Chapter 1   Introduction

Who is this book for, and what is it about?

Those of us who write and edit for the *Success in Research* series believe that those who engage with research will do it better and will enjoy it more if they know more about it. Knowledge is power! We also subscribe to, and live by, the notion that we all improve our practice and delight further in our work if we share our ideas, challenges and successes with others. This book exemplifies that and is intended for doctoral researchers and professionals in higher education institutions (HEIs) at any stage of career with an interest in mentoring in an academic context. Your interest may be in running mentoring programmes within your institution, being mentored for a particualr career-related reason, or being a mentor to support the career development of someone else. We have aimed to create a practical guide on mentoring within the academic context that feels as if we, the authors, are speaking directly to you, the reader. To create that feel, throughout the book, we use 'you' when referring to the readership, and 'we' when referring to the authors. Obviously, because a mentoring partnership consists of mentor and mentee, we sometimes use 'you' to refer to mentor and 'you' to refer to the mentee, but we hope we make it clear within the text as to which readership we are addressing at the time.

To intensify the personal feel throughout the book, in each chapter, we invite you to reflect on the topic under discussion, either in the form of an activity or reflection point. You will also find various other boxes in the chapters, including top tips, voices of experience and case studies, which we hope you will find inspiring, thought-provoking and engaging.

The book is split into three sections. The first covers mentoring at transitions and explores key transitions in the path from the journey into the doctorate all the way to academic progression and beyond academia. It also includes a chapter on cultural awareness. The second section covers mentoring for skills development, where chapters focus on key aspects of an academic career and how mentoring can be used in each one. For example, there are chapters on publishing and writing funding bids, as well as networking and speaking skills. The final section covers mentoring in everyday practice within higher education. Here, we touch on doctoral supervisors and principal investigators as mentors as well as the newer concept of reverse mentoring.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring, in essence, is simply a conversation with a purpose. You might then wonder why there is so much written about mentoring when it is such a simple concept. The abundant amount written on the subject lays bare how complex it can be, how useful it is and in how many situations it is seen as being advantageous.

Mentoring in the modern sense has its roots in the business world, from which it has filtered through to education, the health service and charities. As such, much of the literature so far has come from the business world and only recently has the mentoring taking place in academia been put under the spotlight and researched.

In this introduction, we touch lightly on the definition of mentoring and some theory behind it, but do not go too deeply into either because this book is intended as a practical guide rather than as a tome about the theory. If you are interested in the theory behind mentoring, we

have provided a further reading section at the end of this chapter that includes several good publications on the theory.

The definition of mentoring

Mentoring is not well defined in a large proportion of the literature; indeed, there is even discussion about whether a true definition is actually required (Garvey, 2011). For the purpose of this book, we loosely define what mentoring is in our context, and what it is not.

A mentor is usually more skilled or experienced than their mentee in a particular topic or situation (Murray, 2002). Shea (2002) defines a mentor as a "trusted counselor [sic] or guide", and we agree that there must be trust between mentor and mentee because the advice given by the mentor is unlikely to be adopted if there is little trust between the pair (Monti *et al.*, 2014). The mentoring process is based around a relationship between two people, and, therefore, is different for every pairing, which may help to explain why it is such an intangible concept to define and describe. At the same time, this individual, directed and entirely bespoke support is what makes mentoring so effective and empowering. After reading many definitions of mentoring and coaching we have come to agree with Hamilton (1993)

"It can seem that one has slipped into Lewis Caroll's world of Humpty Dumpty where a word can mean '...just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less'." (p 3.)

In essence, we define mentoring as a developmental activity. The relationship is built on trust and the mentor has experience of a specific skill or background. It is a relationship between a more experienced (mentor) and less experienced (mentee) person with the goal of developing the mentee by conversations between the pair.

How is mentoring distinct from other one-to-one developmental activities?

The distinctions between mentoring, coaching, tutoring and even supervising are notoriously ambiguous, and often the terms are used interchangeably. We certainly recognise the blurred boundaries between each of these terms but prefer not to regard them as synonymous. Instead, we view them as part of a broad spectrum of developmental activities, ranging from those that tend to be non-directive to those that are more directive in nature (Thomson, 2013). The emphasis here is very much on 'tend to', as it would be wrong to assume that those activities at one end of the spectrum are completely devoid of the features characteristic of activities at the other end.

Tutoring and supervising are more directive actitivities, due to their emphasis on providing guidance for a specific outcome and learning. Mentoring and coaching, with their emphasis on personal development of mentee or coachee, are frequently less directive. What tends to distinguish mentoring from coaching is specific non-directive teachniques employed by coaches to enable the coachee to find their own solution to a problem, while mentors bring their wider knowledge, experience or skill to help the mentee achieve their aims.

We emphasise throughout this book that good mentoring relationships are highly reflective and are often driven by the mentee, the effect of which is to foster fewer directive elements in the relationship. Below, Tünde Erdös, an experienced coach, explains her understanding of the difference between coaching and mentoring.

1.1 Voice of Experience - the difference between coaching and mentoring

Coaching may be viewed as an umbrella term for various forms of facilitation, including mentoring. In contrast to mentoring, coaching may be regarded as a vehicle that 'contains' coachees. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines coach as a *"horse-drawn carriage [...] an enclosed body [...] carrying passengers"* from where they were to where they want to be. Unlike mentoring, coaching represents an instrument on the coachee's journey from A to B rather than a person who is familiar with the coachee's field of work, imparts expert knowledge, contributes experience or gives instructions – a mentor.

In Homer's Odyssey, we learn how Mentor is put in charge of Odysseus's son Telemachus when Odysseus leaves for the Trojan War. As an old friend of the family, Mentor advises Telemachus on, and assists him with, how to find his father. From the Odyssey, we can gain deep insight into mentoring as we understand and practice it today: a dyadic informal approach to dealing with dilemmas adopted by a more experienced professional who imparts wisdom to and shares knowledge with a less-experienced individual in a workplace setting. While both the coaching and mentoring relationship are bounded by time and characterized by trust and benevolence, mentoring's primary goal is to promote the mentee's knowledge-based development.

(Tünde Erdös, Executive Coach and Coaching Process Researcher, Owner and Director of PTC Coaching)

The theory behind mentoring

Academics have attempted to apply theory to why and how mentoring works. Research has considered the function of the mentoring relationship, how the mentoring relationship grows and progresses, and the characteristics of mentor, mentee and situation that make the relationship successful. This has resulted in no one clear overarching theory, but several well-established schools of thought being applied to mentoring.

We will not dwell on the theory in this introduction because other authors have done it better than we could in the short space permitted here. For this reason, in the 'Further Reading' section of this book we reference other texts that you can consult for a deeper understanding of mentoring theory. For a wonderful review, look at the critique written by Bozeman and Feeney (2007), where they despair at the large number of mentoring programmes in relation to the small amount of useful theory developed - and conclude that the issue lies with the multidisciplinarity of any sort of mentoring research and therefore the natural splitting of any theory developed.

Benefits of mentoring

Due to the broad range of activities falling under the umbrella of mentoring, the benefits are considerable. For that reason, in each chapter, we highlight the benefits specific to the mentoring context focused on in the chapter. In this introduction, we wish simply to summarise the general benefits for the mentee and the mentor. We start by summarising the benefits to the mentee using the three categories that Crisp and Cruz (2009) highlight as areas where mentoring tends to operate effectively: professional and career development, role modelling and

psychological support. We then focus on benefits to the mentor, by using the categories proposed by Dolan and Johnson (2009).

Professional and career development

Mentoring is effective in supporting professional and career development. Among the many facets of this support is the role a mentor plays in introducing a mentee to the "rules of the game." An example of this is seen in academia when new members of faculty have a mentor to help them understand the values of the department they have joined, the way the department works and what is expected of them as new members of staff. People often seek mentors who are one step ahead of themselves in terms of career progression. This strategy can aid the career development of the mentee because the mentoring pair are able to have conversations about what will be expected of the mentee at the next level and what they need to do to get there. Mentoring for professional and career development is discussed throughout this book and is particularly focused on in Chapter2, 'Mentoring for those entering doctoral education', Chapter 3, 'Mentoring for early career researchers', Chapter 4, 'Mentoring for academic progression' and Chapter 5, 'Mentoring for the transition outside of academia'.

People also seek mentors to develop professionally in one area of their work. For example, an individual who is good at speaking at conferences may mentor someone less confident in public speaking with the goal of passing on their experience in this one skill, and we consider this is in Chapter 8, 'Mentoring to support spoken communication skills'. Alternatively, an academic who has had grant or publication success might mentor a junior colleague in these endeavours, which we cover in Chapters 5, 'Mentoring to support publication', and 6, 'Mentoring to support grant success'.

Role modelling

Mentors frequently act as role model to their mentees because they are often in a position that a mentee is seeking to aspire to. Academia uses mentoring for role modelling in many of its schemes where mentors are assigned to mentees with a similar profile, such as the same gender, ethnic group, background or culture to have conversations about strategies to optimise progress and maximise success. An example of this is the popularity of women mentors in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) subjects where they have been traditionally under-represented in more senior positions. We touch on the topic of role modelling within mentoring throughout this book, especially in Section 1, where we discuss mentoring at transitions, Chapter 9, 'Mentoring to support networking' and Chapter 5, 'Mentoring to promote cultural awareness'.

Psychological support

Mentoring works best when there are no line management responsibilities between mentor and mentee, and so conversations can be very open and honest. (We cover the tension between line management responsibilities and mentoring in Chapters 11, 'Incorporating good mentoring principles into doctoral supervision' and 12, 'Incorporating good mentoring principles as a Principal Investigator'.) With this openness comes psychological support that often cannot be given within line management. Evidence suggests that when a student has a mentor, their chances of staying at the institution, graduating and being comfortable within higher education increase (Budge, 2006; Crisp and Cruz, 2009). These outcomes must be in part due to the support that a mentor provides and that they may not get from elsewhere.

Benefits to the mentor were categorised by Dolan and Johnson (2009) in a study of postgraduate students. In the study, mentors reported 14 different gains or benefits, grouped by the authors into five different categories: 'instrumental' covering employability and productivity; 'socioemotional' involving aspects such as confidence, satisfaction and enjoyment; 'interpersonal' consisting of skills such as communication and mentoring; 'cognitive' covering intellectual growth and 'professional' referring to the better understanding of the workings of the faculty that mentors gained. Each of these broad groups covers a wide range of benefits, which are repeated in the following studies by different authors.

Understandably, given the nature of the mentoring relationship, mentors report feeling fulfilled and developing better interpersonal and communication skills, as well as personal skills such as compassion and patience whilst carrying out the role of mentor *(Budge, 2006; Dolan and Johnson, 2009; Hudson, 2013)*. Others highlight very tangible benefits; for example, in Horowitz and Christopher's *(2013)* report on a mentoring project designed to train postgraduate students in mentoring skills, the mentors reported tangible outputs of the relationships such as posters, conference papers and publications. Other reported benefits for mentors include greater commitment to and renewed enthusiasm for their work (Clinard and Ariav, 1998), and more time to reflect on personal work practices, which is often not possible in a busy work environment (Lopez-Real and Kwan, 2005; and Hudson, 2013).

Another more unusual benefit is the transferability of coaching and listening techniques used in mentoring to other non-mentoring relationships. For example, in Clinard and Ariav's (1998) study, mentors reported using these techniques in their private lives. There are other, more unexpected, outcomes reported such as mentors of student teachers learning new skills and technologies from their mentee and using some of the skills they had learnt to mentor with the

students in their classrooms (Clinard and Ariav 1998)**,** an aspect of reverse mentoring that is the focus of Chapter 13, 'Reverse mentoring'.

Final word

We hope that in this introduction you have gained a taste of at least some of the many flavours of mentoring present in higher education institutions today. We also hope that this book inspires you sufficiently to find out more about the mentoring avenues open to you at your institution and provides you with enough mentoring tools for you to be able to propose mentoring initiatives if they are currently lacking in your institution.

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