A Faculty-Based Mentorship Circle: Positioning New Faculty for Success

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Participant Outcomes

Participants will be able to:

*describe the implementation and evaluation of a mentorship circle initiative aimed at socializing new faculty to their roles and the expectations of the academic environment

*describe a process through which they could develop and implement a mentorship program responsive to their unique academic context

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Background

- Faculty members are under an increased pressure to publish, teach more courses, all the while adopting new technologies and pedagogies

- Competing priorities have increased

- The academic landscape has changed leaving faculty to navigate the new territory with minimal guidance

- New faculty in the Faculty of Community Services (FCS) expressed a sense of isolation and uncertainty in their academic role

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Mentorship…

A guiding relationship (Zeind et al., 2005), the goal of which is twofold: to support career functions by advising and coaching an individual within the context of the culture and expectations of the organization; and to fulfill psychological functions through the provision of a supportive environment of support, acceptance, and role modelling (Rock & Garavan, 2011; Angelique, Kyle & Taylor, 2002).

Mentorship serves the broad purpose of socialization, role modeling, encouragement and facilitating the learning and growth of those involved (Donner & Wheeler, 2007; Hart, 2012; Baxley et al., 2013).

Our process

- Met individually with new faculty members

- Facilitator team explored current mentorship literature and research, specifically within the academic context.

- Chose Darwin and Palmer's (2009) mentorship circle model as the approach for FCS

- Sent out invitations to all faculty who were within 1-2 years of their employment

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Initial Mentorship Circle Meetings

● Discussed our proposed approach with the circle members

● Engaged the group in a Visioning exercise, followed by Metaphoric Reflection

● Facilitated discussion on how these needs could
 be met within the mentorship circle approach

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Topics for the mentorship circle discussions

1. Completing Faculty Annual Report

2. Developing teaching and learning philosophy

3. Developing SRC philosophy

4. Building SRC program

5. Research grant development

6. Interim & tenure track processes

7. Preparing for teaching assessments

8. Check-in regarding how members were doing overall

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Evaluation of the Mentorship Circle Experience

Faculty of Community Services Dean's Office supported a graduate level RA to conduct focus group interviews with both mentorship circle members and facilitators

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…the following themes emerged…

- Structure of sessions

- Culture of support

- Gaining insight into faculty member's role

- Investing in self and others

- The ripple effect

Waddell et al, in press

Structure of Sessions
Blend of informal and formal formats to structure the mentorship sessions

"It was nice to be asked what topics might be useful as opposed to a list of topics that are kind of imposed….it seemed like there was an authenticity to the mentorship because of that.."

"There wasn't , like a set agenda, even though there was a topic; it wasn't like we needed to cover these things…I appreciated that because those who were there for mentorship – that's what they needed at that time"

Waddell et al., in press

Culture of Support

Mentorship sessions were perceived by the mentees to be a safe space to build relationships with colleagues from different schools, who may be experiencing similar challenges of adjustment to a new faculty role

"I think that the safety piece was key…it was more about sharing and people having the chance to share…"

"What was well appreciated was that there were colleagues from different stages of their career…. opportunity for fellowship across disciplines.. it adds to our work and to our personal development.. it builds community"

Waddell et al., in press

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"I think the mentorship circle being situated here at the faculty level is important because we have a good sense of what is expected from us at the school level and, as well, what's expected at the faculty level"

...

"I can say that there was no where [else] that I could go [where] I would've gotten all that information. I probably would have gone to 6 or 7 people….in order to get that information"

Waddell et al., in press

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Investing in Self and Others

Mentees reflected on how the circle was an investment in the well-being of the mentees, not just a program geared to fostering their ability to meet objective performance standards.

"I think when we ask if [the mentorship circle] has increased our service or teaching or SRC [research] capacity that we are asking the wrong question…It doesn't just change the culture, it changes our individual sense of ourselves in this role…how we interact with one another, our students…I would be very sad to be a part of a faculty that only puts forth programs that result in measurable outcomes…"

Waddell et al., in press

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The Ripple Effect

Mentees described the potential of the mentorship circle as a catalyst to changing culture within the university at large by promoting ongoing collegial support

"….those of us who've benefited from something like this might have already been inclined, or are even more inclined, to actually give back in that same way, whether it's formally as a mentor or informally by contributing to our departmental culture"

"It's good …. telling our colleagues…Hey, you know what? You can come in and people will look out for you at the faculty level…its' actually helpful in marketing the institution itself to other people"

Waddell et al., in press

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Important Context

Co-Existence of an established

Faculty Professional Development Program

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Lessons Learned

→facilitators' willingness to tell their stories fostered trust and allowed mentees to share their vulnerabilities

→ interdisciplinary nature of the mentorship circle facilitated mentees' capacity to navigate their role and foster collegiality

→mentorship relationships have reciprocal benefits

→ mentoring is more that dispersing knowledge to mentees

→ hybridity of a themed and emergent approach to structure was ideal

→ provision of a mentorship program demonstrates interest and commitment to each faculty member

Waddell et al., in press

Moving Forward

→support further communication among mentees in between mentorship circle meetings

→identified need for each cohort of mentorship circle may continue to meet to provide ongoing support as they progress in their academic career

→potential of facilitators to open avenues for 1:1 mentorship to complement engagement in the mentorship circle

Waddell et al., in press

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Mentorship Circle Members

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