

MENTORING MODEL: POTENTIAL STUDENTS AS MENTORS

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Abstract

Knowledge is a gift that is transferrable from one person to another. Everyone has it and can transfer it thus making impact on other people's lives. In this paper the authors have come up with an innovative approach of turning potential students in higher education into mentors: Student mentors selected based on certain criteria will support their immediate juniors on their subject content and by evaluating their assessments. Mentors will be continuously monitored for their performance and changes introduced. If required. This approach is expected to benefit the students, mentors and tutors.

To a student, the expected benefits are on enhanced learning experiences from peer support and better understanding of the concepts because of dual interaction with tutor and mentor. For a mentor, it may give a strong foundation as they would continue to be in touch with the concepts learnt in the previous academic year and further clarify their own doubts. This mentorship is expected to prepare them to become academic role models and in turn improve upon their soft skills. The experiences drawn from academic guidance and assessment evaluations of juniors will set the mentors towards an improved work in their own assessments. Unlike a tutor, a mentor having an added advantage of writing an assessment in the previous year and now evaluating the same assessment is in a better position to suggest changes should any be needed in the assessments. In the process, students are inspired and are motivated to become mentors. This gives enough time for the tutors to focus upon research and planning of new interesting learning activities for their students due to the reduced workload.

This paper will discuss in detail the entire process, starting from selection criteria of a mentor till mentor change. Mentor change would be as a result of quality concern arising from supervision which includes mentor performance evaluation, moderation of scripts and feedback sessions.

However, for the system to be successful it is critical that both Students and Mentors be clear of their roles and expectations. There are also some challenges from this approach as mentors may have commitment constraints and issues emerging from student relations particularly in the area of respect and favoritism which will also be discussed.

Keywords: Mentor, Academic guidance, Assessments, Evaluations, Feedback, Moderation.

1 INTRODUCTION

By sharing one's own experiences and life challenges, a mentor assists in developing a deeper understanding of how to deal with situations as they arise [1]. So everyone needs a Mentor. Be it Education, Medicine, Law or Management there is always something that a senior student/professional upon willingness can transfer to junior student/professionals that can foster and develop talent in the learner and hence within the organisation. This paper introduces a novel mentorship model which will add value to the existing learning system in higher education institutions. Being a new idea, the authors have adopted a theoretical framing. The potential benefits of the new model within the sphere of practice have also been discussed in the paper.

1.1 Background study

History of mentoring dates back to Greek mythology where Mentor was a wise old man to whom Ulysses entrusted the guardianship of his son Telemachus during his 10 year odyssey fighting the Trojan wars. This incorporated many different roles, including those of teacher, guide, patron and adviser [2].

After Greek mythology, discussion shifts to Levinson. According to Levinson, Life is divided into various developmental stages, with mentor as a transition figure in developing from early to middle adulthood. The functions of a mentor are those of teacher, sponsor and guide [3].

Moving ahead on a the definition, Burnard has written on mentoring in nursing context ***"We all need help at times, sometimes it is useful if the help comes regularly from the same person and we can develop a relationship with him or her"***[4]. This definition strengthened our understanding of mentorship and enabled us to commission our efforts in the development of a new model for mentoring students in higher educational context.

Broadly speaking, mentorship encompasses several roles. It is concerned with the true interest in nurturing and developing a less experienced individual. This is made possible by knowledge transfer and inculcating of the right professional attitude and ethical behaviour in both mentors and mentees.

1.2 What is mentoring?

Mentoring is interpreted in different ways by different people. The precise definition of "Mentoring" is difficult to underpin. However Mentoring can be stated as "some form of continuous help from a potential candidate to another by way of transfer of knowledge, work or thinking in fostering and developing the less experienced individual".

Mentoring is just one form of support to an individual while the individual can still be supported in other ways (e.g. peer support, support from seniors, teachers, managers, friends, parents, etc). However, because of the success of mentoring as applied and witnessed in professional context, authors believe in using mentoring to be a powerful and rewarding tool to promote learning within educational institutions.

There are two types of mentoring namely Formal and Informal mentoring. Whilst formal mentoring is established by the management and is purposefully developed by matching a mentor with mentee, subsequent monitoring and evaluation of the process for goal attainment, mentoring can also be mentee initiated and happen informally in the social set-up where individuals get to know each other and voluntarily establish relationships. This provides room for further discussion, sharing of ideas and knowledge transfer among people concerned and is far more personal and informal in nature.

1.3 Why do we need mentoring?

Mentoring is the most cost effective and sustainable method of nurturing and developing talent within an organisation. Within the realm of higher education institutions, mentoring can benefit juniors in learning from potential senior students selected based on certain criteria. It is a well known fact that students would prefer learning from peers and seniors than from their teachers because of the comfort zone that lies amidst peers. Although the teachers would be happy to help their students, question arises on how much time they would be able to devote towards such additional teaching/learning.

Mentoring can also prove fruitful in professional working context. Those entering practice in any profession struggle a lot because of Theory-Practice gap i.e., transition from what has been learned to how it is going to be applied. This transition period is stressful and challenging, demanding individuals to gain skills to apply their learnt concepts. With less practice and experience, these practitioners are in need of guidance and support in order to develop confidence and competence which can be established by way of mentoring.

Thus, be it students' education or other professional contexts, mentoring greatly assists the stakeholders on academic, professional and personal development.

1.4 Who is a Mentee, Mentor and Mentor manager?

There are 3 prime stakeholders in the proposed 3M model. They are,

Mentee : Individuals who need support or guidance to realise their dreams or aspirations.

Mentor : Potential candidates with leadership and nurturing qualities who transfer knowledge and help the mentees in achieving their dreams

Mentor Manager: A Mentor manager is the one who coordinates and helps the mentorship program to run smoothly.

1.5 Mentoring relationship

Mentoring is a fostering relationship of developing the less experienced individual through analysis, reflection, learning and practice.

This relationship between mentor and mentee is unique as it establishes a real connection/bond built on trust, respect and openness. The quality of this relationship is based on clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and is crucial towards the successful outcome (win-win situation); if this bonding does not occur and one or both parties are not comfortable within the relationship neither learning nor mentoring can take place.

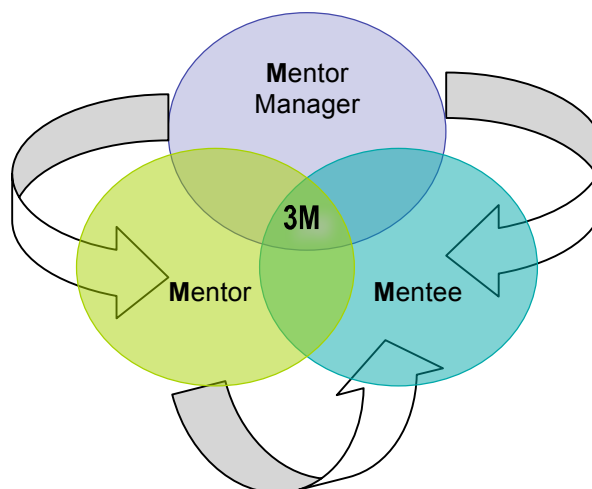
Mentoring is a two way process with mentor having as much to gain as the mentee. The core idea here is to encourage partners to contribute freely and learn from each other as equals. 3M mentoring model is based on an effective relationship between mentor and mentee in promoting learning in higher education.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 3M Mentoring model

There exist several mentoring models like co-mentoring, peer-mentoring and group mentoring, in addition to one to one mentoring as reviewed from the literature. The novel 3M mentoring model is based on a potential senior student mentoring junior students in academic and soft skills development. This demands the careful selection, pairing of student mentors and mentees and preparing them towards a harmonious relationship of growth and learning coordinated by the mentor managers. Fig. 1 depicts the stakeholders involved in the 3M mentoring model.

Fig. 1 Stakeholders of 3M mentoring model



As shown in Fig. 2 our model based on water fall approach transcends from final year to the first year students with the student mentors mentoring their immediate juniors on subject content and evaluation of their assessments excluding final exams. Final exams could also be considered for mentor evaluation upon approval from respective authorities. This model necessitates a minimum of 2 cohorts studying in successive years for mentoring to happen.

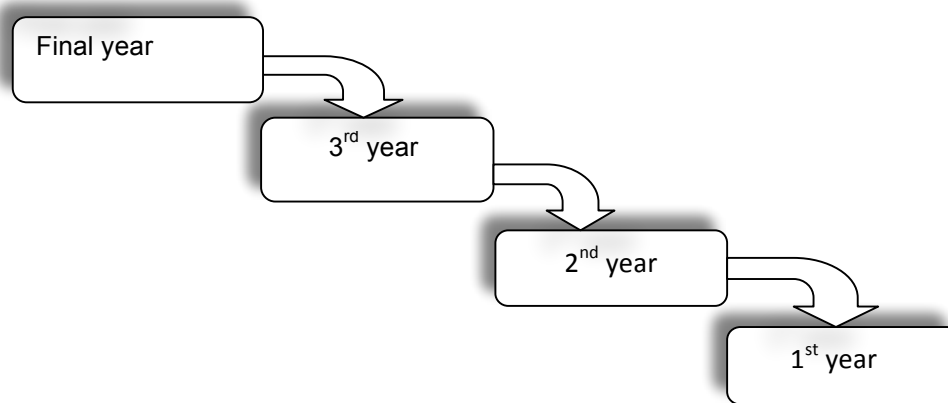


Fig. 2 Water fall approach for a four year program

2.1.1 *Beginning and closure of the mentoring relationship*

As the first year students are new, the mentorship role is initiated from the beginning of their second year and there will be mentors picked from every higher year up till the final year to guide their immediate juniors. The relationship is established at the beginning of their first year where a second year student would be allotted to them as their mentor and will last till the end of the year. Similar mentoring would in turn be executed for the benefit of the second and third year students in a four year model. The final year students, though not paired to a student mentor, are still supported by their tutors and alumni in preparing towards placement in industries. This 3M Model thus benefits all the stakeholders concerned in creating a viable learning environment as discussed in section 3.

In the early stages, mentee will be relatively dependent upon mentor who needs to play a supportive, helpful, friendly and encouraging role. However, with time, the mentee will turn confident and independent and lookup to the mentor who needs to challenge, stimulate, encourage critical thinking and reflection. Too much challenge and stimulation at the beginning and too little later on can hamper the growth and learning and cause the relationship to end without fulfillment of goals.

Though people may not be receptive about closure of a long term mentoring relationship, formal mentoring being a goal- oriented process needs to have an end point. As a result, the formal relationship ends at the close of every year of study, whereby the students get allocated to another mentor in the progressive years. However the good rapport and bond established between mentor and mentee in the earlier years can pave the way for informal mentoring.

In order to have a successful mentoring process, it is important to understand and follow the below outlined sequence of actions

- ☞ Planning and Preparation
- ☞ Negotiation and Execution
- ☞ Evaluation

2.2 **3M Model design & implementation**

The entire process, starting from selection criteria of a mentor to mentor change will be discussed in this section.

2.2.1 *Planning and preparation*

This step focuses on developing the mentoring plan and subsequent building of the relationship. As emphasized by Zachary [5], this stage is very vital in the mentoring process and needs sufficient time and dedicated effort. This step can neither be neglected nor carried out in hurried manner for promising results.

To formulate the mentoring plan, a focus group is formed which comprises of the heads of the department. Typical tools to aid in this stage are a mentor handbook provided by the employer, review of mentoring materials/books” [6]. This group brainstorms and is liable to prepare a draft for approval by the respective authoritative bodies. The draft can include policies, selection criteria, hand book, log book etc.,

Based on the approved mentoring policy the first step towards building the relationship will be to identify mentor managers and potential students to serve as mentors. Not every student can turn into a mentor and so a tutor as a mentor manager. This initiates preparation of appropriate selection criteria by the organization for the use in the selection process.

The proposed selection criteria can depend on the qualities mentioned in Table. 1

Table 1 Sample selection criteria

Mentor Manager	Student Mentor
Initiative & creative	Interpersonal skills
Volunteer	Nurturing attitude
Workload constraint	Academic performance
Performance	Flexibility
Rapport with students	Commitment
Flexibility	Leadership qualities
Interpersonal skills	Peer respect

Having identified the mentor managers and mentors, next step involves pairing the mentees to the respective mentors and mentors with their managers.

As specified in Fig. 3, the prescribed ratio for quality mentoring is suggested at 1:10:50 but can vary with institutions .As per the prescribed ratio one mentor manager is responsible for monitoring 10 student mentors whilst each student mentor would be assigned 5 immediate junior students.



Fig. 3 Paring ratio for mentoring relationship

Mentoring being a challenging process and keeping in my mind the workload of mentors and retention of their interest levels in mentorship program, a right mix of mentees (i.e.) good , average and below average needs to be assigned to a mentor. Mentorship handbook prepared by the focus group would provide the rules and regulations guiding the stakeholders in the mentoring program. Additional mentor materials and log book needs to be designed and made available to the mentors.

2.2.2 Negotiation and execution

The mentor managers will arrange for a formal meeting with the identified mentors clearly explaining to them the roles and responsibilities, goal attainments and benefits in enrolling as a mentor. In order to encourage the student mentors, some incentives can be planned and executed by the lead mentor manager in association with the management. Fig. 4 outlines the roles that need to be played by a mentor in successive stages of mentoring to become a role model inspiring mentees to turn as future mentors.

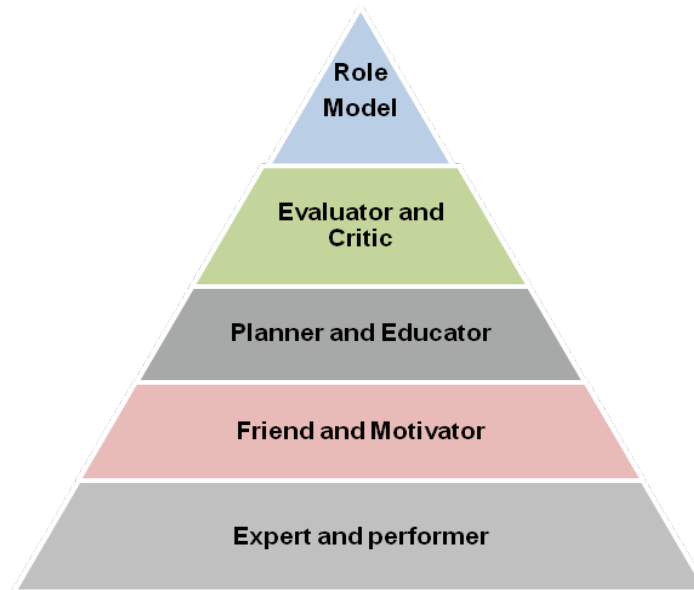


Fig. 4 Role model pyramid

Despite the explanation by the mentor manager, there is no guarantee that the identified mentors would accept mentoring, which would necessitate further negotiation. Flexibility in preparing the schedules, logistics of meetings and consideration of their preferences could convince them to serve as mentors. These mentors are finally asked to sign a contract. The paring list prepared in the previous stage will now be communicated to the respective people for further action.

The Johari window [7] is a self awareness tool which enables individuals to understand and improve themselves. In order to understand the capacity and training needs of the mentors, mentor manager will initiate the mentors to go in for the johari window analysis followed by private discussion to understand their needs. Fig. 5 depicts what will be identified if this analysis is performed in a true sense

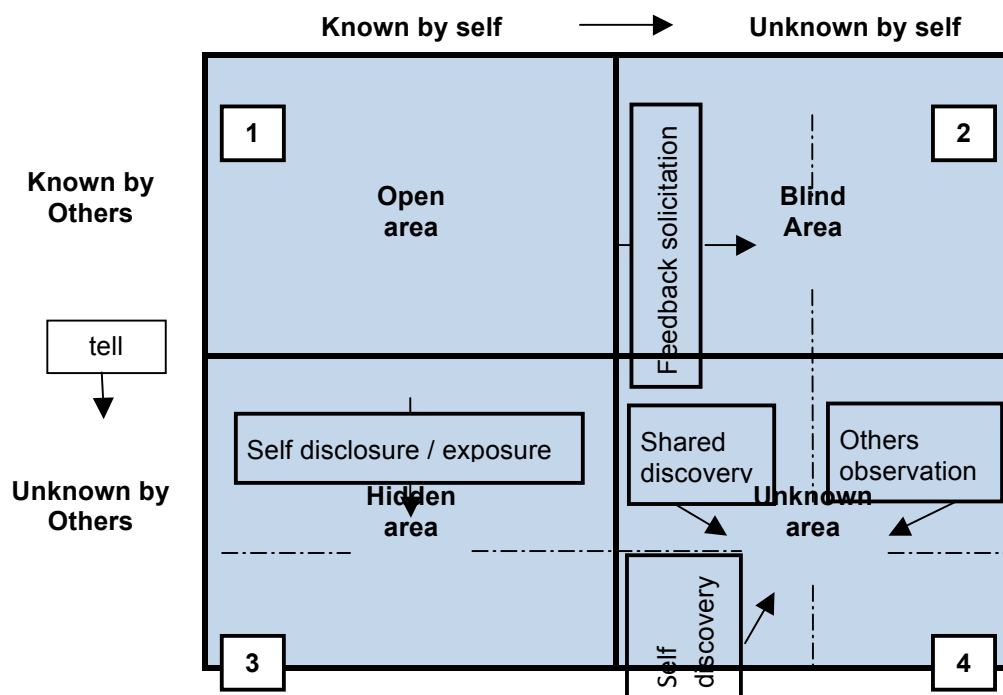


Fig. 5 Johari window analysis

With the suitable training given, these groomed mentors will now be ready to embark on the mentoring journey. Mentor initiates a formal meeting with the assigned mentees and henceforth all the weekly discussions will be recorded in the log books and a monthly report prepared and submitted to the mentor manager for review. The monthly report may have information on guidance, assessment evaluation, mentees performance summary, etc.

“...the needs of the mentee are paramount in the learning and thus the mentoring relationship”[8], so a mentor would advise his/her mentees to perform a **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats (SWOT) analysis for self realization.

Individuals are different in their learning styles. Honey and Mumford [9] have devised an influential self-test, which indicates whether you are primarily an activist, a reflector, a theorist, or a pragmatist which will identify the mentee's learning style. Understanding the mentee's learning style along with the shared awareness through SWOT analysis will enable the mentor to identify the mentee's needs and prompt channeling of the efforts in the right direction.

Mentoring begins with mentor guiding the mentees by the way of clarifying doubts, promoting critical thinking, assessment evaluation and feedback which will in turn improve upon mentee's academic performance. This is a continuous process turning the mentee and mentor as a better professional.

The assessment evaluation criteria will be shared by the mentor manager with their mentors. After the assessment markings are over, the moderation will then be carried out by the respective year tutors and the feedback shared with the mentor manager. It is the duty of the mentor manager to share this feedback with the mentors initiating counseling if any needed.

2.2.3 Evaluation

Evaluation is very crucial in determining the success of the mentorship program. There should always be some real value added out of the mentorship relationship which needs to be guaranteed by continuously monitoring the mentorship activities for any quality concerns.

The monitoring involves measuring mentor's performance in terms of their own academic performance and mentees performance, reviewing logs, monthly report, mentees feedback, feedback from the respective year tutors on students' understanding levels and moderation of scripts.

The findings from the monitoring will reveal the true nature of the relationship, benefits and issues if any needing follow up action. If some relationship stands unfruitful then it will necessitate counselling of the respective people for improvement. Even after repeated counselling, if there are no productive results, it will lead to changes as appropriate e.g. mentor change etc., Mentor can also request for a change with a valid reason which under such circumstances needs to be suitably addressed.

3 3M BENEFITS

To a student, the expected benefits include enhanced learning experiences from peer support and better understanding of the concepts because of dual interaction with tutor and mentor. For a mentor, it may give a strong foundation as they would continue to be in touch with the concepts learnt in the previous academic year and further clarify their own doubts. This mentorship is expected to prepare them to become academic role models and in turn, improve upon their soft skills. The experiences drawn from academic guidance and evaluations of juniors will set the mentors towards an improved work in their own assessments. Unlike a tutor, a mentor having an added advantage of writing an assessment in the previous year and now evaluating the same assessment is in a better position to suggest changes should any be needed in the assessments. In the process, students are inspired and are motivated to become mentors. This 3M model also leverages time for the tutors to focus upon research and planning of new , interesting learning activities for their students due to the reduced workload.

4 CHALLENGES IN 3M

The successful implementation of 3M model may present some challenges as follows:

- ☞ Lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities: could create concerns amongst the stakeholders hampering the healthy relationship

- ☞ Increased mentor workload may affect the mentor's academic performance in the current year of study
- ☞ Though the relationship sprouts with right attitude, lack of interest may develop over the span of time/situation due to issues in gender, race and culture which could lead to attitudinal changes.
- ☞ Favouritism and respect issues: A good fostering relationship at times can introduce favouritism towards some mentees. This may mislead them and introduce partiality among their group of mentees.
- ☞ Peer respect if neglected can become as a serious issue.

5 CONCLUSION

The intention of this research is to foresee the 3M mentorship model as a powerful and rewarding tool in promoting mentorship aiding learning amidst students of higher education institutions. Potential mentors selected in each year will act as catalyst in developing their immediate juniors, encouraging them to pursue their dreams.

Mentoring thus seems to be a promising mechanism for raising standards of all within the institution. It can help to build unified schools where mentor managers, mentors and mentees regularly discuss, learn and improve. Higher officials in the education sector visualize mentors' collective expertise to improve with time, helping them on their current academic performance and an iterative pass over of knowledge back to their juniors. To achieve an ever increasing expansion on knowledge and skills, all mentors and mentees at every stage of development must ensure peer respect and grow as professionals by learning from and with each other.

It may appear like there are only modest gains during the initial stages of a mentoring program. However, mentoring benefits will accumulate with passing years.

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