From Supervisor to Mentor
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From Supervisor to Mentor: Transformations in a Collaborative Partnership

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

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

Diary Notations  Reflective Journals  Mutual Dialogues

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

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

Emotionally-Directed
friendship, psychological supports, psychosocial aspects, fun/play, problem-solving
MAIN FINDINGS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEMPORAL PHASES</th>
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| **HIERARCHICAL CANDIDATE-SUPERVISOR (18 mths)** | • forced  
• involuntary  
• instructional  
• uni-directional  
• goal-specific |
| **EXCHANGE MENTEE-MENTOR (12 mths)** | • egalitarian  
• voluntary  
• interdependent  
• personal and emotional  
• project planning |
| **COLLABORATIVE PEER-PARTNERSHIP (9+ mths)** | • lateral partnership  
• peer equality  
• shared goals  
• multiple mentor network |
## CONCEPTUAL FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Investment</th>
<th>Personalization</th>
<th>Reciprocity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investment</strong></td>
<td>An invested relationship that demonstrates commitment by both partners to the mentoring process.</td>
<td>• energy &amp; passion</td>
<td>• bi-directional nurturing &amp; care</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• time commitment &amp; availability</td>
<td>• encouragement &amp; empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• accessible &amp; approachable</td>
<td>• embrace intergenerational challenges</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• generous, not overly-self-oriented</td>
<td>• joint enterprises as focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personalization</strong></td>
<td>The relationship is highly personal and individualistic with shared goal-setting.</td>
<td>• good fit with commonalities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• shared interests &amp; background</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• celebrate the differences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• personalized connection with boundaries</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reciprocity</strong></td>
<td>A collaborative process with benefits flowing in both directions and extending beyond the dyad.</td>
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OBSERVATIONS

The power of two:

- unpredictable
- rewarding
- dynamic
- complex
- productive
- enduring
- flexible
- joint endeavours
- innovative
CONCLUSIONS

ADOPT A MIX OF MODELS

HARNESS THE INTERGENERATIONAL

EMBRACE COMPLEXITIES

USEFUL TO DEAL WITH PRECARITY
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Internal Challenges

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

External Challenges

• Private university culture
• Even longer timeframe to measure “success”
• Evidence of host organization benefits are obscure
EFFECTIVE MENTORING STRATEGIES

• We preference informal mentoring schemes, but there should be personal evidence-gathering and accountability (diaries, goal-setting).

• We endorse engaging in critical and reflective practices throughout the process to thwart challenges and ensure the mentorship is on track.

• We stress the importance of flexibility and adaptability, and the maintaining of porous boundaries around the partnership.

• We concur that they are formidable sites of learning (and teaching) and can be truly transformative.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

✔ More case studies so that the fine detail of mentorships can be fully appreciated.

✔ Studies where non-mentees are incorporated in a comparative analysis.

✔ Attention to the intergenerational elements with savvy millennials teaching digital skills and technological knowledge.

✔ Cross-over studies between education, professions, business, and industry.
Questions or comments please!

Thank you!