Finding the merit of mentoring

Please check the document version of this publication:

• A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
• The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
• The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

Link to publication

Download date: 17 May. 2024

Summary

This thesis explores how mentoring takes shape and how mentors look at their own mentoring. It aims to provide an answer to the question: **How do mentors experience the what, why, and how of their mentoring?** In this context, 'mentor' refers to a faculty member who establishes a long-term relationship with a mentee, with a focus on the mentee's personal and professional growth. The way mentors implement this relationship is unique to each individual, as they have their own personal interpretative framework that forms the foundation of their mentoring approach. The personal interpretative framework consists of two dimensions. The first is mentors' *professional self-understanding*, which refers to how mentors perceive themselves in their mentoring. The second dimension is *subjective educational theory*, which encompasses mentors' personal system of knowledge and beliefs about how they mentor. Within the context of this thesis, mentors' personal interpretative framework was explored through interviews and a survey. In addition, I explored how mentors and mentees experienced the impact of a specific contextual factor on their mutual relationship: what happens when mentors are not only involved in support, but also in the programmatic assessment of their mentees?

With the study described in **Chapter 2**, mentors' personal interpretative framework is reconstructed. 18 Mentors from three Maastricht University undergraduate programs were interviewed. The analysis of the interview data led to the identification of four mentoring positions: the facilitator, the coach, the monitor, and the exemplar. Each dynamic position represents a coherent set of normative beliefs about activities mentors engage in with their mentees. The positions also describe whether the mentor or mentee takes the lead in these activities and how they could be carried out. Mentors who adopt a facilitator or coach position often do this in a responsive manner, but facilitator and coach mentors differ with regards to the activities they engage in during mentoring. Facilitator mentors more feel that they provide a service to their mentees, where the coach mentors tend to focus more on support of development. Mentors taking a monitor position interact with mentees on a more collaborative basis, signalling how mentees are doing, and helping them to recognise and keep track of their progress. Exemplar mentors, on the other hand, do not have a clear preference for providing service or supporting development, and tend to be a bit more directive in nature.

The second study in this thesis, written up in **Chapter 3**, describes the development and collection of initial validity evidence for the MERIT survey, the MEntor Reflection InstrumenT. The MERIT is designed to support mentors' reflection, and is developed based on theory built in the qualitative first study of this thesis and additional literature review. The survey categorizes mentors' answers into four factors, representing focus points in their mentoring: (1) supporting personal development, (2) modelling professional development, (3) fostering autonomy, and (4) monitoring performance. Mentors often have a specific focus, or combine focus points in their mentoring practice. It is important to note that mentors may prioritize certain focus points over others depending on the context and the mentee.

As described **in in Chapter 4, the** MERIT survey includes duplicate questions. Each question is answered twice: once for actual mentoring and once for preferred mentoring. Mentors were asked to consider their current mentoring approach (actual mentoring) and reflect on whether they would like to do things differently (preferred mentoring). For some mentors the responses in these two modes differed from each other. The analysis of the survey responses revealed that the participating mentors perceived a discrepancy between their actual and preferred mentoring. This could indicate that they desired a different emphasis or level of presence of certain focus points in their mentoring. In general, when mentors perceived discrepancies, the years of experience as a mentor moderated the discrepancy between actual and preferred mentoring, with more experienced mentors perceiving a smaller discrepancy between their actual and preferred mentoring. This effect was particularly influenced by responses related to the focus on 'supporting professional development'.

Chapter 5 presents the final study in the thesis, where both mentors and mentees were interviewed to gain insights into their experiences with the combined responsibility of providing developmental support and conducting assessments. The study explores how this combination influenced their mutual relationship and how mentors and mentees coped with it. The findings indicate that this combination does not inherently cause tension, but it also does not always proceed smoothly. For some participants, making the mentor responsible for both developmental support and assessment fitted well due to the long-term nature of a mentor-mentee relationship. For others this combination caused tensions, which affected the quality of their relationship, the degree of dependence and trust between mentor and mentee and changed the nature and content of their conversations. To alleviate tensions, mentors and mentees described different strategies. Mentors emphasized transparency about their expectations towards their mentees, clearly distinguished between developmental support and assessment, or justified the combination of support and assessment. Mentees agreed with these strategies and discussed similar topics, but the practical outcomes varied. Alleviating tensions should not be a responsibility of mentors and mentees only. Programs of assessment should be designed in such a way that the 'tension temperature' is kept low. All stakeholders involved in programmatic assessment should be supported in learning how to combine support and assessment, and how to have conversations about the expectations of that combination.