Mentoring: Questions and Models

Mentoring and mentoring circles can be valuable diversity initiatives if used to their full potential, but developing successful initiatives can be difficult. This paper seeks to address key questions and provide possible models to overcome these, before rolling out a new mentoring scheme.

Key Questions to Ask

1. **What costs are going to be associated with the set up and maintenance of the scheme?**
   Web-research revealed a wide range of costs experienced when setting up and maintaining a mentoring scheme, with monetary factors including consultancy services, website development, training provision, travel reimbursement, and so forth. Examples were found of mentoring schemes costing from a few thousand pounds to over a hundred thousand, depending on what was being developed. A scheme requiring school engagement activities and creation of an expansive age-appropriate website for the KS3/4 mentees, as well as training for teachers and mentors, cost in the region of £180,000. Developing a mentoring scheme for diversity should not incur such high costs, but a budget will need to be considered for the use of external services and, particularly with e-mentoring schemes, the development of an online portal for communication or provision of a mentor/mentee list from which to match pairs.

   Other costs to consider would be the potential to pay or offer some form of financial reimbursement to mentors. An evaluation of creative industry mentoring schemes considered this possibility as a way of encouraging mentors to devote more time to the relationship. However, concerns were raised over how this might change the dynamic between mentor and mentee from an informal partnership to that of service provider/ client. These costs mainly apply to face-to-face schemes, which could be avoided using a solely e-Mentoring approach and with mentoring pairs being made aware of their responsibility for travelling costs from the outset.

2. **How can you ensure uptake of the scheme justifies its existence?**
   Developing a fantastically thought through scheme only to have low uptake of mentors would not only be a waste of resources, but an enormous waste of opportunity. Recruiting enough mentees is not generally an issue, but ensuring there are enough mentors to meet demand can be problematic. It relies upon accurate predictions of demand for mentors within the society, which is also dependent on what the mentoring scheme is for. Linking it to another activity, such as professional registration, can guarantee that engagement with the system is high, whereas poor promotion of the benefits can lead to low levels of interest in the scheme.

A point to consider is at what stage will the number of mentoring pairs be considered satisfactory? Ultimately this will vary according to how many members you have, and how many resources have been used creating the scheme.

3. How can you ensure there are enough mentors signed up to the scheme?

A concern with many mentoring schemes is not having enough members volunteering as mentors, as demonstrated in NESTA's recent literature review. Below are two potential solutions: recruiting more mentors or assigning each mentor multiple mentees.

Incentives

Finding more mentors will obviously be challenging as this was the initial problem so a more intensive project promotion will need to commence, perhaps using financial or professional incentives to bring about greater sign up. Another option is for organisations to identify potential mentors and ask them to participate, rather than waiting for people to volunteer for the role.

Group mentoring

By assigning more mentees to a single mentor you can avoid the need to recruit more, although knowledge of this from the outset may deter people from volunteering. This approach does not have to revolve around the traditional 1:1 mentorship but can instead use a group mentoring approach. Here, one mentor meets (be it contact or e-meeting) with their mentees at the same time and uses the group to influence the direction of mentoring. This can reduce the amount of time the mentor has to devote to their mentees, as those within the group can share experience and advice amongst each other.

4. How will the scheme be managed?

Most organisations with mentoring schemes already in place have assigned responsibility for the mentoring scheme to an existing member of staff, rather than appointing one solely for the role. Whether this is possible will depend on how much input the society has into the mentoring system once it has been set up and the demand for the service.

5. Will training be provided?

From mentor feedback, training provides a good opportunity to establish what the society aims to accomplish through mentoring, what the mentors should achieve, and what they should be doing to support their mentees. The training equips the mentor with a clearer idea of their role and thus greater confidence in their ability, leading to better mentoring. An evaluation of a professional body's eMentoring scheme showed that those who did not receive training were often confused about their role and how much guidance they were expected to provide.

The type of training is also another factor to consider. Some organisations go all-out and fund a one-day session for both mentor and mentees, allowing them to meet each other before the mentorship begins; others have provided shorter training or online resources, and some provide no training. In terms of the success of these schemes not enough information was found from the web-research to definitively say, although various reports suggest training reduces the attrition rate. Verbal feedback from a society's one-day training course found that most mentors felt this was a little too long; that it could be compressed into a half-day session to reduce demand on the mentors' time. The society is currently re-evaluating its mentoring scheme with this point in consideration.

Across the board it would seem that training is an important element of mentorship and with a plethora of resources available online it shouldn't necessarily have to be an expensive procedure. There is substantial collaborative opportunity here for similar organisations to reduce costs by creating a single training programme across mentoring systems and sharing the production of materials.

6. How will you evaluate/ measure the impact of the scheme?

How to measure the impact or success of a mentoring scheme is an issue that crops up regularly in the literature. As mentoring is a qualitative activity and aims differ between mentoring groups, most impact monitoring occurs by asking the mentor/mentee to evaluate their experiences, often against objectives they themselves set. With mentoring as diversity work, the impact could be examined a few years down the line to determine if there is a correlation between mentoring and increased diversity within the area targeted (e.g. appointment as fellow). This would not necessarily be causation, but could give indications as to whether the scheme was having a positive effect.

Common questions asked of the mentors/mentees include: how useful they found the mentorship, whether they would use it again and if they would recommend it, to generally gauge their overall experience.

There is also potential to monitor mentoring in a similar manner to CPD, with mentees asked to log what they have achieved since last meeting and their aims for the next (or less regularly if meetings are more than once a month).

7. How will the mentoring pairs be matched?

Creating well-matched pairs is essential to the successful running of a mentoring scheme, with research by MacCallum and Baltiman (1999) suggesting that "unsuccessful matches can be worse than no mentoring at all". This may be particularly true with mentoring as a diversity initiative, as the premise of fostering ambition and a desire to progress in their career could be deconstructed by a discouraging mentor, reflecting badly on the senior levels of the mentees field and potentially exacerbating existing misgivings towards remaining in the sector.

Matching by particular characteristics is often seen as good practice, and the ones shown below appeared repeatedly throughout the research:

i. **Personal**
- Protected Characteristics
- Socio-Economic background
- Learning styles
- Outside Interests
- Values

ii. **Professional**
- Sector
- Job Role
- Professional qualification
- Time available
- Perceived needs of mentee/ development needs
- Competencies

Which aspects to match are up to the organisation, as there are diverging views regarding the most successful method for diversity mentoring. Some reviews state that matching via socio-economic background or protected characteristic makes for a better rapport between mentor and mentee, thereby increasing the success of the partnership and providing the mentee with a role model as well as a mentor. However, other reviews suggest that matching across characteristics is more beneficial for creating an inclusive working culture, with the mentee having an influence over the mentor. For example, Clutterbuck (2012) suggests that pairing a male mentor with a female mentee will enable him to consider the obstacles she faces and more readily work towards breaking such barriers, being in a more senior position to implement change.

Consequently, the type of matching will depend on what the organisation considers its primary aims of the mentoring scheme are, and on the availability of mentors from a range of backgrounds. Owing to the nature of the STEM workforce, and indeed the need for this mentoring in the first place, it may be that cross-characteristic mentoring is the most feasible approach.

Of course, the above is assuming that the organisation is heavily involved in the matching, which may not be the case. This is something that should be discussed prior to setting up the scheme and will be dependent upon resources. The web research shows a variance in the level of input from the organisation in terms of matching, with some invested in the scheme at every level of the process and others performing more of a gatekeeper role.

It has been suggested that giving mentees an element of choice over their mentor, even if it is just between two mentors, leads to a more successful relationship as the mentee feels more in control and satisfied with their contribution to the mentorship.

8. **What if the pairing doesn't work out?**
There may be incidences when either the mentor or the mentee wishes to leave the scheme before the relationship has ended, for example a change in career or lack of rapport. It is generally best that they are allowed to do so, as poor matching can have detrimental effects on the outcome. It would be useful if reasons for leaving were given so that they can be used to improve the programme, although in some cases these may be deeply personal and a "prefer not to say" option should be included to reflect this.

The breakdown in the relationship can leave one or both members out of the mentoring programme they wish to be in and so should be re-introduced to the candidate pool of mentors or mentees as applicable. This is obviously easier with rolling application schemes, but a mentee or mentor should not be disadvantaged or prevented from continuing with the scheme because their initial relationship did not work out in fixed-application schemes. The parties should be reassigned, where possible, or given priority on the subsequent intake.

9. **What will the duration of the scheme be?**
The average duration of mentoring is one year, with contact varying from around an hour every week to an email every few months. Some schemes impose quotas on minimum/ maximum contact and a guideline on when they expect the formal mentorship to end. After this point, the partnership may be continued in a more informal manner. Good practice indicates that mentoring relationships that end on a definitive note leave both parties feeling more satisfied with the overall experience, compared to those whose mentorships slowly disintegrated.

Other schemes may be expected to last longer; in the case of mentoring for professional recognition (chartered status) the partnership continues until the mentee becomes chartered, which may take several years. With a diversity-focussed mentoring scheme this may also be the case in order to build a meaningful relationship and promote underrepresented talent to more senior levels. A much briefer scheme may also work with certain diversity motivations, such as new parents seeking mentoring as they return to the workplace, and ceasing the mentorship once this is achieved.

10. What model of mentoring will be used?

As previously mentioned (point 3), there are many different methodologies that can be adopted in mentoring schemes. The basic model of 1:1, face: face contact can be altered to suit the demands and vision of the organisation, proving mentoring to be a flexible initiative to adapt.

Original Model
A single mentor is paired to a mentee (or multiple mentees) and they meet on a one-to-one basis, enabling more personal interaction. Any mentees with the same mentor do not tend to interact.

Group Mentoring
A single mentor is paired to multiple mentees who all meet at the same time. This creates more of a community effort when it comes to mentoring, with the mentees able to help each other between meetings and creating a forum for discussion.

Traditional Meetings
The mentor and mentee(s) meet face to face, with other forms of contact sometimes supplementing these times. This can be useful for building a good rapport, but can make matching mentoring pairs more difficult as it introduces more monetary and time demands for travelling to and from meetings.

E-Mentoring
The mentor and mentee(s) maintain contact electronically, using email, telephone, skype, online forums, etc. This means that geography is not a barrier, and can be a quicker and more informal method of mentoring. With e-Mentoring, the mentor and mentee can still meet face to face if they wish, but at their own convenience and not at the cost of the organisation.

Standalone
Mentoring is a scheme in its own right and is promoted as such.

Adjunctive
Mentoring tied in to another initiative. Suggestions have included using it as part of a networking event, for example introducing mentoring "tables" at a lunch meeting with particular topics of discussion on each and a 'resident' expert. It could also be tied in to other diversity schemes, perhaps as a benefit of an outreach initiative.

Potential for Collaboration

Developing a mentoring scheme is a resource intensive venture and collaborating could help to relieve some of this burden whilst sharing good practice. There is potential for collaboration across organisations with similar fields of interest but perhaps limited funding or initial mentorship pool.

Collaboration could occur from the outset, commissioning an organisation such as WISE to draw up a basic plan for a mentoring scheme which could be adapted to each organisation. The costs for consultation could then be shared across the participating bodies, and would ensure that each individual scheme has been developed to the same high standard. Issues could arise from having a general system, as member organisations will understandably want unique schemes to draw their own membership to, rather than a generic programme that could be accessed from any organisation. This would require discussions as to what the commissioned body could develop and how this could be taken forwards by each organisation.

Training/ Training Providers would be a good area to collaborate on. Some of professional bodies and learned societies already make use of these to train their mentors, and could share contact details with interested parties. Additionally, with higher numbers attending training, there would be the opportunity to reduce costs associated with such training, or to work in conjunction with a provider to develop a system specifically for a group of organisations.

Another area to share good practice would be with the production of materials. Some organisations already produce brochures or PDF guidelines on what it means to be a mentor and how to organise the first meeting. These could either be replicated, with organisations paying the original for use of the materials, or new materials could be commissioned and the cost shared. A further idea would be to compile a list of suitable, already available resources to share across organisations, so that potential mentors can easily access information without having to attend training events.

Designing sign-up sheets, or worksheets to identify aims and objectives, could be another area on which to collaborate. It is important that mentors and mentees know what they are expected to achieve through mentoring, and completion of the targets also provides a good point at which to end the relationship on a positive note, rather than trailing it on with no benefits. By collaborating on these materials it can be assured that the terms of mentoring are clearly laid out, and that both mentors and mentees across all organisations will have an unambiguous framework to determine what they are aiming to gain from the mentoring scheme.

Finally, a web based mentoring approach could be shared across participating organisations, collaborating on designing a basic forum that can then be linked to their individual websites. Organisations such as Brightside Trust already offer their services with respect to this sort of approach, and have already collaborated with the RAEng and NHS to develop eMentoring systems for young people.

Useful Links

General Good practice guides:
NESTA
Literature review on mentoring within the creative industries, including common factors in successful schemes.
http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/creative-business-mentor-network
http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/peer_mentoring_programme.pdf

Group Mentoring/ mentoring circles
BITC
Online toolkit for establishing mentoring circles, and the benefits of using this approach.
http://raceforopportunity.bitc.org.uk/tools-case-studies/toolkits/mentoring-and-mentoring-circles

Mentoring resources
Get Mentoring
Information on creating an online mentoring system and free training materials for mentors.
http://getmentoring.org/mentoring-resources/?did=33

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