

# Mentoring as a Developmental Tool for Higher Education

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*Higher education, a setting devoted to the enhancement of learning, inquiry, and development, continues to lack effective development for faculty. Mentoring relationships seek to provide enhancement, yet few mentoring programs exist. This literature review examines forms of mentoring, its benefits, barriers to implementation, means for successful implementation, and the alignment of mentoring practice with theory. Drawing on the Marsick and Watkins model of informal and incidental learning, a model of mentoring in higher education is proposed.*

Keywords: Mentoring, Faculty Development, Higher Education

## Problem Statement

Multiple angles of research have been conducted regarding mentoring. One angle has examined mentoring within the realm of higher education, a developmental learning ground. Many would argue the purpose of higher education is to enhance learning, inquiry, and development for individuals within our society. In such a setting, mentoring, a common method of employee development, would then fit within the scope of enhancing learning, inquiry, and development for faculty. Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship that fosters support between a mentor and protégé. While this seems to be an ideal developmental tool for employees, few faculty mentoring programs exist in higher education and little is known about mentoring faculty in higher education. This problem will be addressed by reviewing literature in the areas of human resource development, higher education, business, and psychology.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the research related to faculty mentoring programs in higher education. The following questions were developed and used to guide this review of the literature:

1. What are the benefits of mentoring programs?
2. What are the barriers to developing mentoring programs in higher education? How can they be overcome?
3. How can theory guide the implementation of mentoring in higher education?

## Theoretical Framework

“Informal and incidental learning is at the heart of adult education because of its learner-centered focus and the lessons that can be learned from life experience” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 25). Informal learning can occur anywhere, but is not typically highly structured. It can, however, be intentionally encouraged to occur with an organization. Higher education institutions could employ such encouragement for faculty development. Popular examples of informal learning include mentoring, coaching, networking, and self-directed learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Informal learning, such as mentoring, aligns with what we currently know about adult learning. Zemke and Zemke (1995) posit several ideas: adults prefer meaning in their learning; adults rely on prior knowledge and experience; adults are oriented toward solving problems and directly applying their learning in an immediate fashion.

The culture within higher education also needs to be examined when discussing mentoring programs. Tierney’s (1988) work provides a framework for higher education culture which includes six major components: Environment, Mission, Socialization, Information, Strategy, and Leadership. The socialization element represents one aspect in which mentoring can contribute additional information. Within Tierney’s (1988) framework, he asserts that socialization takes into account answering such questions as, “How do members become socialized? How is it articulated? What do we need to know to survive/excel in this organization?” (p. 8). Such questions build a foundation in which mentoring seeks to provide answers.

It is also essential to realize that the system and individual should be suited with one another. Schein's (1971, as cited in Hall, 2002) Model of the Organizational Career helps describe the career from both the individual and organizational perspective. Understanding this three-dimensional model in terms of moves an individual can make within an organization and the types of boundaries that exist within the organization can apply to those entering into mentoring relationships.

## **Methodology**

For the purposes of this literature review, multiple databases were searched to explore formal mentoring programs in the higher education setting. Such databases include JSTOR, ERIC, and EBSCO. Key descriptors and key words used include the following: mentoring, formal mentoring, informal learning, higher education, university, college, faculty, professional development, and employee development. Sources included in the review had direct relevance to informal learning, the nature of mentoring, forms of mentoring, barriers to implementing mentoring programs, and mentoring in higher education. Many of the references include academic and practitioner journals while a few sources include conference proceedings and books. Abstracts provided initial support for sources to be selected, and then a complete reading of research continued the narrowing of sources by relevance.

## **Review of the Literature**

This literature review examines the emergence of the concept of mentoring and its various components, forms of mentoring, and understood benefits of mentoring. This section concludes with a discussion of how higher education institutions can support the development of mentoring programs and how they can successfully be implemented based upon the theory of informal or incidental learning.

### *The Nature of Mentoring*

The concept of mentoring dates back to Greek mythology in the book the *Odyssey*. Odysseus left the care of his household, specifically his son, to his friend Mentor. Hence, the term mentor is often associated with concepts of advisor, friend, teacher, and counselor. Some of the earliest mentoring research utilized this classical concept with Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) describing mentoring as a foundational relationship to facilitate young adolescents into adulthood.

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" (p. 18). Crucial components of mentoring relationships include personal and professional development (Rosser & Egan, 2005).

Hall (2002) 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" (p. 147). He emphasizes the primary function of such relationship is to develop the protégé's learning capacity by transmitting knowledge, organizational culture, wisdom, and experiences.

### *Mentoring Components*

Kram has embarked on much research directly regarding mentoring. She (1983) proposed a conceptual model identifying both career development and psychosocial functions of mentoring. As defined by Kram (1983) "career functions are those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance career advancement," such as sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments (p. 614). Psychosocial functions are defined as "those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in the managerial role," such as role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship (p. 614). These functions define the multiple roles a mentor may portray, as well as the disposition in which the protégé develops.

Fast forward three decades from Kram's original proposal and the functions of mentoring are still being deliberated. With the growing forms of mentoring, such as peer-to-peer mentoring, group mentoring, and virtual or e-mentoring, the standard or typical functions, roles, and/or expectations may need to be redefined (Gibson, 2004).

Various disciplines have studied mentoring, such as organizational behavior, management, human development, and psychology. The underlying factor in these studies, no matter the focus, is mentoring may be a prominent "factor leading to upward mobility in employment, success in education, and personal development" (Crawford & Smith, 2005, p. 52). Mentoring research can take many directions. Various studies have been based upon relations of those involved (Noe, 1988), sex-role orientation (Scandura & Ragins, 1993), and race and gender (James, 2000; Parker & Kram, 1993; Thomas, 1990). More research suggests that even organizational culture and hierarchical

structure can affect mentoring experiences (Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996).

### *Forms of Mentoring*

Mentoring can take on formal or informal relationships. Although the length of relationships may vary depending upon the form, there are typically four predictable, yet not fully distinct, phases that each form encompasses. An Initiation phase begins the process in which the relationship begins. Next a Cultivation phase launches where the relationship reaches new levels; individuals continue to test the career and psychosocial functions that one another can provide. Following, Separation occurs which allows individuals to regain more autonomy, both structurally within the organization and emotionally. Finally, the last phase is Redefinition. The relationship takes on a new style, either in form or possibly ending completely (Kram, 1983).

Traditionally, mentoring has been considered more of an informal relationship between senior individuals (mentor) who are paired with younger individuals (protégé) in an organization. As Galbraith (2001) asserts, “informal mentoring is a relationship that occurs that is unplanned, and, in most cases, not expected. A certain ‘chemistry’ emerges drawing two individuals together for the purpose of professional, personal, and psychological growth and development” (p. 32).

Conversely, formal mentoring allows the organizations to define the overall process, the extent of the relationship, and the timeframe in which mentoring will occur (Foster, Poole, & Coulson-Clark, 2000-2001). Formal mentoring is often initiated by an organization to assist with one or more of the following functions: new employee socialization/enculturation, complement established formal learning processes, improve performance, and/or realize potential (Gibb, 1999).

Phillips-Jones (1983) offers some insight for those looking to incorporate a formal mentoring program into their organization. She suggests that the mentoring be part of a larger career development initiative, allow participation to be voluntary, keep each phase short and manageable, and to select the mentors and protégés who wish to participate carefully. In addition, an orientation should be provided to demonstrate how flexibility in the program is allowed and encouraged, challenges should be expected and prepared for, and monitoring of the mentoring program is necessary for future tweaking.

### *Mentoring in Higher Education*

Levinson et al. (1978) understood that mentoring was extremely underdeveloped in the setting of higher education. He stated, “Our system of higher education, though officially committed to fostering intellectual and personal development of students, provides mentoring that is generally limited in quantity and poor in quality” (p. 334). In a setting where individuals often work alone and many major resources are shared, such as secretaries and ample space, there is a constant battle for individuals to acclimate themselves to within the culture of higher education. As one professor questions the ‘do your own thing’ concept, he notes that this often causes those in academe to struggle with their own needs and demands of the career, which leaves less time available to assist others. “Young faculty are supposed to be independent; a lot of times they don’t know what they are doing—teaching, committees, supervision of students, sole authorships—and there is very little support. It’s sink or swim” (Wright & Wright, 1987, p. 207).

Another motive to develop faculty in academe is for investment purposes. Typical academic budgets often reserve around 90 percent of the funds for faculty salaries. “By the time a new faculty member reaches the point of receiving or being denied tenure, the institution has invested anywhere between \$500,000 to \$1,000,000” in these individuals (Foster et al, 2000-2001, p. 2). If large sums of money and time are being invested in those working within higher education, the institutions should encourage growth and development in an effort to gain a ‘return’ on their investment by mentoring individuals to ensure attainment of tenure rather than continually rehiring faculty who end up being denied tenure due to lack of employee development. An obvious need has been identified, yet little has been done within higher education to meet the challenge.

### *The Benefits of Mentoring in Higher Education*

Mentoring programs are often considered 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). “Increased job satisfaction, higher salary, faster promotion, firmer career plans, and the increased probability that a protégé will also become a mentor” are also common associations with mentored protégés (Wright & Wright, 1987, p. 204).

Specifically examining benefits to protégés within higher education, mentoring can address career development,

networking, professional development, and personal identity characteristics. Attention can be directed toward career development by mentors offering guidance on the development of writing, research, and analytical skills. Working on research collectively and then co-authoring publications can assist a protégé in learning the trials and tribulations of academic research. Inviting their protégés to professional educational association meetings or conferences allows networking to take place. The “unwritten or vague norms” that exist within academia can be best explained by a mentor to a protégé when gaining socialization through professional development.

Protégés who had received mentoring in higher education believe their positive socialization into academe is a result of their mentors qualities: (a) they were knowledgeable about the culture and expectations within their institution and academe; (b) they were well respected members of the institution and viewed as outstanding researchers and scholars; (c) they were supportive and accessible to the protégés; and, (d) they shared a similar philosophical orientation with the protégés (Dubetz & Turley, 2001).

Although most believe protégés are the sole beneficiaries in mentoring relationships, the mentors also reap rewards in these relationships. For example, much assistance could be received mutually from the protégé for multiple responsibilities. In addition, the mentor is able to make use of his/her accumulated experiences to further the experience of the protégé (Ragins & Scandura, 1999). Further benefits to the mentor include a revived view of his/her role; enhanced job satisfaction; self-reflection; additional professional relationships; peer recognition; and a proactive role is taken in regard to learning and development (Rawlings, 2002).

When identifying benefits as they apply within higher education, again the professional and career development, networking, and personal identity characteristics surface. Mentors’ academic and scholarly thinking is rejuvenated or provocatively stimulated. Academic knowledge and experiences are passed on, which may involve research and teaching skills and knowledge. (Wright & Wright, 1987).

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 employee development interventions (Gibb, 1999). In addition, institutions may notice increased commitment and productivity throughout the institution and decreased turnover among employees, 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.).

### *Barriers to Mentoring in Higher Education*

After addressing all of the positive outcomes that mentoring provides, one must question why more programs are not available. If mentoring can provide such great benefits, there must be some lingering doubts among higher education institutions preventing broader implementation of mentoring programs.

Oftentimes, the most recognized barrier identified by protégés is that mentoring is only available to a ‘select few’ individuals—those who are on the ‘fast track’ for promotion. Allowing voluntary participation in formal programs can alleviate the alienation of some potential protégés. Another drawback that is often noted by an overwhelming number of potential mentors/protégés is the time and energy that such relationships involve. Again, the benefits often outweigh the costs in terms of time and energy because of what can actually be accomplished.

Mentors may even feel that if they develop their protégés to their highest potential, they may be replaced by the up-and-coming protégé. Organizations can ease the burden associated with this thought by demonstrating that both individuals actually develop throughout the process, and replacement is highly unlikely within the organization due to mentoring. Instead, organizations, mentors, and protégés should consider this as a development tool for their succession planning (Ragins & Scandura, 1999). In addition, many potential mentors endure the feeling of being pulled in too many directions in needing to prepare and teach classes, publish, serve on committees, advise students, and other campus responsibilities. Thus, they do not seize the opportunity of serving as a mentor. However, the benefits to acting as a mentor may actually assist in the overwhelming responsibilities.

Other barriers include counterproductive relationships. Fury (1979, as cited in Wright & Wright, 1987) identified five potential drawbacks of mentoring that can be applied within higher education: “(a) the mentor may lose power or influence, (b) the protégé may be limited to one person’s perspective, (c) the mentor could leave the organization, (d) the male mentor may want sexual favors from the female protégé, and (e) the protégé could become attached to a poor mentor” (p. 206). While these drawbacks are all based on the protégé’s perspective, mentors may also be hindered in such mentoring relationships. A mentor may misidentify potential in a protégé; when the potential is not seen, this may reflect negatively upon the mentor. Characteristics of the protégé may make the relationship extremely difficult to handle effectively: the protégé may not be able to accept criticism, he/she may constantly need guidance, or listening skills may be lacking. Whether a mentor or protégé, mentoring relationships may prove to be trying (Wright & Wright, 1987).

### *Overcoming Barriers to Mentoring in Higher Education*

Proactive responsibility can be taken by individuals and institutions to overcome professed barriers from the onset. Individuals, both in the mentor and protégé capacities, need to assess if mentoring is appropriate in their own situation. If so, viable steps can be taken to ensure a more positive experience. Jenkins (2005) expands upon the importance of mentoring and the individual responsibility of a prospective protégé: “Mentors are the most important resource for success on the job. Finding them can be a task; positioning yourself to be selected as a mentee is another” (p. 81).

In preparing for being selected as a protégé, individuals should gauge their current skills and identify what additional skills are needed or desired. These skills can include technical, professional, and personal skills (Alderman, 2000). This process can assist achieving an appropriate aligning with a prospective mentor. Protégés should consider the prospective mentor’s work experience and style, age, gender, cultural background, and professional networking capabilities. To take part in a fulfilling mentoring process, protégés should be able to set goals, commit their time and effort, be open to reflection and criticism, have the ability to assess themselves, and personally develop and grow by stretching their ‘comfort zone’ (Alderman, 2000).

In order for the mentors to benefit as desired, they need to understand what is actually required or expected of their role in this interpersonal relationship. One must be committed mentally and in terms of time, be prepared to listen and encourage, develop a ‘plan’ with the protégé that can be monitored or adjusted, share personal and professional experiences, offer opportunities, and be able to also personally grow and develop. In terms of personal qualities, mentors typically espouse intelligence and integrity, professional knowledge and skills, enthusiasm, and a professional image (Alderman, 2000).

*Aligning Mentoring Practice with Theory*

Realizing that mentoring revolves much around life experiences, it is apparent that the theory of informal learning can help to understand the application of mentoring programs. Utilizing the model for informal or incidental learning can assist in institutions understanding how mentoring programs are applied among their faculty.

Because informal learning can take place anywhere there are individuals with a need, motivation, or opportunity for learning, higher education institutions present an obvious setting. Marsick and Volpe (1999, as cited in Marsick & Watkins, 2001) identified the following statements that characterize informal learning:

- It is integrated with daily routines.
- It is triggered by an internal or external jolt.
- It is not highly conscious.
- It is haphazard and influenced by chance.
- It is an inductive process of reflection and action.
- It is linked to learning of others (p. 28).

Taking the aforementioned characteristics into consideration, many apply direction to those in mentoring relationships within higher education. Daily knowledge and experiences are integrated within the mentoring experience. Whether a formal or informal mentoring program, the mentoring activities are not typically highly conscious, and some relationships happen out of chance. In addition, much reflection and action occur throughout the mentoring phases among both the mentors and protégés who are both learning.

The Marsick and Watkins’s (2001) model is shown in Figure 1. The context surrounding mentoring is the mentors’ and protégés’ everyday occurrences and experiences (inner circle). This is the center of informal or incidental learning. The whole environmental context (outer circle) takes into consideration when situations occur, interpretations, choices, and actions surrounding mentors and protégés in their informal or incidental learning experience.

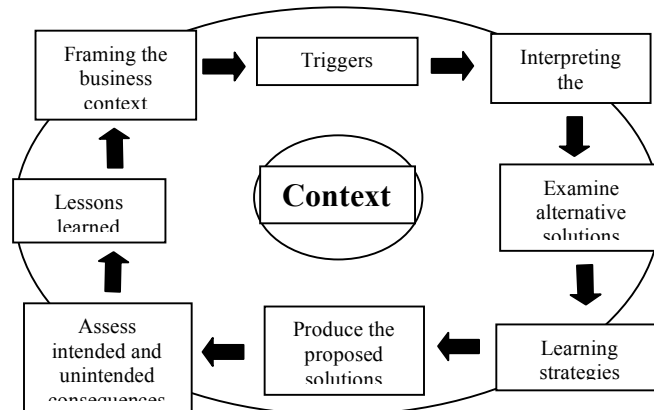


Figure 1. Marsick and Watkins’s Informal and Incidental Learning Model as Adapted with Cseh.

The Proposed Model of Mentoring in Higher Education is shown in Figure 2. This model is an adaptation of informal and incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001) to mentoring in higher education. It represents higher education as the setting in which informal learning can be reconceptualized as mentoring for junior faculty. Just as the circular notion of their model does not necessitate sequential steps within a process, the same would be true with informal learning within higher education. The connection between pieces of the model – as represented by arrows – is theoretically where mentor-protégé interaction continually occurs. For example, the process can begin with a need, opportunity, or challenge in which a mentor or protégé can learn, grow, or develop in some manner (see *Need, Opportunity, or Challenge* in Figure 2). Once a mentoring relationship begins, much interpretation and reflection can take place throughout the process because of alternative solutions, strategies, and learning moments being postulated. This cycle can provide new needs, opportunities, or challenges to be addressed as part of the mentoring process.

The academic and environmental context provides for much interpretation and reflection. Within academe, for example, the context could be as simple as clarifying one objective of the faculty role. Or, it could be as complex as balancing multiple faculty roles and expectations in addition to work-life balance. Upon such interpretation and reflection provided by the mentoring experience, alternatives are presented to a protégé in response to the need, opportunity, or challenge (see *Interpretation and Reflection* and *Possibility of Alternatives* in Figure 2). A mentor can provide such possible alternatives because of their recollections from similar situations or experiences.

Throughout the process the mentor and protégé are simultaneously learning. Amid the mentoring interaction, a proposed strategy or solution seems more apparent (see *Proposed Strategy or Solution* in Figure 2). Such strategy or solution may be a mentor assisting a protégé with new instructional techniques he/she was not entirely familiar with, but a course would benefit greatly from it being utilized. It may also be a mentor and protégé teaming together on a research agenda in which both will gain from the experience. Such solution could also include a mentor explaining to a protégé that turning down certain requests is acceptable; it is not necessary to feel obligated to take on too much as a new faculty member. When the strategy or solution is proposed, again interpretation and reflection should occur (see *Interpretation and Reflection* in Figure 2). This allows a mentor and protégé to continue learning why such strategy or solution is best for this identified need, opportunity, or challenge. Once understood, the implementation can occur (see *Implementation of Strategy or Solution* in Figure 2). The final learning and reflection allows for a protégé and mentor to assess if the outcome addresses the initial need, opportunity, or challenge. These lessons and reflections can be utilized in future contexts when new needs, opportunities, or challenges arise, bringing the mentoring cycle full circle.

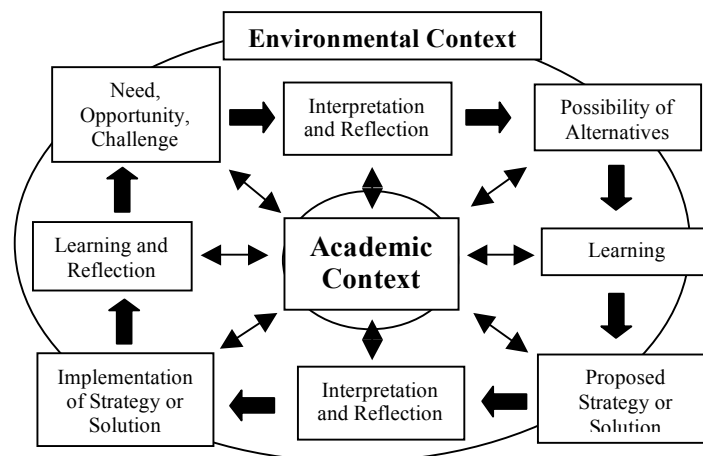


Figure 2. Proposed Model of Mentoring in Higher Education

## Conclusions

For a greater probability of future success, organizations can learn to overcome such professed barriers of mentoring relationships and incorporate such programs into their everyday workplace routine.

Even though mentoring has been around for decades, the definitive advantages are still being discovered. Research has been conducted to follow up on the benefits of mentoring. Fagenson (1989) conducted a study to determine if mentoring truly resulted in the positive effects that have been noted as benefits. When comparing protégés to non-protégés in an organization, it was concluded that an individual's career experiences and their

protégé status are positively related. “Mentored individuals reported having more career mobility/opportunity, recognition, satisfaction, and promotions than non-mentored individuals.” (p. 316). Ragins, Cotton, and Miller (2000) expanded upon this study and posit that the quality of the relationship also attributes to the success of the protégé. Therefore, this demonstrates the necessity for developing superior mentoring programs that can be implemented into the institutional culture, be monitored, and modified if necessary.

The dilemma still being debated is whether or not the most benefits are garnered from informal or formal mentoring relationships. Organizations see the benefits that informal relationships provide and want to gain the benefits more broadly across the institution by implementing formalized processes. Gibson (2004) relates that many studies have actually shown informal relationships to be more positive for protégés in comparison to formal mentoring. This is explained qualitatively because of how the relationship develops in an informal mentoring circumstance. Perceived satisfaction of the mentoring relationship may also contribute to the outcome more so than whether the relationship is formal or informal (Ragins et al., 2000). While the intentions of formalized mentoring programs are evident, it is difficult to duplicate strong relationships that develop informally (Nemanick, 2000).

Although a conundrum still remains about the ‘best’ form of mentoring, some type of mutual benefit is still obtainable from formal mentoring programs in higher education. Hezlett and Gibson (2005) acknowledge that both forms have the “potential” to be beneficial and successful, but this potential may not always be fully delivered due to multiple variables (p. 451). Because of the positive results that have been identified for mentored individuals, it would behoove organizations to more seriously consider mentoring programs as part of their organizational strategy. Formal mentoring can also allow for protégés to gain insight from multiple mentors throughout the program. Aligned with Kram’s “relationship constellations” concept, individuals can rely upon the developmental support from various sources. Each mentor can provide diverse support for the protégé based upon the multiple functions mentors exemplify (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Long-term advantages of employee developmental relationships should be considered within the setting of higher education institutions. Understanding the outcomes mentoring provides is important, but truly acknowledging how and why mentoring occurs from the onset is even more valuable. This understanding provides insight into the application of the model for mentoring in higher education. Then, once mentoring occurs and the protégés realize the importance of growth that occurs within such relationship, they can then pass on their mentoring knowledge and experience to someone else rising in the academia ranks resulting in a continual cycle.

### **How this Research Contributes to New Knowledge in HRD**

Mentoring is a well-known concept of employee development and an understood practice within the realm of HRD. While mentoring has been researched for several decades, there is a lack of application of mentoring demonstrated by the few programs available or offered within higher education. This obvious challenge can be examined in many facets. Current formal mentoring programs within higher education provide insight in how to advance the art of mentoring in additional higher education settings and beyond. As has been realized, the lack of formal mentoring programs offered in institutions demonstrates the need to develop a better understanding in terms of the application of these programs. Considering faculty is the direct link to our world’s future workers and leaders in various areas of expertise, continual faculty development is paramount. The proposed model of informal learning in higher education institutions via mentoring attempts to conceptualize such application. Development, implementation, evaluation, and refinement of mentoring programs will provide increased opportunities for individuals, specifically faculty, as they continue to embark in the academic arena.

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