

LEVERAGING MENTORING AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES FOR CAREER PROGRESSION OF LIBRARIANS IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The subject of mentorship is widely discussed across professional fields and disciplines. The overall goal of mentoring and mentorship programmes is for career development. The concept of mentoring faculty members and administrators is however relatively new to higher education, and rare in information technology circles, including university libraries. The reason is that staff professional development in these types of organizations majorly depends on technical manuals and certification. The focus of the paper therefore, is on how librarians in university libraries can leverage mentoring and mentorship programmes for their career advancement. The paper discussed the concept of mentorship, types of mentoring and mentorship programmes, guide and principles to successful mentoring, reasons for mentoring and mentorship programmes in a workplace, how librarians and university libraries can harness the benefits of mentoring and mentorship programmes for career progression of staff. The paper identified some barriers and challenges to effective mentoring relationship such as unfair manipulations of parties, unrealistic expectations from mentors and mentees, failure to meet appointments, etc., and outlined strategies to overcome such challenges, such as setting mentoring goals and objectives, effective communication and striking a balance against over dependence on the mentor or mentee, among others.

KEYWORDS: Leveraging, Mentorship, Career Progression, Academic Librarians

Introduction

The subject of mentorship is a concept that is widely discussed across professional fields and disciplines, and organizational behaviourists and educational counselors, the world over are in agreement that one of the various ways to facilitate career progression of employees in a workplace is mentorship. The reason is that younger professionals across disciplines and professions, including librarianship need necessary tutoring, coaching and guidance to grow or progress and remain relevant in their chosen careers, profession and work places such as universities.

Mentorship according to Reeves (2023) is a relationship between two people where the mentor provides advice and guidance to their mentee to help them grow, learn, and develop professionally. It is a mutually beneficial partnership between two people with the goal of professional and personal development. Mentorship programs are implemented within the academia to build staff capacity and to enhance the human capital of the organization, including universities (Schriever and Grainger, 2019).

Encyclopedia Britannica (2021) defines a university as an “institution of higher learning, usually comprising a college of liberal arts and sciences and graduate and professional schools, and having the authority to confer degrees in various fields of study”. The importance of university education in all-round development of the society the world over is well acknowledged by scholars. The reason is that university education among other things expose students to new research and technology, and also encourages creative and independent thought resulting in human capital development. The major and established objectives of any university, whether public or private all over the world is teaching, learning, research and community development. To fulfill these objectives, and to meet the challenging demands and expectations of the university, libraries are established in universities.

These libraries are referred to as university libraries. A university library is a library that is dedicated to aid in university education; a type of academic library institution for the university community, and a resource centre for teaching, learning, research and activities related to the operation and management of the university as a whole (IGI-Global, 2020). A university library is a resource centre for teaching, learning, research, and activities related to the operation and management of the university as a whole. University libraries offer access to a vast collection of resources, including books, journals, research papers, and multimedia resources. They also provide study spaces, research support service, and access to technology resources such as computers and their accessories (Library and Information Science Community, 2023).

In a bid to fulfil her statutory mandate of providing information resources and services to the parent institution, university libraries recruit various categories of staff among which are librarians. Librarians are set of professionals who received training to work in a library and other information centres. Traditionally, a librarian is associated with collections of books. However, the role of a librarian is continually evolving to meet social and technological needs occasioned by the emergence of information and communication technology. The job of librarians revolves round the development, collection, organization, evaluation and dissemination of information in all forms. Librarians like every other categories of staff, are not comfortable when they do not progress appropriately in their career. This is because stunted career growth of any employee for any reason results in discontent and demotivation, and this is not too good for any employee.

Career progression is the act of moving forward in one’s career; also referred to as “climbing the ladder” at work (Push, 2023). It is moving ahead in your career either by getting promoted to higher roles, taking new opportunities, achieving career aspirations (Chugh, 2023). Career progression is the totality of your career development and the steps leading to the growth. It allows you to grow your professional skills and be able to succeed in higher level roles, hence, crucial for both personal and professional development and fulfilment. Every professional has a desire to get the climax of their chosen career amidst inherent challenges. Career progression can take many forms, such as being awarded more responsibility within the role you already have, moving to a different department or taking on new challenges, and increasing your skillset and competencies. Career Progression as an act of moving forward in a chosen career is important to

both the employee and the employer and involves taking new challenges and increasing one's skills through training and development opportunities.

Librarianship as a profession has passed through many changes over time, especially with the emergence of digital technologies and to thrive in Library and Information Science (LIS) profession, you must have the required knowledge, skills, competencies as well as the abilities to deliver in your assigned duties. Educause Mentoring Toolkit (2022) observes that the concept of mentoring faculty and administrators is relatively new to higher education and rare in information technology circles. The reason is that in these areas, staff professional development often takes the form of technical manuals and certification. It is precisely however, this type of support organizations that need a strong foundation of mentoring to build and retain a healthy workforce that can react quickly to change and can develop, adapt and regenerate itself overtime. Librarians and other LIS professionals working in higher educational institutions, especially universities, despite combining several duties within limited time aspire to reach to the peak of their career as well, and therefore, require advice and guidance from mentors for their career growth. This way, librarians and other LIS professionals in university libraries can harness the gains of mentorship and mentorship programmes for their career progression. This paper is organized in six segments namely concept of mentorship, types of mentorships, guides and principles for mentorship, reasons for mentorship, ways librarians can leverage mentorship for their career progression, and barriers and challenges to effective mentoring relationships.

Concept of Mentorship

The subject of mentorship is widely discussed across professional fields and disciplines, especially amongst organizational behaviourists and educational counselors. Generally, mentorship is a relationship between two people where the individual (mentor) with more experience, knowledge and connection is able to pass along what they have learned to a more junior individual (mentee) within a certain field or professional area (Oshinkale, 2019). Francis (2021) defines mentorship as one-to-one engagement between a learner (the mentee) and a more experienced individual (the mentor) who shares knowledge and guidance around a specific need. It is a powerful, purposeful, and developmental relationship between a mentor and a mentee (Freedman, 2021). Mentoring is a professional activity, a trusted relationship, a meaningful commitment, an indispensable part of work culture (Educause Mentoring Toolkit, 2022). Kulikoski (2022) opines that mentoring is a productive way to connect with colleagues and peers who can both inspire and challenge you to grow and improve. She opined that one's colleagues and peers are vital resources to help one set career goals capable of pushing one outside comfort zone. Mentorship, according to Reeves (2023) is a relationship between two people where the mentor provides advice and guidance to their mentee to help them grow, learn, and develop professionally. It is a mutually beneficial partnership between two people with the goal of professional and personal development. It involves an established relationship for the purpose of learning and personal or career development (Cronin, 2023). In the academic setting, mentorship refers to the guidance given by an experienced professor or associate professor to a less experienced faculty member on issues relating to academic traditions, resources and institutional values (Anafarta and Apaydm, 2016). In this instance, a mentor is a role model that teaches, assists, provides time, energy and material support as a source of inspiration to the mentee. Identifying strong mentors in one's field is a good way to set oneself up for significant career transition.

Librarians in university libraries should therefore be able to identify senior and experienced professional colleagues as mentors.

Types of Mentoring and Mentorship Programmes

There are various types, forms and models of mentoring and mentorship programmes that can be implemented in a workplace. Some types may be better than others for achieving certain objectives or can be combined to create effective mentoring programmes that work for an organization. Cronin (2023) categorized mentoring into two namely formal and informal mentoring. He describes informal mentorship as unstructured type of mentorship, which is flexible and evolves organically. It is almost like a friendship. Colleagues, family members, etc., can be informal mentors; people you turn to for advice or to challenge you, while formal mentoring is an organized programme that matches people with mentors who can help them towards a goal or targets. Formal mentorship is well structured, organized and managed by the organization. It takes place in many organizations such as business, schools and universities, to support and facilitate the growth of individuals. Formal mentoring in organizations are naturally more firm and inclusive, as they do not rely on senior managers or teachers or “taking shine” to individuals and favouring them (Cronin, 2023).

Mullen (2016), Gould (2021), and Educause Mentoring Toolkit (2022) identified the following types of mentorships that can take place in a workplace. They are:

One-on-one Mentoring: This is the traditional type of mentoring, where one mentor and one mentee agree to enter into mentorship to help the mentee develop, improve and achieve their goals. In this type of mentorship, the mentor has more experience in an area the mentee is interested in and so can act as an advisor and guide. This can take the form of career direction or leadership development. While the focus is primarily on the mentee, the mentor will also benefit, as they develop leadership skills, learn from their mentee and feel a sense of satisfaction from supporting someone in their concern. On-on-one mentorship helps in building long-term relationship, which is nurtured overtime.

Situational Mentoring: This type of mentorship is of short-term duration and addresses specific challenges, issues or opportunities. It often involves a short-term discussion between a mentor and a mentee on a high impact issue, problem, challenge or opportunity. The purpose of situational mentoring is to enhance individual and organizational performance, as well as increase proficiency in leadership competencies (SES Situational Mentoring Program, 2022).

Peer Mentoring: This involves two people from a similar job or age range coming together in mentorship. They may take turns acting as “mentor” and “mentee” or arrange sessions more intermittently. The aim is to share experiences and expertise, learn together and hold each other accountable. Peer mentoring works well as part of a targeted programme. This mentorship model can give employees an opportunity to develop leadership and communication skills in an autonomous, peer-to-peer environment.

Group Mentoring: This is a formal style of mentoring, which involves one mentor working with several mentees in a group. The mentor will lead the sessions with the group of mentees, all bringing in their own range of knowledge and experience. Group mentoring helps to reach out and impact more mentees in a shorter time frame than traditional mentoring. It is an effective way of upskilling groups, and retaining a culture of knowledge sharing in an organization.

Reverse Mentoring: This is a type of traditional mentorship where a more junior person mentors a more senior person in a reverse order. Reverse mentoring recognizes that there are skill gaps and

learning opportunities on both sides of a mentoring relationships. Reverse mentoring can be utilized to upskill senior employees on digital technologies, as part of a diversity and inclusive initiative.

Flash Mentoring: As the name implies, it is another model of mentoring, which refers to quick one-off mentoring sessions aimed at learning a key piece of information or skill. Flash mentoring is useful for creating knowledge sharing, without the pressure to develop a long-term relationship. It can be used in conjunction with other types of mentoring, such as group mentoring, and can be a helpful way to introduce new mentors and mentees.

Team Mentoring: It involves a group of mentors who carry out mentoring sessions as a team. The key difference between group mentoring and team mentoring is that team mentoring often involves multiple mentors working with the group instead of just one. Team mentoring can help to promote diversity and inclusion, as it creates a space for a number of different people with different opinions and perspectives to come together and learn from one another. Team mentoring is good for teamwork and eliminates any potential favouritism or elitism that can sometimes be associated with one-to-one mentoring.

Virtual Mentoring: This can also be called e-mentoring. It is a new type of mentoring, necessitated by remote work experiences. It is done using electronic communication methods to facilitate the mentoring relationship and processes. Other types of mentoring can be run remotely using e-mentorship. E-mentoring can connect people from different cities, and geographical locations in mentorship. Virtual meeting can make your mentoring programmes more inclusive of employees that are unable to travel in-person meeting or that prefers to connect virtually.

Guide and Principles for Mentoring and Mentorship Programmes

Mentorship, indeed is a two-way traffic thing, involving the mentor and the mentee. Some of the guides and principles necessary for successful mentorship relationships, according to Educause Mentoring Toolkit (2022) include:

Mutual Benefits: The relationship of the parties should be defined from the beginning as mutually beneficial, as each participant entered the relationship by choice. The parties should strive for mutual benefits, talk about the learning and development goals, willing to openly share his or her goals to the relationship and work collaboratively to help achieve them.

Build a Working Partnership: Building a working partnership is necessary. The mentor should consider instructing for a working partnership, rooted in the common ground of shared professional goals. These collaborations can lead to discoveries about each participant's preferred working style, daily obligations and professional aspirations. For a good working partnership, participants should take time to meet to know each other, and exchange background information, determine the personal expectations of the relationship, define the "deliverables" and desired outcomes.

Good Communication Skill: This is one of the cherished principles and guide to successful mentorship. AMTA (2023) states that expertise and experience, good communication skills, and genuine interest in the mentee's success are the qualities a career mentor should possess. Good communication involves active listening; paying attention to what the other person is saying, and showing interest and empathy.

Agree on Confidentiality: Maintaining an environment of confidentiality is a critical component in building trust between the mentor and the mentee. Confidentiality will guarantee a mutual understanding for the parties to speak freely and open up as the situation warrants. Metros and

Yang (2006) observe that without confidentiality in mentorship, it may be difficult for the relationship to reach its desired potentials.

Commitment to Honesty: The participants should be willing to frankly share what they expect to gain from the relationship and their vision for getting there. They should be willing to offer frank feedback as appropriate, even if the feedback is critical.

Listen and Learn: Mutual benefits can honestly be achieved when both members feel their view points are not only heard, but respected. Mentors, especially need to remember that the relationship is not all about them. Co-mentors and mentees should not be intimidated or made to feel that their views are not valued. By listening, both the mentor and the mentee will learn.

Lead by Example: Actions create the most active impression. The mentor should strive to model the behavior he wants to see in the mentee. The mentor should not just push towards excellence in the mentee, but should actively demonstrate that excellence (Martins, 2022)

Reasons for Mentorship in a Workplace and their Benefits

Indeed, there are many reasons why employees engage in mentorship. Shulka (2021) did an empirical study on the impact of mentoring and coaching on career development. 76% of the respondents argue that mentoring and coaching have positive effect on overall career achievement and development of employees. Engaging in mentorship programs and activities in LIS will be impactful both to individuals involved and the entire profession. Ultimo (2021) posits that whether you are in Education, Healthcare, Agriculture or Finance, effective mentorship is a stepping stone to success and when properly executed, all parties gain exposure to new skills, ideas and wider audience is reached and problems solved. According to Freedman (2021), mentoring programs strengthens trust, communication and connection to each other. Aboyade, Aboyade and Oladokun (2022) believe that mentorship is an effective and efficient method of helping newly recruited information professionals deal with the job challenges facing them. Seema and Sujatha (2015) quoting other studies opine that, employees with a mentor have more promotion opportunities, earn higher incomes, and develop high work satisfaction than an employee without a mentor. Ghosh and Rejo (2013) in their study defined mentors as individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing support for the purpose of increasing career advancement of Junior organizational members. The mentor offers guidance and direction, but not dictating the goal. She asserted that trust and accountability are factors critical to mentoring and that mentoring format could be one to one, group or affinity groups but is not limited to any pattern so long as individuals are connected to achieve objectives. She emphasized that goals for mentoring must be REAL (R – Relevant, E- Experimental, A- Aspirational, L- Learning-base. Fitzsimmons (2024) believes that mentors can help you to identify and work on the skills you need to succeed at work as well as support you through any difficulty or challenge. Mentorship programs are implemented within the academia to build staff capacity and to enhance the human capital of the organization (Schriever and Grainger, 2019). Effective mentorship is of distinguished importance but requires complex skills and competencies that can be taught, rehearsed and mastered. Ghosh and Rejo (2013) define mentors as individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to promoting support for the purpose of increasing career advancement of Junior organizational members. They opined that career development and growth is tied to mentoring and career success. A career mentor assists people go where they want to go in their career, and the main focus of career mentor is goal driven, professional effectiveness and success.

Mentorship, according to Bill (2021) and Freedman (2021) is of great benefit to the mentee, the mentor, the organization and the society at large. To the mentee, he gains advice, improves his communication skills, develops knowledge and skills, learns new perspectives, increases career success, and derives job satisfaction. To the mentor, he shares expertise with others thereby improving himself as well, his leadership skills are improved, his confidence and self-esteem is enhanced. He uses the capabilities of the mentee to improve the organization, and gains personal satisfaction, thereby advancing his career. In the same way, the organization and society gain, as corporate knowledge is transferred from experienced staff to inexperienced ones. Leadership is made available at little or no cost. There is increase in productivity, increase in profit, increase in organizational socialization, increase in national development, and improved quality of life.

Mentorship as Catalyst for Career Progression of Librarians in University Libraries

A number of studies have been carried out on the positive effects, which mentoring can have on employees, ranging from confidence to mental health, which has the potential of career advancement or progression. A study of mentoring statistics from Reuben (2023) states that 71% of people with a mentor say their company provides them with good opportunities to advance in their career, compared with 47% of those without a mentor. Indeed, mentorship and mentoring programmes are veritable instruments that librarians can harness among other things for their career growth. This can be achieved through:

Sharing of Knowledge and New Skills: Digital transformation has become a reality and has brought about the Information Society, bringing remarkable changes to the librarianship profession with ICT pervading every aspect of library service (Dike, 2014). As a librarian, you might find yourself coming up against these challenges. While a love of books might have attracted one to librarianship, the demand for digital proficiency has become strategically imperative. By acquiring new skills, you can turn these challenges into opportunities. BoltJobs (2022) avers that networking with other librarians, especially through mentoring and mentoring programmes can help in sharing of knowledge and new skills from others, leading to upskilling.

Leadership Development for Librarians: Mentoring is a great way of developing skills in individuals. Older and more experienced librarians and other LIS professionals can pass on their professional knowledge and key professional learnings to less experienced librarians or those preparing to enter a library leadership role. Sharing challenges and facilitating a support system of leaders through mentoring can be an effective way of training upcoming librarians (Cronin, 2023).

Induction and Onboarding: Starting a new job in the library can be daunting. Those few days can be confusing, challenging and disappointing, as it is always difficult to come to terms with what was learnt in the library school and the practice proper. Library organizations can use mentoring programmes to onboard their new employees, pairing them with experienced person who can show them the ropes, especially bringing them up on the practical aspects of librarianship, which is sometimes different from the theories learnt in schools. It is no longer news that some students graduate without laying their hands on classification schemes and other classification tools.

Succession Planning: Similar to leadership development, mentoring for succession planning in a library establishment involves identifying performing staff of the library and preparing them via mentorship for roles within the library. this creates a talent pipeline, and the potential successors receive firsthand information and support.

Knowledge Retention: Similarly, as the older generation of librarians near retirement, it is important to ensure that knowledge and experience needed for information service delivery are not lost. By establishing a knowledge retention/sharing mentoring programme, you can facilitate the passing down of this information across every facet of the library, as well build a community of knowledgeable librarians in the process.

Transitional Periods: Another way libraries and librarians can benefit from mentoring for their career progression is during the time of change or transition. Whether it is new management, a structure overhaul, redistribution, etc., mentoring can help re-establish a culture of community across the library in a short period of time.

Barriers to Mentoring Relationship for career Progression of Librarians.

There is no doubt that mentoring offers many benefits to mentors, mentees and the workplace. But even the best mentoring relationship or programmes and participants do face some challenges in the relationship. Abdullah and Saha (2008) in their research on occupational stress, found that generally, within an organization, the concept of mentoring does pose a problem because it is more informal than formal. According to Sambunjak, Straus and Marusic (2009), gap in communication on shared roles, undefined or wrongly perceived roles, limited communication channels for feedback, and the inability to establish psychological safety can hinder the development of effective mentoring relationship. Mentoring Complete (2018) however identified the following as the most common challenges to mentoring relationship:

Appointment Failures: Both mentors and mentees in library establishments have various commitments and responsibilities, both of which often serve excuses for postponing or cancelling mentoring meetings. Mentor librarians and their mentees failing to meet appointment schedules frequently will erode the foundation of the relationship.

Unrealistic Expectations: Unrealistic expectations from both the green horn librarians and the more experienced ones and assumptions can pose a serious challenge to mentoring relationship. Overloading the mentee with information and expecting the mentee to become like the mentor are good examples of unrealistic expectations that can have negative impact on the relationship. Conversely, the mentee may expect the mentor to provide more support and direction than is reasonable under a given circumstance.

Over Dependence on a Party: There may be over dependence from either parties. For example, a mentor may want to rely on the mentee for emotional support rather than focusing on the mentee's needs. Again, a mentor may also expect the mentee to accept everything he has to offer, instead of letting the mentee find his or her own path. Likewise, a mentee may rely heavily on the mentor's approval. Rather than aiming for independence, the mentee might excessively depend on the mentor before taking decisions for fear of making mistakes or receiving criticism.

Unfair Manipulations: This may be on the part of the mentor or the mentee. In this case, the mentor may indirectly impose a responsibility he is supposed to handle on the on the mentee under the guise that the mentee will learn better. Mentees, on the other hand may fail to assume personal responsibility for their actions and decisions and 'blame' their mentor instead.

Ineffective Mentoring Pairs: A mentoring pair, especially in informal mentoring may not work out for various reasons: lack of commitment on the part of one of the parties, learning styles may not match and sometimes personal idiosyncrasies may hinder the relationship.

Resentment or Jealousy: Mentoring is a much sought after activity because of its positive effect on people's professional development. Unfortunately, mentoring programmes cannot include

everyone in the workplace. As a result, those who participate in such programmes may experience undue resentment from other colleagues not on the programme. This may come in form of jealousy or criticism that the mentee can leave work and attend a mentoring meeting.

Aside the above barriers, another most common challenge in formal mentorship programmes is getting the right number of mentors to participate in the programme. While this challenge is important, the quality of the mentor is just as important, as low quality mentors are not motivated to help their mentees succeed, and will be less effective and less engaged (Insala, 2019).

Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges of Mentoring Relationship

In spite of the challenges to mentoring and mentorship programmes, mentors and mentees need to fashion out effective strategies for successful, efficient and effective mentoring. Mentoring Complete (2018) has put forward the following strategies:

Strive to Keep Appointments: From a mental perspective, participants should treat mentoring meetings as they would any workplace meeting. This way mentors and mentees will keep appointments.

Set Mentoring Objectives: Mentors and mentees should not just dabble into mentoring relationship. From the onset, participants should be able to set specific mentoring objectives and goals. This way everyone is in agreement regarding expectations.

Striking a Balance: Mentors should check their egos and remind themselves that the relationship is about the mentee. On the other hand, mentees should come to terms that they are the one to benefit more. They need to make their own decisions and be aware that their mentors are merely a source of support and feedback. The participants should strike a balance than one over depending on the other.

Education and Training: Education is the best recourse. Mentors and mentees can share information about the programme. Ideally, the organization itself should be transparent regarding exiting mentoring programmes, including how to get involved.

Effective Communication: If faced with ineffective mentoring pairs or other mentoring challenge, one or both parties should be bold enough to speak out as soon as possible. This is one of the benefits of effective communication in mentoring.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The subject of mentorship is a concept that is widely discussed across professional fields and disciplines. Organizational behaviourists and educational counselors, the world over do prescribe mentoring and mentorship programmes as veritable avenues for career achievement and growth. It is a mutually beneficial partnership between two people with the goal of professional and personal development. The concept of mentoring among faculty and administrators is relatively new to higher education and rare in information technology circles. Librarians and other LIS professionals aspire to reach to the peak of their career as well, and therefore, require advice and guidance from mentors for their career growth. Through mentorship, self- confidence is built, new skills and knowledge acquired which becomes a veritable tool for specific goal setting leading to making an informed decision. Librarians and other LIS professionals in university libraries therefore, need to leverage on mentoring and mentorship programmes to advance their career, which brings about workplace satisfaction.

Based on the issues raised and the overall discourse, the paper recommends as follows:

1. Library establishments and librarians should consider and put in place formal mentorship programmes in their libraries.
2. Older librarians should open up and condition their minds to accept reverse mentoring from the new breeds, especially in the handling of computers and other new technologies.
3. For effective mentoring outcome, mentors and mentees should strive for open communication through sustainable feedback at all times.
4. Mentors and mentees should endeavor to maintain established contacts in mentorship relationship.
5. The mentor and mentee should strive to be innovative in their relationship.

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