How Can A Faculty/Budget Division Set Up A Formal Mentoring Program?

Formal Mentoring programs provide a structured environment for the mentoring process. However, setting up a formal mentoring program requires considerable commitment. The following is designed to assist in thinking through some of the considerations required when undertaking this development option.

Well thought out objectives give direction to mentoring programs and provide a basis for evaluation. Time spent planning, consulting and communicating before starting the mentoring program will improve its quality.

**ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS**

Formal mentoring programs are designed around specific goals and objectives which are agreed at the outset.

Factors the area will need to be clear about include:

- What is the purpose of the mentoring program and the outcomes required?
  - For the mentee?
  - For the mentor?
  - For the institution?
- Will any particular groups be targeted? (eg New Employees, High Performing Experienced Staff etc)
- Does the culture provide the right environment for mentoring?
- What mentoring design would best suit our purpose?
- Will there be a program sponsor or committee who will champion the program?
- If so, what are the Terms of Reference? What role will they play? What level of communication will be required and how often?
- What resources are available to support the program? (eg Budget, Program Coordination, Time allocation, Training, Support materials etc)
- How will the program be coordinated and by whom? (eg a dedicated program coordinator)
- How will mentors and program participants be selected? (eg notification of opportunity, voluntary application, selection criteria, references, matching of skills etc)
- How will issues around equity of access to the program and fairness in processes and procedures be addressed?
- What time commitment will be involved? (eg estimated duration of the program, frequency of mentoring meetings, completing feedback/reporting requirements, and involvement in other program activities such as opening and closing ceremonies, training etc)
- What training and support do we need to provide to assist both mentors and mentees?
- How will we monitor, evaluate and review the program outcomes?
- How will mentors be rewarded or acknowledged for their contribution?
- How will the program be integrated with other Human Resource / Development initiatives?

**COMMUNICATION IS KEY**

Open communication is vital at all stages of the formal mentoring program.

Everyone in the area, whether participating in the program or not, needs to know what the program involves, how it will work and why it is being implemented.

Supervisors and Managers, whose staff will be mentored, need special consideration. They need to understand their own role and how it compares with, and complements the mentor’s role.

Opportunities may include:

- Encouraging input for the manager in developing the mentoring plan
- Planning regular meetings between manager, mentor and mentee
- Alerting managers to opportunities to increase their own people development skills
- Using the mentor program to show links to other development and human resources policies
- Ensuring the benefits of mentoring are apparent on the job

Program outcomes will also need to be communicated on a regular basis to key stakeholders as well as participants.

Communicating mentor successes and publicly commending them recognises the mentor’s contribution. The mentoring role can also be formally included in the performance review system and recognised through the Performance Development Framework.
TRAINING CONSIDERATIONS
Training both mentors and the mentees is critical to the quality of the program and the subsequent relationships.
- Ideally training would include topics such as:
- The purpose and goals of the program
- Responsibilities of both parties
- Potential benefits to the mentee, the mentor and the university.
- Developing an agreement to structure the mentoring relationship
- Limitations of the relationship
- Agreement on how others will be involved and communicated during the program (e.g. Program Coordinator, Mentee’s Manager / Supervisor etc)
- Ways to build the mentoring partnership, including questioning techniques, listening skills and giving and receiving feedback
- Topics for mentoring discussions (if relevant)
- Setting up a personal development plan or mentoring action plan based on program goals and outcomes.
- Avenues for termination of the pairing, if this is appropriate.

THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR ROLE
Mentoring needs championing within the workplace, so coordination is central to the success of a formal mentoring program. Depending on the size and length of the program, this is usually allocated as a dedicated program co-ordinator role.
Some co-ordinator responsibilities may include:
- Assisting to develop the structure and write guidelines for the program.
- Consultation with major stakeholders.
- Being the first point of contact for those involved in the program or wanting to know about it.
- Calling for nominations of mentors and mentee, if appropriate
- Assisting in the matching process
- Setting up and maintaining a data base of information on mentors and mentees
- Attending training sessions and other program events
- Assisting in the development of personal development plans or mentoring plans
- Conducting regular progress checks and dealing with any problems that arise
- Program evaluation and reporting

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS
Depending on the program objectives the following criteria may be assessed as part of the evaluation:
Number of participants engaged in the program, completion rates
- Specified skills development
- Career plans
- Workforce flexibility (e.g. job placements, secondments, internal movement, promotions, turnover etc)
- Completion of projects / assignments / additional work based tasks related to program outcomes
- Feedback from mentors and mentees
- Feedback from manager/supervisors, Senior managers and staff not involved
- Cost / Benefit Analysis
Some level of base data should be collected before the program begins, as well as on completion.

POTENTIAL PITFALLS TO BE OVERCOME
The following table outlines some potential pitfalls that may be faced when establishing a formal mentoring program, and possible remedies to overcome them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Pitfall</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Possible Remedies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a new ‘buzz word’ rather than being an integral part of the organisation.</td>
<td>Not doing the ground work or communicating adequately.</td>
<td>Needs to be planned and linked to other HR strategies. Requires commitment from the ‘top’ and the purpose and benefits of the program to be effectively communicated. The program needs to be linked to strategic goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of what mentoring is /isn’t</td>
<td>Ineffective communication / promotion.</td>
<td>Review communication / promotion strategy and program introduction process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers using mentoring to prop up poor line supervision.</td>
<td>Managers not aware of the role of the mentoring program and the relationship between the manager/supervisor and the mentor.</td>
<td>Solve the supervision problem first and then review whether mentoring is fulfilling its purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scepticism of non-participants.</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of the purpose and expected outcomes of the program. Jealousy for not being selected.</td>
<td>Review communication / promotion strategy. Consider introducing a feedback process for unsuccessful applicants. Involve managers in supporting continued development within current role for unsuccessful applicants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Pitfall</td>
<td>Cause</td>
<td>Possible Remedies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under resourcing.</td>
<td>Lack of commitment from the top.</td>
<td>Review the resourcing required for the program to be effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inadequate planning</td>
<td>Gain commitment from management through a ‘hard sell’ of the benefits of the program and expected outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other priorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor / Mentee has not proven satisfactory.</td>
<td>Ineffective selection process.</td>
<td>Review selection criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors do not recognise their limitations.</td>
<td>Lack of effective guidelines for the program.</td>
<td>Ensure ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes are in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unrealistic expectations.</td>
<td>Discuss problems with mentor and mentee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personality clashes between mentor and mentee.</td>
<td>Review the mentoring agreement in conjunction with the individuals concerned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Failure to comply with mentoring agreement.</td>
<td>If this is not possible, the mentoring relationship should cease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of time, commitment.</td>
<td>A new mentoring agreement may be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management issues.</td>
<td>Mentoring program is not sufficiently streamlined.</td>
<td>Discuss the problems being experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unrealistic expectations from those involved.</td>
<td>Review process and make necessary adjustments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of commitment from those involved.</td>
<td>Look at priorities and degree of commitment to the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring program is not achieving the success expected.</td>
<td>Unrealistic expectations.</td>
<td>Review the purpose of the program and success indicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too soon for benefits to be apparent.</td>
<td>You need to keep the program small (conduct a pilot) and then carefully review the program and make necessary adjustments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not linked to attainable goals.</td>
<td>Invite participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Going too big too soon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation criteria is not effective/ measurable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not allowing sufficient release time for the mentor or mentee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No interest in mentoring program.</td>
<td>Not involving key stakeholders.</td>
<td>Review program and ensure that it is endorsed from ‘the top’ and link to outcomes is clearly expressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffective communication / promotion strategy.</td>
<td>Gain input from key stakeholders and program champions. Modify program accordingly and communicate changes made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too many work pressures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For tools and resources please visit [go.unimelb.edu.au/3d7](go.unimelb.edu.au/3d7)