

Mentor development in higher education in Botswana: How important is reflective practice?

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Abstract

Mentor development in higher education in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Botswana is explored in this article. Changes in education policy require mentors to engage in individual as well as organisational change and transformation. Most studies focus on mentee development and the resulting organisational change but there is very little research into mentor development and its effects. Mentors can develop their mentoring abilities through reflective practice and an overt transformational approach to mentoring. An action research methodology was used for a framework of cycles used in the data collection from face-to-face conversations, reflective journals and focus group interviews. The findings indicate that reflective practice contributed effectively to mentor learning and development and improved mentoring ability. This study is important for its insight into the sparsely researched area of mentor development and its contribution to organisational change and transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The field of higher education continues to change as new curriculum systems are implemented to meet objectives for which higher educational institutions exist. Many higher educational institutions today are being challenged to become more competitive and efficient (Day 1997; Franklin, Hodgkinson and Stewart 1998; Leach 1996; Page, Loots and DuToit 2005; Srikanthan and Dalrymple 2002). Vocational Education and Training (VET) educational institutions in particular are experiencing a time of great change (Fibkins 2002). Higher educational institutions are open systems (Cummings and Worley 2005) influenced by the external environment in which they operate and have little choice but to change in response to these external forces. In order to meet the challenges from the external environment, the higher educational institutions require transformational processes that will equip them to meet these changes.

Mentoring is 'a powerful individual development intervention' (Cummings and Worley 2005, 407) that is a means of assisting, supporting and guiding educators in

their professional development (Megginson, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes and Garret-Harrison 2006). Mentoring in higher education brings together a less experienced educator and a more experienced one in a relationship to achieve the developmental objectives of both parties (Fibkins 2002; Nicholls 2002).

Mentoring practice by nature is a social and interpersonal process (Allen, Day and Lentz 2005; Kram 1988). This practice is a conduit through which learning can take place within the organisation. Through mentoring, educators can be encouraged to share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues. The deliberate utilisation of mentoring as a developmental intervention can encourage and enhance the sharing of knowledge and skills in the organisation and bring about change. But how important is reflective practice in mentor development?

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

This action research inquiry took place at Gaborone Technical College (GTC) in the Republic of Botswana, located north of the Republic of South Africa. In 2000, the Department of Vocational Education and Training introduced a new national qualification, the Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP) in response to the 'challenges of practical skills training for the needs of the national economy' (Ministry of Education 2004, 16). The BTEP is a student-centred vocational training program following the guidelines of outcomes based education (OBE). The purpose of the new qualification is to improve the provision of post school pre-service and in-service vocational education and training to alleviate skills shortage in a diversifying economy. Gaborone Technical College was the first higher educational institution in Botswana to pilot the BTEP in 2000.

In practice, the implementation of BTEP was a challenge for educators at GTC because very few of them had experience of implementing OBE. The researcher, a Head of Department at GTC, realised that she could provide the mentoring that less experienced educators needed. A six month pilot action research mentoring project was approved by GTC management and ran over two academic terms with one mentor and two junior educators. Despite GTC's approval of mentoring as a staff development strategy, no mentor training was provided at institutional level.

As higher educational institutions face the challenges brought about by the changes in the environment, these organisations may not move to confront the changes at the pace expected by the educators in the institution. Higher educational institutions often have no control over the changes from the external environment impacting on their internal processes (Cummings and Worley 2005). The organisation may not readily intervene to provide the necessary support for the educators to meet the challenges in a timely manner. In such situations there are experienced senior educators who will find solutions to the demand for change rather than wait for a system-wide initiative from the organisation. They can initiate mentoring relationships and provide growth and development for less experienced colleagues.

The purpose of this study was to address the development of higher education mentors with no formal mentoring training. The research question guiding this enquiry was: How can mentors develop their mentoring capacity through reflective practice?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentors do not automatically have the requisite capacities to support and guide mentees in developing knowledge and skills (Barnett 1995). He contends that mentors must develop their capacity to develop others effectively. This view is supported by Cox (2003) who emphasises that mentors must develop the skills they need to give mentees maximum support in attaining their learning and development goals. Geber (2003) shows that mentors need to continue building capacities to deal with the complex issues they may encounter in mentoring relationships. Mentors who desire to promote the learning and development of others must focus on developing their own capacities.

Transformational mentoring

The emphasis in this article is on transformational mentoring and so the focus here is on its importance in mentor development. There is little reflection in the higher education literature on the transformative view of mentoring designed to bring about change in organisations and workplaces rather than at an individual level only. The transformative nature of career mentoring cannot be ignored in higher education where changing educational policies and practices in the higher education workplace is politically and socially important (Geber 2004).

There are few models of mentoring which focus specifically on transformation. Hay (1995) writes about it but does not present a model. The transformational mentoring model (Geber 2004) evolved as result of a study of early career academics at several South African universities. It is an indigenous African model important for considering organisational and social transformation. In Botswana few institutions provide sufficient support for academics required to implement OBE and other educational policies.

Transformational mentoring involves the establishing of learning alliances for professional development and a commitment to social and organisational change (Geber 2003). Mentoring with a transformation emphasis is particularly important in mentor development where mentors guide less experienced colleagues in order to help them achieve requirements for educational and organisational change which is part of the Botswana national agenda.

The argument for using an indigenous transformational mentoring model in mentor development is that transformation needs to be clearly articulated as part of the mentoring agenda and integrated carefully into it. Unless it is, the chances are that the changes which happen during the mentoring process will be limited to personal and some professional development and will not affect the overall transformation

of the organisation and its educational goals. Indigenous mentoring resonates with African cultural values and the model evolved from several mentoring programmes in South Africa where the traditional models did not embrace the African sense of co-operation and urgent drive for transforming society (Geber In press).

The indigenous transformational mentoring model shown on Figure 1 distinctly reframes mentoring in a transformation context and emphasises the holistic, systematic nature of mentoring. Transformation is the over-arching concept in which mentoring takes place.

Transformation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change agent • Manage diversity 	
Role Model	
<p>Career Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate • Coach • Protect • Prevent exploitation • Provide challenging work assignments • Exposure • Give information • Give political information • Teach/explore facilitative dimension 	<p>Psycho-Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsel • Acceptance and confirmation • Develop trust • Encourage • Guide • Engage in constructive confrontation • Manage transition • Friendship

Figure 1: The Transformational Mentoring Model

Source: Geber 2004.

Transformation is an important new function of mentors and their function as role models is emphasised by the context of this mentoring research. Mentors traditionally provide both career development functions and psychosocial functions, such as those described by Kram (1988) and Cohen (1995). African mentors in the context of higher education mentoring relationships perform additional functions of change agent and managing diversity that specifically relate to transforming the educational goals of institutions (Geber 2003).

Mentors need to become aware and reflective of the reciprocal learning that ideally takes place in mentoring relationships. In doing so, mentors who fulfil all the functions that facilitate transformative relationships will have a long-term impact on organisational change and learning.

The organisational culture in the workplace, both at the macro and micro levels, needs to be considered in mentor development. Mentors need to be sufficiently aware of the disjuncture between policy and practice and develop their own skills in managing change.

Mentor development

Although less attention has been devoted to understanding mentor's learning experience than to that of mentees (Allen, Poteet and Burroughs 1997; Hezlett and Gibson 2005), there is research that examines the learning of mentors through the mentoring process (Allen and Eby 2003; Alred and Garvey 2000; Hale 2000; Healy and Welchert 1990; Singh, Bains and Vinnicombe 2002; Waxman 1996).

Mullen and Noe (1999) found that mentors seek information from their mentees. When the mentor puts this information to use reciprocal learning takes place. In a study conducted by Allen and Eby (2003), mentors who perceived themselves as similar to their mentees reported learning more from their mentoring relationships. Mentors participating in Hale's (2000) study reported that mentoring helped them gain insight into their developmental needs, refresh their skills, understand how others perceived their work, and develop their management style.

Reflective practice and mentor development

Reflective practice has been linked to effective mentoring practice as a way of transforming experience into learning (Cox 2005). Mentoring stimulates individuals to self-assess and reflect, to become more conscious learners, able to apply knowledge of their learning needs and styles to their own development (Hine 2008). Mentoring encourages systematic reflection and can greatly enhance the process of making tacit knowledge explicit (Nicholls 2002). Cox (2005) argues that reflection-on-action promotes reflection-in-action. Critical reflection promotes mentors' increased self-awareness so they can make better use of experiences and learn more effectively.

METHODOLOGY

Introduced by Kurt Lewin (1952), action research explores identified issues within practice through recurring cycles of action and reflection (Dickens and Watkins 1999). Carr and Kemmis (in McNiff 1997) define action research as 'a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which these practices are carried out'.

Action research is a cyclical analytical process, alternating between action and reflection (Dick 1993; Dickens and Watkins 1999; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988). It involves cycles of planning to improve on process; acting to implement that plan; observing the effects of the planned action; and finally, reflecting on the effects which become the next phase of the subsequent cycle. Action research, by the very nature of its reflective cycles linked with action, helps researchers to reflect on the results of inquiry and apply these to their learning.

Action research is commonly used in the field of organisational development (Huber 1991) and in higher education research (Feldman 2003; McNiff 2002) to bring about organisational change.

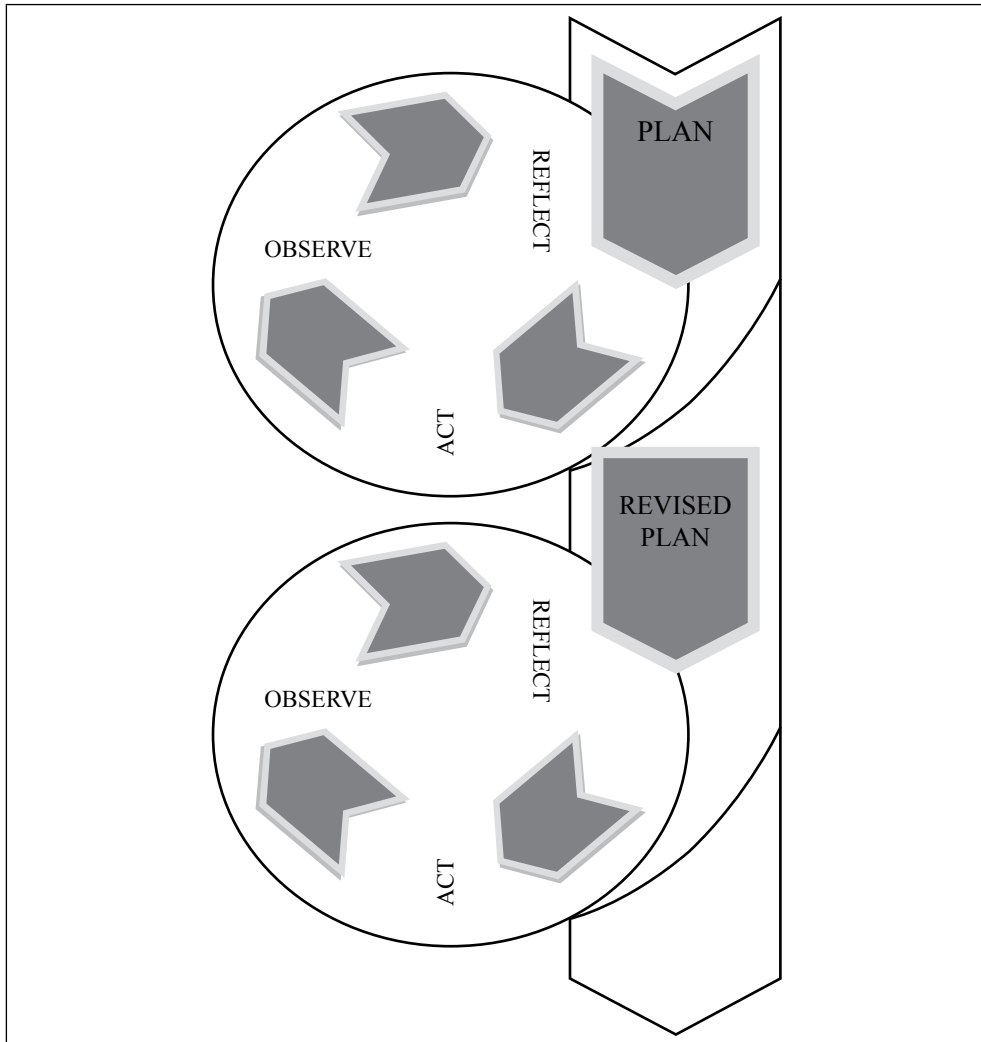


Figure 2: The Action Research Spiral

Source: Kemmis and McTaggart 1981. *The Action Research Planner*. Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press, p. 8.

THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES FOR THE MENTORING PROCESS

The aim of this action research study was to initiate a mentoring intervention to support and guide educators in facing the challenges in GTC, while simultaneously providing data for research purposes. It was also a developmental process to improve the capacities of the mentor.

To achieve the objectives of mentor development, the researcher designed a six-month mentoring project which involved three people; the researcher who was

the mentor and two mentees at GTC from different departments who agreed to participate. The six month period coincided with two complete academic terms. In planning for the action research cycles, the researcher incorporated mentoring stages of building rapport, direction setting, progression stage, winding up and moving on into the action research cycles (Megginson et al. 2006).

The concept of developmental mentoring was explained to all participants at the beginning of the pilot project. Notes and observations from the face-to-face mentoring conversations, personal reflective journals, and focus group interviews provided data to feed back into the action research cycles. These cycles are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: GTC Action Research Cycles and Mentoring Stages

Stages of the mentoring process	Proposed Date	Action
Building rapport	Early September 2006	Selection of participants and signing of consent forms
	Mid September 2006	Information about developmental mentoring, training in reflective writing and other techniques
Direction setting	Late September 2006	Construction of Personal Development Plans; Practice in reflective writing; Periodic mentoring conversations
Progression stage	October 2006 to December 2006	Conduct weekly mentoring conversations with mentees
	October 2006 to December 2006	Collect personal reflective journal entries from mentees at end of every month for three months
	Mid December 2006	Carry out focus group interview
Progression stage	January 2007 to March 2007	Continue to conduct weekly mentoring conversations with mentees for a further three months
	January 2007 to March 2007	Continue to collect personal reflective journal entries from mentees at end of every month for further three months
Winding up and Moving on	Late March 2007	Carry out final focus group interview
	Late March 2007	Closure meeting with the mentees

Key: Action research cycles and mentoring stages

- First Action Research Cycle and mentoring stages of Building Rapport and Direction Setting
- Second Action Research Cycle and Progression stage
- Third Action Research Cycle and mentoring stages of Progression, Winding up and Moving on

The mentoring project was planned to integrate with the flow of the educators' everyday activities such as teaching duties and classroom management activities, so that the mentoring process formed a natural part of their work.

Mentor *planning* began with arrangements for the structured mentoring conversations and took into account each of the stages in the mentoring relationship (Megginson et al. 2006) as outlined in Table 1. The planning was influenced and informed by the personal development plan (PDP) goals identified by each mentee.

Acting by the mentor occurred in the scheduled weekly mentoring conversations. These mentoring sessions were mentee driven and the mentor provided guidance and support.

The mentor took notes during the mentoring sessions while *observing* the mentees' behaviour. Observation also involved the mentor's participation in other mentee activities such as lesson observations and classroom management activities. The mentor's observation provided constructive feedback to the mentees afterwards to enhance further learning and development.

Each mentoring activity was followed by critical *reflection* in the mentor's reflective journal so that it was deliberate and conscious (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988). The reflections critically reviewed the development of the mentees and the changes occurring within the mentoring relationship. Reflection was essential for the mentor to discover changes in her own development and was crucial in addressing her learning systematically in the next action research cycle.

Data from reflective journals and focus group interviews are analysed in the following section on the findings of the study.

FINDINGS

The mentor realised that she needed to strengthen her mentoring skills to make her an effective mentor (Cohen 1995; Daloz 1998; Galbraith 2003). She would not be telling educators what to do but rather, she would be supporting, guiding and encouraging them in accomplishing what *they* wanted to achieve. The mentor detailed in her personal development plan her learning objectives for targeting three core mentoring skills (Cohen 1995; Fibkins 2002; Galbraith 2003; Harrison, Lawson and Wortley 2005; Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002; Scwiebert 2000). They are: listening, questioning, and providing feedback.

Evidence of the mentor's learning and development is presented in an analysis of how the mentor structured mentoring conversations and improved her practice. The mentor used her own reflective journals, as well as the mentees' reflective journals for the data.

Structured mentoring conversations

A significant issue emerging from the data was the structured approach which the mentor devised to use during the mentoring conversations. The structured format commonly used was adapted from the GROW model (Whitmore 2002). During the rapport building and direction setting stage, she found it a challenge to implement GROW. The model appeared restrictive when the mentor tried to follow the rigid questioning structure. The mentor reflects on these feelings in her journal:

I tried to ask relevant questions at points I thought I should. I asked several “why” questions to probe more deeply what the mentee was saying. Again I felt the restrictions of asking questions I had felt before. It did not feel normal to me ...

The mentor’s reflections on the GROW structure provided insight about why the implementation of this model was uncomfortable and she used them to inform the next action research cycle. During the progression stage, the mentor found that the reason for her discomfort was because the GROW model had been created for Western cultures. Perhaps it would work better if she modified it to suit her context in a VET educational institution in Africa. If she combined the African love of telling stories and GROW’s rigid structure, she would find a balance. This led the researcher to construct a mentoring conversation guide for herself. She continued to plan for her mentoring sessions and reflects on this issue in her journal:

What the planning of questions did, was that it prepared me, so that I felt confident that the meeting was going to go well. I was not apprehensive in any way. I think this is because I knew there was no chance I would dry up, as I had my set of questions. That is the advantage of preplanning.

After each mentoring session, the mentor recorded her learning and reflections using the mentoring conversation guide and reviewed this every time just before the next mentoring session. This meant that she was systematically building on her learning and experiences from the previous mentoring sessions and incorporating them into subsequent sessions. The mentoring conversation guide ensured that data gathering was deliberate and systematic, and linked reflective practice to the action research cycles. The mentor soon became more comfortable with the structure that she had modified.

The learning and development for the mentor was focused, continuous and systematic. She found that this structure emphasised her own developmental focus without losing sight of her vital facilitative role of supporting and encouraging the mentees.

Developing the mentor’s listening skills

The ability to be a good listener is one of the most desirable characteristic mentees expect from mentors (Jonson 2008). Good listening skills are a significant way of communicating that mentors are genuinely concerned about mentees (Cohen 1995; Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002). They assist mentors in building a climate of trust which allows mentees to share honestly and reflect upon personal experiences.

During the building rapport and direction setting stages of mentoring, the mentor perceived listening as a major challenge. Mentors can effectively assist mentees in their learning and development only if they understand the mentees’ developmental needs accurately but the mentor found that she talked much more than she listened. She highlights this issue in her reflective journal:

I have been grappling with the amount of talking I do during my mentoring meetings. I have worried that I talk too much and that perhaps I could reduce the amount of talking that I do. I have made a goal for myself to deliberately reduce the amount of talking I do. I need to listen more, and allow the mentee to do the talking.

She needed to build trust, encourage the mentees to share their thoughts and experiences and assist them to reflect on their experiences by listening carefully to what they said rather than monopolising the conversation. Even with a dedicated effort to improve, it was not an easy task. The mentor continued to talk more than she listened and made excuses for her slow learning. She reflects on this issue in her reflective journal:

How do I share it if I do not talk about them? How does the mentee get to learn from me if they do not hear what good or bad experiences I have gone through? Today, I feel that the talking I did was fine.

She attempted to justify her reason for talking so much to her mentees:

If it is sharing of experiences, giving advice, telling stories that have happened to me that the mentee can learn from, I need to tell them, I need to talk. And the mentee needs to listen. It is of course important for the mentee to be heard, so that for me as the mentor, I can deduce where the relationship is going, and what kind of learning is taking place.

The mentor was too eager to share her experiences with the mentees so mentees could relate these stories to their situations. Listening more keenly to the mentees made her more aware of the relevance of her stories to the mentees' situation. This vital learning point was incorporated into the next action research cycle, and into the progression stage of the mentoring process.

Gradually, the mentor gained confidence in her ability to decide when to speak and when to listen. She realised that the mentees did not automatically start contributing more to the discussions without her encouragement and only responded to her cues on how they should behave during the mentoring conversations. She reflects upon this improvement in her journal:

I feel that sharing my experiences with W was good. I feel that letting him ask me questions was good. I got to throw some questions back at him, to see how he is synthesising what he is hearing. Today, I did not feel inadequate to talk to the mentee.

The mentor's reflections provided information which she fed systematically into the next action research cycle, and the progression and winding up stage of the mentoring process. She reached a point where she felt confident that she had developed her listening techniques and improved to the point that she could focus on what the mentees had to say and respond appropriately to their questions. One of her mentees commented in his reflective journal when he wrote:

As I talk to her I seem to talk too much and perhaps give too much information than I need to ...but she listens attentively to me, and this encourages me to share more of my plans with her ...

Reading this reflection from her mentee was a surprising confirmation of the mentor's improvement and ensured that she had capacity to listen empathetically to mentees and build trust vital for a conducive learning environment (Cohen 1995; Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002).

Developing the mentor's questioning skills

Skilful mentors facilitate conversations in such a way that they open up potential for facts to emerge and meaningful dialogue to occur. Techniques that encourage mentees to reveal information include asking questions in non-threatening ways, showing interest and concern, and giving mentees ample time to explain situations. Questioning enables both mentors and mentees to clarify issues and to ascertain mutual understanding (Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002).

During the rapport building and direction setting stages, the mentees were passive and expected to be told what to do and how to do it. It took the mentor time to realise that it was up to her to change this situation. Often, she took the easy way out by filling the gaps during mentoring conversations so that there would be no awkward moments. So the mentor deliberately put the onus on the mentees to contribute by waiting for them to respond, rather than trying to fill the silence. This process was not easy for the mentor as she reflects on a session where she was trying out this technique:

In this session, I realised that I was still not totally comfortable with the silence. The silence after I have asked a question, and he is thinking it over, before providing a contribution. Although it was not an uncomfortable silence, I still felt that there was a void that needed to be filled. But I had already seen that need in myself in earlier sessions, and set myself a target that I would attempt by all means to draw out the mentee more, for him to hear less of my voice.

The mentor encouraged the mentees to identify their concerns about where they wanted to develop and improve, and become more proactive in searching for their own solutions. The mentor practiced asking carefully phrased questions that required extended answers. She also became more comfortable in giving the mentee ample time to respond to questions without feeling discomfort.

The mentor started to see some improvement in her attempts to draw the mentees out. Gradually she observed the mentees' view of themselves changing, and they started to look at themselves as generators of knowledge rather than merely receivers of it. She recorded this in her reflective journal:

I feel that I am improving in involving the mentees in the conversations. I am asking “what do you think you should do?” more often, rather than offering a solution immediately. I am encouraging the mentee to think for him or herself about the options that are open. I can see that M is getting it ... our conversations are becoming richer and deeper. I think this is because she is contributing more of her thoughts to the conversation.

The dilemmas that the reflective practice highlighted contributed positively to improvement in the mentor’s questioning techniques. The awareness of her learning was carried forward to the next action research cycle, and into the progression and winding up stage of the mentoring process.

During the first focus group, at the end of the first action research cycle, it was clear that the mentor had made some improvements in encouraging the mentees to be active participants in the mentoring relationship. One of the mentees stated:

At the beginning [of the mentoring relationship] I must say also, I was a bit vague in my expectations but I thought it would be more of the mentor driven type of relationship, and to me I was looking for her to do a lot of things ... like call me, tell me what to do ... Then I realised ...it’s me to talk to her to tell her what it is that I want from the relationship, and that sort of shook me up a bit. I have to do all the work ... say what it is that I want from the relationship.

The mentee’s feedback resonates with the African culture, where elders are respected, viewed as bearers of knowledge, expected to talk about their experiences and the young people are not expected to question them. It would be natural for African mentors to expect the same top-down approach. Younger educators would be expected to keep quiet while the older more knowledgeable educator, acting as mentor, told them what to do. The pilot mentoring project at GTC encouraged a change in behaviour which differed from cultural norms and the learning curve was steep.

Developing the mentor’s feedback skills

Feedback is essential for effective learning (Taylor and Furnham 2005) as behavioural change results when mentees know what they need to improve. The mentoring relationship is enhanced when mentors can communicate a concerned attempt to comprehend the ideas, feelings, and experiences from the mentee’s point of view (Cohen 1995). The mentor’s role is that of a neutral sounding board (Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002) rather than a judge. Mentees’ perception that they are being heard, rather than being judged, puts them in a frame of mind to share information about their concerns.

At the beginning of the mentoring relationships, the mentor’s skill in providing constructive feedback was underdeveloped and hampered by her authoritative approach. She wanted to be supportive, encouraging and non-judgemental, yet her

reflections revealed she was controlling and wanted to proceed in her own way. Megginson et al. (2006) mention that mentors adopt this 'managerial, directive style' where basic mentoring skills are lacking. Early in the mentoring process, the mentor reflects on this issue in her journal:

During my conversation with M, I was impatient at what I saw as her shortcoming. I was forthright and directive ... I am beginning to wonder whether these are indications that I am too autocratic, and do not give people a chance to work out their ideas ... or that I want them to think like me, or do it the way I want it to be done ... rather than encouraging them to come up with their own solutions. As a mentor, I need to give M more encouragement to come up with her own solutions. I would like to try this next time she comes to me for advice.

Adopting a managerial approach reduces benefits to mentees and is disadvantageous because the mentor would do things 'as is procedural'. This hinders the mentor from listening keenly and leads to providing inaccurate feedback. Reflections on the mentor's style provided information on where she needed to improve. As the mentoring relationship progressed, the mentor became less 'autocratic' and more 'participative' in letting the mentees drive the mentoring relationship, rather than being the driver herself. It became easier for mentees to view the feedback positively, appreciate it, and learn from it. Although not overly confident that she had found a feedback style she was comfortable with, the mentor felt that she had made some improvement. She recorded this in her reflective journal:

I am encouraging the mentees to think for themselves, and participate more actively in the conversations. When M wanted to do the same old lecture method for her class, I requested her to consider a more interactive teaching method. We explored different options together for her. I encouraged her to reflect on our conversation and decide which way she would like to go. She then drafted a lesson plan for discussion during our next meeting ...

The improvement in the approach from the mentor resulted in mentees acquiring enough confidence to try out new teaching styles. This positive result in the mentees' career development invigorated the mentor to continue to improve her feedback skills, and to feed this learning into the next action research cycle.

Giving constructive feedback became easier and it was gratifying each time the mentees received feedback positively. The mentor enjoyed the turn around as the mentees became owners of the outcomes. One of the mentees puts it this way about feedback provided on her teaching:

I have used new methods of approaching my teaching which has focussed more on the learner. The learners are becoming more interested in what I am doing and they have also gained a lot and I've seen the improvement through their performance in their assessments... .

Feedback from the mentees, coupled with the mentor's observations of the mentees' lessons and classes, highlighted the positive changes they were making. The more changes became apparent, the more the mentees became excited about their development as educators. This achievement emphasises the importance of the mentor's development in a mentoring relationship as well.

DISCUSSION

This study used the transformational model as the conceptual framework for mentor development and raised the question of whether mentors develop their mentoring capacity through reflective practice: four important findings are identified for discussion.

First, the study reveals that mentor development is important to the higher education institution as it can result in the transformation of the organisation's educational goals. Geber and Mothlake (2008) found that integrating transformation into mentoring practice results in individual and organisational developmental outcomes. The transformational model (Geber 2004) merges mentoring theory and African cultural values relevant to the African context. Focusing on mentor development can benefit any higher educational institution and can contribute to the creation of a mentoring culture within the organisation. Awareness of the benefits of mentoring will encourage willingness in other educators to form a pool of mentors with valuable mentoring skills. Mentor development ensures that mentors have the capacity to engage in good quality mentoring relationships, and successfully support and guide mentees in their own learning and development.

Second, this study highlights that mentor development was enhanced by the mentor's acute awareness of her own personal developmental objectives. Yet mentors are not often trained adequately for the mentoring role (Geber 2003) and are frequently left to use their initiative and rely on their values and intuition to guide mentees (Cox 2003). Healy and Welchert (1990) suggest that 'mentors, in the very act of guiding and promoting others, act to effect their own transformation'. This study shows that mentors with their own clear developmental goals incrementally improve their mentoring practice. Mentors should be encouraged to have clearly articulated personal development plans outlining their goals while executing their role in the career development and psychosocial support of others. The transformation of mentors and mentees promotes organisational transformation.

Third, reflective practice proved crucial in enhancing mentor development. This article contributes to mentoring knowledge by providing solid evidence that mentors can use reflective practice to improve their mentoring capacity in their work context. Reflective practice encourages mentors to develop an awareness of the self as a learner (Hine 2008). Singh et al. (2002) assert that tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1958) held by professionals in the organisation can be made explicit in the mentoring process. Adopting reflective practice is one way that mentors can make their tacit knowledge explicit to both themselves and to others. Mentors can interrogate their practice,

reflect and then reappraise values and behaviours. Reflection enables mentors to turn experiences encountered in the mentoring process into learning episodes. The process of reflecting on experiences and challenging beliefs and values proved to be vital to learning and improved mentoring practice. Using the action research cycles integrating the stages of the mentoring relationship allows systematic development for all participants.

Fourth, the mentor devised a structured approach adapted from the GROW model (Whitmore 2002) that suited the African mentoring context. Adding structure to mentoring relationships increases the chances of attaining desired developmental goals. Badsha (2001) suggests that structure ensures that developmental mentoring outcomes are not left to chance. Because of the structure, the mentor was able to contextualise the mentoring approach congruent with an African value system. This contextualised structure resulted in positive developmental outcomes for the mentees and assisted the mentor to improve listening, questioning and skills in providing feedback. Combining African cultural norms and mentoring theory resulted in a steep learning curve for the mentor.

Mentor development is sparsely researched so this study provides important new findings for the area of mentoring theory and practice.

CONCLUSION

In engaging mentors in transformation, the building of mentor capacity allows higher education institutions to meet the challenges they face from the external environment. As the external environment continues to influence the internal processes of VET educational institutions, educators must be encouraged to find innovative ways to adapt and effect the transformation. Mentor development is a way that educational institutions can achieve educational and organisational change which can equip them to cope with these changes. This study provides a practical example in mentor development in higher education in Botswana.

Mentors build their mentoring capacity congruent with their environment and culture. Reflective practice plays a vital role in creating the self-awareness that mentors need to contextualise mentoring practice to suit the organisational culture as well. The assumption that all mentoring models can effectively suit all environments is not a workable option. Mentors must continuously develop their capacities to be congruent to their environment.

This study has significant implications for educational institutions in general, and VET educational institutions in Africa in particular, for mentor development in a climate of educational policy change and for considering strategies to deal with it.

NOTE

- 1 Dr. H. Geber is a full-time employee at the University of the Witwatersrand and was promoter for this study.

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