Mentees at the Beach! What do Mentees Want?

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Abstract

The California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) Resource Team Model (RTM) is an innovative model of mentoring, coaching, and training, which includes a broader network of support for mentors and mentees. Based on developmental network models, the RTM is formed by having three mentor librarians with different strengths guide and support one new librarian for six months. The RTM ensures that new librarians acquire the necessary tools and support for a successful start as they become familiar with all areas of librarianship and with the culture of the new organization. In addition to the discussion of recent mentoring theories, the article covers the advantages and disadvantages of the model, its weaknesses and strengths from both the mentor and mentee perspectives.

Introduction

Since hiring a new tenure track faculty librarian is a long expensive process, the CSULB Library designed and launched the Resource Team Model (RTM) in 2007. This is an innovative mentoring, training, and coaching approach that addresses the challenges of traditional one-on-one mentoring models.

The RTM includes a broader network of support for mentors and mentees and is formed by three mentor librarians guiding and supporting one new librarian for six months. The main objective is to familiarize the mentees with all areas of librarianship and with the culture of the new organization. Since traditional mentoring relationships neither address the current needs nor instill necessary leadership skills (Murphy, 2008), the RTM aims to provide new librarians with the tools and support for a successful start as they move towards tenure. Recent research in mentoring suggests that traditional models seem to be shifting to a new direction that encourages broader networks of support and the use of multiple mentoring partners in a non-hierarchical, collaborative, and cross-cultural environment (Bosch, Ramachandran, Luévano, & Wakiji, 2010; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Kram & Ragins, 2007).

The first part of our paper draws heavily on an article published in the *New Review of Academic Librarianship* by two of the authors (Bosch et al., 2010) which is, in essence, a case study of the RTM. The second part is an outgrowth of that research and focuses on the needs of the mentees rather than the mentor or the organization.

Literature Review

A good amount of mentoring literature comes from organizational psychology. Researchers in this field define a developmental network as "the set of people a [mentee] names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the [mentee]'s career by providing

developmental assistance" (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 268). Within the last two decades, mentoring models have moved from the study of single mentoring relationships to a range of relationships that offer developmental assistance in both psychosocial and career-related functions as observed in the groundbreaking research of Kram and Isabella (1985). Although their study demonstrated the benefits of formal and informal relationships that mentees were exposed to, not until the incorporation of social network theory into the study of mentoring did the researchers begin to have a clear understanding of the dynamics and dimensions of developmental networks.

Considering that mentoring relationships pivot around close personal interactions, Kalbfleisch (2007) postulated Mentoring Enactment Theory in which participants in a mentoring relationship support one another, actively engaging in developing, maintaining and repairing their relationships through "strategic and routine communication" (p. 500).

Within academic librarianship, much literature has been focusing on the implementation of formal mentoring relationship, advocating mentoring as a way to familiarize new librarians with promotion and tenure process and to foster leadership. Golian-Lui (2003) showed that successful mentoring creates a support network and exercises leadership skills from both mentor and mentee. Zhang, Deyoe, and Matveyeva (2007) considered careful matching as well as clear guidelines and expectations the most crucial factors of a successful mentoring program. Farmer, Stockham, and Trussell (2009) documented the revitalization of an existing mentoring program by recruiting willing and able mentors as volunteers and by shifting the mentoring focus from the tenure process to a holistic development of new information professionals.

The CSULB RTM Model

As previously mentioned, the following section about RTM draws upon a recently published article by two of the authors (Bosch et al., 2010). Picking a mentor or a team is without doubt the most important aspect of the program. RTM requires that mentors be selected from library program committees (e.g., reference and instruction services, collection development, tenure process). Since mentors are selected based on their strengths in a specific specialty, the mentee has multiple opportunities to learn and consult from a number of senior librarians. The RTM picks its own leader or a leader naturally emerges (usually the one who schedules the meetings and agenda).

Additionally, the psychosocial dynamics among the Resource Team mentors could influence the success of the program. RTM considers the team members' gender, cultural background and research interests to provide a broad and complementary combination of skills and personalities. Another thing to consider is whether or not one of the team members should be a subject specialist in the same or related area. Finally, additional training of the team leader is needed to articulate the goals of the RTM team. Figure 1 is a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of the RTM for mentors and mentees.

CSULB RESOURCE TEAM MODEL (RTM)			
MENTORS		MENTEES	
Advantages:	Disadvantages:	Advantages:	Disadvantages:
· 6 month commitment · One mentee · Shared workload · Not required to have all answers · Professional engagement	· Scheduling meetings · Possible lack of collaboration and cohesion among team mentors	· Team established before arrival · Regular meeting times · 3 mentors · Call team meetings as needed · Mentors serve as advocates	· Scheduling meetings · Possible lack of collaboration and cohesion among team mentors

Figure 1. RTM advantages and disadvantages for mentors and mentees

Matching mentors with a mentee

Since the biggest challenge of most mentor and mentee relationships is a possible mismatch of personalities and interests (Cox, 2005; Zhang et al., 2007), RTM aims to provide the new librarian with plenty of social and professional interaction with three different mentors. In most cases, strong relationships have resulted among RTM members. Even in cases where a formal mentor relationship is not established, mentees often develop solid friendships with mentors. This practice makes mentees feel more comfortable in their new setting and feelings of isolation and alienation are thus minimized. The engaged and connected mentee is more quickly and thoroughly integrated into the library culture. Additionally, the RTM links mentees with the professional expertise of senior librarians in many other areas of the profession. For example, one mentor's expertise in a particular area of research can help launch a new librarian's research agenda.

As a result, RTM resonates with the Developmental Network Model in which participants graduate from *constellations of relationships* to multi-layer *developmental networks* (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Evaluation of the model: mentors' perspective

Given the structure of the RTM, the three mentors share the commitment and workload, not single-handedly bearing all the responsibility. Mentors have the option to refer the mentee to the designated team "expert" whenever needed. It should be stressed that the model is a "resource" team and the mentors frequently act as conduits to provide the information needed by the mentee. With a fixed start and end date, the short term commitment is definitely a factor in persuading mentors to take on this extra work load.

Mentors feel professionally and organizationally engaged when providing guidance on a particular issue. In addition, it allows mentors to exchange ideas about teaching and learning. According to Munde (2000) and Zhang et al. (2007), mentors agreed that the investment of time and energy involved in advising a new colleague was a personally satisfying experience.

Evaluation of the model: mentees' perspective

The uniqueness of the RTM approach is that mentees can establish strong mentoring relationships with one or three mentors. Concurrently, mentees can receive three different opinions or suggestions on how to tackle an issue or task. This practice allows mentees to emulate positive mentoring behaviors and create a cycle of support.

Furthermore, mentoring process could start even before the new hire arrives on campus. Before arrival, new librarians receive an email with several training documents attached. The opportunity to review these documents ahead of time allows the mentee to become familiar with their new library. If needed, the mentees could establish communication with RTM mentors and library colleagues. For example, one of the new librarians exchanged emails with her RTM team about housing and schools. Hansman (2003) believes that "supportive mentoring relationships can contribute to the psychosocial development of individuals, and helpful mentors can greatly enhance a person's career or personal development" (p. 16). Mentoring models, moreover, may also attract new hires to commit to the position as they feel confident about the support network at the new institution (Ghouse & Church-Duran, 2008).

What Do Mentees Want?

Mentoring relationship can be found at any career stages--the beginning, mid-level, or towards the end of one's career. A newer librarian, for instance, may benefit from the experience of senior colleagues when learning the ropes of a new job. There could also be reverse mentoring when a more seasoned librarian may benefit from a newer librarian's expertise on newer technology. Our experience and research suggests the following qualities that a mentee looks for and wants from their mentor(s):

A nice "arranged marriage" (short or long term)

Like any personal relationships, mentoring works well among compatible partners. The match-up within the RTM model respects participants' personalities and group dynamics, making sure that the mentors and mentee would work well together.

Communication and expectations

Mentoring does not exist in vacuum. Mentees look for approachable mentors who are willing to communicate with them on a regular basis, whether by phone, e-mail, in person or a combination of these methods. As noted by Zhang et al. (2007), "the success of a program is based on the clear definition of the program's goals and limitations, the presence of standard elements, a procedure that is easy to follow and review through mentoring calendar, training of mentors, clear reporting line and the library expectations toward mentors and mentees" (Discussions section, para. 1). It is better if mentors have a clear idea – or as clear as is possible – about their expectations and are able to communicate with their mentee to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding. This would help the mentee not cross any boundaries by accident and help build a healthy and trusting relationship.

Reciprocity, mutuality, complementarity

Mentors should be supportive, nurturing, trustworthy, and non-judgmental. Mentees look for mentors who will encourage them when they need the most support and not judge them for their mistakes or weaknesses (Farmer et al., 2009). Additionally, mentors should be their mentees' cheering team and applaud their successes whether big or small.

As a case in point, the RTM mirrors Mentoring Reenactment Theory as both mentors and mentees actively engage in a two-way, constructive communication. They maintain, refine and further develop their working relationships within the context of the CSULB University Library.

Characteristics of an Ideal Mentor

According to Allen (2007), not much has been written about the specific qualities of a mentor. However, the success of any mentoring relationship is contingent on the behaviors and characteristics of both mentor/mentee. Some of the characteristics which are essential in an effective mentor include:

Mentor's willingness to engage in mentoring

Mentees want a mentor who has a genuine interest in their progress. Commitment to mentoring a new professional requires time and effort and if the mentor is not enthusiastic and interested, the process could fail. Some mentors accept a mentee for reasons other than authentic mentoring. Hopefully, most mentors accept because they are committed and want to be part of the mentees' professional development (Farmer et al., 2009). An expertise in the field, the ideal mentor also possesses an interest in the mentee's career path, helping the mentee establish and attain her goals (McKinney & Gooden, 2007).

Mentors as advocates

Mentees see their mentors as "a cheerleader, active supporter, a 'friendly face in a confusing situation' who guides new librarians in their professional growth" (Zhang et al., 2007, Findings section, para. 2). Mentees also look for mentors who are aware of their cultural differences and personalities. Mentors should consider development needs of mentees (Johnson, 2002) and support them when they have a roadblock that prevents them for pursuing their goals. Due to lack of confidence, some mentees may "feel incompetent – like imposters who will soon

be revealed" (Johnson, 2002, p. 93) and it is the role of the mentors to provide positive reinforcement.

Mentors as conduits (facilitators)

Mentors must sometimes act as conduits. If a mentor does not know the answer to a question, it is alright to admit this and refer the mentee to the appropriate colleague: the ultimate goal is to facilitate and lead the mentee to find the right answers (Kuyper-Rushing, 2001).

Mentors as leaders (developing positive leadership traits)

Mentees want their mentors to take the lead as they have less power and authority than their mentors. Mentees may not know how to make the first move or when and how to contact the mentor. As a result, mentees look for mentors who can lead and guide them through the challenges of establishing themselves as a new professional.

Mentees look for a true and honest leader, one that will serve as a role model and that will support and encourage them to grow and become an independent professional. Thus, good mentors will openly share their weaknesses and strengths with mentees (Perlmutter, 2008). Effective mentors also advocate the benefits of emulating successful behaviors since "modeling allows direct demonstration of many behaviors specific to the profession, and this often produces faster learning than direct experience" (Johnson, 2002, p. 93).

Conclusion

The CSULB RTM is a new concept in academic libraries and similar to other mentoring models such as group mentoring and a mentoring circle. This approach incorporates both mentoring and coaching as well as work place training. The success of mentees in the RTM stems from the availability of multiple, dependable, and committed mentors; the increased chances to establish a strong personal connection with at least one of the three mentors; the ability to work in a collaborative and flexible environment; and the exposure to a diversity of ideas and perspectives from senior library colleagues.

It is gratifying that we have received positive and constructive feedback about the RTM model and that many colleagues (in tenure-track and non-track institutions) have indicated that they would be interested in developing a similar model for their campus. The RTM, though costly to implement (due to the involvement of three mentors for one new librarian), is worthwhile in the long run as it fosters constructive attitudes about the work environment. As noted by de Janasz and Sullivan (2004), "mentors facilitate the socialization process, help acculturate junior members of the organization, and foster more positive attitudes toward their work settings and higher organizational commitment" (p. 264).

Finally, most research on mentoring in academic libraries has focused on the role of the organization and on the mentor's perspectives. Fewer articles have been written on the mentee's perspectives in academic libraries. This paper is our first attempt to address this gap.

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