



Navigating Effective Mentorship Strategies: Insights from Medical Faculty Community of Practice

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Significance:

This article outlines twelve effective strategies that mentors can employ to foster successful mentor-mentee relationships. It serves as a guide for novice mentors to be mindful of when engaged in this professional relationship and lays the groundwork for future research in health professions education.

Abstract

Mentors often struggle to understand their mentees' needs and to determine effective support strategies that impact the mentor-mentee relationship. This is particularly common among medical faculty, who lack formal training and opportunities to discuss and share. In light of the current situation, we organized an open seminar titled "Empowering Medical Faculty as Mentors" on January 6, 2024, followed by a full-day workshop on February 3, 2024, at Dow University of Health Sciences. This research article aims to involve the medical faculty community of practice to discuss the challenges encountered and coming up with effective strategies in the realm of mentorship.

Methods

It was an exploratory case study. The event was attended by fifty-one faculty members from 18 medical and dental colleges in Karachi, Pakistan. They were selected based on their teaching experience, seniority, and age. The views and experiences of the participants were documented during discussions and validated through a thorough literature review. The collected data was analysed and coded into themes and subthemes, ultimately identifying strategies for effective mentor-mentee relationships.

Results

Twelve key strategies for effective mentor-mentee relationship were generated. They were identified as: socialised niceness; transformative capability; adapt a leadership style; psychological resources; manage high assumptions; self-assessment; build a positive connection; avoid pushing personal agenda; reward mentors; efficient time management; recognise gender as a social construct, and to build trust. These should be a valuable resource for new mentors and medical faculty members to be mindful of and consider while involved in the mentoring relationship.

Conclusion

Both mentor and mentee well-being have received more attention in recent years and is increasingly prioritized in higher education. The identified strategies establish a foundation for future research in health professions education and guidance for educators to be mindful of creating supportive professional relationships that benefit both mentor and mentee.

Introduction:

Mentor plays a vital role in the growth and success of learners in higher education (1). Rolph (1996), Kwan (2005), and Gheihman (2024) describe the various roles and duties of mentors in guiding and supporting learners throughout their educational journey, going beyond formal courses and programs. They help shape learners' sense of competence, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-discovery, reflection, goal navigation, performance, and fulfilment (1-4). Typically, the mentoring relationship forms a one-to-one, two-way bond (4), between a seasoned senior academic "mentor" and a less experienced individual "mentee" (5, 6). Mentoring significantly impacts the development of young faculty by providing valuable feedback, advice, and acting as a counsellor, equal partner, and critical friend to enhance counselling and interpersonal communication skills, preparing them for their roles.

Nevertheless, mentors frequently face challenges in comprehending mentee needs and determining effective support strategies that impact the mentor-mentee relationship (3). This is particularly common among medical faculty, where formal training and opportunities to discuss and share practices within the community are lacking. Lave and Wenger introduced the concept of communities of practice (COP) in situated learning (7). COP provides the opportunity for professionals having shared interest or passion to enhance their practices through interaction, and highlighting the integration of individuals within the community (8).

This research article uses the concept of COP and involved the medical faculty to discuss the challenges encountered during the mentor-mentee relationship and ultimately identifying strategies to resolve them. This idea was translated by organizing an international open meeting and a focused workshop, supplemented by an extensive literature review. The open forum was held on January 6th, 2024, followed by a subsequent workshop, conducted on February 3rd, 2024, at the Dow University of Health Sciences.

Methods

An exploratory case study was conducted to document the perspectives and experiences of medical faculty serving as mentors. Fifty-one faculty members from 18 medical and dental colleges in Karachi, Pakistan participated. The participants were selected by their institutional heads based on their seniority, extensive teaching and mentoring experience, each with over five years in the field. The event featured experienced mentors and educators as speakers. Insights from the participants were collected and documented by (SA). Both the authors reviewed and analysed the data, coding the content to identify themes and subthemes.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Dow University of Health Sciences (IRB-3248/DUHS/2023/450).

Results and Discussion: The results generated twelve key strategies for effective mentor-mentee relationship:

Strategy 1

Socialised niceness

This was highlighted as a crucial factor influencing the mentor-mentee relationship. Participants were of the opinion that the exchange between mentor and mentee should take the shape of avoiding or ignoring conflicts, refrain from discussing controversial topics, be people pleasing, norms following, and downplaying their own assumptions. Therefore, it is suggested to implement this strategy in order to advance inclusivity, equity, and justice (9).

Strategy 2

Transformative capability

Evidence suggests that a mentor, as a guide, must recognize their ability to transform the relationship, supporting the mentee's personal growth and freedom (10). It evolved from the discussion that the transformative aspect of mentoring becomes even more significant, as mentors are challenged to promote diversity and inclusivity, employing important skills such as non-judgemental listening, shared problem-solving, and sharing opportunities (4).

Strategy 3

Adapt a Leadership Style

The challenge of choosing an effective leadership style was identified as extremely important by the participants. Mentors aim to achieve positive outcomes for learners, and both discussion and literature have shown the positive impact of leadership styles such as Autocratic (where the supervisor retains the majority of control), Democratic (focused on coordination, cooperation, and collaboration), and Laissez Faire (empowering the subordinate to work with freedom and free will) (11, 12). A study conducted in Pakistan demonstrated the successful utilization of both autocratic and democratic leadership styles, influencing the quality of education (13). In another study, a particular emphasis on the autocratic leadership style led to the attainment of optimal learning outcomes (14). Therefore, the participants agreed on the need to carefully adjust the leadership style to the specific context and the needs of the learners in order to enhance their performance.

Strategy 4

Psychological Resources

The discussion and literature have highlighted the importance of "intrinsic motivation" and "driving engagement" as crucial resources in shaping the student experience (15). Participants believed that having these resources leads to positive outcomes, while their absence predicts burnout and boredom. A study revealed that job demands led to decreased job satisfaction among university professors due to

emotional exhaustion, while these resources were found to boost satisfaction (16).

Strategy 5

Manage high assumptions

It has been noted that high assumptions present a significant challenge for mentors, both in sessions and in the literature. They are often expected to have a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of education (3, 17). The pressure to meet high expectations often lead mentors to conceal their genuine emotions and adopt a role that aligns with public expectations. Having high expectations for mentors to be all-knowing can be daunting for novice teachers, who require specific support beyond classroom activities such as guidance outside the classroom, collaboration with peers, seniors or colleagues (18). The assumption that mentors inherently possess expertise and skills in all areas may contribute to increase stress. Mentors are advised to manage high expectations and seek additional support for their mental well-being due to the pressure of high assumptions (19).

Strategy 6

Self-assessment

Recognizing and acknowledging one's weaknesses was identified by the participants as a significant challenge that demands thoughtful mentorship strategies. Literature highlights that self-assessment allows mentors to evaluate their weaknesses and gradually implement necessary changes, enhancing their relationship (20).

Strategy 7

Build a positive connection

A constructive bond with mentees, irrespective of personal choices or traits, was identified as a crucial element in shaping the mentoring dynamic. It was suggested by the participants that mentors should demonstrate resilience by enhancing individualization, developing a deeper and more holistic understanding, and engaging a diverse group of individuals in the mentor-mentee partnership (21). Literature supports to include interpersonal communication behaviors like mentor care, clarity, credibility, rapport with students, immediacy, and confirmation as predictors of forming positive connections and achieving academic excellence (22).

Strategy 8

Avoid pushing personal agenda

It was discussed among the participants to avoid pushing personal agendas and instead focus on guided discussions. Literature recommends enabling mentees to contemplate their unique educational and career journey without any form of compensation (6). Mentors should prioritize mentee-driven agendas and goals using newer models with single focused interactions, short-term relationships (23), or formalised-near-peer-tier mosaic mentoring (4), facilitating a professional development plan that aligns with the mentee's aspirations and needs. In order to maintain the integrity of the relationship, mentorship should involve active non-judgemental listening, specific feedback, posing thoughtful questions,

creating cognitive conflict, and encouraging autonomous exploration, all of which greatly influence mentee learning experiences (4, 24).

Strategy 9

Reward mentors

Various incentives such as financial prize, best mentor award, a supportive work environment, and training opportunities can be used to reward mentors and boost their motivation as identified during the discussion. The impact of mentor motivation extends further, as it indirectly influences the mentees motivation by shaping their performance and supporting their basic psychological needs (25). Participants recommended that educational institutions should create an environment that not only fosters the professional development of mentors but also recognizes their contributions through a reward system.

Strategy 10

Efficient Time management

Time management was identified as a real challenge for mentors during the discussion. Literature suggests following strategies such as goal setting, prioritization, identifying and eliminating time-wasting activities, and closely monitoring task execution for efficient time management (26). Educators and mentors encounter the additional challenge of effectively managing time during office hours i.e. work-work balance (4).

Strategy 11

Recognise gender as a social construct

The notion that 'gender' is a mere social construct is often attributed to scholars such as Judith Butler, who argue that gender identity is shaped by societal norms and cultural practices (27). This challenges the traditional view of gender as a fixed and binary concept, highlighting the role of social construction in shaping individual gender experiences.

In the realm of mentorship, participants recognized gender as a social construct, noting that mentorship dynamics can be influenced by societal expectations and norms surrounding gender roles. Participants acknowledged and respected the fluid and constructed nature of gender to promote inclusive relationships between mentors and mentees.

Strategy 12

Build Trust

Trust was identified collectively by most participants as a crucial component of mentoring relationships. Platz in his article has also recognised the importance of building trust that could be cultivated through relational values like belonging, inclusion, confidence-building, connection, learning from mentees, and assisting in identifying and overcoming their weaknesses, all while developing the mentor's own soft skills (28). These suggestions are vital in fostering positive mentor-mentee relationships that enhances the overall academic experience.

Conclusion

This article underscores the importance of employing effective strategies for mentors to foster successful

mentor-mentee relationships. These twelve strategies were identified during discussions among medical faculty in the context of an international meeting and workshop. As mentors strive to guide learners, they face challenges that can be resolved using effective strategies such as socialised niceness, recognizing their transformative potential, and adapting leadership styles to meet the goals. Additionally, mentors must include strategies like trust-building, avoid driving personal agenda, and maintaining a positive connectivity with mentees. The article also highlights the importance of additional strategies such as effective time management, self-assessment, self-motivation, gender dynamics, managing high assumptions, and rewarding mentors. This analysis serves as a foundation for future research, emphasizing the use of effective strategies in navigating the mentor-mentee relationship.

Ethical considerations

The research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Dow University of Health Sciences with Reference # IRB-3248/DUHS/2023/450.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

There are no conflicts of interest to disclose that could influence the results of this project.

Author contributions

Farhan Vakani is the Professor and Director of the Dow Institute of Health Professionals Education. He is also the principal investigator of this project and conceived the idea. Both authors, Farhan Vakani and Sana Ali, contributed to data collection, analysis, and write-up.

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