

Project Report

Using Mentoring and Coaching to support work based learning: an evaluation

People involved

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Introduction to the research

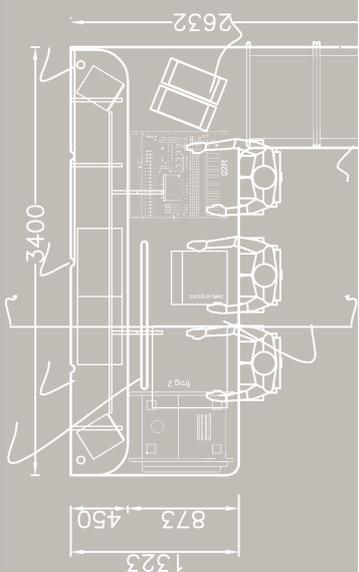
Summary of findings

The findings from this research indicate clearly that the particular non-hierarchical model of peer mentoring and coaching used by the Institute of Education's Mentoring and Coaching Service should be continued and escalated, because it has promoted work based learning in, through and for the Institute as a workplace. This learning has been successful partly because of the cultural, practical and sociobiographical situatedness of the learning made possible by the non-hierarchical nature of the learning model underpinning the Service, and because learning has been supported by, and linked to wider networks within and beyond the Institute. The practical situatedness combined with cultural, and sociobiographical situatedness of participants' learning, meant that learning was focused on practice, as well as institutionally supported and

personally motivating. The learning aspired to and achieved by both mentor/coaches and clients of the service has been a situated learning, relating to self, behaviours and relationships in the workplace, as well as professional skills; it is therefore likely to inspire further engagement with and motivation for work based learning. For clients, the success of the process depended on the mentor/coaches' skill in allowing the clients to take the active, responsible role in their learning. This was facilitated by the fact that the mentor/coach had no professional power over the client. An instructional model where the mentor/coach told the client what to do would have been unlikely to yield the richness of learning described by clients in this evaluation. The fact that the mentor/coach was not restricted to roles traditionally associated with either mentor or coach meant that the mentor/coaches could address a range of work based issues, in the way most appropriate for the particular client.

Rationale for this evaluation study

This evaluation was commissioned by Dr. Sue Askew in January 2007 after conversations with Jacqui MacDonald, Head of Staff Development. Its purpose was to evaluate the ways in which the Institute of Education's Mentoring and Coaching Service was supporting work based learning at the Institute of Education. The evaluation seeks to pinpoint the features of the Service that are essential to the success of the Service in promoting work based learning, and the aspects of the Service that could be improved and how they could be improved. Conclusions reached through this evaluation will guide Jacqui MacDonald and the Staff Development



team in the future development of the Service and may lead to more extensive plans for it. Conclusions can also be used academically, for the insights they provide into the relationship between this particular model of mentoring/coaching and socially situated work based learning, as defined by Evans et al (2006).

Methodology for this study

Methodologically this study had a constructivist framework, in that knowledge was believed to be constructed by the participants in the research. By prompting and listening, the interviewer aimed to help interviewees explore their own learning aspirations, achievements and applications as richly as possible. The influence of the researcher was acknowledged, and indeed used, as interviews became for some participants time for further reflection and learning. However, individual interviews were stand-alone and out of context, leading to some limitations on the kind of knowledge constructed. An approach that might another time provide still richer detail and be particularly appropriate for a study of work based learning interactions, would be a case study approach, perhaps including observations and collaborative interviews with the mentor/coaches or clients.

Methods

The interview sample

The principal method for this research was individual interview. Twelve mentor/coaches and eight clients were interviewed between January and June 2007. They were contacted by email or by phone after the head of Staff Development had asked them if they minded being contacted. No mentor/coaches declined to be interviewed, although four out of twelve clients declined, including one man. One declined because of an accidental breach in confidentiality, in which her name was exposed to some other clients; another two clients declined because they had only had one mentoring/coaching session, but it had not suited their purposes; and one did not explain why she declined. Those who

declined included three research officers and one lecturer.

Of the eight clients who agreed to be interviewed, all were women. Six came from within the Institute of Education and two from affiliated colleges. The professional roles of the clients included seven administrative posts and one research officer and among the administrative posts represented, four were senior posts. They had had between one and six mentoring/coaching sessions. Two interviewees had had only one session, one had had two, two had had three, two had had four, and one client had had the full six sessions. Two of the clients were expecting to engage in further sessions.

Among the professional roles of mentor/coaches, were included the Head of Staff Development, four lecturers, five administrators and two other members of staff in advisory roles. There was one man.

The interview and analysis process

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. A quiet, private room was used for the interviews, and interviewees were given a choice of which room would suit them, and then, where they would like to sit in that room. Notes were taken during the interviews as funds were not available for transcribing. These notes were fed back to the team of mentor/coaches (but not to the clients) and they had the opportunity to comment on how their words had been reported. Very few changes were needed on the basis of their responses to the notes.

Analysis consisted of looking for themes within interview notes and clustering relevant ideas together. During the writing of this final report, knowledge was then constructed out of these themes in relation to the broad framework of mentoring/coaching models and the promotion of work based learning.

Ethical issues in this study

Issues of confidentiality are generally very important within the context of mentoring and coaching so confidentiality was already an

expectation among clients and mentor/coaches. Clients were invited to interview without knowledge of other clients (except in the one accidental case mentioned above) and mentor/coaches were interviewed individually despite some methodological advantages that group interviews might have yielded. Clients were asked not to name their mentor/coach during interviews and mentor/coaches never reveal names of clients anyway. Mentor/coaches and clients were assured that their comments would be anonymised, and for this reason random numbers have been assigned to each participant in this report, with C relating to clients and MC relating to mentor/coaches. The only possibility of a breach in confidentiality occurs if a mentor/coach recognises the situation described by a client. All participants gave their informed consent to be interviewed and were free to withdraw at any time. The purposes of the evaluation were made clear to all.

Key findings

Work based learning and the Institute's Mentoring and Coaching Service

Mentoring and coaching as promoters of work based learning

Mentoring and coaching have been heralded as powerful supports to learning in the workplace. The 'mentoring revolution' of the 1990s described by Rodger (2006, p. 29) has clearly benefited work based learning in a range of workplaces. For example, Handscomb (2006, p. 3) could claim that '... coaching and mentoring... are forms of professional learning that do indeed have... direct positive effect in changing practice'. Cordingley (2006, p. 7) has called mentoring and coaching 'the cornerstones of teacher professional development'. Eraut et al's (1998) research on highly qualified workers, found that employees named mentoring as one of the key vehicles through which they learned at work (cited in Evans et al (2006) p. 7). However, 'mentoring' and 'coaching' can take many very different forms, and 'work based learning' is understood differently by different groups of people. This report examines how the

particular model of mentoring and coaching adopted by the Institute of Education has affected work based learning in the sense of 'workplace learning', as used by Evans, Rainbird and colleagues in their (2006) publication, 'Improving workplace learning'.

The different models of mentoring and coaching

Distinctions between mentoring and coaching are sometimes made. The National Coaching and Mentoring Framework established in 2005 (see Cordingley, 2006, p. 8) defined mentoring as 'to support significant career changes focused on the whole person'. The mentor is often conceived as supporting the individual at need, and acts as a critical friend and sounding board, but may or may not have superior expertise to offer the client (Pennington (2004), quoted in Carnell, 2006, p. 12). The National Framework defined specialist coaching as 'focused on drilling deep into professional knowledge and expertise to refine, hone and tone existing skills'. Coaching is often construed as 'a more structured learning process aimed at explicit professional development in an agreed area(s) of performance' in which the coach takes a more directive role than in mentoring (Pennington (2004), quoted in Carnell, 2006, p. 12).

The Institute's model of mentoring and coaching

The model of mentoring/coaching which underpins the Institute's Mentoring and Coaching Service, however, embraces both definitions (above) within its non-hierarchical model of peer mentoring and coaching. The Institute's Mentoring and Coaching Service was set up originally by Jacqui MacDonald, Head of Staff Development. The model of mentoring and coaching proposed by Carnell, MacDonald and Askew (2006), all of whom developed the Service after Jacqui MacDonald's initiation, assumes that the key role of a mentor and a coach is to facilitate a learning conversation. This includes a cycle of reviewing a client's workplace situation, learning through new insights about the workplace situation, applying the

learning to improve the situation and reviewing the learning conversation itself. They point out that key features of both mentoring and coaching include some aspects associated with this facilitation of the learning conversation, including: creating a learning environment, clarifying objectives relating to work based learning, joint planning and questioning, collaborative teaching, risk taking and reflection, reviewing the effects of change in the workplace and promoting self awareness (p.4).

The professionally non-hierarchical nature of the Institute's Mentoring and Coaching Service

A distinctive feature of the Institute's Service, however, is that peer coaching is at the core of its model in that the peer potentially becomes the mentor/coach, whilst also remaining a peer. The first employees selected to 'train' as mentor/coaches for the Institute's Service, represented a range of professional positions within the Institute of Education. Their mixed hierarchical status meant that non-hierarchical matches could be made between mentor/coaches and clients. Among the team of mentor/coaches were included the Head of Staff Development, four lecturers, five administrators and two other members of staff in advisory roles.

Great care is taken when clients are matched to mentor/coaches, in the Institute's Mentoring and Coaching Service, so that no work based hierarchical links are made. For example, no client is linked to anyone connected to his/her everyday work and its management. Clients who hold administrative posts are sometimes matched to mentor/coaches who also hold administrative posts, so that they can empathise with the client's situation in a particular way. The difference between client and mentor/coach lies in the latter skilfully managing the learning conversation instigated by the client, not in the mentor/coach's professional status.

In their exploration of workplace learning, Evans et al (2006) describe the hierarchical nature of most employment systems as a barrier to practices of

learning in, for and through the workplace. They refer to the challenges of the 'wage relationship and wider systems for the management and regulation of employment' (p. 3). These challenges might be embodied in low trust relationships at work; management systems that emphasise command and control rather than support; an underlying belief that people are disposable; and a culture of blame where mistakes are punished rather than learned from. These barriers to learning are barriers that the Mentoring and Coaching Service sought to address through its non-hierarchical model of mentoring and coaching.

The social and situated model of work based learning, which underpins the Institute's Mentoring and Coaching Service

The model of mentoring/coaching is non-hierarchical in another sense, too. The learning perspective underpinning the Service views learning as socially constructed and situated, thus valuing the social and contextual components in learning. Such a view challenges the conventional hierarchical relationships between mentor/coach and client, and between teacher and learner. Thus the Mentoring and Coaching Service is non-hierarchical both in terms of the workplace professional hierarchy, and in terms of its view on how learning happens.

As an example of the non-hierarchical view of learning underpinning the Service, a distinction is made by Evans et al (2006) between training and workplace learning. They emphasise that training often indicates a formally structured process of transferring a body of knowledge to the learner, whereas work based learning involves 'locating learning in social relations at work' (p. 7; and thus when 'training' is used in this document to refer to situated work based learning, this misnomer is signalled using inverted commas). Evans et al show that attempts to improve workplace learning through a target-driven approach are often counterproductive because they are underpinned by a view of learning as the acquisition of skills and knowledge, rather than learning as participation (see

Watkins et al, 2002).

The model of learning on which the Mentoring and Coaching Service is founded, includes learning as participation and as social construction (as well as acquisition of skills and knowledge: see James, 2006; Sfard, 1998). In keeping also with Wenger's (2000, p.227) conception of learning as '... an interplay between social competence and personal experience', the learning of clients and mentor/coaches alike is recognised to be situated in a) the culture of the workplace; b) participants' practical activity; and c) the sociobiographical features of the learners' life. Learning thus situated is associated with deep engagement and hence motivation for both mentor/coaches and clients. In particular, learning is situated socially/biographically in that mentor/coaches and clients share responsibility for learning and personal development; learning is adjusted to the learners' own situation and experiences; links are made between practice and support; and social and emotional dimensions of learning are acknowledged (Evans et al, 2006).

Learning for mentor/coaches as part of wider networks of learning

Our findings indicate that in mentor/coaches' monthly learning sessions (in which they learn to become better mentor/coaches), learning may be co-constructed. This comes about because the practice and situations of all the members of the learning team contribute to meanings constructed; and metacognitive reflections are made on how the community functions, in terms of behaviours and relationships. Mentor/coaches in particular are encouraged to grow in a learning community centred on practice, but also supported in their participation of the various other communities in which they engage. Perhaps for this reason, some of the mentor/coaches are able to connect their mentoring/coaching learning to broader frameworks than those offered by their work roles; for example, they take new behaviours and attitudes into their home or leisure situations, and alternative work networks. Wenger (2000, p.229)

describes how participating in these 'communities of practice' is '... essential to our learning. It is at the very core of what makes us human beings capable of meaningful knowledge'.

Learning aspirations described by mentor/coaches and clients

The Workplace Learning Task Group defined workplace learning as 'learning in, through and for the workplace' (Sutherland, 1998, p. 5 quoted in Evans et al, p. 7). In this evaluation research, mentor/coaches and clients expressed their desires to experience learning in and through the workplace; mentor/coaches also aspired to learning for the workplace, in terms of supporting clients. Whilst mentor/coaches were clear that in their roles they were learning, clients did not necessarily conceptualise the process of mentoring/coaching as to do with learning. This may have been partly because the information they had received when they applied to the Mentoring and Coaching Service had not specifically used the word 'learning' in relation to mentoring and coaching. Some clients as adults may, in any case, not like to think of themselves as learners (see Boud and Solomon, 2003).

Aspiring to learning in the workplace

Mentor/coaches were interested in being part of a new model of mentoring/coaching in which peers worked 'with colleagues in a supportive way' (MC5). Their aspirations were specifically for social learning, in that team members expressed the desire to get to know others across the Institute, and to be known by them; to share their knowledge with them and to learn from them; to become confident in speaking with them (MC4), and to try to understand them (MC5).

For clients, however, learning in the workplace meant having someone to talk to, to help them think about difficult issues, 'to discuss the fear and ... get some solutions, get focused' (C2). They did not always want answers, but wanted 'guidance in reaching solutions' (C3). The crucial feature of such guidance, however, was that it came from someone who was within the same workplace

setting, but not connected to the client's professional hierarchy. Three of the eight clients interviewed said they needed to talk to someone who had no connections with their Line Managers because the Line Managers were part of the situation causing them difficulty. They did not want to be told what to do, but to talk with someone who could help them find distance from their situations and get a new perspective on them. For example, one client wanted a new perspective on the changes going on in her worklife and her increases in work load (C5); and another (C7) wanted an outsider view on what her role should be, whether she was in the right place and how she could deal with awkward situations in her team. The learning aspired to here was a situated and social learning, in which the individual mentor/coach or client's identity in relation to others was important. The teaching and learning model they assume is one of social or mutual knowledge construction rather than one of instruction and acquisition.

Aspiring to learning through the workplace

In some cases, on the other hand, clients simply wanted to be instructed and to acquire skills or information which would improve their performance in some way. This can be thought of as desiring learning through the workplace, using the workplace as a vehicle for acquiring useful skills and knowledge. For example, C4 wanted advice on how she could progress with her career in the Institute, including what courses might be useful. She wanted help with getting onto the Post Graduate Certificate for Administrators, and also with finding job vacancies as they came up and doing applications. C8 wanted advice on retirement planning and finances, and which skills were appropriate to develop in the context of retirement.

One client saw the opportunity for mentoring/coaching as a chance for free personal development that she was not going to miss (C2). She also approached the Service in a crisis and needed her mentor to tell her what to do because she had only three days in which to prepare an entire Masters teaching session. In this situation, it

seemed appropriate to the mentor/coach, who was an experienced Lecturer, to provide direct advice, although at the same time trying to connect the client's 'tacit knowledge' to her current learning (Evans et al, 2006, p. 11).

Another client seems to have seen the Mentoring and Coaching Service as a means through which to undergo counselling or therapy. She wanted help in getting out of 'the very bad emotional state' she was in, but she did not have a clear idea what form that help would take, nor the strength to act on suggestions made by the mentor/coach. This passivity may have been a reason for her saying that the Service had not helped her at all, and had actually made her feel more powerless (C9). Therefore, although some clients just wanted to be 'told', most of them were active in seeking out the information they wanted, and in acting on suggestions made, and therefore their learning seems to have benefited through the workplace.

Mentor/coaches also wanted to acquire skills and information through the workplace. They attended monthly sessions in which they developed skills and knowledge related to mentoring/coaching. Whilst much of the learning they described was social and situated, and co-constructed within the community, they did aspire to learning discrete skills to improve their performance in some ways. For example, two of the mentor/coaches took on the role partially to enhance their CVs. Three of the mentor/coaches already had mentoring/coaching skills which they hoped to improve to use inside and outside the Institute. More generally, mentor/coaches wanted to acquire improved talking and listening skills to help them in the workplace, but also for use in other contexts.

Aspiring to learning for the workplace

Several of the mentor/coaches joined the mentoring/coaching team because they wanted to learn how to help others in the Institute, sometimes because they themselves had been in situations where they would have valued some mentoring/coaching support. They

wanted to develop the capacity to listen properly to clients, and to help them resolve issues. Their perspective on how help would be given tended to be on encouraging the clients to go through all the necessary stages to help themselves, to see things in a different way, and perhaps recognise how their own behaviour was interfering with what they wanted to achieve. Mentor/coaches emphasised empowering clients to take control of their own learning, through dialogue with them, rather than through instruction, even though this former approach sometimes seemed more difficult.

Learning achieved by mentor/coaches and clients and how it accords with models of learning

Mentor/coaches and clients described the learning they had achieved through the mentoring/coaching experience. Both sets of interviewees described learning about self in the workplace, learning about relating to others in the workplace and learning skills and knowledge through and for the workplace. In some cases the learning aspirations they had described were met, but in other cases they had been superseded.

Learning about self in the workplace

Joy (2006, p. 39) describes how mentor/coaches who were trained at the London Centre for Leadership in Learning came to listen and question more and talk less, in their daily work life as a result of mentoring/coaching training, and that they became more confident because the training had helped them reappraise their own roles. This mirrors very closely how mentor/coaches of the Institute Mentoring and Coaching Service reported on their learning. This learning was not an acquisition, but an awareness they had developed about themselves in relation to their workplace. They learnt the importance of adapting to others and of sometimes keeping silent to allow others space; that although they could not change others, they might be able to empower others to deal with difficult situations. A couple of mentor/coaches described how they had even learnt intolerance of people who did not act in

empowering and enabling ways (MC1; MC2o).

Clients also experienced this shift in perception about themselves. C5 told us, 'There was no tangible product from the (mentoring/coaching) session, but the session helped me gather my thoughts and become conscious of the issues'. C12 experienced a clarity in her thinking about tricky work based issues, aided by the calming influence of her mentor/coach.

Whilst a new perspective on the situation was one of clients' explicit learning aspirations, a new confidence was a more unexpected outcome. Four of the eight clients interviewed described how they had learnt to believe more in themselves than they had before their mentoring/coaching sessions. C2, in preparing to deliver her first Masters teaching session, described how the mentor/coach had pointed out the skills and knowledge C2 already had which gave her confidence when faced with the challenge of teaching for the first time. This confidence was linked to the fact that her mentor/coach had no relationship with her Line Manager with whom C2 had felt unvalued and unsupported. C2 commented that it was '... amazing how you can believe someone!'

C8 also learnt that she was not as bad as she thought she was, that she did have abilities that are respected. Through mentoring/coaching, she came to believe, 'I can just do this...' C12 and C7 had both felt that they were 'up against a brick wall' and that they could not change anything. Through mentoring/coaching, they came to see that it was not such a huge thing they had to overcome and that they were capable of dealing with it.

Sadly, C9 whose learning aspiration was to be helped out of her very bad emotional state, had the opposite experience. She became discouraged through the mentoring/coaching, and said she ended up feeling that she only had herself to help herself but she did not have sufficient energy to act.

Learning about relating to others in the workplace

When the model of learning is participation, learning and socialization are difficult to separate. It is not surprising then, that both mentor/coaches and clients described their learning as learning about their behaviour towards other people in their communities. This was a particularly powerful experience for mentor/coaches who became a close-knit group through meeting once a month for development. Despite its professionally mixed make up, relationships within the group were described as '... very respectful, with a great sense of equity' (MC10). As they had aspired, they were learning about workplace colleagues and learning to understand them and withhold judgement of them. One mentor/coach described learning a raised awareness of people, and a 'conscious engagement' with them, which involved listening to them and reflecting on what she had heard (MC2o). Another mentor/coach said she had learnt to be more open, friendly, empathetic and sympathetic, and to concentrate on one thing, and one person (MC6).

Learning of skills and knowledge through and for the workplace

In keeping with their aspirations, clients and mentor/coaches acquired skills useful for the workplace and sometimes beyond too. The mentor/coaches described learning skills through and for the workplace in the sense of specific mentoring/coaching skills. Some of these were more developed than others depending on their previous knowledge of mentoring/coaching, for example, one mentor/coach felt that her listening skills were much improved but she still needed to work on her skill in asking pertinent questions (MC7). Another mentor/coach had learnt how she needed to go for a walk after seeing a client because she felt 'full of their stuff' and needed to clear her head (MC5). Some mentor/coaches mentioned the importance of acquiring the theoretical underpinning of mentoring/coaching.

The 'trainers' themselves were still learning about the mentoring/coaching process, and about successful strategies for

developing new mentor/coaches. One 'trainer' described being now '... less precious about the whole approach' (MC10). New issues were raised about mentoring/coaching each session after the team had been practising and were able to reflect on their practice. Through this the 'trainer' had learnt the advantage of the ongoing month by month sessions compared to a once-off initial training, but she also became aware of how differently different learners learn.

Clients had identified as one of their learning aspirations the acquisition of further professional skills and knowledge. At least half of the group had acquired useful workplace skills and knowledge. For example, C7 developed her delegation skills, learnt to trust other people in the workplace more and how to deal more effectively with an increased workload. She found it particularly useful to be able to try out proposed strategies, and then feed back to her mentor/coach and discuss further action. C4 received guidance in applying for new jobs which she acted on successfully and C8 actioned some financial steps suggested by her mentor/coach.

Important factors that affected the learning of clients and mentor/coaches

Qualities of the mentor/coach

Rodger (2006, p. 37) claims that the mentoring/coaching model that will work best '... is the one underpinned by a secure personal relationship between mentor and trainee'.

This view was certainly represented by the clients in this research, who emphasized that their learning was facilitated when their mentor/coach had some existing connection with the client. For example, three clients had met their mentor/coach before and learning was easier because she was not a complete stranger. C2 found it helpful that her mentor/coach had similar cultural origins as herself, and the mentor/coach had told her empathetically, 'That can often be (our particular) way of doing things'.

Researchers have suggested a range of qualities or roles thought to be important in a mentor/coach to ensure optimal

learning during a mentoring/coaching session. These are shown in Table 1 below, in juxtaposition to the qualities suggested by the clients in the current research as having helped them in their learning.

The eight clients interviewed applauded the mentor/coaches they had met who, among them, demonstrated the traits listed above in the last section of the table. Only the client who was in a bad emotional state criticized her mentor/coach for not being 'tuned into the same station' as she was (C9). Rodger (2006) suggests that the ideal mentor has a combination of personal traits and good skills. As well as discussing personal traits, clients in this study recognized the importance of the mentor/coaches' skills in planning and managing the sessions well. Because the context for mentoring/coaching was the workplace, it was essential that mentor/coaches be flexible in arranging sessions. A couple of clients had found it difficult to find a time when they could meet their mentor/coach, and C8 described feeling guilty about using a whole hour of work time for mentoring/coaching saying, 'I wouldn't like the Director to know!' (she did then go on to have the full six sessions). One client had found the homework set by her mentor/coach too difficult but when she told her mentor/coach, the mentor/coach postponed their next meeting and this created even more pressure on the client's already pressurized situation (C3).

It is noticeable that clients stressed that mentor/coaches needed to encourage them to draw on their own experience and knowledge, and allow for exploration by asking challenging questions. The comments indicate that clients were interested in constructing knowledge in collaboration with their mentor/coach, rather than being instructed by them. They appeared to recognize that this way of learning would be more helpful to them.

The multifaceted situatedness of the monthly learning sessions for mentor/coaches

The aim of the monthly learning sessions for the team of mentor/coaches was to provide ongoing professional development to support mentor/coaches in their practical, cultural and sociobiographical situations. This multifaceted situatedness was one key feature that made the sessions particularly powerful.

The cultural situatedness of the monthly learning sessions for mentor/coaches

The scheme had a comfortable niche within the cultural structures of the workplace. The initiator of the whole scheme was described as a 'confident and visionary person' (MC1A), and her ongoing collaboration with the two 'trainers' for the monthly sessions meant the learning was linked to wider Institute

Rodger (2006): Critical friend, compassionate, protector, maternal colleague, supportive confidante, good listener, understanding, well developed sense of humour

Kay and Hinds (2005): Approachable and willing, committed, enthusiastic

Pennington (2004): Open, respectful, tolerant, honest, supportive, encouraging, having integrity, trusting

Carnell et al (2006): Empathetic, wishing to see others succeed, confident about what can or cannot be done, patient, sensitive, willing to make time

Current research (2008): Approachable, empathetic, non-judgmental, good eye contact, calm, positive, having encouraging outlook, good listener, sympathetic, trusting, humorous, using plain language, flexible, non-prescriptive

Table 1. Qualities or roles of mentor/coaches that are facilitative of clients' learning

support networks. One of these was a provision of mentor/coaches for the mentor/coaches to use themselves. They had learnt through being mentor/coached, how useful this particular model of mentoring/coaching could be, and they also picked up some mentoring/coaching strategies as they were being mentor/coached. The keen support of the Director of the Institute gave credence to the whole process, as did supportive Line Managers who prioritised mentoring/coaching sessions. The dissemination of the publication about the Mentoring/Coaching Scheme had also been encouraging as it made the process something that concerned everyone.

Some mentor/coaches found being interviewed for this Institute-wide evaluation provided further support to their learning in the monthly sessions. They valued having the dedicated time to talk about mentoring/coaching, as a chance to celebrate and reflect on the process individually. One participant learnt about things she wanted to discuss in the next monthly session (MC1A); another was reminded about taking responsibility for her learning (MC2o); and another became aware that the way she was talking to the interviewer was qualitatively different because of skills she had learnt during 'training' (MC7).

The ways in which the Scheme was culturally situated clearly benefited the experience of mentor/coaches. However, aspects in which it was less comfortably situated within the wider culture of the workplace had a negative influence. For example, mentor/coaches bemoaned the structural constraints that meant a proposed extended, possibly residential learning session would not be possible, and the lack of a dedicated mentoring/coaching room implied it had a relatively low priority within the Institute as a whole. Other negative cultural or structural influences on the learning of the group included time pressures and work pressures. Not all Line Managers had seemed to realize that group members would need to take a morning out of work to attend mentoring/coaching sessions every single month. So participants could not

always attend the monthly sessions, and then their learning missed out (and they did not always take up the trainers' offer of a private meeting to discuss what happened in a missed session). Then group members' absences affected others' learning negatively during sessions and there was a perception that numbers had been dwindling particularly during the latter months of the first year of the Scheme. This could mean less variety when choosing who to work with, leading to reduced potential for learning.

Despite what could be described as its decontextualised nature, most participants had found the initial three-day training useful, which was given by two 'experts' from the LCLL. The intensive nature of this training in a three-day cluster, was a useful starting point although for those who had no previous experience of mentoring/coaching it was a particularly steep learning curve. However, participants noted that the mentoring/coaching model of the two trainers during the intensive training was inconsistent with that of the two monthly session 'trainers' which had added to a confusion about the difference between mentoring and coaching.

The practical situatedness of the monthly sessions

The practical situatedness of the learning sessions was very important for mentor/coaches' learning. The monthly sessions had been 'practice-oriented, hands on, right from the start, with the participants actually doing it themselves' (MC7). This led to high levels of engagement and motivation during sessions as issues from practice were drawn out. Some mentor/coaches met together between sessions to practise mentoring/coaching, others mentor/coached outside the workplace setting, which meant they gained practice and learnt to deal with particular issues outside the sessions, too. Sometimes ad hoc conversation among group members, in between sessions, turned into valuable learning experiences because of the good relationship participants had together. Later on, they were actually mentoring/coaching clients who had

applied to the Mentoring/Coaching Service, and this provided more important opportunities for learning.

The practical situatedness was so important for their learning, however, that mentor/coaches felt they needed more practice. Several mentor/coaches complained of not having had enough 'live' mentoring/coaching sessions. They were afraid that if they did not practise 'live', they would lose momentum and lose their skills, and also increase their nervousness. Learning was hindered in that issues arising from 'live' sessions could not be addressed during the monthly sessions if there had been no live sessions. Only so much could be learnt through practice mentoring/coaching, and through learning the 'vast' theories behind it (MC2o). In addition, some participants who had done some 'live' mentoring/coaching, told us they found that some clients had misconceived expectations, so the learning of both mentor/coach and client was hindered.

The sociobiographical situatedness of the monthly sessions

Mentor/coaches described the sociobiographical situatedness of learning in the group who met monthly, in terms of their shared responsibility for learning. They described the group as 'nurturing, with a good climate of trust, and a harmony in the group' (MC10). The group was 'open to sharing thoughts and ideas and trust' (MC5) and they benefited from hearing about others' experiences, and from learning through one another, especially as the group was so mixed in terms of its personnel. One mentor/coach noted that she benefited most when the maximum number of people were attending (MC2). Clearly the qualities of the members of the group affected how well learning happened in the group. The initiator of the whole scheme had handpicked members of the group, had trust in them and had given them the responsibility to become effective. They had all taken this really seriously, and it was noted that there were some very skilled people in the group (MC1A), across the hierarchical range.

Mentor/coach MC6 summarised her experience of the learning in the group

as follows:

The most influential factor on my learning has been the group itself. Without the continued commitment and support of others, I would not have had the confidence to put theory into practice. There is a good feeling when we get together – an atmosphere in which I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts and experiences without being judged. Hearing the group's observations on my own contributions and listening to theirs has helped my learning enormously and given me the encouragement and reassurance to try out a completely new skill. I believe such a learning environment is crucial to the success of establishing a worthwhile Coaching/Mentoring Service at the Institute.

Technical aspects of monthly sessions

One mentor/coach described the support of the two 'trainers' as 'more than wonderful, it's brilliant!' (MC2o) because they were really interested in learning rather than just training (despite the misnomer of 'trainers'). The 'trainers' were credited with being calm, patient, well organised, approachable and very experienced. Their responses to emails in between sessions, and their open invitation for any of the mentor/coaches to talk to them between sessions, was particularly helpful.

The regularity and frequency of the sessions, and the fact that they continued over the year kept up the momentum and gave participants the chance to leave their pressured work places behind and concentrate fully on mentoring/coaching, getting to know other members of the group. The fact that sessions were in the morning meant mentor/coaches were still fresh, and the M&S lunch at the end was a pleasant incentive. Each session was well time-managed, well planned and introduced new focuses appropriately. A couple of participants mentioned how beneficial the reading associated with the sessions had been for their learning (MC6; MC4) and more pre-readings were proposed (MC6).

The mentor/coaches also had some

suggestions about how the technical aspects of these sessions could be improved, to maximise learning. Having a dedicated, customised room for meeting clients was a priority for many mentor/coaches, although the tension of keeping mentoring/coaching confidential and yet having a dedicated room, was also raised.

In terms of the content of the actual monthly learning sessions, one mentor/coach suggested using feedback from clients to inform trainers' learning (MC4). Another member suggested that seeing video footage of people from outside the Institute in mentoring/coaching situations, would be a helpful addition to just practising with each other within the group (MC2). While the current 'trainers' felt there was no need for the external experts to run any future initial 'training' session, one mentor/coach suggested that the current 'trainers' undergo some further development themselves, or invite a third expert in, so that future input could continue to be challenging (MC1).

Recommendations

The cultural, practical and sociobiographical situatedness of the learning aspired to and achieved by participants of the Scheme, was the key feature that gave it power, and should therefore continue to be the focus of the Scheme

The findings from this research indicate clearly that the particular non-hierarchical model of peer mentoring and coaching used by the Institute's Mentoring and Coaching Service should be continued and escalated, because it has successfully promoted work based learning in, through and for the workplace. This learning has been successful largely because of the cultural, practical and sociobiographical situatedness of the learning made possible by the non-hierarchical nature of the learning model underpinning the Service, and because learning has been supported by, and linked to wider networks within and beyond the Institute. The practical situatedness combined with cultural, and sociobiographical situatedness, meant that learning for most participants was focused as well as

institutionally supported and personally motivated. The learning aspired to and achieved by both mentor/coaches and clients has been a situated learning, relating to self, behaviours and relationships in the workplace, as well as professional skills; it is therefore likely to inspire further engagement with and motivation for work based learning. When planning how to improve the Mentoring and Coaching Service, it will therefore be imperative to sustain focus on the multi-dimensional situatedness of both mentor/coaches' and clients' learning.

The non-hierarchical model of mentoring/coaching should be continued

The model was non-hierarchical in two connected ways: in that the professional position of the mentor/coach was not related to their role as a mentor/coach; and that the mentor/coach did not instruct clients in what to do but rather worked together with them to find solutions.

The fact that mentor/coaches had no professional authority or power over the client, was essential to allow a learning conversation even to begin. And then, once it had begun, the success of the process depended on the mentor/coaches' skill in allowing the clients to take the active, responsible role in their learning. An instructional model where the mentor/coach told the client what to do would most likely not have yielded the richness of learning described by clients in this evaluation. The fact that the mentor/coach, whatever his/her professional position, maintained the role of peer, meant that the mentor/coaches could address a range of work based issues, in the way most appropriate for the particular client.

In future, the co-constructive role of the mentor/coach needs continued emphasis and this could be more explicitly described to both mentor/coaches and clients. Indeed, learning needs to be mentioned in the Service's promotional literature for clients, and mentor/coaches would benefit from systematic opportunities to reflect on their learning as they did during interview for

this evaluation. Use of a new word to replace 'trainers' would be in keeping with the co-constructive role of mentor/coach.

Monthly learning sessions for mentor/coaches should continue and be expanded

The findings suggest, and mentor/coaches suggested, that particular emphasis needs to be placed on keeping the monthly learning sessions thriving for the mentor/coaches, and could indeed be useful for a new cohort too. The richness and the impact of the learning experienced in this setting makes it worth investing resources into this group on an ongoing basis. Of prime importance is this group's clear focus on learning, rather than on being 'trained'. Even without taking account of how mentor/coaches assist clients, this learning group community has been a high point in the work based learning of many of its members. Continued skilful handpicking of suitable mentor/coaches with desirable qualities will increase the likelihood of useful learning for clients. As mentioned by the mentor/coaches and clients themselves, if more mentor/coaches were trained (including more men and more older mentor/coaches) it would allow even better matching of mentor/coach to client. It would, in addition, give more employees the chance to participate in a fruitful learning community.

The scope of the Service should be expanded

One client told us, 'Every workplace should have this Service, for employees to go to safely'. Some employees had a vision of the Mentoring and Coaching Service expanding to other colleges of London University who, on the basis of this evaluation, might be interested in this non-hierarchical model of peer mentoring/coaching. Institute trained mentor/coaches could train staff from other colleges until, in the long term, a reciprocal arrangement might operate. In this scenario, the work based learning of employees across London University could benefit, and, using cross-collegiate mentor/coaches, the danger of mentor/coaches being linked to clients'

immediate workplace situations would be minimized.

Promotion of the Service should be improved

When mentor/coaches and clients were interviewed, they suggested that dissemination of information about the Mentoring and Coaching Scheme needed to be increased and amended. They suggested that the Service should be described across the Institute as an opportunity for work based learning that all employees could access, not just those with 'deficits' and not just administrative staff, or just academics. Clients needed clear information about what mentoring/coaching sessions could and could not do for them in terms of learning. Senior Managers had a particular need to be informed about the Service and so encourage both clients and mentor/coaches to participate in it without fear of reproach. A dedicated room was needed to indicate its institutional importance. Clients suggested that leaflets and posters were not enough for promotion of the Service. The Service could also be highlighted at employees' induction sessions and school/departmental/faculty meetings. The more widely it was used, the more colleagues would feel at ease to talk about it, and then it would be informally promoted too.

Impact indicators

Individual workers contribute to both the preservation of existing working practices and to changing them. Both preservation and change are integrally linked to workplace learning (Evans et al, p. 98).

Participants in this evaluation described becoming more deeply connected to their workplace situations. At the same time, some were able to articulate how learning about themselves and their own behaviours and relationships in the workplace had impacted on others in the workplace.

Among clients, for example, C2 told her

colleagues about the Mentoring and Coaching Service because she had become more sensitive to the fact that her colleagues might be suffering in silence as she had done previously. Having experienced mentoring/coaching herself, she realized that her colleagues needed to talk about things with each other so she tried to initiate more dialogue within her department. On the other hand, C3 said that since her mentoring/coaching, she had become more relaxed in her attitude to people she found difficult to work with, better able to resist taking things personally and better able to walk away; she thus lessened the chances of a workplace conflict erupting. She was also having an impact on her workplace by actively seeking to leave it, as suggested during her mentoring/coaching sessions.

However, as one of the 'trainers' said, even without reference to the clients' experience, the mentoring/coaching scheme impacted on the workplace through the mentor/coaches' learning. The 'trainers' noticed a changed relationship with the mentor/coaches outside the learning sessions, implying to them that they themselves had changed. Mentor/coaches described increased confidence in the workplace, allowing them to do their jobs more effectively, especially in terms of how they communicated with other colleagues. For example, one mentor/coach described using mentoring/coaching type questions routinely in everyday work conversations; another administrator explained how she 'became conscious of how it would seem to the other person' when she was dealing with students, and after that, she listened to them better and gave them her full concentration (MC7).

Key Literature and Weblinks

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