resource fundamental to consistent mentoring relationships. In contrast to the previous respondent, where mentors came from a specific source, the source of mentors for this scheme is the broadest of all respondents as the respondent does not have set criteria for their applicants although indicates

that most apply as they were brought up in the area and want to give something back to the community.

The wide range of mentors is the main reason for this scheme providing a relatively comprehensive training scheme for the mentors. The training provided is diverse with initial inductions followed up by more in depth internal and external training courses on subjects such as Strategic Crisis Intervention and Prevention, Mental Health First Aid and solution Focused Brief Therapy but the respondent identified a need for further training in areas such as how to form an exit strategy and maintaining boundaries with parents. The need for training on maintaining boundaries with parents can be explained by the respondent's belief that a positive and non-threatening relationship with the parents or guardians or each mentee is essential to ensuring a successful relationship.

The respondent believed that weekly meetings are ideal and that a relationship should last for more than 60 meetings. The length of an individual session is believed best at between 2 and 3 hours and although face to face meetings are considered best, the respondent also identifies activity based mentoring as useful. The characteristics identified as 'ideal' by this respondent may be heavily influenced by the fact that they deal solely with young mentees who, it can be assumed, need more attention and time to form a successful relationship. The respondent identified reviews with all relevant parties as their main control mechanism. These are carried out on a quarterly basis and although no formal corrective action is required all problems are consistently and constructively resolved.

Case Four

Case four represents an organisation with more than 250 but less than 500 employees in the voluntary and not for profit sector. The primary interest group for this mentoring scheme is mentoring in the workplace and the respondent performs the role of mentoring scheme coordinator as part of a wider organisational role. The mentoring scheme has existed for between one and two years. As with most of the other respondents, there is no foreseeable end to the scheme and has plans to expand that are only limited by the time available to the respondent.

The funding is received from an external source and is given for a period of approximately four years. The length of funding granted to this scheme is longer than the average, but the respondent expresses an opinion that more developmental work would be achievable if the term of funding were greater. The respondent believes the mentoring provided is an individual, confidential support relationship that allows the mentee to explore issues important to their leadership. This organisation offers other services to compliment the mentoring scheme such as coaching, all with the objective of organisational growth.

This scheme is operating close to capacity with 14 mentors in relationships with 35 mentees and the source of mentors is independent management consultants with significant experience in the voluntary sector. Although there are plans for expansion, these are not seen as essential and will only be implemented when the respondent has the time to do so successfully and without compromise. The source of mentors is not a limiting factor to the expansion of the scheme even though the criteria for mentors is the most restrictive of all those explored in this study.

No formal, structured mentor training is given through the scheme beyond the initial short induction. The induction is believed to be essential as the respondent believes it provides an opportunity to make sure the mentors know what their objectives are and again, to make sure they share the values of the organisation. However, the training provided beyond the induction is limited but believed to be adequate due to the high level of professional experience displayed by the mentors involved.

The ideal format for a mentoring relationship as described by this respondent is of monthly meetings lasting more than one but less than two hours as part of a relationship that lasts for more than 16 but less than 30 meetings. The relationship should be carried out person to person and the respondent advocates' activity based methods of communication. The respondent also advocates the use of a neutral location designated by the mentee. The need to cater for the mentees needs is apparent here as it was where the schemes dealt with children, but it can be assumed that in this case the need is a result of the fact that the mentee is a paying client.

The two main reasons for mentoring being introduced in this organisation were as a part of a wider organisational change and as an additional support mechanism for people in a guidance role. The respondent believes that mentoring provides a positive method of specific management development where the less tangible skills can be enhanced to the benefit of the individual and the organisation they work for. The most significant tangible benefit of mentoring observed by the respondent in this scheme is that the mentees have been able to remain in their positions for longer than those who haven't been mentored. It is believed that the reasons for this are varied and include increased job satisfaction and the fact that mentees feel greater value from their organisation.

The type of mentee once again influences way the scheme is managed in that this respondent provides individual contracts with their mentees and mentors and regular monitoring and evaluations are carried out compliment client feedback surveys. This is by far the most comprehensive set of control mechanisms detailed by the respondents and it is fair to assume that this is a result of the environment the scheme operates in.

Case Five

Case five represents the smallest organisation in the sample with less than ten employees. The respondent was a Child Services Manager and spends time coordinating the mentoring scheme as part of this role. The organisation is a voluntary, not for profit organisation that uses mentoring as a service that supports vulnerable young people. The scheme was established between one and two years ago to compliment existing services offered by the organisation but there is uncertainty as to the duration of the project. Interestingly, the respondent believes that the uncertainty regarding duration of the project does not affect the working practices of the scheme which operates as it would regardless of the projected lifespan. The scheme is externally funded and is unique to the respondent s discussed here as the term of the funding is less than one year. Although the funding is uncharacteristically short for the type of scheme, the respondent feels confident that further funding will be provided and as mentioned above the believes the scheme operates as normal regardless of the funding period.

This scheme is also the smallest of all studied with capacity for ten mentors and ten mentees and like most other respondents; this scheme is working below capacity. Interestingly the

scheme is one of only two schemes studied that has an equal number of mentors to mentees. The respondent believes this is an advantage as the mentor has the opportunity to focus on one mentee rather than having to develop multiple relationships which is believed to be challenging. The number of mentors available is high in comparison to the number of mentees and this is also given as a practical reason for the ratio of mentors to mentees being equal. Again, this scheme is unique in that there are no plans to expand the numbers of people being mentored. The respondent believes that this is primarily because of the number of mentees staying steady, but acknowledges that the short term funding available would make expansion plans difficult, if they were in fact required.

The training provided for the mentors is limited to short in house training courses without a formal induction of mentors. Interestingly an induction is not identified as a form of training that would improve the performance of mentors but goal setting sessions were identified as beneficial. The respondent does not believe that there is a need for training to be enhanced as, while the respondent acknowledges the importance of structured mentor training in some schemes, in this scheme the supervision process provides an adequate, cheaper alternative.

In terms of mechanisms for control, this organisation operates a supervision programme where mentors are supervised, which compliments continual evaluation from all parties involved. It is believed that the strict mechanisms for control exerted over the mentors are an effective substitute for more comprehensive training. The supervision sessions are believed to provide an opportunity to continually improve the performance of the mentors by providing specific support to their areas of need.

As expected for a scheme dealing with young people, the respondent believes that longer relationships are more beneficial with weekly sessions lasting for between one and two hours seen as ideal. Again, the advantages of activity based mentoring for young people are recognised in this case and the respondent believes that there advantages are not restricted to mentoring young people. However, the respondent believes that the duration of a relationship should be between 16 and 30 meetings which is short in comparison to other schemes dealing with young people. Although the respondent would not indicate this is a result of restricted funding it is difficult to believe that this does not have an influence.

Case Six

The public sector organisation has more than 500 employees and provides mentoring as a workplace activity. The respondent is the mentoring coordinator, a task performed as part of a wider organisational role. This scheme is the youngest of those studied having been established for less than 6 months and is also the only scheme that has a limited period of existence of another one or two years before it is reviewed and altered or terminated.

The funding comes from both internal and external sources and covers the planned span of the project. Although the respondent is not certain, it is believed that there is a good chance of further funding if the scheme is deemed a success.

Similarly to the previous respondent's scheme, this scheme is the only other scheme that aims to work with equal numbers of mentors and mentees. However, the scheme displays the more common characteristic of working below capacity. The fact that the scheme is not facilitating the number of relationships it is capable of is a result of the short period of time that it has

been in existence and the fact that the ratio of mentors to mentees is equal is a result of the workload of the mentees and the fact that mentoring does not constitute a large part of their wider role. The respondent believes that more than one relationship would prove to be too much of a strain on their time.

The training provided is comprehensive but no accredited training is provided for the mentors. The respondent doesn't believe accredited training to be of high value as the mentors used by the scheme are not 'career mentors' and have consistently display previous academic and professional achievements. In this scheme, training is started by an initial induction with internal training courses being offered. These are complimented by frequent focus groups where the mentors get together and share experiences, which similarly to respondent five, is a process believed to improve the performance of mentors through sharing experiences. Further to the sessions provided internally, external sessions are provided by external experts. Although comprehensive training is provided, interpersonal skills are identified as an area that cannot be improved through formal training and role plays were identified as a possible method to enhance these skills.

The ideal frequency of meetings was described as monthly with sessions lasting for between one and two hours and relationships being characteristically short for the type of mentees/mentors involved at between 6 and 15 meetings. Again it is believed that the relationship should take the form of face to face with some phone or email contact involved. The respondent believes it is important that the relationship is flexible in terms of the partnership and the parties involved should have a fair degree of choice when it comes to who their mentor/mentee is. It was also deemed important that either party can withdraw from the relationship if it is not longer seen to be working.

There were many reasons for introducing this mentoring scheme, but as well as the more common reasons, in this case mentoring was introduced to promote equal opportunities within the organisation. Although the general feeling was that this aim was achieved, it is understandably difficult to quantify.

Controlling the mentors in this scheme is seen as an informal process with no paper records of achievements or objectives being completed. The scheme operates an open door control format where participants can seek advice through a dedicated 'supervisor' who is available to tackle individual problems. Although this is a positive facility, it cannot be classified as a control mechanism as it is down to the mentors to identify a problem and take corrective action. However, it is important to acknowledge that this respondent believes that the best aspect of this scheme is that the control lies in the hands of the participants.

Discussion; Above the Surfaces and Hidden Depths

The respondents, mentoring scheme co-ordinators, represented mentoring schemes in diverse 'above the surface' and hard contexts, dealing with mentoring as a workplace activity and as a community based service to specified groups of people. Although the sample is small, the quality of the responses allows some below the surface analysis of the softer issues. As the literature on mentoring suggests, the range and variety of characteristics displayed by 'mentoring' is considerable, with different schemes using different techniques and indeed using mentoring in apparently completely different ways. Some use mentoring to support vulnerable individuals in society while others successfully use mentoring to increase retention of valuable members of staff. The mentoring activities in these schemes are different in some obvious

above the surface ways. For example, with the schemes that mentored young people, the ideal relationship characteristics were of high intensity where the schemes that involved mentoring as a workplace activity valued characteristics that encouraged freedom, with the relationship managed by the participants. Further to the intensity of the relationship, activity based mentoring was seen as an activity well suited to the mentoring of young people although one workplace mentoring coordinator suggested that the benefits were not restricted to working with the young.

In responses from different contexts it is apparent that above the surface MSP differences exist between schemes that deal with young people and schemes that deal with employees. The differences were the focus on relationship development and the subsequent intensity of the relationships, the level of training provided for mentors and the control and monitoring mechanisms in place. It is apparent that the organisations who worked with young people valued training in a different way as those mentoring professionals. The scheme coordinators for young persons mentoring schemes agreed that training was a fundamental practice to ensure mentors were of a basic standard where the scheme coordinators for workplace mentoring schemes had a more advanced requirement of the training provided and wanted to make sure the training encouraged shared values as well as enhancing mentoring skills. The reasons for this is not clear, but "safety" and "risk assessment" as key considerations in working with young people may provide sufficient motivation to concentrate resources on ensuring the fundamentals are at a consistently high standard.

It is interesting to note that the workplace scheme coordinators that participated in this study were more conscious of the controls that were required to maintain the standards of mentoring than the young person's scheme coordinators. Maintaining and controlling the standard of mentoring when young people are involved is a significant consideration. However, it may be true that workplace mentoring is also under closer scrutiny and under greater pressure to deliver results for other reasons.

At depth, in this respect, the control mechanisms in place for the schemes studied were poor. Most of the respondents accepted that their use was not consistent. Although it is easy to criticise a lack of control and evaluation techniques, it should be noted that all scheme coordinators questioned felt that they had to place a certain degree of trust in their mentors and were conscious of undermining that trust through constant evaluation. While none of the schemes displayed comprehensive control mechanisms, the coordinators of larger mentoring schemes acknowledged the requirement for more detailed control although the mechanisms were considered more difficult to implement. This may be a reason for the smaller schemes displaying more functional control techniques such as supervision while the larger schemes tended to have techniques that were dependant on one of the participants to take action.

In one case the scheme coordinator identified their control mechanism as an effective substitute for a more structured training programme. The evaluation method was described as resembling an appraisal programme where behaviour was corrected and more positive techniques were discussed. This technique worked in a unique environment where the vast majority of mentors had previously been mentored as part of the scheme and the respondent acknowledged that the methods should not be universally applied to mentoring schemes.

The standard of training courses varied considerably with the corporate schemes displaying the more advanced training techniques but the voluntary schemes (which mostly dealt with young people in this study) had more structured training courses. All respondents accepted that,

although essential, training could not provide some of the most desirable skills a mentor should possess such as interpersonal skills and personal judgement.

Issues about funding are difficult to clarify as each scheme had different sources of funding with different conditions attached. While desired by all, the larger schemes expressed a requirement for longer periods of funding which was inevitably attributed to the larger scale of the operation. Although all but one scheme had defined time limits on their funding, all but one of the scheme coordinators questioned believed their was no foreseeable end to the existence of their programme. While the perceived sustainability of the schemes in question can be considered positive, it must also be recognised that the co-ordinators had little if any say over the continuation of funding.

The scheme coordinators see multiple benefits from being part of the scheme and although the message was consistently positive, it should be acknowledged that to receive an accurate picture of the benefits of each scheme, the opinions of the mentees, mentors and perhaps even the funding bodies should be taken into account.

Conclusions

The conclusion from this study is that above the surface diversity in MSP clearly exists. That diversity can be captured to some extent by classing MSP challenge into high level categories, such as 'for the young' and 'for in-company schemes', or using other kinds of distinctions. At this level there were some potential common factors; schemes that are under-performing in terms of numbers of participants yet have ambitions to expand as those involved perceive it to be a successful intervention. Yet while mapping above the surface in more detail may have some benefits, it cannot help us better understand the common factors facing MSP. Focussing on that we need to break the surface to explore hidden depths. This does assume that there will be common depth concerns, soft themes. These are found in the case studies, around apparently simple issues such as control and evaluation. Simple does not mean 'easy' to understand and resolve. Indeed these are very challenging common factors. But, their operational and management handling in mentoring schemes, as well as clear strategic vision, matters. This could come more to the fore in research to support the evolution of MSP. Diverse schemes that will continue to flourish and go their own ways with different characteristics and attributes above the surface will always be with us; but a better return on research time and energy in the near future might look more closely at exploring common MSP agendas and concerns.

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