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# **Workplace mentoring of degree apprentices: developing principles for practice**

## **Abstract**

### **Purpose**

This article focuses on developing a deep understanding of the nature and impact of the workplace mentor role in degree apprenticeships (DAs). It investigates a theoretical model of DA workplace mentoring activity, with findings used to develop a set of principles for supporting the development of effective mentoring practice.

### **Research design**

Data underpinning this article was collected as part of the monitoring and evaluation of the first year of a Chartered Manager degree apprenticeship programme at a post-1992 university. Workplace mentors and mentees were interviewed to explore their experience of mentoring within this programme.

### **Findings**

This study found there to be many positive benefits of workplace mentoring for apprentices, their mentors and the organisation. This understanding can be used to support the development of principles for effective mentoring practice.

### **Research limitations/implications**

The data support the validity of the proposed model for DA workplace mentoring activity. In order to become a helpful guide to mentors' planning of areas of support, the model may need to be refined to show the relative importance given to each activity area. The findings of this small-scale study need now to be extended through work with a larger sample.

### **Practical implications**

The set of principles offered will be valuable to workplace mentors of degree apprentices across organisational sectors to ensure quality of delivery and outcomes.

### **Originality/value**

This article contributes to an understanding of the impact of mentoring as a social practice on mentor and apprentice development. Such an understanding has the potential to positively influence the quality of delivery, mentoring practice and thus apprentices' learning.

**Keywords:** degree apprenticeship, workplace mentoring, quality, transformational change, pedagogies of work based learning

**Classification:** Research paper

## **Introduction**

Despite changes in investment patterns, regulation and education provision, a skills gap, in which employers struggle to recruit workers with appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding, is proving a continuing challenge for a shifting UK economy (Vivian et al, 2015). Here, the amassing of wealth through mass production of commodities has been superseded by the knowledge economy, privileging the development of ideas (Cable, 2014). This shifting picture drove the government in 2012 to commission Doug Richard to undertake a review of apprenticeships in England to ensure that they met current economic needs.

The Richard Review (2012) suggested ensuring that employers, those with most clarity about sector needs, be facilitated to drive apprenticeship development. The revised apprenticeship programme introduced by the Government in 2013 (HM Government, 2013) thus determined that employer-led groups, known as trailblazers, devise new Apprenticeship Standards for discrete occupations, describing the knowledge, skills and behaviours in which an apprentice should be proficient by the end of their apprenticeship. As of October 2018, the Institute for Apprenticeships has approved 44 Standards at Level 7, 90 at Level 6 and 31 at Level 5, all with allied Assessment Plans, stipulating arrangements for academic learning and workplace competency, and End Point Assessment arrangements.

A belief in the value of employer-led curriculum development (Wall and Jarvis, 2015) and a close integration between job and learning opportunity is central to achieving such levels of competence and meeting sector and wider economy demands. However, a learning environment which encompasses both university and workplace can place complex demands on learners. Structuring appropriate support for such multi-faceted learning appears central to degree apprenticeships' success, through an effective tripartite relationship between employer, apprentice and HEI, enacted in part through the collaborative working of a workplace mentor, apprentice and employer liaison tutor.

The role of the employer liaison tutor within the degree apprenticeship structure is a new one within many universities and remains in the process of development. Similarly, the role of workplace mentor is yet to be wholly elaborated and understood. An exploration of the general aims and processes of mentoring proved helpful in illuminating how the role of workplace mentor in degree apprenticeships might be conceptualised. The centrality of the interface of work and learning, and the workplace mentor's crucial role in facilitating this places them in a key position to determine the quality of the apprenticeship provision and successful outcomes.

## **What do we understand by mentoring within degree apprenticeship programmes?**

Developing a shared clarity over what is understood by the term mentoring was key to our emerging understanding of how to support effective mentoring practice within degree apprenticeship programmes. The conflation of the terms coaching and mentoring in everyday parlance is reflected in their contested nature in the literature (Western, 2012). Attempts made to differentiate them generally concentrate on areas of focus and skills used (see, for example, the Scottish Mentoring Network ([careerdevelopmentplan.net](http://careerdevelopmentplan.net)) and Curee's (2005) national framework for mentoring and coaching). This 'crude positioning of different viewpoints' (Garvey et al., 2009:10) tends to homogenise coaching and mentoring's aims and approaches however. We are interested instead in exploring a particular type of mentoring, one which would occur in the workplace and positively impact on a degree apprentice's learning and development. We therefore found it instructive to consider the roles, focus and process of mentoring activity to evaluate how the traditional differentiation

between the roles of coach and mentor might be disrupted in degree apprenticeship (DA) mentoring activity.

In general terms, the role of a coach is predicated on professional expertise in the field of coaching whilst mentors have experience in the mentee's area of work. Mentors are therefore often allocated to colleagues new to the organisation, with a focus on the development of understanding about organisational processes and functions. The role of the mentor of a degree apprentice surpasses this functional level however, with mentors habitually supporting their mentee's professional learning within an organisational context (Arnold, 2009) and, in some cases, promoting an agential approach to their own self-development. Such depth of professional influence is catalysed by the longevity of the mentoring relationship within a degree apprenticeship, where the professional relationship sometimes lasts up to six years.

In terms of process, Garvey et al. (2009) suggest that both mentors and coaches adopt a similar set of skills and adapt them according to their particular focus. A view of coach as technician, for example, would be supported by a range of coaching models, from structured conversational guidance such as the GROW model (Arnold, 2009) to the employment of psychometric tools. Conversely, a view of coach as development partner would be supported by processes such as the offer of a contained place and time for reflection and the development of a creative space within which the coachee can be authentic.

Mentoring processes have traditionally been construed less as joint exploration than as sharing from expert to new colleague, where experienced colleagues - adepts - provide access to practice which supports the development of newcomers' - apprentices - professional aptitudes and organisational relationships (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The clear power differential here could be seen as an interesting distinction between coaching and mentoring. Indeed, Barton and Tusting's (2005) work highlights the darker sides of collegial working, where exclusion rather than inclusion can dominate the mentee experience. However, the structure of degree apprenticeship programmes, with learning overtly taking place concurrently in university and workplace, casts the mentor more firmly in the role of inclusive development partner explored above. The status of many apprentices as longstanding employees, themselves adepts in many organisational practices, supports this conceptualisation.

A pragmatic approach to an understanding of DA mentoring can be suggested by considering the implications of the system of Apprenticeship Standards which define what it is to be a professional in a named role. Opening with a descriptor of this role, the Standard goes on to describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of role holders. Drawing from theories of identity development, it is useful to consider the Standard's description of the growth of a professional persona as rooted in a discursive perspective on identity. Such a perspective suggests that we are who we are because of the way others recognise our accomplishments (Gee, 2001). Thus we become an accepted member of a professional group. The purpose of mentoring then becomes to support the apprentice in developing as a professional in a named role such that other role-holders would recognise them as 'one of their own'. Such a professional persona is not a fixed state however. Accepting Erikson's (1975) view of identity as a work in progress rather than a static end gives mentoring the potential to support the development of an authentic work self which may change over time.

The identity of the mentor is also relevant here. Within the structure of degree apprenticeships, mentors are drawn from the mentee's organisation. They may well have multiple roles, being the mentee's line manager and colleague, and thus need to manage a dual professional relationship colleague (Brickley 2002, in Brennan and Wildflower, 2014). Indeed, in some cases mentors may be mentoring those in a senior position to them in the organisation. This position of insider-mentor can effect long-lasting development but equally

brings its own challenges (Knight and Poppleton, 2007). Developing clarity around necessary boundaries (Zur and Anderson, 2009) may well be fundamental for the success of DA mentoring.

Supporting the development of an understanding of the link between theory and practice is a key function of the mentoring role. Le Maistre and Pare's (2004) conceptualisation of the transition from school to work is useful here. Understanding this transition as a move from strategy to enactment, Le Maistre and Pare (2004) consider how individuals move from a study of practices to their performance. Thus, the accounting theory which a student learns at university within a module on their DA programme becomes, in practice, used to be able to provide meaningful information at a budgeting and planning meeting for a new project.

Whilst welcome, such a model may not take full account of the difficulty in bridging this theory-practice gap across a range of complex contexts, as observed in disciplines with established pedagogies of integrating academic and work based learning. Addressing a long-standing issue in nursing, for example, Musker (2011) points to the imperative for the space for reflection in this process for nursing students, whilst Salifu et al.'s (2018) work exposes the difficulties of bridging this theory practice gap in international nursing contexts with limited resources and a lack of agreed educator roles. Mentoring thus becomes a key factor in supporting individual apprentices in establishing the connectivity between previous learning and current activity.

### **What is the impact of effective mentoring?**

A discussion of the proposed impacts of effective mentoring raises an issue - how might such impact be reliably observed? Given the nature of mentoring activity, it may not be appropriate to employ solely quantitative organisational metrics, such as return on investment, as a success indicator. Indeed, Clutterbuck (2005) raises the issue of the incompatibility of the notion of measurement and review with the need to maintain a high degree of responsiveness in a mentee-focused relationship. Such measurement may additionally form an ethical and practical challenge to the relationship set up through individual mentoring agreements. Instead, softer measures may be appropriate such as mentee's general well-being, retention, creativity. (Arnold, 2009).

Despite these procedural misgivings, a strong evidence base exists to suggest the positive impact of employer mentoring on the behaviour, engagement, attainment and educational and career progression of young people (Hooley, 2016). Effective mentoring within degree apprenticeships supports the apprentice in developing their professional persona through the acquisition and refinement of knowledge, skills and behaviours. This is achieved through "an exchange of wisdom" (Parsloe and Wray, 2000:12) which supports not only individual development but also the achievement of organisational strategic goals. Additionally, studies show the potential for positive impact on the mentor and their ability to create a learning environment for co-workers (Senge, 1990; Billett, 2003).

Positive impacts on apprentices' development includes improved resilience, engagement and performance (Grant et al., 2009). However, the critical enhancement of professional skills (Metso and Kianto, 2014, in Rowe et al., 2017) through support for work-based learning is the key indicator of effective mentoring practice. The concept of work-based learning is therefore itself in need of theorising here.

Work-based learning can be simply defined as 'curriculum controlled by higher education institution, content designed with employer, learner primarily full-time employee' (Brennan and Little, 1996). Providing more detail, Boud and Solomon (2001), work-based learning can

be conceptualised as a partnership between organisation and university to foster learning in which:

- Learners are employed/in a contractual relationship with the external organisation.
- The programme followed derives the needs of the workplace and the learning: work is the curriculum.
- Learners engage in a process of recognition of current competencies prior to negotiation of programme of study.
- A significant element of the programme is through learning projects undertaken in the workplace
- The University assesses the learning outcomes against a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels

While Apprenticeship Standards have been written by employer-led trailblazers, the organisations involved in the employment of apprenticeships and the mentoring relationship may not have been directly involved. This can affect the partnership, and the contextual understanding of the outcomes, as noted by Smith and Betts (2000) whereby the 'occupational and maybe professional standards have been described or delineated by bodies outside the partnership'. They do however acknowledge that 'it is, of course, very difficult to conceive of an individual carrying out all but the simplest of work-based activity who cannot learn from the experience of doing it'.

Work-based learning focuses on both the outcomes, learning as a product, and the experience, learning as a process. Apprenticeship Standards focus on the instrumental product in terms of knowledge and skills, but also the process with an additional focus on behaviour which can only be developed experientially. Given the iterative nature of skills development, and the individualised timelines required for the development of behaviours, an important part of the mentoring relationship is to journey through the process together as mentor and mentee, supporting Erikson's (*ibid*) concept of the authentic work self developing over time.

### **How can the development of effective workplace mentors be supported?**

Despite the demonstrable positive impact on mentees, the impact of mentoring activity on mentors must also be considered. Billett (2003), for example, raises the issue of work intensification, exacerbated by mentors' feelings of being underprepared. A clear acknowledgement of the importance of mentors' roles and the instigation of appropriate developmental support for colleagues undertaking this role appears crucial then (Hooley, 2016). Such support is often conceived as short-term and focused on skills, knowledge and understanding of the various elements of the mentoring role (Hirst et al., 2014). However, there is evidence to suggest that longer term mentoring can have positive results for mentors ranging from improved professional performance (Grima et al., 2014) to enhanced job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Ghosh and Reio, 2013). It appears that long term development programmes need to take account of several other factors which influence the likelihood of successful mentoring for all stakeholders. Garvey (2014) identifies these as:

- the relationship between mentor and mentee: this includes issues such as length of relationship, intimacy, dependence and power
- the social and organisational context: this includes issues such as practical and structural concerns, the formality of processes and motivation
- the use of advice, knowledge or experience: this includes issues such as the recognition of learning as a social activity and an understanding of the knowledge economy

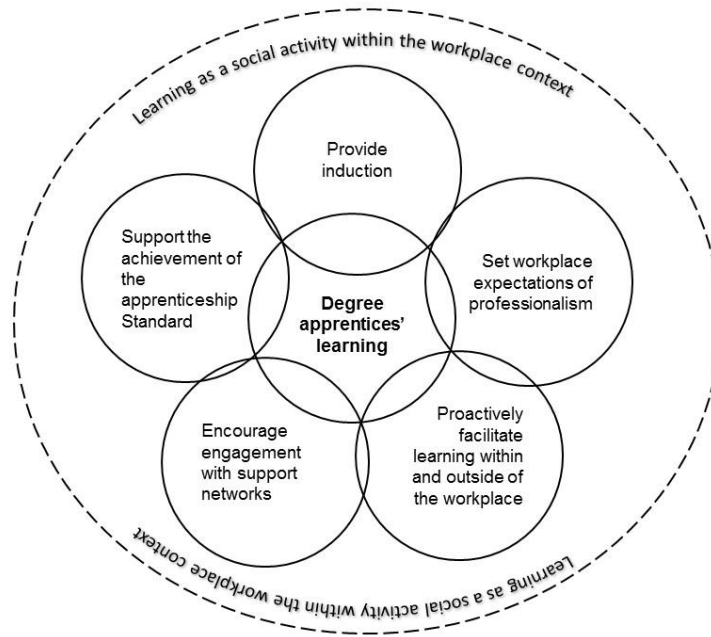
The relationship between mentor and mentee is of crucial importance in DA mentoring programmes, with the level of ability to relate to the other a key determinant of success (Machin, 2010). Mutual respect and joint learning would be an ideal in such a relationship. However, consideration of Garvey's (2014) inclusion of power relations in the determinants of mentoring success is pertinent here. An interpretation of the main impetus of organisational socialisation as ensuring the fit of the individual into organisational norms (Weidman and Stein, 2003) could position the mentor as organisational servant rather than co-learner. A consideration of the organisational context for employee development is therefore key.

Within degree apprenticeship mentoring such contextual information is often overlooked (Cox, 2003). A command and control management style, for example, may favour a transmission form of mentoring, where the mentee is initiated into organisational norms. Conversely, a distributed leadership culture may favour mentoring for individual growth and, by extension, organisational stability. Equally, the strength of the organisational learning culture can also impact positively or negatively on the extent to which mentors can stimulate effective learning activities (Cortini, 2016). The development of appropriate workplace norms for learning, for example, has been seen to be a key factor in determining the likelihood of successful mentoring activity, with mentors' direct guidance to apprentices afforded influence by a working environment which invites and values learning (Billet, 2001). Such learning organisations (Senge, 2006) promote opportunities for the transfer of learning to others which is at the heart of the mentoring process.

In summary then, the social relations between people, activities and contexts (Bourdieu, 1997) influence the degree of mentoring success. This recognition of learning as a social activity comes in spite of the relatively procedural and compliance-driven nature of the apprenticeship process. In this context, it is crucial that mentoring's development potential for both mentor and apprentice is foregrounded in the development of any mentoring programme.

## **A research agenda**

Our developing clarity over the practice and impact of effective mentoring within DA programmes led to the formation of a clear research agenda, that is, to develop a deep understanding of the nature and impact of the workplace mentor role in degree apprenticeships. Our initial exploration of relevant literature and degree apprenticeship guidance suggested the potential value of constructing a particular model of mentoring activity for supporting the development of degree apprentices, shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1:** A model for mentoring degree apprentices

The model suggests five, interconnected mentoring domains which support the learning of degree apprentices: providing induction, setting workplace expectations of professionalism, proactively facilitating learning within and outside of the workplace, encouraging engagement with support networks and supporting the achievement of the Apprenticeship Standard. It sets these activities within the context of a workplace which recognises and supports learning as a social activity.

Our research investigated the validity of this model for degree apprentice mentoring. We were interested in exploring the degree to which this theoretical model is reflected in and illuminates the reality of mentor and mentee experiences. This article gives us a formal opportunity to critique this model, in order to develop and offer a set of principles for supporting the development of effective mentoring practice.

### **The data gathering and analysis process**

The apprentices who are the subject of this research were undertaking the first year of a Chartered Manager degree apprenticeship programme in a post-1992 university. The mentors were supporting these apprentices. This research was carried out by the authors as three academics, all of whom have key roles in the development of degree apprenticeships within our university. We sought to undertake and present authentic research and were initially concerned by Patton's (2002) suggestion of a move towards researcher 'neutrality' as fundamental to securing such authenticity. However, it appears that Patton's 'neutrality' does not equate with a search for objectivity. Instead, he proposes the adoption of a research approach which does not set out to prove or disprove a specific reality, but which supports the researcher in her attempts to understand the world revealed by the data.

Following Pring (2000), our intentions were not then to attempt a revelation of the elusive fixed truth of mentoring but instead to reveal and interpret the multiple realities implied in



how mentees and mentors understand the mentoring experience they were involved in. The potential of qualitative research to reveal internal states – worldviews, values, symbolic constructs – in addition to externally observed behaviours (Denzin, 1989) aligned with this purpose.

In common with much qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002), these purposes were best served by focusing on a small sample of five mentors and mentees. Rather than securing a representative sample which would allow for generalisation in the positivistic sense, we instead intended to use our sample to illuminate our understanding and, through a thematic analysis, offer a tentative model and principles for practice for ourselves and others to refine. A purposive and convenience sampling approach allowed us to fulfil these aims. This approach allowed us strategically to select participants whom we believed would provide information-rich cases and with whom we could work meaningfully within the resources available. Workplace mentors and mentees in one organisation were therefore interviewed informally over the telephone. The conversation was guided by a series of interview prompts, circulated to participants to consider in advance, to explore their experience of mentoring within this degree apprenticeship programme.

Given our current professional relationship with our research participants, we sought to adopt a non-hierarchical, collaborative research approach. The informal conversational interview (Patton, 2002), otherwise termed the unstructured interview (Fontana and Frey, 2003), appeared appropriate. Such interviews have more in common with conversations than interrogations (Kvale, 1996), challenging the normal hierarchical relationship which interviews generally imply.

In analysing our data we did not seek to bracket (Tufford and Newman, 2010) our empathetic understanding but instead used it as a tool to support deep insights into participants' experiences. We undertook a thematic analysis of the data, using structured analytical processes to identify patterns and to ensure the validity of our analysis. However, we also overtly sought to develop a holistic approach to the data through surfacing and acknowledging resonances and dissonances.

## **What we discovered**

Our thematic analysis of the data was guided by the central concerns of our research, that is, the development of a deep understanding of the nature and impact of the workplace mentor role in degree apprenticeships. The data collected suggested that this understanding could best be developed through the consideration of three themes: *expectations of mentoring, mentoring impact, and barriers to effective mentoring practice*. These are considered in turn below.

### *Expectations of mentoring*

Apprentices expressed wide-ranging expectations of their mentor. These varied from offering guidance on day to day workplace issues (Participant A), to supporting professional development and sponsorship (Participant B). One apprentice imagined their mentor as having a key role to play in supporting an understanding of university 'assignments and ideas' (Participant C).

Mentors conceived their role to focus on:

*Helping the student to understand the 'world of work' and how best to operate within it.*  
Participant D

Examples of this 'world of work' included problem-solving, career planning and dealing with workplace change. It also encompassed the process of professional identity formation, with Participant E exemplifying Gee's (2001) understanding of identity development, conceiving her role to be to:

*.....encourage certain behaviours*

Participant E

so that her apprentice would be appropriately recognised as a professional in their field. All mentors also saw their role as extending supporting progress through the degree apprenticeship programme. This picture supports the proposition of expected activity across all five domains of our proposed mentoring model.

### *Mentoring impact*

The expectations held by apprentices and mentors were variously reflected in the reality of the mentoring relationship. The impact of the mentoring relationship on apprentices, mentors and their organisations is therefore considered here.

- On apprentices

Apprentices varied in their perceptions of the impact of mentoring activity. Where a positive impact was cited, this was often skills-based. Participant A, for example, noted the positive impact of her mentor on the development of skills and competencies needed for her job.

A range of impacts of differences in skill-set between apprentice and mentor was articulated by apprentices. Apprentice A, for example, appreciated the potential for cross-function learning which his mentor offered him. He wondered, however, if having a mentor in his specialist area of interest might support the development of professionally valuable collegial relationships.

In some cases, the impact of the mentoring experience was identity rather than skills-based. Participant B, for example, referenced the impact of her mentor on her development as an autonomous professional, commenting that her mentor:

*... did a great job of helping me to come up with solutions to my own problems.*

Participant B

For Participant C, this professional identity formation was supported by his mentor's brokering of relationships with more experienced colleagues.

Mentoring's impact on career progression formed another key theme. Participant A conceived this as sponsorship, whilst mentoring inspired Participant C to give of his best which in turn had a positive effect on his performance and organisational reputation.

*He gave me the extra motivation to exceed expectations to impress management.*

Participant C

This apprentice supports Gee's (2001) contention of recognition by others as a key element of professional socialisation.

Where mentoring works well, then, the experience exemplifies the positive view of the learning potential of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In these cases, the mentor often supports the apprentice not simply with the detail of their day to day work but in 'seeing the bigger picture' (Participant E) of organisational culture and norms. For some apprentices, the expected impact of mentoring on their learning and development had yet to be fully realised, however. In these cases, apprentices do not appear to be consciously excluded from becoming full community members, in contrast to Barton and Tusting's (2005) proposal. However, some mentors' lack of time or expertise in the mentoring process can result in apprentices being unconsciously denied a valuable development opportunity.

- On mentors

Participants evidenced various motivations for working as mentors for degree apprentices. One such motivation focused on an imperative to support the learning and development of less experienced colleagues and 'to give something back' (Participant E).

*I enjoy the opportunity to coach/guide people and I like seeing how they develop.*

Participant D

Mentoring of others can also be seen as the opportunity to provide the kind of professional support lacking from one's own organisational history.

*However, not having had a great deal of guidance/support network in my own career ... certainly see the advantages and was happy to sign up.*

Participant E

Mentoring activity was generally seen as fulfilling its promise and, in some cases, providing a valued experience for mentors.

*I always find mentoring very energising. People at the start of their career are overflowing with enthusiasm and the desire to learn, it's infectious.*

Participant D

Some mentors found the mentoring relationship gave them the opportunity to gain insight into other departments and thus increase their own organisational understanding.

- On their organisations

Apprentices appreciated the value placed on learning by their organisation, through its commitment to the concurrent funding of the degree apprenticeships of a number of employees and to supporting their learning whilst in the workplace. This positive learning culture, with workplace norms valuing learning (Billet, 2001), appeared to provide a favourable context for effective mentoring (Cortini, 2016).

Apprentices offered some interesting views on the positive impact of mentoring at organisational level. For some, this impact centred on enhancing a positive workplace culture whilst others focused on the development stronger employee relationships through more effective networking and thus stronger cross-functional working.

Not all mentors were clear about the general impact of mentoring to the organisation, although in some alluded to their role in ensuring organisational benefit. Participant D, for example, supported an apprentice in deciding to leave the organisation which the mentor saw to be both personally and organisationally appropriate.

The reality of the mentoring relationship evidences the emphasis placed on discrete domains within our proposed mentoring model. Setting workplace expectations of professionalism and supporting the development of the apprentice in their professional role appears to be an important aspect of mentoring activity. Mentors and apprentices both put a premium on the impact of mentoring on learning and networking. However, mentors did not feel empowered to support the achievement of the Apprenticeship Standard in a significant way.

The areas of impact raised by both apprentices and mentors support our proposition of mentoring as a social practice. The relationship between mentor and apprentice is seen as key to securing positive impact, as is participants' perceptions of the value placed by the organisation on learning.

### *Barriers to effective mentoring practice*

Mentors and apprentices provided some helpful insights into barriers to effective mentoring practice. Commitment to the process on the part of the mentor was viewed as vital to the programme's success. Apprentices had a variable experience of this commitment.

*My mentor is very committed to mentoring – others may not be so lucky.*

Participant B

Issues around finding a regular time for a meaningful dialogue was given as an example of this lack of commitment.

For one mentor, issues around professional truthfulness provided a barrier to the positive impact of the mentoring relationship.

*It is difficult to get beneath the surface... being told that everything is ok/no particular issues whilst knowing that there are certain performance/behaviour issues that need to be handled by the Manager/HR...*

Participant E

Here, the apprentice appears to be choosing to present a front-stage, external self to his mentor, whilst living an internal backstage self alone (Goffman, 1959), an ability confirmed by Winter (2009) in his discussion of organisational identities.

A lack of adequate information on various aspects of the mentoring process can also hinder effective practice. Mentors generally felt that a greater knowledge of the detail of the 'university' aspects of degree apprenticeship programme would help them to support their apprentices' progress more effectively. Equally, less experienced mentors would welcome more supporting material, such as case studies and 'top tips', to ensure that the mentoring process fulfils its developmental potential.

### **Implications for effective mentoring practice: developing guiding principles**

The empirical data gathering process for this research was guided by a model which proposed five key domains of mentoring activity and suggested the importance of a supportive workplace context for the successful mentoring support of degree apprentices. Whilst activity across the areas varies between mentoring pairs, the data generally support the validity of the proposed model. The majority of mentoring activity focused on proactively facilitating learning both within and outside of the workplace, alongside the development of

an appropriate professional identity. Supporting induction activities was given a low priority. Support for gaining of the apprenticeship Standard was constrained by mentors' lack of information around specific requirements and their role in supporting their achievement, although this may also be influenced by the data collection point being at the early stage of the apprenticeship programme. Learning was clearly recognised as a social activity, despite the process and compliance-driven nature of degree apprenticeships, where success is defined against externally-prescribed knowledge, skills and behaviours. In order to become a helpful guide to mentors' planning of areas of support, the original model may need to be refined within organisations to show the relative importance given to each activity area.

The data also suggest the need, in some cases, for further mentor development in a role which is key to apprentice success. The following set of guiding principles for effective mentoring practice arise from the data and are offered as a tool to support the development of organisational and personal mentoring strategy and practice.

### **Guiding principles for the effective mentoring of degree apprentices**

Examining both the literature on mentoring and the research data gathered allows the formulation of a set of guiding principles to assist with the successful mentoring of apprentices. Taking this approach has been used as a successful framework for discussing curriculum development within the same post-92 university and has allowed academic staff space for reflection whilst affording a good amount of flexibility in meeting similar ends in different ways. As guiding principles do not stipulate the precise actions that need to be taken but rather provide a conceptual structure that maps out the broadest sense of journey, it allows for disciplinary difference within a shared vision of good practice. The precision of actions to be taken can then be devised and adapted to suit the needs of the organisation, the apprentice and the discipline within which the Apprenticeship Standard is located whilst establishing a consistency of expectations in the quality of delivery across all apprenticeships.

Within these guiding principles it is important to note the need for mentoring to take place in an organisational context which values learning, which provides support through organisational structures and which takes account of the impact of other organisational roles held by each participant – both mentor and mentee. The guiding principles are framed under each of the proposed domains of mentoring activity; this enables them to be considered as influences on the process of mentoring, alongside the activities which are the product of mentoring thereby mirroring the work-based learning which the mentee is undertaking within their apprenticeship.

1. Provide induction
  - a. Structure the mentoring relationship to support the induction process intensively throughout the first phase of the apprenticeship, before moving to a longer term pattern of support.
  - b. Establish agreed ways of working that are mindful of the needs of the apprentices and the mentors, including appropriate professional boundaries.
  - c. Focus early support on identifying what areas of the organisation the apprentice needs to understand immediately in order to do their job.
  - d. Consider what the needs of an apprentice might be that may differ from the induction and mentoring requirements of a regular employee.
  - e. Set up ways in which information can be shared, and questions raised as this is likely to be more intense in the first phase of the apprenticeship as norms are established.

2. Set workplace expectations of professionalism
  - a. Model a sense of self as a professional, sharing a sense of understanding of the need to be able to represent the organisation.
  - b. Explore the behaviours which are often tacitly understood within an organisation in terms of professional cultures and practices, including etiquette and expectations.
  - c. Share a historical and wider context understanding of the organisational culture, structure and norms.
  - d. Assist in understanding the wider world of work, but particularly the corporate identity of the organisation and/or the professional identity of the apprentice.
  - e. Balance the need for the emotional intelligence as a mentor supporting developments and the requirement to identify when issues require management intervention.
3. Proactively facilitate learning within and outside of the workplace
  - a. Regularly review progress in terms of action learning and target setting, both informally and in a structured way as required by the apprenticeship.
  - b. Use a model of reflection to examine the experiential learning with the apprentice to help in the identification of key learning points which can be evidenced.
  - c. Structure conversations to focus on the transferability of knowledge, skills and behaviours learned.
  - d. Broker relationships with colleagues who can support learning both within and outside of the organisation.
  - e. Cross fertilize learning by connecting the apprentice to other areas of the organisation which are outside of their immediate work area to extend and enhance learning.
4. Encourage engagement with support networks
  - a. Assist and encourage the apprentice to join and connect with regional and national networks associated with a relevant professional body or industry group.
  - b. Introduce apprentices to their own internal and external networks, sharing the professional connectivity.
  - c. Empower the apprentice to participate in wider networks associated with developing identity and wellbeing, which may be connected to protected characteristics or personal circumstances.
  - d. Signpost internal development opportunities that assist in the development of the knowledge, skills and behaviours required of the apprenticeship and if required, act as a sponsor.
  - e. Identify the professional development learning opportunity provided through unexpected and additional tasks taken on, as part of the ongoing reflection on learning.
5. Support the achievement of the Apprenticeship Standard
  - a. Balance the supportiveness nature of mentoring with the need to push, stretch and challenge the apprentice to achieve their goals and meet the Standard.
  - b. Review progress, encouraging reflection and documenting of evidence as an incremental process to enable a coherent picture of their development and achievement of the knowledge, skills and behaviour.
  - c. Provide the space for conversations which enable the apprentice to articulate a holistic understanding of their development as an autonomous professional.
  - d. Foster a deep and trusting relationship in which honesty and authenticity lead to conversations which provide a sense of professional truthfulness.

- e. Engage in professional development to ensure confidence in the precise requirements of supporting the achievement of the Apprenticeship Standard.

## Conclusion

The apprentice and mentor experiences presented in this article have contributed to the nascent understanding of the impact of mentoring within degree apprenticeship programmes. The interesting findings of this small-scale study need now to be extended through work with a larger sample, with particular attention paid to developing a deeper understanding of mentoring as a social practice. An evaluation of the impact of the proposed principles for effective mentoring practice would equally form a valuable contribution to the field.

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