

Mentoring in the Nigerian academia: experiences and challenges

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Abstract

Using qualitative and quantitative measures, this study explores the mentoring experiences and challenges among 48 members of the academic staff in a Nigerian university social science faculty, where the mission was to enhance the skills of academic staff members through mentoring programmes. The findings of the survey revealed that the few existing mentoring relationships are informal and were developed on the basis of similarity of research interests, initial delegation of work activity by mentors to their protégés, the delegation of conference/workshop attendance by mentor to protégés, inclusion of protégés in research projects and supervision of the protégé's thesis. Results showed that areas in which mentors have supported their protégés include enlistment in group and international research networks, publication, counselling and advice, and financial support. The unresponsive attitude of junior academics, the pressure of administrative duties, lack of funds and formal mentor/protégé structures were commonly reported as barriers to mentoring. The implications of these findings for faculty policy formulation, training and effective delivery of mentoring are discussed.

Key words: Mentoring; academic protégés; African perspective; enhancing skills; staff development; Nigeria.

Introduction

Mentoring is not a new concept in academic circles (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005) but it has recently been revived in Nigerian universities as there is a growing concern about raising academic standards and a desire for Nigerian universities to compete favourably with their counterparts in other parts of the world. The management of the institutions are therefore under increased pressure to create opportunities for professional guidance and development of their academic staff to avert a slide in academic performance. One way to maintain academic standards and performance is mentoring – a training and development relationship that enhances an individual's professional growth (Jennings, 1971; Orth & Jacobs, 1971; Levinson *et al*, 1978; Roche, 1979; Kram, 1985; McCall *et al*, 1998). Mentoring relationships can be informal or formal. Informal mentoring relationships are those which evolve naturally from shared admiration, aspiration, values and interests (Kram, 1983, 1985; Sullivan, 1992). The formal types are those created to ensure that more employees have the opportunity to reap the benefits of the relationship. They are formed through a planned matching or assignment of mentors and protégés (the younger and less experienced partner in the union) by the organisation (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

The association between mentoring and the career development of protégés is made possible because mentors provide two broad categories of functions – career development and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1985). Career development functions are mentor activities

which facilitate protégé advancement in an organisation, while psychosocial functions are those which address the interpersonal and emotional aspects of the relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Typical career development functions include challenging work assignments, visibility to management and sponsorship, exposure and protection (Fagenson, 1989). Psychosocial functions comprise role modelling, friendship, counselling and acceptance. These functions enhance a protégé's identity, work role effectiveness, career advancement, self-confidence and address other interpersonal concerns of the relationship (Burke, 1984; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

The pursuit of development by young scholars in the Nigerian academic terrain is not without challenges, fears and anxieties. Indeed, the literature suggests that youthful entrants into the adult workplace encounter a variety of developmental tasks that are effectively facilitated by a good mentor relationship (cited in Kram, 1985). Mentoring is regarded as one of the best tools for "reducing stress for novice teachers, orientation to curriculum and promoting the creation of better norms of collegiality and collaboration" (Sweeney, 2004). It helps in the resolution of challenges and predicaments, making it more likely that an individual attains his career goals and growth. The benefits of mentoring is based on a developmental social learning perspective which posits that behaviour is learned in interaction with others, especially when they serve as models (Sarason *et al*, 1991; Baldwin, 1992). In this regard, mentoring is especially valuable for the transmission of positive attitudes as mentors provide invaluable information on the mission and philosophies of the organisation, help employees cope with career stress and give proper orientation towards workplace values (Murray, 1995; Gilley & Boughton, 1996; Payne, 2006).

In addition, mentoring affords the transfer of skills which protégés can apply in diverse professional circumstances, promotes productive use of knowledge, clarity of goals and roles, career success, career growth, salary increases and promotions, career and job satisfaction (Levinson *et al*, 1978; Kram, 1985; Fagenson, 1989; Scandura, 1992; Aryee & Chay, 1994; Burke, Mckeen & McKenna, 1994; Okurame, 2002; Okurame & Balogun, 2005). Mentoring relationships are also useful even to the senior partner in the union, as it provides an opportunity for them to develop a base of technical support and power which can be readily summoned in the future (Hunt & Michael, 1983). Being recognised as the mentor of a successful protégé enhances the reputation of the senior academic/partner among his or her peers. Obviously, the positive outcomes of mentoring are capable of fostering a satisfied and 'well-groomed' professional workforce. The corollary of the mentoring relationship can therefore be summed up as the professional development of employees and institutional effectiveness.

Although, findings on the relevance of mentoring for employee development are mainly from industry, they are no less important in the academia. However, despite considerable empirical support for the importance of mentoring in the professional development of individuals and the quest for the latter in the Nigerian academia, a dearth of empirical exploration of mentoring activities subsists. The incidence of mentoring in the university system and the challenges thereof remain unclear. Under these circumstances, central research questions arise: how have academics experienced mentoring? What are their perceptions of mentoring as a development tool? Do academics experience barriers or challenges in the utilisation of mentoring? These constitute the research questions of the present study.

The present study therefore explores mentoring experiences and challenges among academic staff members of a social science faculty in a university located in south-western Nigeria. The study is justified in the chosen setting because of the faculty's recently expressed mission to enhance the skills of academic staff members through mentoring programmes (expressed in

Isiugo-Abanihe, 2007) and a complete lack of empirical information on mentoring in the faculty to serve as a baseline for further action. The current study is an attempt to address these shortcomings and facilitate the effective utilisation of mentoring by providing a context-specific database. The following objectives served as guide for the exploratory study.

1. To ascertain the extent to which members of academic staff in the faculty perceive mentoring as a crucial component of academic development.
2. To find out the form and extent of mentoring relationships among academic staff in the faculty.
3. To find out how existing mentoring relationships were initiated
4. To find out the focus of mentoring activities in existing relationships
5. To identify barriers experienced by senior academic members to being mentors of junior/new faculty members.
6. To identify challenges experienced by protégés in mentoring relationships.

The Research Context

The study was conducted among academic staff members of a social science faculty in a Nigerian university. The institution, located in the south-western part of Nigeria, is one of the five first generation federal universities (they are so categorised because of their age of establishment relative to others) that were in existence in the 1960s. It offers degree programmes in social sciences, arts, education, pharmacy, medicine, agriculture and forestry, law, basic sciences, and technology. Academic standards for these programmes are regulated by an arm of government in the area of development and management of university education, the National Universities Commission. The university has produced thousands of graduates that have excelled in the local and international work environment.

Currently, the university has a 2:1 undergraduate and postgraduate student's enrolment ratio. A large number of the total student enrolment figure is accounted for by the university's social sciences faculty. This faculty, which is highly ranked in the university and among social science faculties in Nigeria, is one of the five faculties with an appreciable number of the university's academic staff. These are mainly Nigerians from diverse backgrounds; their gender composition is skewed in favour of males. An institution-wide culture of induction exists among academic members of staff. This may or may not lead to mentoring relationships – a broader application than induction. On the whole, academics take responsibility for their own professional development.

African (Albeit Nigerian) Perspectives of Mentoring

Mentoring is a phenomenon that has been rekindled in the Nigerian environment because of the need for tutelage in the socio-political arena and the growing appreciation of the benefits of mentoring in the work setting. Mentoring in the Nigerian work setting reflects the broad activities identified by Kram (1985) – which is largely focused on counseling, protection and sponsoring the career advancement of an individual. These relationships comprise both genders and are generally organized by prevalent gender role stereotypes. Mentoring relationships often develop spontaneously based on proximity, hierarchical line of responsibility, ethnic affiliation, admiration, competence, shared values, and gender concerns. Instances of an official assignment of protégé to mentor are common among non-government organisations that seek to develop youths. Mentors whether in spontaneous or assigned relationships are frequently older and more practiced compared to their protégés. A common feature of these relationships is the great allegiance and respect accorded to mentors by their protégés. This is particularly in view of the African perspective that wisdom stems from old

age. Though, some negative connotations of mentors as Godfather exist, in general mentors are appreciated for giving direction to younger colleagues.

Method

Participants for the study were selected through the purposive sampling method. They were academics with tenure of 4 years and above who were available at the commencement of the session when this study was started. Academics with at least 4 years of teaching experience in the faculty were selected as participants because this time-frame is considered adequate for fostering developmental relationships like mentoring (Kram, 1985; Zey, 1985; Murray, 1991). It is equally considered sufficient for understanding perceptions of mentoring in the faculty. Respondents are therefore information-rich cases for the investigation of experiences and challenges of mentoring in the sampled faculty. A total of 48 (6 females and 42 males) academics in five units of the sampled faculty took part in the study. They were 27 junior, 9 middle and 12 senior level members. Their average age is 45.08 years (SD = 6.71) while average tenure with their current institution is 13.5 years (SD = 3.67).

Procedure and measures

The study instrument was administered to academic members of staff in their offices with an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. They were informed that the study is an empirical investigation of personal mentoring experiences and challenges of academics in the faculty. Participants were not aware of the study's ultimate aim of providing empirical guidance for the faculty's mission to develop staff through mentoring programmes. This helped to avoid possible bias in the responses of participants.

Data were obtained on age, sex, job status and institutional tenure, and a number of open and close-ended questions were asked with several follow up questions that probe for more detailed information of mentoring experiences and challenges and perceptions of mentoring as a crucial development strategy for academic staff. Respondents were required to provide written responses to questions bordering on whether or not they were mentors or protégés in the faculty, and to list two most important mentor supports they had provided (if they are mentors). They were also asked to indicate opportunities for mentoring in the faculty and how members have or can avail themselves of the relationship. They were to indicate whether or not mentoring had served as a crucial component of their development, and point out barriers to the maintenance and assumption of mentoring roles by middle and senior academics. Furthermore, participants were asked to state the extent to which they agreed on a likert scale that a list of potential staff development strategies (adapted from McAlearney, 2005; e.g. 'Offer internal leadership development programme for academic staff', 'Establish official developmental relationships between junior and senior academic staff') should be the faculty's priority.

The quantitative measure involved a mentoring functions scale modified from Okurame (2002; e.g. 'My mentor assigns or nominates me for challenging assignments that facilitates my career development', 'I have admired and modelled my behaviour after my mentor', and 'I admire my mentor's skills and sincerely desire to acquire same'). The 15-item scale measured mentoring functions that protégés felt they had received from their mentors using a response scale of 1, "strongly disagree" to 5, "strongly agree." An alpha coefficient of .89 was obtained for the scale in this study.

Results

The present research utilised qualitative and quantitative measures that yielded descriptive and quantitative results. The results are presented under different subheadings:

The perception of mentoring as a component of academic staff development

Findings reveal that 37.5% (18 out of 48) of the respondents reported that mentoring is a crucial component that has helped them develop as academics. Results show that 10% (3 out of 30) of those who reported a contrary opinion were currently involved in a mentoring relationship. Responses to follow up questions reveal that participants in the study recognised mentoring as a valuable developmental tool but they differed in their opinion of the type of mentoring relationship to be encouraged. Majority of the respondents (70.8%) disapprove of the establishment of a formal mentoring programme in the faculty; 10.4% were undecided while 18.8% were in favour. Follow-up questions during instrument administration showed that reasons for rejecting the setting up of formal mentoring programmes include concern for its feasibility given the different disciplines and research interests, and a lack of mentor role tradition in faculty units. Conversely, respondents who favoured the establishment of formal mentoring programmes argued that it would advance a tradition of mentoring and foster commitment to its ideals in the faculty.

However, an overwhelming majority strongly supported other potential development strategies to enhance mentoring, i.e., that mentoring should be complemented by an internal leadership development programme for staff (93.8%) and the provision of financial resources to support external programme attendance (77.1%). A few strongly supported the setting up of developmental targets for high potential academics (33.3%) and the provision of feedback on performance evaluation (29.2%).

Extent and form of mentoring relationships

Findings show that 29.6% (8 out of 27) of the sampled junior academics and 44.4% (4 out of 9) of the middle level respondents were protégés; one of the middle level protégés double as mentor. The distribution of mentors varied thus; 11.1% of the middle level respondents and 66.7% (8 out of 12) of the senior respondents were mentors; two middle-level protégés had mentors outside the institution. All the mentors except one had previous mentoring experience as a protégé. Simple frequency shows that all but two of the mentors were males. Results indicate that majority of the protégés (58.3%) and mentors (50%) were from the same academic unit of the faculty. All protégés and mentors were involved in the informal type of mentoring relationship. The chi square analysis showed that the disparity in the total number of junior and middle level members with ($n = 12$) and without ($n = 24$) mentoring experience reached statistical significance, $\chi^2(1, n = 36) = 4.56, p < .05$.

Initiation of mentoring relationships among faculty members

The majority of the participants (87.5%) believe that opportunities for informal mentoring relationships abound in the faculty; the remainder (12.5%) disagreed. An analysis of the responses of academics to follow-up questions on how existing relationships were initiated showed that they evolved from similarity of research interests, initial delegation of work activity by mentors, delegation of conference/workshop attendance by the mentor, the inclusion of a protégé in research projects and supervision of the protégé's thesis.

The question "how can members of academic staff avail themselves of mentoring relationships" produced similar responses among members with and without mentoring experience, and across academic ranks. They frequently mentioned seven ways through which

mentoring can be fostered among faculty members. Table 1 shows that the most mentioned means were mutual respect and reverence for academic feats, resolve to share resources and experience (87.5%), followed by personal decision/conscious effort to establish a link with a potential mentor or protégé (75%) and appreciating the need to mentor or be mentored (68.7%). The least mentioned means is encouraging members to request to be mentor or protégé (25%).

Means	Respondent* %
1. Mutual respect and reverence for academic feats, resolve to share resources and experience	87.5%
2. Personal decision/conscious effort to establish a link with a potential mentor or protégé	75%
3. Appreciation of the need to mentor or be mentored	68.7%
4. Joint research, publications, teaching and conference/workshop attendance	60.4%
5. Approaching senior colleagues with development problems	56.2%
6. Provision of academic leadership by senior members	50%
7. Request to be mentor or protégé of an academic	25%

Table 1: Means of fostering mentoring relationships among faculty academics

Focus of existing mentoring relationships

Results show that each mentor reported multiple areas in which they have supported their protégés. Content analysis resulted in the collapse of these responses into five recurring areas of support. These are introducing protégés to group and international research networks (88.8%); joint authorship of articles, critique of manuscripts proposed for publication by protégés, and provision of information on journal outlets (88.8%); counselling and advice (33.3%); technical training in analysis of data (22.2%), and financial support (22.2%).

Protégés reported the level of informal mentoring functions that they felt they had received from their mentors on a mentoring scale (modified from Okurame, 2002). Factor analysis of protégé responses on the scale revealed three categories of informal mentoring functions. One of the categories was eliminated because it contained only an item (Eigen values with just one item overestimates the number of factor extraction (Zwick & Velicer, 1986)). Consequently, factor analysis extracted two factors that reflect career development and psychosocial functions of mentoring. A paired sample t-test analysis showed a significant difference between the level of reported career development and psychosocial functions, $t = 5.435$, $df = 11$, $p < .001$. The mean score on career advancement function ($M = 32.68$) was significantly higher than that of psychosocial function ($M = 26.31$).

Perceived barriers to the maintenance and assumption of mentor role

An examination of barriers to mentoring among middle and senior academics in the faculty revealed eight frequent themes. Findings show that mentor role status clearly distinguished respondents on the identified themes. Results presented in Table 2 show the following mentoring barriers commonly mentioned by academics who are currently mentors: branding of mentors as spearheads of cliques (clique was described by respondents as “network of senior academics who use their power to get advantage for themselves”) and protégés as favoured, lack of funds and laziness of protégés and the unresponsive attitude of protégés. Non-mentors frequently reported lack of formal structures that encourage mentoring, self-withdrawal on the part of junior faculty staff and pressure of administrative duties as barriers to their assumption of mentor roles.

Barriers to the assumption/maintenance of mentor role**	Respondent*	
	Mentors (n = 9)	Non-mentors (n = 12)
1. Branding of mentors as spearheads of cliques and protégés as favoured	77.7%	25%
2. lack of funds	66.6%	8.3%
3. laziness and unresponsive attitude of protégés	66.6%	41.6%
4. lack of trust	33.3%	-
5. Lack of a formal structure to foster mentoring	11.1%	66.6%
6. Self-withdrawal of junior members	44.4%	50%
7. Pressure of administrative duties	33.3%	41.6%
8. Lack of reverence by juniors for the expertise of seniors	22.2%	25%

* Respondents were middle and senior level academics who were either mentors or non-mentors

** Each respondent mentioned multiple barriers to the maintenance/assumption of mentor role

Table 2: Barriers to the assumption/maintenance of mentor role by middle and senior academics

Challenges experienced by protégés

Content analysis of responses shows six areas in which protégés experience challenges. These are inability to measure up to a mentor’s standard, inadequate attention from mentor, balancing conviction with expectations of a mentor, inadequate opportunity to speak freely about their ideas, fear of being branded as ‘anointed’ and the pressure of deadlines.

Discussion

The findings of the present study should be used with caution because of several limitations. The findings are based on a small sample size. Although sampling for proportionality is not the key concern of this study, the limited sample generates the problem of non-response bias. This limits the extent to which respondents’ views, and findings, fully represent the population of interest. Besides, the study depended on self-report of mentoring experiences for data collection. Recall and possible distortion of mentoring experience by some respondents may therefore also generate an avenue for alternative explanations of findings. Future studies should examine a larger sample of faculty academics to afford much more representative views. It should also incorporate objective measures that would prevent bias and help to corroborate self-reports of mentoring experience obtained from participants. Again, the present study is exploratory; further investigation is necessary to confirm its findings. The foregoing limitations do not diminish the practical implications of the present findings for fostering an effective mentoring programme that will benefit all stakeholders in the faculty; rather, it calls for an extensive study of mentoring relationships in the faculty.

The study tapped into mentoring experiences of academics in a Nigerian social science faculty to identify challenges and prospects for the faculty’s proposal to develop staff through mentoring programmes. Findings reveal that existing mentoring relationships are informal. The lack of formal mentoring relationships reported in this study probably reflects the fact that mentoring in the Nigerian context is not an officially assigned relationship. One implication of this is that not all academic staff members in the faculty have benefited from mentoring. Since informal mentoring evolves naturally from shared values, aspirations and interests (Kram, 1983, 1985; Sullivan, 1992), mentors and protégés in informal relationship are less likely to take on just anybody. Consistent with this conclusion, the results of this study showed that existing informal relationships are not widespread; the majority are located

in one of the five academic units sampled in the faculty. The literature suggests that a situation where some employees receive mentoring support and others do not, results in perceived inequity, expressed resentment, jealousy and perceived distributive injustice among those who did not obtain support (Scandura, 1998; Bauer, 1999). A major challenge for the faculty therefore is to ensure that mentoring gets to all.

Mentors in identified relationships are predominantly male; indicating a dearth of female mentors. Though this is clearly a consequence of a highly skewed male-female senior academic staff ratio, it portends another challenge for the faculty to develop staff through mentoring. A growing number of new/junior faculty members are women and the virtually male mentor structure found in the study implies that opposite sex dyads would necessarily occur. This form of dyad needs to be focused to avoid potential problems such as misconstruing the relationship as sexual, social distance, gender stereotypic beliefs and its impact on mentoring outcome (Kram, 1985; Burke *et al*, 1994; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Okurame, 2006). Clearly, opposite sex mentoring requires that academics receive some training on relationship skills and how to better focus the mentoring project in the face of gender stereotypic beliefs.

The finding that existing relationships were formed through preliminary contacts between junior and senior academics indicates a prospect for fostering informal mentoring in the faculty. Indeed, a majority of respondents indicate that mentoring opportunities abound and this could be utilised if academic members resolve to submit or share resources and experience, if they make personal decision/conscious effort to establish a link with a potential mentor or protégé, if they appreciate the need to mentor or be mentored and if they request to be mentor or protégé of an academic. What these suggest is that mentoring could be fostered and nourished when certain attitudes are in place and when there is increased contact between junior and senior academics. Academic members who desire to be mentors or protégés and the faculty management that aspire to develop staff through mentoring would need to pay adequate attention to these aspirations.

The faculty management is equally challenged by the finding that the majority of the respondents disapprove of the establishment of a formal mentoring programme. Instead, respondents supported the encouragement of informal relationships that are complemented by an internal leadership development programme for staff, financial resources to support external programme attendance, and targeted developmental challenges for high potential academics. Reasons proffered for rejecting a formal mentoring programme revealed concern for feasibility given differences in discipline and research interests, compatible protégé-mentor matching, and a lack of the mentoring tradition in most units of the faculty. The literature on mentoring argues that though mentoring is traditionally informal, formal structures have been set up to ensure that its benefits reach a larger proportion of the workforce. Therefore, a mentoring programme without a formal version would leave much to be desired. The findings from this study suggest a need for faculty management to pay attention to how mentoring opportunities can be formally fashioned to avoid the problems envisaged by members. A formal mentoring programme, unlike its informal counterpart, will afford every junior academic a chance of being mentored.

A number of barriers were identified towards the establishment of mentoring programmes in the faculty. Faculty management will have to take note of the mentor role status leaning of the identified barriers. Obviously, perceived or real barriers can deplete the pool of the faculty's mentors. Special attention also needs to be paid to the finding that protégés reported a number of challenges. These findings call for a training and policy intervention to help

current and potential mentors cope with seeming obstacles and to assist protégé and would-be protégés cultivate the right mentoring attitude.

The study revealed that though all participants currently involved in informal mentoring relationships recognise that mentoring is valuable and acknowledged the need to help faculty members develop through it, some of them reported that their relationship had not been a crucial component of academic development. This implies that favourable outcomes are not necessarily attributed to the few existing mentoring relationships. Unsatisfactory informal mentoring relationships are no more effective than no mentoring at all. Even marginally satisfying formal or informal relationships have no favourable mentoring outcome (Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000). The only means through which academic members in the faculty could benefit from the relationship is therefore through good mentoring. Faculty administrators who may wish to establish mentor/protégé relationships are therefore confronted with the task of ensuring that these partnerships are not only formed but are effective and satisfying.

An examination of the areas in which mentors have provided support for their protégés revealed that research and publications is their main focus. This finding corroborates the conclusion of Aladejana, Aladejana & Ehindero (2006) and implies a tendency for mentors to engage in career development functions since the identified areas are activities which facilitate an academics' advancement. The finding in the present study is probably a consequence of a guideline that makes promotion and advancement contingent upon research and publications made by an academic. The implication is that other professional duties of academic staff (such as teaching and community service), which the faculty equally craves to improve, do not receive the desired attention. As noted by Sweeney (2004), mentoring is one of the best tools for providing curriculum orientation to young lecturers. The faculty's mission of developing the skills of staff and fostering excellence in teaching, research and community service through mentoring may not be a reality if all components are not made focal points by mentors.

From the protégé's perspective, results reveal that informal mentoring functions in existing relationships are in line with Kram's (1985) two broad categories - career development and psychosocial functions. A comparison of mean scores on both components show that protégés reported that career development functions were significantly higher than psychosocial functions. This indicates that interpersonal concerns of the relationship are not typical and corroborates an earlier inference that mentors pay more attention to career advancement activities. Mentoring literature suggests that psychosocial functions are equally important for favourable academic career development. The psychosocial functions incorporate friendship, identification, role modelling, social support and acceptance (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). It depends on the emotional bond that underlies a mentoring relationship and reflects the quality of interaction by a mentor-protégé pair (Ragins & cotton, 1999). The low levels of psychosocial functions recorded in this study may therefore be a sign of a dearth of these elements.

Again, empirical investigations in the Nigerian setting suggest that male mentors provide low levels of psychosocial functions compared to female mentors (Okurame, 2007). As male academics outnumber female academics in this study, it should not be a surprise that psychosocial functions were low. At the same time, the setting of the present study could be adduced as reasons for the low level of psychosocial functions in identified relationships. First, the pervading scholastic atmosphere in the faculty virtually encourages actions which promote career development, and second, the career development activities of mentors are more in tune with upward progression in the faculty. Since psychosocial functions enhance

protégé's self-efficacy and sense of competence resulting in personal development and better professional identity formation (Ragins & Cotton, 1999), the findings imply that a more effective utilization of mentoring in the faculty will require some training in interpersonal and social skills for academic members to adequately take advantage of this component of mentoring.

The study has contributed an African perspective on mentoring in the academia and a database that has implications for the utilisation of mentoring as an intervention for the development of staff in the faculty. The usefulness and practical application of this study calls for a new policy and training interventions that would ensure that a significant proportion of academic staff have the opportunity to avail themselves of mentoring relationships. The faculty would gain from a policy which stipulates that senior members of academic staff with vast experience in their respective fields should engage a junior staff in a mentoring relationship. This has the potential of creating a mentoring culture in the faculty, more so if the ability of a senior member to provide mentoring is also made a component of the faculty's reward system. This strategy may well be extended to junior members to encourage them to seek out mentors. Again, a special reward policy that recognises the quality of interaction between the sexes could help to foster good mentoring relationships.

A faculty policy on formal developmental relationships like mentoring is valuable to ensure that mentoring is fully utilised in the faculty. Though some academics could avail themselves of informal mentoring relationships, formal versions are necessary to ensure that the benefits reach all. Faculty management should note that as important as mentoring is, all academic staff members may not seek the relationship if it is not formally established. Indeed, formal mentoring can be used to address developmental issues of minorities and disadvantaged individuals in the faculty. The suggestions made by Ragins & Cotton (1999) for overcoming some of the problems of formal programmes should suffice as guide for the faculty. First, potential protégés and mentors should be identified. Second, identified individuals should be trained in essential and suggested skills for an effective mentoring relationship, and thirdly, individuals should be allowed to choose their mentoring partners after training.

Training, an indispensable feature of any effective mentoring programme (Dancer, 2003), can help the faculty fulfil its mission of developing younger members through mentoring. The possibility of attaining the faculty's goal of promoting scholarship and effective teaching is therefore predictable if potential mentors and protégés are trained by the faculty management. In putting up members for training, special attention has to be paid to the qualities and issues identified as relevant by respondents. Such training has to be gender sensitive and programmed to pay adequate attention to cooperative interaction since interpersonal problems are a major issue in dyads involving men and women. Training in this area will improve interaction between men and women in the faculty and allay fears in such compositions. It is also imperative that the training programme focuses on empowering the few senior female academics to be mentors to multiple female protégés. The contribution of this study to a conducive environment for the effective utilisation of mentoring in the faculty depends on the effective implementation of these interventions. Interestingly, the recommendations that evolved from findings are all within the purview of faculty management.

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