

Full Length Research Paper

Mentoring programmes for academic staff at the Polytechnic of Namibia

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Mentoring enables staff to acquire skills needed to progress successfully in their work environments. The main objective of the study was to establish if staff members at the PoN are interested in the concept of introducing mentoring programmes. Policies adopted by tertiary educational institutions play a key role in determining the future of an institution. The enquiry employed a case study approach because it dealt with a specific institution in Namibia. A triangulation method was utilised to solicit information from academics, administrative and support staff by conducting semi-structured interviews with HoDs and sectional heads. A closed-ended questionnaire was distributed to 230 staff members of which 130 responded, which gave a considerable satisfactorily response rate of 65%. Research proved conclusively that formal mentoring programmes be introduced for academic staff members. A total of 86.9% of staff members supported the idea of introducing mentoring programmes. Therefore, the researchers recommended that the PoN should introduce an effective formal mentoring programme for junior academic staff members. The study only involved Namibians and permanent resident staff that have been employed at the institution, and hence excluded non-Namibians, who are appointed on contract. It will be in the best interest of PoN that a study should be conducted to investigate the views of non-Namibians regarding mentoring programmes. In future when formal mentoring programmes are introduced, a study should be conducted regarding effects of mentoring programmes on junior staff member's job performance. This paper offers PoN management an insight into the views of employees regarding mentoring programmes. The value of this paper is that it would benefit the institution, which finds it difficult to attract and retain qualified people, due to higher salaries being offered in private and other public sectors. Developing staff through mentoring programmes will uplift the nation, which has a skills shortage and encourage more young talent to take up a career in academia.

Key words: Mentoring, career, programme, retention.

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary educational institutions are labour intensive and are largely dependent on their employees for efficient delivery of services in order to achieve their goals. Therefore, most organisations place much emphasis on mentoring programmes through their training and development efforts in order to enhance employee knowledge, skills and ability (KSA), which will ultimately lead to work performance improvement and the achievement of organisational goals (Harvard business essentials 2004:

82). Furthermore, the majority of these organisations or institutions have begun to introducing formal mentoring programmes to ensure that employees are equipped with the necessary competencies (Wing, 2009; Dawn and Palmer, 2009). During 2004, the Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN) renamed their vision as "Namibia's inter-nationally recognised university of applied science and technology". This projects a status and profile that the institution seeks to achieve by 2008 (Polytechnic Strategic Plan (PSP), 2008:3). PoN further stated in their PSP (2009 -2013:10) that they want to build an academic staff comprising at least 10% professors, 10% associate professors, 40% senior lecturers and 20% junior lecturers by 2012. This illustrated that they were now in a process of transforming. The World Bank (2005:66) reported that the PoN

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found it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff including Namibians. It is therefore, in the interest of PoN to pay attention to their staff's careers and promote professional growth through mentoring programmes. If set goals should be achieved, current staff should be equipped with the necessary KSA, which are required for a university. As mentioned by Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002:29), mentoring can be used as an alternative, rather than sending employees to formal educational programmes and training courses to acquire knowledge and skills required in the workplace, since not all learning is achieved by attending programmes and courses. By the efforts of introducing mentoring at the workplace, the mentor will then ensure that employees transfer the skills learned on the job (Clutterbuck, 2002:29). The HR Code was established in 1998 and, does not make provision for mentoring programmes for junior academic staff.

Mentoring

The learning process begins from the day we were born, the first steps we took and it continuous throughout our lives in order for us to be successful. Mentoring has been regarded as one of the learning methods used to enhance individuals learning and development in all spheres of life (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002:1). Mentoring originated from the Greek mythology, the character of Hommer's *Odyssey* called mentor, and the word was synonymous with trusted advisor, teacher and wise person (Berk et al., 2005:66). Nonetheless, in today's work environment it has been described as a process whereby an experienced senior employee helps to develop a less experienced employee (Noe et al., 2006:402; Mackey and Livsey, 2006:186). Mentoring in higher educational institutions is defined as "a process whereby an experienced senior faculty member helps to develop a less experienced junior faculty member" (Dawn and Palmer, 2009:126). This definition will be referred to throughout the paper. The person who is mentored is called the "protégé", "mentee" and "mentoree", whereas the experience person who imparts wise and reliable advice is often referred to as a mentor (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002:1; Abrahams, 2009:46). The mentor will advise, guide, teach, inspire, challenge, correct and serves as a role model to another faculty member for that individual's professional development (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002; Harvard Business Essentials, 2004; Berk et al., 2005; Megginson et al., 2006). A survey, which was conducted by Rose (2003:479) concerning enhancement of mentor selection by using an ideal mentor scale, discovered that 75% of respondents would prefer someone that is approachable and who can give clear, open and effective feedback. However, 87% of respondents noted that they would prefer someone who can give them honest feedback, whether positive or negative, regarding their job performance. In the absence

of such characteristics, the potential for conflict in mentoring relationships could increase (Leslie et al., 2005:697). Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002:148) argued that, for the relationship to be successful both the mentee and mentor must possess a certain set of qualities, skills and attributes. The key competencies that the mentor should possess are; communications skills, genuine belief in the mentees' potential, self-awareness and knowledge and experience in the area he or she mentors (ibid). Clutterbuck (2004, cited by Karallis and Sandelands, 2008:446; Abraham, 2009:46) noted that an effective mentor should be someone who manages the partnership; encourages and empowers; nurtures; teaches the mentee; offers mutual trust and respect and responses to the needs of the mentee. Moreover, it is important for the mentor to find out if the mentee has an internal locus of control (that is people who see themselves as being control of their environment and their life) or external locus of control (that is people who believe that everything happens to them is beyond their influence) in order to know how to approach the mentoring relationship (Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002:163). The mentor should find out whether the mentee has the desire to be mentored, once this is establish then the relationship will evolve smoothly (Wing, 2009:18).

Every graduate, in spite of which prestigious institutions they come from have no work experience and little do they know about the world of works (Wing, 2009:19). Therefore, organisations or institutions that have not yet introduced mentoring programmes should consider introducing them in the context of personal development for those graduates or new employees (Klassen and Clutterbuck, 2002:16). The purpose of mentoring in higher educational institutions should be to acquire skills that have been described as: "understanding the underlying values, traditions and unwritten behavioural codes of academics; effectively managing a productive career in academics and establishing and maintaining a network of professional colleagues" (Leslie et al., 2005:693). Within an academic institution, mentoring can also be used to support non-academic staff to settle into their new jobs and to give them feedback on how to improve their work performance (Bryant and Terborg, 2008:13).

There are formal and informal mentoring programmes in higher educational institutions (Leslie et al., 2005; Berk et al., 2005; Dawn and Palmer, 2009). Informal mentoring refers to mentoring that takes place when mentor and mentee meet on an "ad hoc" basis to give each other guidance and advice (Leslie et al., 2005:693). However, in today's knowledge economy, the status quo has changed, and higher educational institutions are making mentoring more comprehensive and reachable by introducing formal mentoring programmes (Dawn and Palmer, 2009:126). This makes it possible for aspiring academics to receive mentoring support from a number of different people within the institution (Dawn and Palmer, 2009: 126). The advantages of introducing formal men-

toring are: increased career success; increased retention; increased knowledge creation and sharing; offers great commitment; increased research income; and publication rate (Leslie et al., 2005; Bryant and Terborg, 2008; Gardiner, 2005 cited in Dawn and Palmer, 2009). The key advantages as describe by Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002: 29) are also as follows: it is an integrated approach for customised development on a broader scale; it encourages continuous self-managed learning, it inspires employees to consistently improve their performance and it cost-effective method than sending staff on formal and short-term course.

The mentor will get extrinsic benefits such as "enhanced professional recognition when mentees perform well, new knowledge and skills; and leadership development," and for a mentee it provides a great opportunity for networking; career opportunity and advancement; improved knowledge and skills; greater confidence and well being and improve performance and productivity (Lesslie et al., 2005; Megginson et al., 2006). Further-more, studies conducted by Garvey and Garrett-Harris (2005 cited in Megginson et al., 2006:30) concerning benefits from mentorship revealed that the mentee received 40% benefits, the organisation 33% and mentor 27%, this shows that all stakeholders will benefit from introducing mentoring programmes. Therefore, mentees should take ownership of the mentoring process, because they are the once that mostly benefits from it (Karallis and Sandalands, 2009: 206). The author of Business Executive, Linda King Taylor (2009 cited by Karallis and Sandelands, 2009: 204) noted that mentoring inspires individuals to improve their learning beyond their potential performance, philosophy and personality. This demonstrates that mentoring has a long-lasting benefit, when implemented correctly and if people in the men-toring relationship are committed in order to ensure its success (Karallis and Sandalands, 2009: 208). However, there are also challenges when implementing mentoring programmes, especially during the matching of mentoring partners, because not everyone identified as mentors are competent (Dawn and Palmer, 2009:126). There could be cross cultural issues, especially when the mentoring programme adopts a traditional approach (Kalamas and Kalamas, 2004: 78), which is talking, listening and receiving career related support from only one person (Bryant and Terborg, 2008: 18), because people come from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, there should be a clear matching process and the roles of the both parties should be clarified (Megginson et al., 2006: 33). In the absence of formal mentoring programmes in higher educational institutions, mentees might find it difficult to approach a mentor (Leslie et al., 2005: 693). Studies that were conducted by Leslie et al. (2005: 693) relating to on junior faculty experiences with informal mentoring, discovered that most mentees received guidance on an "ad hoc" basis, as mentors do not have sufficient time (Dawn and Palmer, 2009: 126). Hence

juniors will receive guidance from colleagues within the department.

In order to ease the setbacks experience with informal mentoring programmes, organisations have established mentoring circles and introduce formal mentoring programmes. Formal mentoring programmes encourage the achievement of objective much better than informal programmes (Klassen and Clutterbuck, 2002: 190). Formal mentoring programmes provides balance benefits to both mentor, mentee and the organisation compared to the informal programmes that normally only benefit the mentee (Klasen and Cluttenbuck, 2002: 128). Mentoring circles has been recommended for use in university environments (Spenser, 2005 cited in Dawn and Palmer, 2009: 127).

Mentoring circles involve groups of mentors and mentees who mentor each other. Group members will share their experiences, challenges and opportunities for the purpose of solving a problem (Dawn and Palmer, 2009: 127). This is also known as peer-to-peer mentoring. Harvard Business Essential (2004: 123) stated that young ambitious people can learn from each other because they share the same experience and they can empathize and provide mutual support to each other. Even though peer mentors cannot provide the challenge, role modelling and trust that other peers might need and as a result lead to some peers not being willing to participate in mentoring relationship (ibid). Nevertheless peer mentoring has been successfully used by organisations seeking to grow their talent pool (Karallis and Sandelands, 2009: 204).

Klassen and Clutterbuck (2002: 167) indicated that organisations can employ graduate recruitment and induction mentoring in order to assist new employees. More than that, mentoring could also be use to attract individuals with employment potential and to help graduates to find their place in the organisation (ibid). However, the mentoring process must be monitored to ensure desired goals are achieved. The aim of monitoring should be to keep abreast of what is going on, to make the necessary adjustments when needed and to evaluate the programme on a continuous basis using feedback either verbal and written reports and annual surveys or questionnaires (Megginson et al., 2006: 107). A case study that was conducted by Kentz regarding formal mentoring process, noted that mentoring be made available to everyone that is on the entry level regardless of their background and experience in order to maximise their potential (Karallis and Sandalands, 2009: 205). Organisations attract two kinds of individuals, namely the career-oriented and the job-oriented. The job oriented person will worked 9 - 5 and seeks satisfaction and personal growth outside the company and is unlikely to take mentoring seriously, whereas a career oriented person, looks for satisfaction and growth in the work-place, and would therefore, place high value on mentoring (Harvard Business Essentials, 2004: 85).

It is against this background that organisations that support individual development should formalize mentoring programmes to ensure fair access to mentoring for all members (Leslie et al., 2005: 698). This will be beneficial for both the institution and staff members. Mentors should be able to assist the mentees in shaping their careers in a manner that is beneficial to both the organisation and the individual. Career development is defined as “a process of requiring individuals and organisations to create a partnership that enhances employees’ knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes required for their current and future job assignments” (Gilley et al., 2002 cited in McDonald and Hite, 2005: 419).

Individuals should take ownership of their careers by planning in a rewarding manner because they are the masters of their own careers and they should utilise opportunities that are offered by the organisation (Hedge et al., 2006: 341) by creating career opportunities through networking and making themselves visible (De Vos et al., 2006: 161). Individuals, who take initiative in planning and developing their careers, have a strategy and become more successful than those who do not (De Vos et al., 2006: 161). They are likely to benefit more from training and development opportunities, which are offered because they know what they want.

External and internal business environments are constantly changing. Organisations compete to attract and retain highly skilled workers (Baruch, 2006: 129). Generation X (Gen-X) and generation Y (Gen-Y) are highly skilled people that place high value on career development and will work for organisations that will provide them with career development opportunities (Mayer, 2006: 65). Due to this demand, organisations have no choice but to assume responsibility to plan and manage their employees’ careers (De Vos et al., 2008: 162). Organisational career management refers to “those activities undertaken by the organisation to plan and manage the careers of its employees (De Vos et al., 2008:161). Organisations should develop strategies that match employees’ career aspirations with the future needs of the organisation. The organisation should play a role of a supporter and developer of human assets (Baruch, 2006: 130). Benefits that can be gained from career development efforts include: increased retention, improved performance, employee satisfaction, and creation of loyalty and organisational commitment to employees (De Vos et al., 2008: 159). Mentoring has been identified as one of the strategies that can be used to retain high-potential employees and graduates (Karallis and Sandelands, 2008: 450; Strategic Finance, 2007: 17).

People come to work for different reasons, which are mainly based on their needs. Several authors have postulated theories about what motivates people to work, for example, Maslow, Herzberg, ERG and McClelland (Robbins et al., 2007:143). Whilst acknowledging their theories, some theories have been criticised because their investigation was primarily about what people want

from a job, and not why they leave. No differentiation was made between sectors. Higher education institutions consist of professional and non-professional staff and, as such, their motivating factors to work might be different.

Academic staff may enter the profession merely for altruistic reasons such as helping students to succeed; their desire for teaching; and to help society develop (Mayer, 2006: 63). However, the younger generation might enter academia for varying reasons. The young generation, called generation Y (Gen Y), are people who were born between the years 1980 to 1990. Some of them might enter the teaching profession for extrinsic reasons such as money, status and holidays (Mayer, 2006: 63).

Non-professionals might also have extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, which are stated in Herzberg’s two-factor theory (Robbins et al., 2007: 144). Gen Y might look for organisations that can offer them flexibility, autonomy, support for personal growth and ability to learn new things (Edgar, 2001, cited in Mayer, 2006: 58). Therefore, finding out the reasons why people leave is as important, as it will identify challenges that employees face. Reasons for high labour turnover in higher education institutions include the following: dissatisfaction with relations between seniors; working conditions; few hours spent on research; excessive workload; financial rewards; lack of career opportunities; and work-life balance (Metcalf et al., 2005:20; De Vos and Meganck, 2009: 50). A study, which was conducted by Mayer (2006) in Australia discovered that young academic staff members’ reasons for leaving are a bit different. Their decisions to leave range from workload; lack of input in decision making; wanting new challenges; teaching out of field; insufficient autonomy; poor salary; and personal circumstances (Mayer, 2006: 65). The study discovered that workload was cited as the highest, while salary was the least motivating factor for resigning. Mentoring can be employed to developed more staff to take up additional roles thus reducing the workload of other employees (Megginson et al., 2006: 158). It is up to the mentee to show initiative during mentorship (Abraham, 2009: 45).

Whilst acknowledging the research conducted by various authors on topic of mentoring, there has been limited empirical research regarding the effectiveness of mentoring programmes in tertiary educational institutions hence literature from developed countries and private organisations was reviewed, mainly.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and procedures

For the purpose of the study only a samples size of N = 230 staff members were selected as agreed with the institutions statistician to complete the survey questionnaire, and a sample size of N = 10 staff members were interviewed. Probability sampling was utilised because the sample size selected represented the entire population. The representative sample was drawn from a computer generated list obtained from the institution. The different views and

Table 1. Mentoring programmes.

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strongly agree	75	57.7	59.5	59.5
	Agree	38	29.2	30.2	89.7
	Disagree	10	7.7	7.9	97.6
	Strongly disagree	3	2.3	2.4	100.0
	Total	126	96.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	3.1		
	Total	130	100.0		

(n = 130).

opinions of all staff were crucial in the study therefore, careful selection of people in the targeted population was made to include everyone. A self-administered questionnaire was formulated and respondents were asked to complete it themselves. The aim for using a self-administered questionnaire was to get the views of staff members employed at the institution, regarding the introduction of formal mentoring programmes. The questionnaire was compiled in a user friendly manner and was limited to only closed-ended short questions and statements, in order to ensure that relevant data was obtained. The statements included list of answers that staff members had to choose, which made it interesting and flexible. Respondents were asked to complete their forms on-line and mail it back as soon as they finish, since it was a quicker and effective way. Fifty-seven (57) respondents completed their forms on-line. Out of the 230 sent, 130 responses were received yielding a response rate of 65% which was a satisfactory response rate. The privacy, anonymity of respondents was kept and they were assured that the data were only for research purposes. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior staff drawing from their experiences in terms of their opinions and their knowledge. The interviews took approximately 20 min to complete depending on the person being interviewed. Open-ended semi-structured questions were used. Informants interviewed were sectional heads and Head of departments five (5) HoDs and five (5) sectional heads were selected. The purpose for interviewing them was, firstly, because they are in senior positions. Secondly, as senior staff members one of their responsibilities is to identify training needs and to ensure that their subordinates are equipped with the necessary competencies and skills to effectively perform their job (HR Code: 1998:19). Institutional documents were also reviewed to corroborate the empirical data.

Measure and analysis

First, the responses of HoDs and sectional heads were captured.

In your view, should mentoring programmes be introduced?

Both the HoDs and sectional heads agreed that mentoring programmes should be introduced for new staff members. HoDs noted that they already have informal mentoring programmes, but that these are not rewarded and recognised by the institution, hence they are unstructured. Sectional heads noted that mentoring programmes would help staff to settle in their new work environment and give them a better understanding of how the department operates. One of the sectional heads noted that they introduced informal mentoring programmes within their department. She further explained how they conduct their mentoring programme within her department. Experienced individuals within the department are identified to guide and assist new staff members, while new mem-

bers would submit a report weekly about his or her work progress. HoDs felt that, as an academic tradition, it is common to have mentoring programmes for junior academic staff members.

Results from the self administered questionnaire

The rationale for including this issue was to determine how many staff members welcome introduction of mentoring programmes for new staff members.

Table 1 reveals that an overwhelming 57.7% of respondents strongly agreed, and 29.2% agreed, which totals 86.9% (57.7% plus 29.2%) who agree that mentoring programmes should be introduced, while 7.7% disagreed and 2.3% strongly disagreed, which totals 10% (7.7% plus 2.3%) who disagree that that mentoring programmes should not be introduced. A total of 3.1% of respondents chose not to respond to the statement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The institutional documents and interviews conducted that the PoN finds it challenging to attract qualified Namibians and have appointed 65% non-Namibian academics. Non-Namibians are only granted two (2) or three (3) years' work permit, which allows them to work in Namibia. It was found that the PoN has (58%) Namibian academic's, of which thirty-nine (23%) are entry level positions, which are filled by those who meet the minimum requirements (Polytechnic's ITS Staff Report as at February, 2009). Results shown in Table 1 indicate a good response rate of 86.9% (57.7% plus 29.2%) of respondents who agree that mentoring programmes should be introduced. Findings from the interviews conducted with HoDs and sectional heads revealed that most academic departments have already implemented informal mentoring programmes for junior staff members, describing it as an academic tradition. The results and findings from interviews show a high tendency in favour of mentoring programmes. In terms of section 19(3) of the Employment Equity Act 29 of 1998, a registered employer is required to train a Namibian citizen as an understudy for every non-Namibian that is employed. Findings from the interviews indicated that there are no succession plans in place to ensure that Namibians occupy vacancies that are filled by non-Namibians. The HR Code was introduced in 1998 and staff only taught up

to the diploma level, however as indicated by the PSP (2009 - 2013:10) they want to build an academic staff comprising at least 10% professors, 10% associate professors, 40% senior lecturers and 20% junior lecturers by 2012.

Realisation of the vision set by the PoN in their strategic plan reports is wholly dependent on staff members employed. Therefore, the institution should be able to mentor junior and new academic staff members. However, as commented earlier, the HR Code: SDT does not make provision for mentoring programmes, although when research was conducted it was discovered that there were informal mentoring programmes. Therefore, based on the above issue, the researcher recommends:

An effective formal mentoring programme

There is an urgent need to introduce effective formal mentoring programmes for junior academic staff members. This is needed for the benefit of the employees, as revealed by respondents in the questionnaires. HoDs and sectional heads are also in need of a formal mentoring programme. Mentoring refers to a process whereby a senior staff member assists a junior member to understand the codes behaviour within academia and further support and encourages them in developing a career as academics. The presence of formal mentoring programmes would motivate junior staff members. Mentoring programmes should also be used as a platform at which junior staff members would ask questions, express their concerns to senior staff members and deal with fears and anxieties as they arise in order to improve their work performance.

Furthermore, with the introduction of formal mentoring programmes, staff members would have fair access to mentoring. Moreover, senior staffs that are identified as mentors should attend mentor training courses and should also be willing to be mentors. Those identified as mentors should be open, honest and approachable. Mentoring should be incorporated into the administrative workload of staff members and each department should nominate someone annually who can become a mentor. Mentoring should not only be limited to junior academic staff members, but should also include senior staffs that have no former lecturing experience. Formal mentoring will increase retention and knowledge creation and sharing amongst staff members. Those identified as mentors will also benefit from mentoring through gaining mentoring experience, although it will require time and effort. The objectives roles and responsibilities of a mentoring programme should be made clear to the mentor and mentee, and they should both agree to it. Effective formal mentoring programmes should be used to help staff members to settle in, and to offer them with work performance improvement feedback. The mentoring process can span over three to six months, with two visits per week between the mentee to mentor. Introducing a

formal mentoring programme will be beneficial to the institution. Developed formal mentoring programmes can also be used to address inequalities by identifying staff members who have potential to fill future positions that are occupied by non-Namibians, thus reducing the number of expatriates appointed and lowering recruitment costs. It will also encourage young people to join the academic environment and become researchers.

Conclusion

Having a mentoring programme for junior academic staff members might change the staff equity profile. Investing into mentoring programmes should become a strategic priority for the PoN. This can reduce the shortcoming experience by the institution in terms of human resource capacity building needed for the achievement of its vision. With better experience staff members PoN can become a prime centre for academic excellence.

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