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Reconceptualising mentoring: A conceptual framework that supports and contributes to the professional learning of research colleagues.

Abstract
Previous research (Clarke, 2004) reported on the reconceptualisation of mentoring using a three layered model. The model provided a conceptual framework which viewed mentoring as developing through a series of overlapping layers. Within each layer of the model, characteristics and outcomes were identified which were indicative of each layer.

The model was implemented in the ‘Green Wired Safe’ (GWS) Research Concentration at the University of Western Sydney in August 2004 and throughout 2005 as a way to develop mentoring relationships between the members. Not only was the model implemented in the research concentration but the members also became the research participants in the study. The model through its implementation in the concentration was able to be tested to confirm whether the ‘layered’ conceptualization of mentoring was in fact a representation of how mentoring can develop.

This paper explains the process undertaken in the research concentration to develop understandings of mentoring. The discussion of the process reports on the strategies used to provide opportunities for mentoring relationships to develop with fellow research colleagues in the concentration as well as identify other opportunities which would further enhance and strengthen mentoring relationships between GWS researchers.

Introduction
A key question of the overarching aim of this research was to identify by what means universities could regenerate research performance in the context of the Commonwealth’s Research Quality Framework. One such means implemented at the University of Western Sydney has been the introduction of research concentrations as a structure to assist with, among others, building collaborative research networks through nurturing leadership density and offering opportunities for individual and small group mentoring. Theory and practice of co-mentoring has been introduced in the GWS research concentration as a framework for developing and enhancing research performance.

Background to this Study
A previous paper by Clarke (2004) focused on the experiences of an early career researcher involved in a mentoring relationship at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), Australia. The mentoring relationship that the author was involved in at her workplace with two colleagues was explained using a layered relationship-mentoring model. The model consisted of three layers and within each layer the characteristics of the mentoring relationship were identified. The mentoring relationship was examined in respect of the implications such relationships have on professional learning for academics in their early career stages. The model provided a conceptual framework for educational and other organisations to provide opportunities for similar mentoring relationships to be formed in their particular organisation for early career employees.
This paper is presented as research in progress being largely descriptive of the process used to date at the University of Western Sydney to implement the layered relationship mentoring model in the GWS Research Concentration.

**Theoretical Framing**

Over time there has been a plethora of definitions on mentoring. In general, modern mentors are viewed as influential and more experienced people who can assist in the attainment of work and career goals of a less experienced person in the organisation. Mentors have been defined as guides (Bey & Holmes, 1992), counsellors or coaches and role models (Crow & Mathews, 1998). These definitions viewed mentoring as one-way relationships. Jeruchim and Shapiro (1992), however, presented a different view of mentoring encompassing a mutual and beneficial relationship between the mentor and protégé. They define mentoring as

... at its best, a close, intense, mutually beneficial relationship between someone who is older, wiser, more experienced, and more powerful with someone younger or less experienced. It is a complementary relationship, within an organisational or professional context, built on both the mentor's and the protégé’s needs (p. 23).

**Forms of mentoring**

Mentoring can be recognized by the type of relationship that is evident in each mentoring process. It can be a formal or an informal relationship and within these boundaries the relationship can be reciprocal or non-reciprocal. A reciprocated communication pathway for each of the participants in the relationship and an equal role status of the mentor and protégé constitute the mentoring relationship that is referred to here as “co-mentoring”, and is the ultimate focus of this study.

**Formal mentoring**

Formal mentoring relationships are generally designed for a predetermined length of time and are usually of short duration. Many managers implement formal mentoring programs as a strategy to induct new employees into their organisation (Douglas & McCauley, 1997). Within these programs the protégé is allocated to a mentor by the management of the organisation and usually, there is little or no involvement of staff in the selection process of matching the mentor and protégé by either party. These programs are purposefully developed, monitored and evaluated by the management in terms of expectations and goal attainment. There is an inequality of status in this relationship with communication usually being one-way. The mentor directs and drives the communication down to the protégé with little opportunity for the protégé to have input or respond to the communication from the mentor. The one-way communication in formal mentoring can result in the protégé being unable to 'connect' with the mentor (Figure 1).

Inequality of status with communication.
Communication is driven down to the protégé

Mentor
Douglas and McCauley (1997) reported that senior management in organisations in the United States, which did not already have a formal mentoring program in place were planning on developing one within the following three years. As organisational competitiveness increases so does the role of the management of the organisation extend to capitalise on the intellectual capital of its employees.

Phillips-Jones (1982), Kram (1991) and Murray (1991) have argued that management personnel in organisations do not fully understand the challenges inherent within formal mentoring programs. Ragins and Cotton (1999) put this lack of understanding down to the scarcity of empirical research related to mentoring programs. Indeed, practice has exceeded the pace of empirical research. In formal mentoring programs mentors do not have a previous personal connection with their protege but participate in the mentoring programs for the 'good of the organisation'. As an outcome of this lack of connection, both mentors and protege may not always be committed to each other or to the program. The consequences of this diminished commitment can result in an underdeveloped mentoring relationship.

**Informal mentoring**

The essence of informal mentoring is the establishment of beneficial interpersonal relationships based upon effective communication (Kerka, 1998). Mentors in informal mentoring relationships provide direction, support and insights and they essentially provide "...their proteges with a sense of what they are becoming" (Debolt, 1992, p.30). Opportunities for recognition, encouragement, feedback, advice on balancing responsibilities and knowledge of the informal rules of the organisation have been cited in the literature as some of the benefits of informal mentoring (Kerka, 1998; Schiewbert, 2000).

Informal mentoring relationships are spontaneously formed through people getting to know each other in the work environment. The relationship is usually voluntary and is often based on mutual professional identity and respect. The relationship is of a more personal nature and communication flows usually from the mentor to the protege but it takes place in a more informal manner (Figure 2). This informality is derived from the fact that the management of the organisation does not initiate the relationship but rather the relationship often forms through social contexts such as meetings over coffee. The communication in this relationship is more relaxed and has little structure. The mentor's communication is usually in the form of support, guidance and advice. Within this type of informal mentoring relationship there is still a hierarchical status with communication between the mentor to the protege. The difference in the status of the relationship between formal and informal mentoring relationships is that the communication in informal relationships is less formal as the name denotes.
Ragins and Cotton (1999), in a comprehensive study in the United States, compared formal and informal mentoring. They found that informal mentoring relationships were much more beneficial to proteges than formal relationships as the strategies used in the informal process were of a more personal nature such as coaching, counselling, role modelling and providing friendship.

There is still a hierarchy of status in this relationship but the communication is less formal

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2: Informal mentoring communication pathway**

Perna, Lenner & Yurs (1995) concluded from their research that the effectiveness between formal and informal mentoring could be due to the differences in the structure of the relationships. The pairing in an informal mentoring relationship is often the result of both the mentor and the protégé selecting personal qualities that mirror the qualities they would like to emulate. The informal mentoring relationship offers both the mentor and the protégé the opportunity to select each other, an aspect not usually present in formal mentoring programs. Ragins and Cotton (1999) also indicated that formal mentoring programs often last less than a year. On the other hand, informal mentoring relationships can last for many years allowing for a personal connection between the mentor and protégé to develop.

Evidence from the literature indicated that there are fewer limitations in informal mentoring than formal mentoring. Ragins and Cotton (1999) found in their research that the benefits of informal mentoring were many. The two major areas of difference between informal and informal mentoring were in the levels of career guidance and psychosocial support. Informal mentors provided a higher level of coaching and increased the protégés visibility in the organisation. They also provided counselling, social interaction, role modelling and friendship.

**Co-mentoring**

The co-mentoring relationship has been a recent development reported in the literature (Jipson & Paley, 2000; Mullen, 2000; Kochan & Trimble, 2000). Co-mentoring recognises the contribution that each person brings to the relationship and is based on reciprocal benefit. In this relationship the status of each person is equal and the communication pathway is one of reciprocity with each person mutually benefiting from the relationship (Figure 3).

In this relationship the status of each person is equal and the communication pathway is one of reciprocity.
Figure 3: Co-mentoring communication pathway

Mullen (2000) defined the co-mentoring relationship as synergistic. She viewed it as providing opportunities to be involved in each other's learning by sharing purpose and commitment in common projects. A number of other writers including Jipson and Paley (2000) and Kochan and Trimble (2000) documented their personal co-mentoring experiences. In their stories they discussed how these experiences were mutually beneficial. Their discussions were based on collaboration and shared decision-makings. The ability to collaborate and share was seen as providing opportunities to strengthen personal and professional skills.

Rymer (2002) discussed two essential components necessary for a successful co-mentoring relationship. The relationship should be a friendship of peers rather than a hierarchical relationship and that communication was dialogue rather than the transmission of organisational information. The co-mentoring relationship serves the individual needs of each person involved in the relationship. Within the relationship the individuals act as partners often complementing each other's knowledge and skills. The co-mentors may be different ages and have different expertise, skills and knowledge. What is important in this type of mentoring relationship is that the relationship is of mutual benefit.

Table 1 provides examples of characteristics of each type of mentoring. Examples of characteristics of design, allocation, selection and monitoring processes, communication, status, type of relationship, commitment and connection of mentors and proteges are drawn together from the literature in this table to illustrate the differences and similarities of each of the types of mentoring.

Table 1: Exemplars of characteristics of types of mentoring relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Formal mentoring</th>
<th>Informal mentoring</th>
<th>Co-mentoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design structure</td>
<td>Pre-determined length of time in the relationship</td>
<td>Often relationships last for an extended period of time</td>
<td>Often relationships last for an extended period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation of protégé to the mentor</td>
<td>Allocated by the management of the organisation</td>
<td>Usually spontaneously formed</td>
<td>Based on each other's complementary knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection process</td>
<td>Little or no involvement of staff in the selection of mentor to protégé</td>
<td>Voluntary, often based on mutual professional identity and respect</td>
<td>Friendship of peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring procedures</td>
<td>Monitored in terms of expectations and goal attainment</td>
<td>No formal monitoring</td>
<td>No formal monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>One-way communication from mentor to protégé</td>
<td>Communication takes place in an informal manner</td>
<td>Dialogue occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of each person in the</td>
<td>Inequality of status</td>
<td>Still a hierarchical status but</td>
<td>Equal status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Communication less formal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of relationship</td>
<td>Non-reciprocal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor connection with protégé</td>
<td>Sometimes lack of connection occurs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the mentoring program</td>
<td>May not always be committed to each other or to the program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The previous research (Clarke, 2004) revealed that three phases could be evident in the formation of mentoring relationships. These being:

- collegial friendship
- informal mentoring and
- co-mentoring

Further analysis of the data indicated that mentoring could be conceptualised not as phases but rather as a series of overlapping experiences. These experiences can be schematically described as a set of layers (Figure 4). The data showed that there were not distinct phases but rather the mentoring relationship and its characteristics moved between the layers and also that the layers overlapped as indicated in Figure 4. There was not a distinct break between each layer but rather the process merged one layer into the other and from this data I developed the “Layered Relationship-Mentoring Model”.

Figure 4:
Layered relationship mentoring model for early career development
The focus of layer 1 of the mentoring relationship was on the development of an interpersonal relationship with the mentors and the protégé.

The focus in this layer (layer 2) of the relationship was on the protégé's professional learning and development.

Layer 3, the Co-mentoring layer, develops as a result of the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship. The relationship becomes equal with support and guidance being offered by each of the participants in the relationship. The focus in this layer of the relationship is on an equal partnership and equal status of each of the participants.

Within each of the layers typical characteristics and outcomes were evident (Table 2).

**Table 2: Typical characteristics and outcomes of each of the layers in the layered mentoring model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layer 1</td>
<td>• interpersonal relationship in the workplace</td>
<td>• network of friends developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• social meetings</td>
<td>• common research interests discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• conversations regarding research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• knowledge of the informal rules of the organisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• conversations regarding research</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• conversations regarding research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• conversations regarding research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• conversations regarding research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 2</td>
<td>• safe haven</td>
<td>• linking own research to practice of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• guidance and support</td>
<td>• common research interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• professional dialogue</td>
<td>• exposure to new professional opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• affirmation of work</td>
<td>• papers written and presented jointly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• encouragement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• confidence building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• progressing work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• trust developed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 3</td>
<td>• mutual guidance, support and encouragement</td>
<td>• own professional identity developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• equal partnership developed</td>
<td>• mentor role being phased out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• identification of research opportunities</td>
<td>• protégé moving towards becoming a mentor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Research Design

**Discussion of the mentoring process, the strategies used to provide opportunities for mentoring and the opportunities to enhance and strengthen mentoring relationships between GWS researchers**

The GWS seminar series provided the scaffolding to enable the ‘layered model of mentoring’ to be developed within the group. At an August, 2004 meeting the model was explained by the author acting as the facilitator. Layer 1 of the model, its characteristics and outcomes were discussed at the October, 2004 meeting.

**Introduction of the Mentoring Process**

**Stage 1**

*Developing Layer 1: Collegial Friendship*

A collegial process was facilitated in a semi-formal setting over morning tea. Members met on a one-to-one basis and held conversations to get to know one another on an equal footing (no hierarchy of position or experience was to be considered either in the forming of the pairs or in the conversations). The members talked about themselves, their interests and their research focus.

**Collection of data**

Data was collected on the implementation of the mentoring model in GWS over a twelve month period beginning in October, 2004.

**Stage 1**

Initially, a focus group session was conducted. At this session the author facilitated some open-ended questions followed by individual reflection on the session. To prompt discussion and assist with ‘breaking the ice’ key questions pertaining to individual research was provided to the members (Appendix 1). At the conclusion of the GWS meeting the members were invited to complete a pro-forma (Appendix 2) which focussed on identifying contributing and inhibiting factors of developing a collegial friendship in the workplace. GWS members were also asked to identify opportunities to further enhance and strengthen mentoring relationships between GWS researchers.

**Stage 2**

To allow time for collegial friendships to develop (a crucial factor in establishing mentoring relationships) the next seminar presentation by the author was held in April, 2005. The presentation began with a review of the previous session and a discussion of the Layer1 Collegial Friendship characteristics and outcomes. Over a social lunch the members of the concentration were asked to discuss the development of any collegial friendships with a partner and identify any characteristics or outcomes evident in their developing relationship. They were asked to plot any characteristics and outcomes they had identified against the layer 1 Collegial Friendship characteristics and outcomes (Appendix 3). The members were also asked to identify...
any other characteristics and outcomes which they believed formed part of the mentoring relationship evident in Layer 1.

At this seminar meeting Layer 2 Informal Mentoring was explained and discussed with the view to expose the members to the characteristics and outcomes of the layered mentoring model. An opportunity was made available for members at this meeting to express their interest to take part in the 2005 AARE symposium presentation.

At future GWS meetings opportunities will be provided to discuss the implementation of layers two and three of the model.

**Analysis and findings of the data**

At this point in time of the writing of this paper the layered mentoring model is in the implementation stages and there has not been any analysis of the data so far.

**Discussion**

In a future paper the findings and implications of the testing of the mentoring model will be discussed in relation to its capacity to foster a collegial and professional learning environment in the workplace.

In particular, the reciprocity of each member in the mentoring relationship will be examined. The findings from the previous research by Clarke (2004) suggested that each participant brings knowledge and skills to the relationship and that these skills and knowledge can be complementary to each other. Not only do the participants in the mentoring relationship contribute certain knowledge and skills but also because of these skills the roles they play in the mentoring relationship can vary from one participant to another. In other words, the success of the mentoring relationship depends on the extent to which vital roles are available from the individual repertoires of the participants. These factors will be examined in the findings of this current research of the implementation of the mentoring model in the GWS Research Concentration.

**Conclusion**

The challenge for the GWS Research Concentration is to determine how collegial friendships can best be fostered in the work environment. The GWS Research Concentration has determined a means through their seminar series to identify and develop strategies that can capitalise on mentoring opportunities.

The “Layered Relationship-Mentoring Model for Early Career Development” described in this paper is a strategy that can be utilised in the higher education setting. Further opportunities for promotion of the development of mentoring relationships could include staff colloquia, social functions, internal faculty conferences for the presentation of joint papers, faculty grants established for joint research work and writing and training availability for mentoring.

The model also could be established as a process of mentoring for early career researchers. Given the limitations as discussed in the literature of a formal mentoring program being established, an early career mentoring program based on this model could be initiated where time and opportunities for collegial friendships to be established could be encouraged and indeed nurtured at the Faculty level. In higher education organisations the status of the mentor need not be hierarchical but rather
friendships may be based on identified research interests, needs or areas of expertise. For this reason alone, formal mentoring programs which are usually based on a more senior person mentoring a less senior person is not an effective mentoring system to develop in higher education. The “Layered Relationship-Mentoring Model for Early Career Researchers” is useful as it is not engineered but is spontaneous in its creation and development and should be recognised as such with appropriate time allowances built into the work profile.

It is acknowledged that there are tensions and dichotomies that exist in exploring the structural and organisational approaches to developing mentoring relationships. In particular, there are challenges for organisations when considering mentoring, specifically informal mentoring and co-mentoring relationships, as the relationships are formed spontaneously and sometimes serendipitously.
References


**APPENDIX 1**

*Discussing Your Research*
The purpose of this exercise is for early career researchers to as clearly and succinctly as possible explain your research to a research leader.

**Key Questions**

1. What is the purpose of the research?

2. What is missing in the current available research?

3. What will your research add to the field of knowledge?

4. Why does your research matter?

5. To whom does your research matter?

6. How are you addressing these matters (method)? Why are you using these research methods?

Session led by Maggie Clarke
August 2004
APPENDIX 2

CO-MENTORING:
LISTENING TO YOUR VOICES

We are very interested to listen to your comments, advice and suggestions regarding the activities we are running in our GWS Australia Co-Mentoring Sessions. Last Friday we undertook an activity to assist with developing Collegial Friendships…Layer 1 of the Mentoring Model.

Layer 1 of the model consists of the following characteristics and outcomes.

**Collegial Friendship Mentoring (Layer 1)**

**Characteristics** –
- Interpersonal relationship in the workplace
- Social Meetings
- Conversations regarding research
- Knowledge of the informal rules of the organization

**Outcomes**
- Network of friends developed
- Common research interests discussed

Could you please consider the following for comment?

1. From your participation last Friday, what characteristics did you identify as assisting and contributing to developing a collegial friendship?

2. What factors
   a) have contributed to helping you make connections with other researchers in GWS;
   b) have inhibited you making connections/developing any outcomes/following up professional relationships with the colleague/s you networked with last Friday?

3. Considering Layer 1 Collegial Friendship Mentoring, what opportunities/activities could you suggest to further enhance and strengthen the relationships between GWS Australia Researchers?

Thank you for your input and your comments. Your comments will enable us to develop further sessions that meet your needs.

Maggie Clarke
APPENDIX 3

Layer 1: Collegial Friendship Mentoring

*Directions for completion of the table.*

Column 1 lists the characteristics of layer 1. Column 3 lists the outcomes of layer 1.

In Column 2 tick if the characteristics have been evident in your collegial friendship/s formed as a result of being a member of GWS.

In Column 4 tick if the outcomes have been evident in your collegial friendship/s formed as a result of being a member of GWS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layer 1 Characteristics</td>
<td>Layer 1 Characteristics evident in your collegial friendship/s</td>
<td>Layer 1 outcomes</td>
<td>Layer 1 outcomes evident in your collegial friendship/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of an interpersonal relationship in the workplace</td>
<td>Network of friends developed</td>
<td>Common research interests discussed and identified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations regarding research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of informal rules of the organisation</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please list other characteristics which you believe are indicative of layer 1 that have been evident as a result of your collegial friendship/s formed from participating as a member of GWS.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Please list other outcomes which you believe are indicative of layer 1 that have been evident as a result of your collegial friendship/s formed from participating as a member of GWS.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
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Thank you for your thoughts and participation

Maggie