

From expert to novice: Supporting mentor development through professionalisation of practice in formal schemes

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Abstract

Mentoring schemes continue to increase within organisations and rely on attracting and retaining motivated volunteers. At the same time, mentoring is also becoming embedded within professional frameworks and discipline experts are being enlisted in formal schemes to widen their involvement in supporting novices in their professional development. This phenomenological study follows the experience of four mentors from two professions, who were actively mentoring in their first formal scheme. Findings show that even experts in a professional field can return to the experience and anxieties of early practice and that formal schemes and training may not sustain commitment to mentoring in the future, unless they provide opportunity for reflective development. A conceptual model for mentor development is proposed which offers an approach to support the experiential transition from ‘professional-as-mentor’ to ‘professional mentor.’

Key words: Mentor development, formal and informal mentoring, identity development, professional standards, novice to expert.

Introduction

Mentoring schemes have increased as organisations seek to leverage the benefits for their staff and stakeholders, often leading to processes surrounding the recruitment, briefing, training and evaluation of volunteers in organised programmes. Mentorship has also emerged as a desired competence within several professional standards and frameworks, including nursing (Nursing & Midwifery Council, 2008), medicine (General Medical Council, 2012) and law (Hamilton & Brabbit, 2007). In contrast, Bligh (1999, p2) describes the tradition of informal mentoring in professions as ‘an invisible support network’, where mentors support the integration of the novice mentee, passing on tacit knowledge about professional culture. This support is key to supporting the journey to expert practice (Benner, 1984; Daley, 1999; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986).

The mainstreaming of mentoring in roles and professions brings the discreet network of mentoring capacity into visibility; initiatives to support or develop more structured work-based practice may then follow. There is an equally palpable shift towards formalisation of mentoring practice within the practitioner community, as reflected by The International Coach Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), who have filed a formal Code of Conduct (EMCC & ICF, 2011) as a basis for practice regulation, with the EMCC also hosting a competency framework for practitioners (2009). Yet it remains unclear how much of this professionalisation agenda reaches the awareness of volunteer mentors, or how it influences their engagement with frameworks or expectations which have been shaped by wider stakeholders.

This study aims to help organisations, professions and mentoring practitioners to reflect on the implications of formalising mentoring practice and to consider how this may influence the experience of the ‘professional-as-mentor’ on the ground. In a landscape where mentorship may become, for some, a professional expectation as well as a voluntary activity, schemes and initiatives will not be sustainable if the motivation and development needs of the professional community are not fully understood.

The study also explores the experience of formal mentorship from the mentor’s perspective, following reactions of participants undergoing training for formal schemes. A common concern amongst learners has been whether they have been ‘doing it wrong’ when engaging in informal mentoring prior to training. On the one hand, we could assume that mentor training would clarify good mentorship; on the other, depending on the learners’ constructs at the outset, we could foresee that for some, this could disrupt their sense of what ‘proper’ mentoring is. Mentor development has been recognised in research (Dobie, Smith & Robins, 2010; Eby & Lockwood, 2005) but not explored in the context of a standardisation agenda; this is important to enable organisations to recognise how to harness mentoring talent without devaluing the practices and paradigms which have been developed organically within professional learning/helping relationships.

This article will describe a phenomenological study into the experience and development of mentors within formal schemes in two professions. Following a summary of the literature and an explanation of methodology, the findings will illustrate three mentor states which reflect a personal journey from ad-hoc mentoring to conscious practice. A conceptual model for mentor development through these states is presented, offering an exploratory proposition about how sustainable capacity for mentorship can be nurtured in order to meet increasing professional demand.

Literature

Two strands of mentoring research were reviewed: mentoring in organisations and mentor identity.

Mentoring in Organisations

Whilst informal mentoring of novices in organisations has been recognised and studied since the seminal study by Kram (1983), formal mentoring itself is still a developing research field (Wanberg, Welsh & Hezlett, 2003) with a focus on the mentor’s perspective being less common than on mentee experiences or outcomes (Allen, Poteet & Burroughs, 1997; Haggard, Dougherty, Turban & Wilbanks, 2011; Wanberg et al. 2003, Weinberg & Lankau, 2011). Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2014, p41) also note a positivist trend in mentoring research which ‘privileges statistical significance over subjective meaning’; nonetheless informal mentoring has been shown in some studies to produce more effective outcomes than formal mentoring (Chao & Gardner 1992, Underhill 2005). This study recognises the significance of experience rather than tangible outcomes; it directs attention to the voice and story of the mentor and what it is ‘really like’ to move between both informal and formal practice (van Manen, 1997, p42).

Mentoring context has been identified as important (Cox, 2003), yet Haggard et al. (2011) identify a gap in the literature concerning how occupations and settings may influence mentor constructs and experiences. Research within professional groups is more common than research across disciplines, although evidence is developing (Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent, 2004; Salter, 2013). The mentor’s experience of formalisation within a profession may be implicit through discipline-specific influences, or else may become direct and visible through a process of briefing and training. There is general agreement in literature that effective mentor training is key to programme success (Allen, Eby & Lentz, 2006; Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Parise & Forret, 2008) yet some point to the organisation-centric nature of the process. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) suggest that elements of

training are in fact briefing, a means of influencing mentor behaviours described as ‘policy intervention’ by Roberts (2000, p157). Bearman, Blake-Beard, Hunt and Crosby (2007) agree, describing mentor training as a legitimate opportunity for an organisation to reinforce desired norms and values. Mentor training itself is noted as an under-researched area (Bearman et al., 2007; Cox, 1999; Jones, 2013) yet is commonly cited as a benefit of formal mentoring which is important to and anticipated by mentors (Allen et al.1997; Eby & Lockwood, 2005 and Ehrich et al., 2004).

As organisational mentoring schemes have become more common, they frequently ask for volunteers to take part in a quite undefined role. Such mentors may regard themselves as having prior or transferable experience (Cox, 2003; Dobie et al. 2010, Salter, 2013) but a clear picture of what mentoring is still eludes many mentors. There is frequent debate about definition in research and Haggard et al. (2011) point to the existence of around 40 different mentoring definitions in empirical literature, also suggesting that complete agreement amongst researchers is neither possible nor advisable and warning against research design which directs the constructs of research participants. . Difference in emphasis between US and UK based mentoring is also noted by some (Bozionelos, Bozionelos, Kostopoulos & Polychroniou, 2011; Garvey et al., 2014; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002) which suggests that mentoring is far from being a unified field of practice, given global variations in underpinning philosophy. Organisational mentors have therefore navigated in unclear practice territory. This study was therefore mentor-centric and offers no assumption about definition, allowing the mentor’s constructs to surface from the data.

Mentor Identity

In a small scale study, Chiles (2007) finds that an organisation’s agenda for a mentoring programme can influence mentor identity formation. Amidst unclear definitions and significant external influences, a clear understanding of how mentors come to identify themselves as such remains elusive and empirical research into mentoring identity is missing in the literature. Roberts (2000, p.157) describes mentoring as being ‘a role constructed by or for a mentor’, suggesting that both mentor and organisational interpretation of the role may be at play. Whilst organisations may influence the design of a role ‘for’ volunteer mentors, it is less clear how a mentoring identity is created ‘by’ mentors themselves, although Cox (1999) suggests that some may possess an innate identity, being ‘born’ mentors. Others agree that there is a gap in understanding of ‘the essential attributes of the mentoring experience’ (Allen et al.,1997; Gibson, 2004, p267; Haggard et al., 2011).

The importance of context has also been highlighted by Cox (2003); others suggest that there can be different interpretations of mentoring in formal schemes within different professional groups (Ehrich et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2005). Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) found that the boundaries and caveats of a formal scheme could displace a volunteer’s informal constructs, with experience of unexpected difficulties adding further confusion. A longitudinal study by Dobie et al. (2010) showed that medical faculty mentors could feel disorientated by shifting expectations from their mentees over time, whilst Eby and Lockwood (2005) focus on inner impact such as self-doubt. Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005, p. 573) found that the transition to a new learning practice caused mentors to be positioned ‘sometimes as novices and sometimes as experts’, indicating that mentor identity may not be a stable phenomenon.

Since the influence of contextual factors on mentor experience has not been fully explored in research and in the absence of a definitive mentor identity model, mentors are likely to bring a self-constructed sense of what it is to be and become a mentor to their formal role and development activity. A better understanding of the experience of becoming a ‘professional mentor’ may help to minimise risk that even well-intended standards, frameworks and training may disengage the volunteer mentor.

Research Design and Method

Some researchers have called for more qualitative mentoring studies to balance limitations of dominant positivist methodologies (Garvey et al., 2014; Gibson, 2004; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). This is an interpretivist, qualitative study using an IPA methodology, based on hermeneutic principles, which explores in depth the lived, subjective experience of mentors who are engaged in formal schemes. This approach allows detailed focus on a small sample of mentors. The use of a hermeneutic approach (Heidegger, 1927) also allowed my own experience as a mentor to play a legitimate role in the research (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Ethical approval was necessary since the study involved drawing data from mentors' personal stories and emphasis was given to confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study

The overarching question was: *does exposure to a formal mentoring scheme influence the evolving identity of participating mentors*, with the following subsidiary questions:

1. How do mentors develop their mentoring identity through experience?
2. Do formal mentor scheme principles and professional standards become integrated within evolving mentor identity, or are they held apart?
3. What are the implications for mentor scheme designers and trainers? Does mentor training and support serve the mentor as equally as the scheme, sponsors and mentees?

In order to examine the relationship between the lived experience of a mentor, a formal scheme and a professional context, the criteria for a purposeful sample required participants to be active mentors, working within a profession and engaged in a formal scheme to support junior practitioners. Active schemes were approached, excluding any where I had been involved in design or training; two offered access to participants. One paired consultant physicians with junior doctors and the other paired newly qualified teachers with head teachers or senior educators. It was important for the scheme leads (gatekeepers) to understand that the study would not focus on their mentoring scheme *per se*. Both circulated a participant information sheet to their mentor pool, although one did so to a selective sample and this may have steered mentor representation. Two mentors volunteered from each scheme; by coincidence one in each pair was in a later stage of their professional career and the other in mid-career; this optimised the balance of mentor perspectives.

A single, in-depth semi-structured interview of about 60 minutes was the primary source of data collection and the geographical spread of the four volunteers required a combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews. Participants were invited to offer any additional reflection at the member checking stage (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), consistent with the hermeneutic principle of improving the quality of the study through 'co-construction of data' (Laverty, 2008, p.30). Two mentors took this opportunity. Respondents were invited to talk about any experiences they regarded as mentoring, to prevent the research design informing their construct of meaningful experiences. Core questions were designed to elicit:

- Experiences of becoming a mentor
- Experiences of mentoring in the professional role and current scheme
- Reflections on the meaning of mentoring and possibilities for the future

Data were analysed using the model outlined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), beginning with immersion in the data. Interviews were transcribed and analysed for each mentor in turn, using three interpretative lenses: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual. A process of iterative abstraction

followed, noting initial patterns and ideas from transcript analysis in order to identify emergent themes and then thematic clusters. Through further abstraction, core themes for each participant were identified and mapped back to the transcript to establish that there was authentic participant data for each. A summary table was sent to each mentor for validation, showing core themes, associated sub-themes and representative quotes.

Creswell (1998) suggested that a phenomenological study should meet at least two of eight quality criteria drawn from a synthesis of research approaches and of these three were incorporated: clarification of researcher bias, member checking of preliminary analysis and use of rich description. The framework by Yardley (2000) was used to add four further criteria; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and impact and importance. Researcher reflexivity was key to quality assurance and by keeping and transcribing an audio diary after interviews and during data analysis, I sought to identify openly any biases or assumptions that could influence data analysis (Lavery, 2003).

The findings have inevitable limitations, since an IPA study requires a small sample size and dependence on a single data source, so cannot offer a generalisable proposition without further research. The study is also limited to only two professions and to traditional, dyadic, expert-to-novice mentoring relationships. Salter (2014) found that different disciplines approach practice with different professional influences and so participant perspectives will not be consistent between the represented professions. Lopez and Willis (2004) point out that there is no one meaning produced by a phenomenological study and as a sole researcher's interpretation will be invariably subjective, the findings would benefit from consideration by other researchers, with extension into a wider sample of professions and mentoring models.

Findings

Three superordinate themes emerged that related to the identity state of the mentor when talking about:

1. prior informal mentorship (The Tacit Mentor): here, mentors described earlier experiences with a connection to other professional or identity roles
2. current formal mentorship (The Formal mentor): mentors' accounts demonstrated more conscious awareness of mentorship within their current scheme roles
3. aspirations about mentorship (the Transient Mentor); here, mentors adopted a more uncertain stance when considering mentorship beyond the formal scheme

I found that two conceptual frameworks mapped against these three states, suggesting a relationship with my findings. The developmental model of self, proposed by Bachkirova (2011), suggests that a sense of self is a fluctuating phenomenon, influenced by a dynamic interaction between multiple subsidiary identities. Development of the whole self over time involves movement through four stages of which the first three, Unformed Ego, Formed Ego and Reformed Ego, echo these evolving mentor states. From a mentor development perspective, Merrick and Stokes (2003) suggest that mentors progress through four learning stages and the first three Novice, Developing and Reflective, with each requiring a different focus for support. The following presentation of findings will develop the relationship of participant experience to these theoretical models.

1. *The Tacit Mentor*

One research question asked: *How do mentors develop their own mentoring identity through experience?* In the first stage of the interview, participants often described mentoring as an extension of another work-related role, with accounts of pre-scheme practice showing how they developed skills through professional experience. Discussion of mentorship outside their work role was, if mentioned

at all, fleeting. A common pattern was for mentors to describe relationships and conversations which they classed as mentoring in retrospect, but with a caveat as to whether it would be regarded as 'proper' mentoring:

At the time, I would say I didn't realise it was mentoring. I think that kind of building of relationships with people to get them to think about things that are potentially there in terms of development is actually an aspect of all the mentoring that I've done. (Mentor 1)

Although at the time I didn't think of it as mentoring or coaching, it was that relationship of professional, one to one reflective conversation. (Mentor 2)

In the broadest sense, even friends and people who ask you for advice, I certainly wouldn't label it as mentoring...we kind of box it probably into, 'oh this is mentoring in a workplace'. I've probably done mentoring...in the wider context without really thinking about calling it mentoring or identifying it as mentoring. (Mentor 4)

The participants all reported the development of their practice through work-based roles or opportunity, without consciously identifying themselves as mentors. Their informal encounters reflected mentoring functions such as pastoral guidance, educational support or professional role modelling. They also referred to personal values and influences which shaped their interest in moving on to a more formal scheme and when the volunteer opportunity arose, in most cases it was clear that their professional calling lay at the heart of their motivation to support others:

I have an aptitude to listen and care and be interested in people and in how they're doing and to want to help. I think that I just have those in me and I think through the best aspects of classroom practice...I had an awakening of an awareness of the importance of reflection. However, I don't think I have a definitive notion of what proper mentoring is. (Mentor 2)

I guess why I came into medicine was to help people...I mean, you know you can't buy and bottle that kind of feeling of sharing your experience with people, giving people advice.... helping them through...then getting the positive feedback that that's happened... that gives you a real sense of good feeling and pride. (Mentor 4)

Mentoring and professional identities appeared largely interdependent amongst the participants and it seemed that a defined work role provided both infrastructure and opportunity for mentoring encounters. However, it was often in retrospect that the connection was made between these helping conversations and coaching or mentoring and in some cases, it was either the pre-interview telephone briefing or the interview itself which prompted this association. One participant went on to describe a dynamic interplay between managerial and mentoring roles:

It's quite fluid across the two roles and sometimes you won't necessarily label it and say, this is your mentoring period and this is the period where we're doing the supervisory bit...those kind of grey areas where things cross over from supervision to mentoring and back again. (Mentor 4)

This fusion of mentoring with other role-related activity in this informal stage of practice was common, suggesting that initial experiences may be hard to tease apart from other elements of a day-job. Reflection through a mentoring lens helped participants to identify their mentor activity, skill or behaviours and it seemed of less concern that the role in some relationships may have involved direct management or assessment of the mentee, rather than being 'off-line'. (Megginson, Clutterbuck & Garvey, 1995).

The mentors reflected a Tacit Mentor state in that they had engaged in practice which they could recognise as mentoring in retrospect, but not necessarily at the time. Linking this to theory, in

Bachkirova's (2011, p.135) Unformed Ego state, the developing self reflects dependence on, or fusion, with a role, person or entity to give it form; the focus is being 'able' rather than being efficient. Merrick and Stokes (2003) also suggested that novice mentors who develop their skills through work roles are not consciously aware that they are mentoring and need initial training to focus on protocols, theories and approaches.

2. The Formal Mentor

The primary research question asked: *Does involvement in a formal mentoring scheme influence the evolving identity of participating mentors?* with a further question 'Does mentor training and support serve the mentor as equally as the scheme, sponsors and mentees?' Awaya et al. (2003) emphasise the importance of seeing mentorship within a profession as a relationship rather than a set of duties but the reflections of mentors in this state show that they are, as appointed mentors, broadly supportive of engagement in a scheme which inculcates a more structured approach to practice:

I haven't got a formal mentoring qualification, but I found myself informally doing a lot of pastoral support to trainees ... and educational supervision seems to have a very limited role in that...I really felt that it would be useful for me to try and get involved in the process a little bit more because I think that our trainees really need something like this. (Mentor 3)

I definitely think there's a role of a more formalised mentoring approach across lots of areas... I think informal mentoring has been going for quite a long time and there are some benefits, I think, of formalising it because it's a sort of time hungry activity and, you know, most of the time people will do it because they're interested. (Mentor 4)

However, all reported challenging experiences in their current scheme, such as uncertainty when working with someone they had been matched with, or feeling that they needed to deal with expectations of mentorship which extended beyond their normal, organic approach:

In this job there's more of a responsibility, if somebody is struggling to help them sort it out. (Mentor 1)

To be honest I found that type of [matching] process a little bit nerve racking because someone had chosen me and I felt that there were expectations... when you're doing it formally I guess there's a pressure for product almost, for them to have made some progress towards their goals. (Mentor 3)

We met up to start with and it was formalised Royal College mentoring. So I don't really know what to make of what we were going to talk about or how and I just, sort of, threw the floor open and said, you know, 'what do you want talk about?'. (Mentor 4)

It was notable that when a positive outcome was described, it was almost with a sense of surprise and increased reward; success as a mentor in the scheme context was not taken for granted and sometimes brought a sense of relief. Two of the mentors cited lack of qualification or training in mentoring as a source of self-doubt when starting out in the scheme and all were open to the scheme training, but it was not without criticism. One mentor highlighted that the training had felt scheme-centred rather than mentor-centred:

One of the faults about this programme is that I don't think there was enough emphasis maybe on the mentoring side of the mentoring. There was more of an emphasis on the module content side of it ... few of us who would have been very interested in learning about becoming good mentors and that wasn't there, well only in a small quantity. (Mentor 2)

Others described how their own mentoring constructs had been disrupted or where they returned temporarily to a novice state of ‘conscious incompetence’ (Broadwell, 1969). This perhaps begins to shed light on the sense of uncertainty observed from mentors who attend training:

About the formal training...I was apprehensive if I'm honest. Thinking what is this going to be like? One part of it ...a session where you had to be the listener then and sort of not talk or not use your experience, that actually was quite difficult because you naturally want to. (Mentor 1)

The sessions we did... we were talking about all sorts of things. You know, what if there's physical attraction between the mentor and the mentee? What if they suddenly talk about some crime that they've done? Wow, but my experience has been nothing like that. It made it feel kind of more serious than it probably was. In the sense of the possible issues that could occur. (Mentor 4)

A consistent positive experience was the opportunity to become part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1971) which offered a sense of belonging and opportunity to share experiences and perspectives with other mentors within their profession. This in itself proved to be a resource for learning and adapting practice within the professional context:

This has been wonderful, you know... being in an environment with other mentors where you can question and challenge and laugh. ... there aren't the vested interests and it's all of us together embarking on this thing... they've just been very supportive but also have their own interesting perspectives. (Mentor 2)

It was interesting to hear other people's experience really and good to learn from others, things that worked, things that don't work. I think also there were things that I looked at, listened to rather and thought, mm I don't think that would work for me but I guess some of it is learning what's good, what's not good and what would work in your environment and your way of working. (Mentor 4)

This form of collaborative interchange with other mentors is a form of learning which has been highlighted as of particular value to formal mentors (Jones, 2013; Parise & Forret, 2008).

The accounts of mentors in the Formal Mentor state thus reflected a self-consciousness about practice which did not appear in their informal experiences, prompted by factors such as having less control over who they mentored, the mentoring agenda and by more directed learning. Linking this to theory, Bachkirova's (2011) Formed Ego state is characterised by a sense of competence and assurance, but also a realisation that not everything can be controlled; the developmental focus is on being efficient. Merrick and Stokes (2003) see the developing mentor as having greater theoretical awareness and practical experience but still operating within a limited repertoire of skill and confidence, with the primary learning need being process development and dynamics.

3. The Transient Mentor

One research question asks: *Do formal mentor scheme principles and professional standards become integrated within evolving mentor identity, or are they held apart?* All the mentors reported support for and professional benefit from involvement in their formal scheme, yet when invited to project their mentorship into the future, their tone shifted to one of uncertainty. In spite of gaining increased clarity about the role and practise of mentoring, the ‘why and what’, without a role or a scheme which systematically integrated mentorship on the horizon, they were far less certain about ‘how’ it would continue. This was characterised by more hesitant speech and even avoidance of exploring possibilities too deeply.

I do think I've got reasonably strong people skills, I enjoy supporting others and I wouldn't mind putting it to use ... but I think I'd prefer to use those skills through some organisation... I would like to do voluntary work. I've also thought about hospital visiting but we'll see. (Mentor 1)

How formally I continue with it or continue to evolve in my work I don't know...in a way I had assumed it would stop but with a sad, with a heavy heart. However, now that I'm talking to you, I kind of can see that there are probably all sorts of opportunities for mentoring. (Mentor 2)

I mean, I don't know what the next phase is ... I don't know if they're thinking about taking it forward. It would be interesting continuing. I'm not really sure. (Mentor 3).

A desire to continue learning to a point of formal qualification was apparent from the two mid-career mentors, but both were less clear how this would happen.

I'd like to become more qualified as a... I'd like more training as a mentor. I'd like to know more about the process of mentoring. Yeah, I think, I would like to almost have the space to reflect and to think intelligently about how mentoring can fit into all sorts of aspects of work that I'm involved in. (Mentor 2)

I would really like to go ahead and get a formal qualification in mentoring, because I think it would just help me in general to feel more comfortable with the process... so I might look into that. (Mentor 3)

The two more senior mentors made no reference to continuing development options for the future. It was evident that the experience of structured mentorship produced some mixed feelings about engaging in further schemes which fell outside the normal flow of the current workplace, with the exception of one mentor who had retired. Mentors alluded to potential barriers being the challenge of finding time; these included fitting it around the day job, juggling a scheme with work commitments in a different organisation or weighing up the impact that involvement in a scheme would have on work-life balance:

I've got a bit of a concern in a way that I'm very possibly going to be working full-time and therefore will have to stop mentoring. (Mentor 2)

I'm just completing my second year as a consultant... I have an eighteen-month old daughter and a three-year-old son, and he's started school full-time recently and I think we are trying to, as a family, just adjust to my new role and make sure that we take enough holidays and things like that. (Mentor 3)

That very much needs to be recognised within the mentor's job plan because, as I said, it's time and labour intensive sometimes. Even a one-and-a-half-hour meeting with feedback and preparation before, you know, that needs to be written into people's job plans if it's going to be a more widespread scheme, which I think it needs to be. (Mentor 4)

The accounts in this **Transient Mentor** state resonate with Bachkirova's (2011, p162) Reformed Ego state, where contradictions and conflicts in the state of self can emerge, along with a search for new meaning and a more generalised aspiration to be 'the best that one can be'. Merrick & Stokes (2003) propose that once formal mentors gain some experience, they are ready to engage in reflective practice as a development priority; this is endorsed in NHS-based studies (Connor et al., 2000; Jones, 2013). An unexpected outcome of the research process was that the in-depth reflection required in the interview appeared to fulfil this need for some of the mentors and the research interview itself became, in that sense, a mentoring encounter.

Discussion and implications for practice

This article considered the implications of the trend to standardise mentorship in professions in relation to the lived experience of mentors who engage in formal schemes and training. The primary research question asked: *does involvement in a formal mentoring scheme influence the evolving identity of participating mentors?* A further question was: *do formal mentor scheme principles and professional standards become integrated within evolving mentor identity, or are they held apart?* Neither of the schemes in the study had made specific connection to external frameworks for mentoring practice such as the EMCC (2009) framework and the mentors made no reference to mentorship as a feature within their own professional standards, although they were broadly supportive of the prospect of 'proper mentoring'. The desire to learn more, or to become qualified was driven by an interest in becoming informed and confident rather than to match up against a framework; this suggests that any wider agendas to embed mentorship in professional practice may remain hidden from view. One mentor summed up a paradox in the formalisation agenda which suggests that professions and organisations need to find a balance between integrating mentorship within professional practice without disengaging mentors through a sense of compulsion:

I think there's certainly something about recognition professionally. At the moment it feels like a kind of also ran add-on bit, but I think it certainly needs to be something that's recognised that people do, not just tagged on. So definitely the role of mentoring has to become more mainstream and more important and more the usual way of doing things. The norm if you like.... I think when you get to a stage where you 'have to do it', it becomes ... less a mentoring thing and more of a sort of, 'okay, I've got to do this'. (Mentor 4)

This raises the question as to how helpful it may be to mainstream mentorship within professional frameworks, as this could be a tipping point for engagement. For some mentors who may already operate within regulated professions, operating within an 'invisible network' (Bligh 1999, p2) may remain a more attractive proposition than explicit mentorship expectation. Garvey et al. (2014) ask whether standards are serving the practitioner or the marketplace; Cox (2003) cautions against the reduction of coaching and mentoring to a set of competencies whilst Bachkirova and Lawton-Smith (2015) suggest that practice frameworks focus on more holistic and engaging capabilities. A further issue touched on by the participants was whether organisations recognise and allow time for mentorship within the professional's job description. If professions increase expectation to mentor, but local organisations do not reflect it as a core work activity, this disconnect may discourage Tacit Mentors from extending their mentoring practice, or volunteering for formal schemes. Alignment of both professional and employer agendas therefore requires consideration if mentoring is to be effectively mainstreamed.

A subsidiary question was *What are the implications for mentor scheme designers and trainers?* prompted by my experience of the apparent ambivalence from some volunteer mentors at the prospect of formal training. This study shows that in the development journey of this sample of mentors, a shift in perspective occurs, prompted by an experience of moving from tacit mentorship as an expert professional to novice mentorship in a Formal Mentor role, echoing the study by Orland-Barak & Yinon (2005). Anticipation of future mentorship was unclear in these cases, suggesting that whilst a formal mentorship role can help to strengthen a sense of initially uncertain mentoring identity, it may not sustain commitment to mentoring in the future. An intelligent view of mentor development needs is therefore important, since this study indicates that learning and support needs may evolve through experience and that schemes within professions can make no assumptions that professional confidence will translate to mentoring confidence within or beyond the first formal scheme.

The conceptual model in Fig 1 aligns a theoretical model of identity development (Bachkirova, 2011) with a practice-based model of mentor skills development (Merrick & Stokes, 2003) offering a possible framework to guide the support of novice ‘professionals-as-mentor’ through the transition to ‘professionalised mentor’.

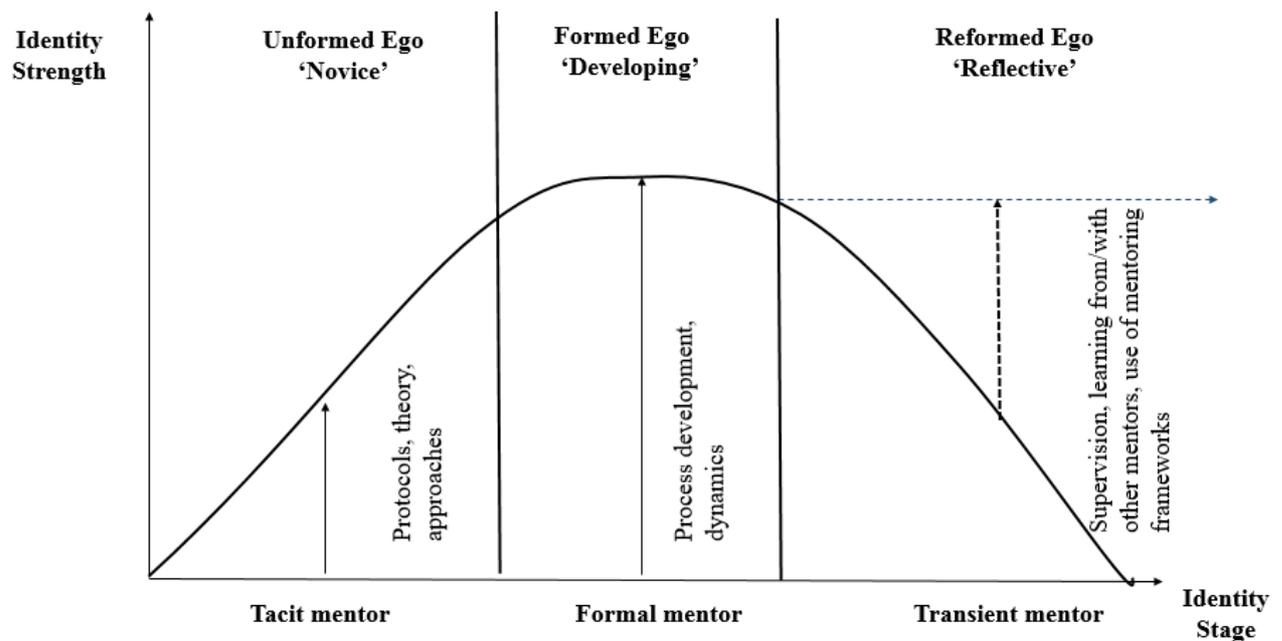


Figure 1: Mentor Identity States and Model for Mentor Development

The experience of the mentors in this study reinforces the proposition that without reflective development, a formed sense of mentoring identity can diminish, or even regress. An identity which grows from professional experience and is then crystallised by a formal scheme, could be weakened by loss of mentoring structures and community. An understanding of mentor development patterns is therefore helpful. Jones (2013) found that whilst both formal mentors and mentees learn in similar ways, mentors’ learning tends to diminish over time, whilst Grant (2007) found that practitioner training is most effective when staged over time. A further message for organisations or schemes from this small study is that in order to support sustainable practice, investment may be needed to maintain mentor communities and to extend learning from briefing and skills training to reflective development; this would embed an experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). For expert practitioners who may have capability to reflect-in-action in their professional role, a return to reflection-on-action as a novice formal mentor may be welcome (Schön, 1983).

There were limitations to this study, so the purpose is to prompt future researchers to explore new questions, with the model offering a starting point which is open to wider testing. It is based on experiences of mentors who were undertaking formal roles for the first time and further studies could explore further experiences across other schemes. The short duration of the study only allowed a snapshot in time; participants were asked to reflect on past experience and project into future possibilities, so accounts will have been influenced by the clarity of participant memory and the speculative nature of future thinking. Future research, with a longitudinal design, could more reliably

track developing mentor identity and could explore development in the seemingly ambivalent Transient Mentor state in more depth.

This research offers an exploratory contribution to help map the personal journey from tacit, ad-hoc mentoring to conscious, developed practice, directing attention towards what it is to be both a mentor *and* a professional and showing the interplay of these identities as mentors evolve and develop. Attention to reflective development needs within in this context may bring a welcome return by supporting retention of much needed mentoring resource, minimising the risk that well-intended training investment brings short term return for a particular scheme, rather than creating sustainable capacity for professions. This contribution to our understanding of the journey of ‘professional-as-mentor’ towards ‘professional mentor’ opens questions and possibilities which may optimise benefit to professions over time, whilst growing the mentoring community as a whole.

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