

MENTORING: A HOLISTIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Higher education (H.E.) has changed dramatically over the past decades with increasing enrolment, student mobility, diversity of provision, and the changing dynamics of research and technology. With over 254 million students enrolled globally (UNESCO, 2024), diversity and employability has made it imminent to incorporate more personalized education and flexible learning paths. Mentoring is visualised as a helping relationship in which two individuals with similar experience and requirements come together, either informally or formally, in the pursuit of fulfilling career-related and psychosocial needs. This relationship process may be embedded into Higher Education in order to enhance the holistic advancement - academic development, career development, as well as personal - of graduate students (Lunsford et al., 2017, p. 323). Such an approach benefits all the stakeholders – learners, mentors, industries, government and policymakers – if engaged in purposefully. This article is conceptual in nature, undertaken by review of secondary data, exploring the concept mentoring, revisiting the various models of mentoring, and examines three cases to establish the importance and relevance of mentoring in Higher Educational Institutions (H.E.I.s). The article ends with clear directions to the various stakeholders in higher education.

Keywords: Mentoring, Mentorship, Higher Education, HEIs.

Introduction

The landscape of higher education (H.E.) has changed tremendously over the past years, presenting novel challenges at the actors - the learners and teachers. The realm of higher education has transformed dramatically over the past decades with increasing enrolment, student mobility, diversity of provision, and the changing dynamics of research and technology (UNESCO, 2024). With over 254 million students enrolled globally – a number that has more than doubled in the last 20 years and is fast expanding, higher education institutions (H.E.I.s) face increasing diversity, necessitating more personalized learning paths (UNESCO, 2024). More than 6.4 million students are pursuing their further education abroad, with India and China neck-in-neck in the race with almost 1 million each. The world's big economies - China and India - contribute almost one million students each to Higher Educational Institutions in E.U. and U.S. India and China export .33Mn and .27Mn students respectively to U.S. alone, followed by South Korea (.043Mn), Canada (.028Mn), and Taiwan (.023 Mn) respectively (IT, 2024; Yadav, 2024). Thus, Higher Education is becoming more diverse and internationalised.

Higher education institutions (H.E.I.s) need to keep pace with the diverse student population varying in prior knowledge, learning needs, and interests, demanding more personalized education and providing flexible learning paths (Zhang et al., 2020). This places greater responsibility and pressure on students in higher education (HE), as they have to be in charge of their own learning processes. Again, students are expected to evolve to be lifelong learners capable of operating in a global labour market that is always in flux (Demirel, 2009). Given the rapid shift in occupations with jobs disappearing or new ones emerging, learners are challenged to develop 'employability competences,' besides the competence to 'anticipate constantly changing situations and adapt' (Nuis & Beusaert, 2021; Tynjälä, 2008). This sets high expectations for students, rendering their transition to the labour market more challenging and stressful.

Mentoring is best understood as a space, wherein the participants willingly share their expertise, knowledge, skills, and experience with another person, helping them to reflect and progress. Mentoring engages as a critical pedagogical and professional strategy that bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application. Defined as a dynamic, reciprocal relationship focused on the holistic development of mentees, mentoring benefits all the stakeholders - students, faculty, and industry professionals alike.

Despite its proven efficacy, mentoring in higher education faces numerous challenges, including lack of structure, shared purpose, inadequate training for mentors, and weak linkages between academia and industry. It bears implications to the stakeholders. For students, this often results in incompatibility due to misaligned career trajectories and insufficient preparedness for the workforce. The faculty members miss opportunities for professional growth and research collaboration with the students and the industry, while industries struggle to find suitable talent equipped with practical skills and interdisciplinary expertise.

This concept article, explores the multifaceted role and scope of mentoring in STESS fields, emphasizing its transformative potential for all stakeholders. By examining existing models, identifying gaps, and proposing actionable recommendations, this study aims to highlight mentoring as a good practice to higher education and a catalyst for innovation and societal progress.

Review of Literature

Mentoring

The word '*mentor*' has its historical origins in Homer's '*Odyssey*', wherein Odysseus (Ulysses), the King of Ithaca, entrusts his son Telemachus to the care and direction of his old and trusted friend, Mentor, before he sets out on his epic voyage into the Trojan War.

Considering that Mentor is ineffectual and old, Goddess Athena, disguises herself as "Mentor", acting as a wise and trusted counsel to Telemachus. Thus, in course of time, *mentor* as a word became associated with the role of a wise, trusted person, who guides and advises; *mentorship* was seen as a relationship between a teacher (*guru*) and student (*shishya*). The notion of mentorship is largely idealised as a positive thing, though original Greek conceptions painted a more complex picture of the relationship between Mentor and Telemachus (Garvey, 2017).

Originally, mentoring and coaching were both primarily visualised as interventions in workplace settings to achieve success in business (Jacobi, 1991). Even though sometimes used interchangeably, coaching and mentoring have a slightly different purpose (Viera, 2021). Coaching is task-oriented and focuses on improving specific skills, while mentoring is a broader relationship aimed at holistic personal and professional development (Viera, 2021). In line with their conceptual difference, the term coaching is more often used within workplace settings, while mentoring has become synonymous with higher education (HE), as an integral part of study programs (Foster et al., 2015; Santora et al., 2013). Despite the prevalence of mentoring in the context of higher education, the conceptualisation and implementation of mentoring has been fraught by the proliferation of various definitions and operationalizations (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

According to Crisp and Cruz (2009), mentoring has been defined in more than 50 different ways. For instance, Blackwell (1989) defined mentoring as “a process by which persons of a superior rank, special achievements, and prestige, instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as *protégés*”. Terrion and Leonard (2007, p. 150), however, defined mentoring as “a helping relationship in which two individuals of similar age and/or experience come together, either informally or through formal mentoring schemes, in the pursuit of fulfilling some combination of functions that are career-related and psychosocial”. Weinberg (2019) noted a distinction between a mentor and a friend as the value from the relationship is based on a specific outcome, namely a student’s development in academics, career, and self. Additionally, a mentor cannot be all things to any mentee nor should he try; it is imperative to have other stakeholders in place for students who need crisis management or to draw upon the expertise of others (Johnston, 2007; Weinberg, 2019).

The tangents between these definitions clearly illustrates how differently mentoring have been conceptualized, in terms of the actors in the mentoring process, their relation to each other and the purposes of mentoring. This apparent lack of conceptual clarity has also resulted in a variation in measuring mentoring. For instance, when Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2000) measured the extent to which ‘mentees felt that support was offered to them’, Brodeur et al. (2015) measured different mentor behaviours, while Gullan et al. (2016) measured four aspects of the mentoring relationship.

A meta-analysis of 112 individual research studies found that mentoring has significant behavioural, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, and career benefits (Eby et al., 2008), depending on the different functions being performed by the mentor. Originally developing from qualitative research in an organizational context, the concept of mentoring had two functions: *psychosocial support* (e.g. friendship, emotional support, encouragement) and *instrumental support* (career-related e.g. providing advice, discussing goals) (Kram, 1983). An early quantitative approach identified role-modelling to be a distinct third factor (Scandura and Ragins, 1993). Knowledge transfer was later identified as a fourth function in the context of mentoring for college success (Nora and Crisp, 2007) as well as mentoring creativity (Form et al., 2017). These examples demonstrate how scattered that existing perceptions about mentoring are. The conceptual confusion reflected in the variety of definitions and measurement instruments jeopardizes research on the critical success factors and effects of mentoring programs. Nevertheless, based a synthesis of multiple definitions, a mentoring can be broadly defined as a

structured, supportive relationship fostering intellectual, professional, and personal growth through reciprocal interactions.

Higher Education

Higher education in general refers to the tertiary-level of education that follows secondary education (high school), that provides advanced academic and professional knowledge besides skills through bachelors, masters and doctoral programs (IGI, 2024). In an era characterized by rapid advancements in science, technology, engineering, and social sciences (STESS), higher education institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal role in preparing students in a society, to tackle complex, future challenges. Higher Education (HE) not only helps individuals acquire *knowledge, develop critical thinking skills and attain intellectual maturity*, but also in the process, is expected to encourage *self-discovery* and the *development of a sense of identity and purpose*; it promotes the *exchange of knowledge, research and innovation* and *equips* students with essential skills required to meet ever changing global labour markets (UNESCO, 2024). Thus, Higher Education, may be regarded a rich cultural and scientific asset that enables personal development, besides promotes economic, technological and social change of any society, in the long term. Higher education has presented its own set of problems considering the demand and expectations from higher education, dynamics of transaction between on-site to online and hybrid modes of learning, fast-evolving technology, diversity among the learners and teachers, need for community living and cooperation, etc. This has presented stress to learners and the facilitators alike. A harmonious relationship and a shared sense of purpose is of paramount importance in Higher Education.

Mentoring in Higher Education (H.E.)

Mentoring offers an enduring personal relationship between participants to cultivate 'career knowledge, self-identity and transformation, and social and emotional support', in order to help support a future colleague. Being a process embedded into higher education in order to "enhance the academic development (including development of research skills and a disciplinary identity), professional (career) development, and personal (psychosocial) development of graduate students" (Lunsford et al., 2017, p. 323), this approach growth can benefit both parties involved in mentoring, when it is engaged in purposefully.

One reason to encourage mentorship is because of the mutual benefits provided by the relationship. Mentors are needed for students to appreciate the different expectations of higher education. For example, undergraduate students usually learn and apply proficiency confined to a discipline, whereas graduate students are expected to challenge and contribute to the knowledge base within the field (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, n.d.). Without proper mentorship, some students would not receive the push they need to present or publish material.

Additionally, even higher education institutions may observe benefits from mentoring programs. First of all, the costs associated with mentoring are often less in comparison with other types of H.R.D. or employee development interventions (Gibb, 1999). Besides, institutions may notice increased commitment and productivity throughout the institution and decreased turnover among employees and students, as well as the ability to attract or recruit faculty who desire this developmental opportunity in academia. Other institutional

benefits include more profound interaction among colleagues, greater communication, and increased networking (Anthony, n.d.).

Stakeholders in Mentoring

The stakeholders in mentoring within higher education are diverse, each playing a crucial role in creating and sustaining effective mentoring ecosystems. For all purposes the academia cannot remain insulated from the industry, as the latter sets the benchmarks and becomes the goal of the existence of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Hence, by simple logic the stakeholders in higher education (H.E.) include:

- Internal Stakeholders
 - learners
 - peers
 - faculty
 - management
- External
 - industry
 - employers
 - suppliers
 - government
 - policy-makers

Externally, the industry integrates evolving technologies and creating demand for new products or services. This generates employment as well opportunities with potential employers and suppliers. The government regulates education and industry, while policymakers incorporate enabling policies. Internally, the management decides along with the mentoring program coordinator creates frameworks and moderates the ambience for mentoring among the learners and faculty.

Theoretical Frameworks for Mentoring

In this part, the authors discuss at least five key frameworks with direct implications to mentoring as a concept. The key ones considered were:

1. Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978):

As the name suggests this framework stresses on the subjective perspective and experiences of the stakeholders borrowing heavily from constructivism. Vygotsky stressed on active learning, wherein learners are seen as responsible and actively engaged in their learning process and the faculty becoming a facilitator. Hence, social interactions between and among the teacher-student and peer groups become social contexts for dialoguing and refining on ideas and contexts. Thus, the output or goals are cocreated among the stakeholders – learners, faculty and the industry and learners in developing competencies that are beyond their independent abilities.

2. Facilitative Learning Theory (Rogers, 1983)

Here, the Rogerian *humanism* and person-centred approach is stressed. The Facilitative Learning approach positions mentoring as a personalized and empathetic

process of growth. It highlights the importance of establishing trust and emotional safety in the mentoring relationship. Here the institution, the faculty or the industry, have to foster a 'safe space,' wherein learners feel comfortable in exploring ideas and vulnerabilities, and in the process undergoes reflection and self-directed learning. This 'safe space,' encourages the learners to take risks, which otherwise they are cautious of. Thus, the mentors foster environments that empower mentees to reflect and take ownership of their development.

3. Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984)

Kolb observes a 'learning cycle', consisting of four-stage process—experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation.[u14] According to Kolb, the mentor provides a wide variety of focus experiences that helps the individual mentee to experiment, reflect, learn and further refine. Thus, the personal views accumulated from the learners' past experiences, are regarded important and as central to their growth. This draws parallels with the Integral Pedagogical Paradigm (I.P.P.) wherein the *context*, *experience*, *reflection* and *action* are the pillars in learning (ICAJE[u15] , 1993; CDG[u16] , 2012),

4. Integral Pedagogical Paradigm (I.P.P.).

The IPP is an approach to teaching-learning, that emphasizes contextual learning through reflection, experience, and action, aligning with mentoring practices in higher education (ICAJE, 1993). In the I.P.P., the Mentor appreciates the *context*, which is the distance between the learners and the learning context as well as the facilitator, designs appropriate *experiences* by way activities that provide concrete opportunities to experience not just cognitive, but affective elements that drives action and commitment, which the learner engages in (ICAJE, 1993). Subsequently, the learner *reflects* on how the experience affected the person decides on how the experience affects the learners in terms of feelings, attitude, values and how she/her repositions herself/himself with respect to the world. In other words, these reflections realign the way in which the learner sees the world and responds to it (*action*) (ICAJE, 1993).

5. Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991):

According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning involves reassessing assumptions and integrating new perspectives through guided reflection. Transformative learning approach is aligned to critical realism, wherein, learners reassess their assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours through guided reflection (critical reflection). Mezirow rightly assigned the title *disorienting dilemmas* to suggest that learning begins necessarily and essentially with experiences that challenge and dispute the learner's current perspectives. According to Mezirow, starting with a dilemma, self-assessment of assumptions, critical reflection on assumptions, recognition of dissatisfaction, exploring alternatives, formulating a plan of action, and eventually ending with reintegration of a fresh perspective. Hence, mentors are expected to act as guides who encourage learners to undergo transformative experiences, fostering critical thinking, reflection and adaptive change. In the process, they encourage mentees to embrace challenging experiences as opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Characteristics of Mentoring: A Reflection

Mentoring as a developmental practice is deeply rooted in theoretical frameworks that emphasize learner-centred, reflective, and socially interactive approaches to education

and personal growth. The intersection of *social constructivism*, *facilitative learning theory*, *experiential learning theory*, and *transformative learning theory*, provides a robust foundation for understanding mentoring in modern contexts. Hence, we may conclude on the following characteristics attributed to the construct 'mentoring':

1. **Socially Constructed Process:** Mentoring fosters partnerships that emphasise dialogue, collaboration, and co-creation of knowledge.
2. **Emotional and Psychological Safety:** 'Safe, trusting' environments, attributable to genuine mentoring relationships allow mentees to explore their vulnerabilities, share experiences, and work toward becoming self-directed learners.
3. **Action and Reflection:** Kolb's experiential learning theory highlights the cyclical and iterative nature of mentoring, where mentors and mentees reflect on experiences, conceptualize insights, and apply them in new contexts. Practical models such as Whitmore's (1983) *GROW Model* translates this theory into actionable mentoring practices, emphasizing goal-setting and feedback loops for continuous improvement.
4. **Transformative Potential:** Mezirow's transformative learning theory, positions mentoring as a vehicle for profound change. By guiding mentees through disorienting dilemmas and fostering critical reflection, mentors can help mentees challenge assumptions, develop fresh perspectives, and integrate these changes into their everyday lives fostering deeper personal and professional transformation.
5. **Integrative and Holistic:** The overlap between these frameworks suggests and demonstrates that mentoring is a multi-dimensional process; it integrates emotional safety, experiential learning, reflection and dialogue. These elements of eclecticism collectively empower mentees to take responsibility for their personal growth, while providing mentors with structured yet flexible approaches to support this development.

Phases in Mentoring

Mentorship Model: Relationship Stages

Mentorship behaviours can be understood and engaged with in all stages of mentoring relationships. Groundbreaking research published conceptualised four sequential stages through which mentoring relationships (*mentorship*) evolve based on qualitative research in organizational settings (Kram, 1985):

1. **Initiation** - when mentors and mentees, explore, get to know one another and share mutual expectations; this may end with goal setting.
2. **Cultivation** - When the mentor-mentee relationship matures and mentors typically provide the greatest degree of psychosocial and career support
3. **Separation** - when mentees yearn and seek autonomy, and start to function independently of mentors, the same may be perceived as a 'rebellion'
4. **Redefinition** - when mentors and mentees either transition into a different type of relationship characterised by more peer-like interactions or ultimately terminate the relationship.

It is important to understand that in due course of their academic and career pursuits, mentees' expectations and needs are likely to change (McGowan et al., 2007), resulting correspondingly, in the type of support require from the mentors (Pollock , 1995). Hence, given that mentee- and mentor expectations too can change over time, challenges are bound to arise from misaligned expectations in their relationship across mentorship stages.

GROW Mentoring Model: Process Stages



Sir John Whitmore, a Formula-1 driver and coach formulated the Goal-Reality-Option-Will (GROW) Model, which remains a practical application that incorporates and implements a structured approach to mentoring. According to Whitmore (1995), the phases are:

1. **Goal:** The Goal section of GROW identifies and addresses what the mentee wants to achieve, hence focussing on the solution rather than the problem. Some of the Goal questions include: "What do you want?," "What does it look like, and feel like to have achieved?," "What are people saying to you?." Hence, the process is more solution-focussed and impels the mentee for goal-setting (G).
2. **Reality:** The next phase is to ascertain reality orientation. Here, the mentor explores the mentee's present status, helping the mentee to get clear about 'what is happening?', and how it affects themselves and others. The learner reflects by way of self-assessment where she/he stands, which often indicates an inertia for change, in other words a *statusquo* (R). Some of the questions include: "What is happening at the moment?," "If an ideal situation is 10, what number are you at now?," "What have you done so far?," "Who else is affected?," "What are you doing that's working towards your goal?," "What are you doing that is getting in the way of your goal?," etc.
3. **Options:** Having reflected, the Mentee becomes more aware about the imperative to change. This naturally propels the learner to explore various options (O), so as to change and reach the goal. Some of the questions found useful include: "What are your options?," "What else could you do?," "What has worked in the past?," "What steps could you take?," "Who could help you with this?," "Where could you find out the information?," "What might someone else do in your shoes?," etc.
4. **Will:** As opposed to 'Options', 'will' (W) is about discovering which option/s the mentee can *commit* to undertaking (*action*). In other words, the learner decides, and commits to an action plan. Some examples of Will questions are: "What will you do about

that?," "How will you do that?," "When?," "What will it take for you to commit to that action?," "What could you do to become more committed?"

Case Studies

Case #1. A Music-enthusiast transformed into an Audio Engineer

Background

John, was a first-year student of engineering, seen as the most disengaged students in his class, 'doomed to fail.' He showed little interest in his coursework, hardly even turned up of lectures and had failed all his exams during Semester-1. However, he would turn up and on time! where there was a cultural program happening on campus. The mounting pressure from professors and his family, left him demotivated and frustrated.

The Turning Point

Dr. Janaki, one of John's lecturers, noticed his transformed persona whenever there was a music or dance program; he would be on time and in the forefront in organising rock concerts, designing and printing the flyers, assisting in setting up the sound systems and mixer-units perfecting and fine-tuning it, and, also dancing his heart out. Observing this spark and energy, dr. Janaki decided to have a one-on-one conversation with John. During their conversation, John confessed his fascination for music and sound and his dream of becoming a Rockstar. He expressed his frustration and angst over his parents' chastisement over him being "unrealistic". Janaki, saw an opportunity to guide John and suggested that he explore the field of acoustics and audio engineering, a niche that combines engineering principles with sound technology.

Mentorship Support

Dr. Janaki took John under his wing and tailored a mentoring approach to ignite his interest and rebuild his confidence. She encouraged John to start with small, achievable projects related to audio engineering, such as building a basic speaker or understanding how microphones work and refining its recording quality (personalised guidance). Janaki eventually introduced John to her college-mate Ramachandran, who was an audio engineer in a prominent audio equipment manufacturer (networking). Ramachandran, recognising John's aptitude, introduced him to some practical tools and technologies, including digital audio workstations (DAWs), audio processing software, and sound measurement devices (industry exposure). Ramachandran also demonstrated to John how core engineering subjects like physics, electronics, and signal processing applied directly to the field of acoustics, making coursework more relatable and meaningful. Janaki, in the background, set short-term goals and celebrated small wins to help John stay motivated (psychosocial support). Weekly check- ins ensured John stayed on track and continued to learn hard. She would also reward him concert passes whenever he completed his planned tasks (catalyse).

The Transformation

Over the next one year, John underwent a remarkable transformation. For once, his academic grades steadily improved as he connected his studies to his passion. He excelled in courses like electronics, mechanics, and signal processing and began clearing his backlog in examinations. John designed and built a noise-cancelling device for his final-year

project, earning praise from his peers and faculty. He even presented a research paper and did a publication with dr. Janaki and Ramachandran. The once shy and withdrawn, John became an active participant in class discussions and a leader in group projects. He eventually became more popular with his college mates and teachers. Inspired by his progress, John set his sights on pursuing a career in audio engineering, focusing on innovations in sound design and acoustics.

Reflection

Dr. Janaki's mentorship helped John discover his true calling and to reset his journey. This case underscores the transformative power of mentorship, particularly when it aligns a student's passion with their academic pursuits, translating into the possibility of a meaningful career. In lot many contexts like India, students are often forced to join technical education institutes. These spaces have an abundance of talented youth, but quite unaware of their purpose in life, sublimating their frustration by perhaps turning anti-establishment and rebellious. It takes a supportive mentor to spot the innate talent and strengths, and align them to their respective fields.

Case # 2: Transforming Anxiety into a concrete Ambition

Background

Sita, a final-year student of master's in social work (MSW), stood at a crossroads in her life. Despite excelling academically and receiving a ready job offer as Project Coordinator with Art Crafts, an NGO working on women empowerment in Mumbai, she was hesitant to accept the offer. Anxiety and self-doubt, stemming from the very difficult circumstances at home, clouded her decisions. Her father an alcoholic, who had multiple extramarital affairs, would often threaten her mother, creating an atmosphere of fear and instability. Sita feared leaving her mother alone to face potential violence fearing for her life, leading her to reject opportunities that could otherwise launch her career.

Turning Point: A Disorienting Dilemma

Dr. James, the Head of the Department and her mentor, recognized Sita's potential and emotional struggles. Rather than focusing solely on academic or career advice, dr. James adopted a holistic mentoring approach to address the underlying issues that involved working closely with both Sita and her mother to build a foundation of stability and confidence. When he confronted her regarding her fears Sita, simply said that her mother had said an emphatic "no!;" she also felt that violating her mother's decisions would lead to a curse. During the telephonic conversation that ensued, James asked the mother what her concern were, to which she asked two existential questions (in her view), "Where would she stay?" and "How would she eat?" The Mentor asked the mother what were her plans for Sita to which she replied that she aspired to send her to Canada. The Mentor gently confronted her with the same two 'existential' questions, helping her to realise her dilemma.

The issue finally boiled down to her over-protectiveness over her daughter and the daughter's real fear for her mother's life at the hands of her father. This realisation helped both of them to understand the problem and look at the future more realistically.

Mentorship Interventions

Dr. James provided Sita and her mother with a 'safe space' to express their fears and anxieties. By establishing a non-judgmental environment, dr. James helped Sita articulate her aspirations to become a project consultant. His gentle confrontation helped the mother-daughter to assess the core issue – the overprotectiveness arising out of anxiety. Recognizing the real threat posed by Sita's father, dr. James encouraged her mother to initially meet the local police inspector and initiate steps against domestic violence. He explained the protection available under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and facilitated connections with legal aid organizations –DLSA and Women's Commission (legal aid, networking). James also arranged counselling sessions for both Sita and her mother.

These sessions were designed to help them process their trauma, rebuild their confidence, and develop coping strategies (psychosocial support). A pivotal step was convincing Sita's mother to support her daughter's employment so that they augment their status. James emphasized that Sita's independence could not only provide financial security but also set a positive example for others in similar situations. To align Sita's career with her long-term goals, dr. James helped her identify stepping stones (career Planning). He suggested that Sita take up some employment immediately that would take her mind off her worries about home. She decided to apply and eventually took up a teaching assignment to gain experience and confidence, which could later serve as a foundation for her consultancy aspirations (competence building).

Transformation

Over six months, with dr. James's consistent support and encouragement, Sita and her mother experienced a significant transformation. Sita eventually took up employment at a Social Work college, where she successfully started teaching given her good language and conceptual clarity. This boosted her self-confidence and helped her develop articulation and practical skills having to supervise students of social work in their field practice. Within two years, she shifted to offering consultancy services to with an NGOs of international repute working in palliative care and community empowerment. Sita's mother filed a complaint against her husband and secured a protection order, creating a safer and more stable home environment. With continued psychosocial support, the mother regained her confidence in Sita, allowing to step out of her house and take up employment.

Outcome

Sita transformed from an anxious student into a confident professional, balancing a career in training, consultancy and outreach. Her experiences allowed her to become an advocate for survivors of chronic and terminal illness.

Reflections

Effective mentorship goes beyond career advice to address the emotional, social, and sometimes familial challenges that impact on a mentee's decision-making (holistic mentoring). Educating families about their rights giving them the confidence to face their fears (psychological support and empowerment). Legal support also restrains violators from abusing the vulnerable and creates safer environments for development. Helping a mentee connect their career aspirations to their personal experiences can drive purpose

and motivation (catalysing). Engaging a mentee's family can be crucial in ensuring long-term stability and success of individual clients (psychosocial support).

Case #3: Transforming a Rebellious Artist into a Gentleman Cinematographer

Background

Sathya, a sociology undergraduate, was known on campus for all the wrong reasons and his notorious temper. Rebellious, tardy, and uninterested in academics, he did badly for his internal exams and also alienated himself from both peers and faculty, owing to his arrogance and nasty temper. Dr. Mathew, the head of an adjacent department, once got a taste of his temperament when he noticed Satya sitting astride the desk of a hapless junior lady student professing his love for her, determined to 'make her fall in love'. Satya, once came up with the brilliant idea of a community radio which held the attention of the staff council, but got turned down on account of his non-negotiable demand for control of the project and short-tempered responses during the discussions that ensued with the staff council. Despite his artistic talents – sketching, painting and experimental installations – Alex lacked direction and purpose, and so dismissed as a 'lost cause' by others on Campus.

The Turning Point: A Christmas Program

However, an opportunity for mentoring presented during the annual Christmas celebrations on campus, of which Mathew was the staff coordinator. During the planning meeting for the annual Christmas program, where tasks were defined and individuals were to be nominated as committee coordinators, Alex volunteered to become the student coordinator of the program. The first decision that he took was on to himself, promising to hang a Christmas Star at a central point on Campus. He promised the same at the meeting on Friday, determined to get in up by Monday morning next week.

When Mathew arrived on Campus on Monday there was no star. When called Satya tersely responded that it was not possible and conveyed his frustration over the authorities 'torpedoing' his genuine plans for a grand celebration. Mathew enquired with the Director and found out that Satya's budget for the star alone was half of the budget allocated for the Christmas celebration; he had planned for a 'grand, 14 feet tall LED star' to beat the previous year's star installation.

Mathew, a skilled mentor took on him the opportunity to transform Sathya. By evening, after the classes were over, Mathew requested Satya to meet him. And aware of Satya's aptitude and artistic skills, Mathew collected an A3 paper and a box of crayons. He took Satya to Level-3 of the building and stood him on the portico them facing the Campus. He asked Satya to visualise the Campus during Christmas, sketch an outline of the Campus and design on paper the Christmas to his heart's content. Satya outlined and conjured a colourful schema of Campus – the portico with the star hanging; the Sutter Hall with a Christmas Tree, the backdrop of the stage, the sets for the Pantomime, the Choir stands, the decorations in the Sutter Hall; decorations and lighting along the path from the almond tree leading up to the Sutter Hall; the central lawn with the wrapped presents laid out; the tennis lawn where food was to be served for the diners; and a stage for impromptu Karaoke. Satya remarked, "gosh! there is so much to be done!" There flashed a change in attitude – his arrogance gave way to humility with the realisation of the tasks at hand and the teamwork required to realise his dream Christmas.

The Transformation

From that moment on, Alex was a changed person. Slowly, steadily but reluctantly he put aside his temper and rebellious demeanour. He began carefully planning the event with the sub-committees and thanks to the facilitation by Mathew and a very communicative vice-chairperson, Sharon who was popular on Campus. Alex worked with remarkable creativity and dedication when designing stage backdrops, curating music, and producing a short video montage for the event. He even brought in a Feroz, a popular Radio Jockey on Club F.M. to host a show on Campus with competitions in order to boost the morale of the students working to make the event grand. Mathew was amazed to see Satya work single-handedly on an abandoned flex bill-board which he retrieved from the store, covering the small holes with reflective spangles and designing the logo across the flex, symbolising the college façade with candles and three floors across with ribbons representing the three-levels of the building. The event 'Advent' turned out to be one of the better Christmas celebrations the Campus had witnessed, complete with multi-stages events, and a flash mob around a camp-fire, perhaps the first in the history of the Campus. And, in the middle of it all, Mathew and the teachers who wrote him off, found Alex, dancing and basking in his new found glory of acceptance and popularity.

After the end of the program, Dr. Mathew approached Alex to praise his work, which was also echoed during the evaluation. Over the semester, Mathew was able to motivate Satya to assess his interests, which happened to be film-making given his passion for storytelling, music, and visual art. This conversation marked the beginning of their mentoring relationship and his planning out his career in the visual arts and the film industry.

Mentorship Interventions

Dr. Mathew took a strategic, empathetic approach to guide Alex from being aimless, rebellious, arrogant youth, into becoming a focused and ambitious individual. Dr. Mathew acknowledged Satya's artistic talent and explained how his creative skills could be harnessed for meaningful work (empathy). He helped Satya see the connection between sociology and art, particularly in storytelling, social commentary, and film-making. To channelise his energy, Dr. Mathew encouraged Satya to produce short films and documentaries for campus events. These projects allowed Alex to experiment with his creativity while developing technical skills in video production and sound editing (practice tasks, mini-projects). One of his projects, a documentary on homelessness, became widely appreciated on campus, boosting his confidence. Dr. Mathew introduced Satya to courses on media studies and film theory, showing him how sociology could provide deeper insights into societal narratives and themes for his art (interpreting, bringing tangibility). Mathew encouraged him to attend workshops on film production, which provided exposure to industry professionals and hands-on learning. Dr. Mathew connected Satya with alumni working in creative fields and introduced him to industry mentors and also helped him apply for internships with local media houses, where he learned professional practices in storytelling and production (networking, creating opportunities). Dr. Mathew, being a trained psychologist, very delicately, helped Alex to reflect on his responses, which he himself recognised to be arrogant, and found to be spoiling his chance of planning and working out things to his advantage (confrontation, self-assessment, critical reflection). Mathew also made it a point to support and provide appropriate positive feedback (reinforcement). Non-

acceptable tone and body language was indicated; Alex was receptive to the suggestions. The presence of Sharon as a moderator in communications with the student body, the committees and the authorities was a good buffer (environmental modification). Mathew also negotiated with the authorities to cut him some slack. Rewards were designed so as to augment and reward positive changes demonstrated by Satya. For that matter, even the camp-fire which went against the policy of the Campus, was organised in order to reward the positive change – managing temper and reducing stubbornness. Dr. Mathew provided personalized study plans and encouraged him to align his assignments and projects with his artistic interests, making his sociology coursework more engaging, which helped Satya to improve his academic standing, (psychosocial support and planning).

Outcomes

Within a year, Alex's transformation became evident to everyone on campus. He demonstrated personal growth becoming more aware of his seemingly arrogant tone of conversation and responses. He became more focused and disciplined, channelling his rebellious energy into creative projects with social impact. Besides he began collaborating with peers, shedding his unpopular image and becoming a well-respected figure on campus. This acceptance translated into academic improvement, wherein Satya's grades improved as he submitted assignments on time and did projects that blended his artistic talent with sociological insights. His final-year thesis, a short film analysing the impact of urbanization on marginalized communities, received accolades from faculty. All this inspired and augmented his chances for success. Alex planned to apply to the National Film and Television Institute and was accepted into their prestigious film-making program, where, he honed his skills in direction, cinematography, and sound design, eventually launching a career as a filmmaker.

Reflection

This case illustrates how mentorship, combined with structured guidance and emotional support, can transform a struggling student into a confident and accomplished professional. Mathew the mentor ticked all the right contexts - recognizing latent talent by observing a student's behaviour and interests in his natural settings (accompaniment, psychological support); connecting Satya's interests with opportunities, aligning a student's passion for arts and filmmaking; building a supportive relationship; modifying the environment and people around to catalyse change.

Discussion

Some of the key strategies in Mentoring come out through the three cases being discussed. Satya's (Case #3) case is a typical case in which reflection, behaviour modification, as well as building up of supportive social environment helped in bringing about and sustaining changes. Recognition of the innate talent (aptitude for music, film-making), empathetic and caring attitude of the Mentor catalysing socially acceptable behaviour, creating and capitalising on social events matching the aptitude as in John (Case #1), and Satya (Case #3) aided change. In other words, the incremental change in the mentees' behaviour becomes visible and is appreciated by the actors in a social context, augmenting and sustaining further changes to follow.

Mentoring programs are often considered relevant in Higher Education because of the positive effect they can have on those involved. Protégés in mentoring relationships often experience a multitude of benefits: improved self-confidence; an increased availability of advice and relevant information; an opportunity for encouraged reflection on practice; additional personal support; improved effectiveness; an awareness of culture, politics, and philosophy of the organization; and, access to a confidant for concerns or ideas (Rawlings, 2002). Another element considered important is to challenging the mentee to reflect critically on their behaviour and attitude (disorienting dilemma), and make amends in such a way that it becomes appropriate to the social context in which they operate, thereby winning the confidence of the actors – peers, teachers and administrators – so as to improving interpersonal relationships. Hall (2002) rightly defines mentoring as an “intentional relationship focused on developing self of relatively unseasoned protégé through dialogue and reflection; an implicit focus on development of the next generation in context of interpersonal relationships.”

In Case #2, Sita was apprehensive of venturing into a career of her choice for reasons of anxiety and insecurity. A psycho-social assessment of their family constellation indicated that the mother and daughter were observably enmeshed owing to the marital discord and insecurity in the family arising out of the alcoholic and abusive father. The mentor’s role there was to approach the case holistically, looking at the constraints, providing them psycho- social support. Sometimes, networking and legal aid becomes inevitable to augment progress. Thus, although there was no expectation of immediate career progress, it was important to support Sita, and give her confidence of taking the first leap of faith by venturing out of home for work, rather than a more drastic moving across the country, which would have substantially helped her career development. So, it is not the magnitude of change that matters, rather the first little but definitive step with the safety net and encouragement provided by the mentor. According to Gibbons (2000), “mentoring is a protected relationship in which learning and experimentation can occur, potential skills can be developed, and in which results can be measured in terms of competence gained rather than curricular territory covered”.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

The mentoring ecosystem as stated earlier, should ideally include policymakers, regulatory bodies, associations, civil society organisations, institutions (HEIs), mentoring program coordinators, mentors, mentees, alumni, Industry and peers. This multi-stakeholder model is important in ensuring that mentoring in higher education remains dynamic, inclusive, and impactful. The following are recommendations to stakeholders (Simon et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2022):

- **Policy-makers and Regulatory Bodies** have to establishing inclusive framework and target-oriented policies factoring in gender equity, diversity, career development and placements. They need to structure frameworks and allocate funding for mentoring programs. Given the changing times and dearth of resources, industry-academia engagement should be promoted. Besides there is a need to develop ecosystems for research and development (R&D) and start-ups,
- **Institutions** should formulate internal policy to promote inclusivity and engage with given the diversity of participants. There should be well structured mentoring

frameworks – detailing clear goals, periodicity of evaluations, and incentives for mentors – to aid implementations within the institution. There should also be mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and improve mentoring programs to ensure quality and inclusivity. Institutions must focus on training mentors and providing resources to support mentoring programs. Cross-disciplinary and international mentoring partnership should be encouraged to broaden opportunities for learning and collaboration. Institutions like Stanford University have implemented peer-mentoring programs with measurable success in improving student retention rates.

- **Mentors** should create an ambience that accommodates diverse mentee needs, share expertise and personal experiences, offering personal and professional insights and also facilitate networking opportunities. The mentor must be open to offer personalised support and undergo continuous participation in training to enhance mentoring efficacy.
- **Mentees** should be open to actively engage in mentoring relationships and willing to seek feedback. They also need to set clear objectives by goal-setting in consult with the Mentor. Mentees should utilize mentoring opportunities to build networks and acquire both technical and soft skills.
- **Mentoring Program Coordinators** have to evince interest in recruiting and appropriately pairing mentors and mentees, organising training sessions for potential mentees and mentors, monitoring progress of mentoring teams, providing feedback as well as addressing challenges for the smooth conduct of institutional mentoring programs.
- **Industry and External Stakeholders:** Industry in general, corporate partners and suppliers, professional associations, and civil society organisations also have a significant role to play in mentoring ecosystem. This can be fostered by:
 - engaging with academia and tapping resources – learners, faculty-student teams or even student teams - for research and development
 - promoting a start-up ecosystem
 - offering internships to individual mentees or faculty-mentee teams
 - offering career opportunities to mentees
- **Alumni:** The alumni can serve as mentors and role models for students and junior faculty by sharing real-world experiences, providing networking opportunities and contributing time and resources to institutional development
- **Peer Groups:** Engagement with the peers is important to ensure support and shared learning opportunities. This may be ensured by collaborating in peer-mentorship models, offering reciprocal support and guidance and community-building within the mentoring ecosystem

Specification of roles for each of the stakeholder illustrates the critical role stakeholders in mentoring in higher education for enhancing academic success, leadership, and inclusion. Implementing these recommendations can create robust mentoring ecosystems in universities and research institutions.

Conclusion

Mentorship, as a relational practice, supports the creation of a 'safe, inclusive spaces,' and 'respectful culture of learning and growth' by way of 'self-exploration,

reflection, curiosity, and identity formation' (Nowell, 2022). Mentorship if meaningfully and purposefully integrated into academia, will support the 'development of teaching, research, supervision and leadership practices', and which ultimately contributes to 'enhancing student experiences' (Grimes & White, 2015). Across disciplines, research has observed that those who engage in mentorship demonstrate 'higher levels of scholarly productivity, experience a greater degree of satisfaction in their careers, display increased confidence and competence in various academic skills, and have greater levels of career success and advancement' (Nowell et al., 2016; Pethrick et al., 2020). Mentorship also supports the development of stronger collegial work and social relationships that can help students persist in their studies (Lorenzetti et al., 2020) and faculty to stay at their institution (Kanaskie, 2006), and rendering such institutions the repute of being great spaces to work and live in. Future research should focus on scalable mentoring models and metrics to evaluate their long-term impact on higher education outcomes. Thus, mentoring may be regarded as an essential tool and good practice that may be incorporated in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

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MENTORYSTĖ: VISAPUSIŠKA MOKYMOSI GALIMYBĖ AUKŠTAJAME MOKSLE

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Santrauka

Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais aukštasis mokslas labai pasikeitė - daugėja studentų, didėja studentų judumas, paslaugų įvairovė, keičiasi mokslinių tyrimų ir technologijų dinamika. Pasaulyje studijuoja daugiau kaip 254 mln. studentų (UNESCO, 2024 m.), dėl įvairovės ir įsidarbinimo galimybių tapo neišvengiama įtraukti labiau individualizuotą švietimą ir lanksčius mokymosi būdus. Mentorystė įsivaizduojama kaip pagalbos santykiai, kai du panašią patirtį ir reikalavimus turintys asmenys neformaliai arba oficialiai susitinka, siekdami patenkinti su karjera susijusius ir psichosocialinius poreikius. Šis santykių procesas gali būti įtrauktas į aukštojo mokslo sistemą, siekiant didinti holistinę - akademinę, karjeros, taip pat asmeninę - magistrantų pažangą (Lunsford et al., 2017, p. 323). Toks požiūris naudingas visoms suinteresuotosioms šalims - besimokantieji, mentoriai, pramonės šakoms, vyriausybei ir politikos formuotojams, jei jis taikomas tikslingai. Šis straipsnis yra konceptualaus pobūdžio, atliktas apžvelgiant antrinius duomenis, nagrinėjant mentorystės sąvoką, grįžtant prie įvairių mentorystės modelių ir nagrinėjant tris atvejus, siekiant nustatyti mentorystės svarbą ir aktualumą aukštojo mokslo institucijose (VŠĮ). Straipsnio pabaigoje pateikiamos aiškios rekomendacijos įvairioms aukštojo mokslo suinteresuotosioms šalims.

Raktiniai žodžiai: Knygos: mentorystė, mentorystė, aukštasis mokslas, aukštosios mokyklos.