Effective Practices in Graduate Student Supervision Using the Mentoring and Coaching Approaches

Norhasni Zainal Abiddin, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate related elements in mentoring and coaching which could be implemented in graduate student supervision. The article is basically designed by reviewing and discussing the related findings on the mentoring and coaching literatures. The element that used in the mentoring and coaching is studied in order to get better approaches in graduate student supervision practices. With all of the combination of elements in these two approaches, graduate student supervision model is developed. The main focus of the model is to enhance the relationship between two parties towards the effectiveness of practices in graduate student supervision.

Keywords: Coaching, Graduate Student, Mentoring, Supervision.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the effective ways in relation to graduate student and supervisor using the reviewed of the literature on mentoring and coaching. The findings from the related literature have been reviewed and discussed to provide suggestions for a better model on graduate student supervision practices. Mentoring and coaching are all part of educational training to develop people in the profession. Of course they are not the same as graduate student supervision, but they have some similarities. They are related to the self-development, professional growth and career development of the supervisee in order for the supervisee to fulfil and gain greater experience. It is also to improve the performance of the supervisee towards achieving their objectives. Mentoring and coaching have their strengths and weaknesses. Supervisory approaches vary and depend of the people involved, the place of meeting and the terms of the relationship. Therefore, by looking at these two approaches, some of the elements in each of it may not be included in one another. By taking this into account, all the related elements in these two approaches could be allocated together to enhance the effectiveness of the relationship between two parties.

On the other hand, supervision of graduate student is concerned with the mechanics of ensuring that the student makes good progress towards completion of their study (Hockey 1996). The supervision literature indicates that ethical, technical and methodological problems can be minimised or prevented if all the participants in the relationship strive to enter it with clear expectations for their respective roles and about the rules for their interactions (Goodyear et al. 1992). Therefore, both the individual and the supervisor must be diligent about explicitly working together to establish mutual expectations, responsibilities and benefits for both of them (Phillips and Pugh 2000). It can be seen as a very useful way to investigate the elements in mentoring and coaching as they are part of the learning process in order to help the graduate student achieving their objectives.

THE REVIEWED OF THE LITERATURE ON MENTORING AND COACHING

Mentoring as it has been argued is the most effective way to transfer skills and knowledge quickly and inspire loyalty in new employees to co-operate in an organization (Robinson 2001). Generally, it is a popular approach in education and business. A mentor is identified as someone who teaches the student in a personal and close long-term relationship that allows critical concentration on the task performance (Kirkham 1993). Before 1990s, most authors
used the word ‘supervisor’ in reference to a mentor at school with the meaning of someone who directs or oversees and watches over students so as to maintain order (Gardiner 1989; Zimpher et al. 1980), but increasingly, we see references to the mentoring of young people entering the teaching profession.

Bullock (1988) was on the opinion that a mentor should establish a good rapport with his protégés, assess their needs in consultation with other interested and appropriate parties, and end the mentoring relationship at the appropriate time and in an appropriate manner. The relationship facilitates personal growth and can also encourage and enable learning in order to maximise the mentee’s potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be (Fisher 1994; Mackenzie 2004). The relationship should be dynamic (Danziger 2001) and reciprocal and can be emotionally intense. It should assist with career development (Smith and West-Burham 1993).

Coaching and mentoring are similar activities and, in the working context, a mentor can be called upon to fulfil both roles. The term coaching is often used interchangeably with counseling and mentoring, but many scholars differentiate these activities (Burdett 1998; Minter and Thomas 2000). Counseling generally addresses the employee’s emotional state and the causes of personal crises and problems, and it involves short-term interventions designed to remedy problems that interfere with the employee’s job performance (King and Eaton 1999), while mentoring typically describes a long term process that is developmental and career focused and covers all life structures (Burdett 1998; Hansman 2002). For Pearson (2001), the clear differentiation between the two is that, typically, mentoring is a long-term arrangement and has a wide perspective. A coach may or may not be a member of the same organisation as the coachee, so the coaching arrangement may be short-term for the immediate improvement of performance and its focus may be narrow. They require different methods, in that coaches ‘instruct’ and mentors ‘counsel’.

A general literature on coaching exists from a sports and athletics perspective (Feltz et al. 1999). As documented by Parsloe (1999), coaching is derived from university slang for a private tutor or instructor in sport. Therefore, much of the literature about coaching in the context of management has been drawn from sports coaching (Kilburg 1996; McLean and Kuo 2000). Coaching is, in essence, about human relationships, between the coach and coachee, and the coach and the organisation (Pearson 2001). The relationship between coach and athlete is an empathetic one extending beyond the instrumental operation of the process, which takes place over an extended period of time (Lyle 1985). Adler (1965) stated that coaching has long been established in the history of music. In the beginning of opera, a musician had to be everything at once: composer, arranger, voice teacher, music teacher, conductor and coach. Adler (1965) proposes that in music, the purpose of coaching is to build a repertoire and preparation for specific performances-concerts, auditions or contests. In such preparation, the coach must be very persistent, even regarding the most minute details, so that a piece is completely ready for performance.

Antonioni (2000) and Vander (2000) identify coaching in business. Coaching for them is a partnership between a manager and an individual who reports directly to him or her in which the coach focuses on helping the coachee to optimize his or her potential. Coaching can help an organization create an environment of meaningful jobs and a positive atmosphere by eliminating barriers that prevent employees from reaching their full potential. It can empower employees to be more productive and improve morale (Franklin 2000; Selman and Fullerton 2004). There are three primary strategies for coaching: (1) creation of a relationship between the coach and each individual as a part of the team; (2) observation to uncover technical and skill deficiencies that need coaching; and (3) demonstration of alternative ways to increase an individual’s effectiveness (Ridlehuber 2001).

SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE FINDINGS ON MENTORING AND COACHING

In reference to the literature review about coaching and mentoring, it has been accepted that for an effective practices in student-supervisor relationship the approaches in coaching and mentoring could be best combined.
Mentoring, which is very synonym to the relationship with a student and teacher at school level is very useful to be adopted in graduate student supervision. This is due to the approach used was more to personal related help as well as professional ones. At this level, the teacher’s shoulder would be the place for the student to cry on. They can seek information or revealing their personal problems without having too officially related with the teacher which can be seen as the best chance for the supervisor and student to develop their relationship. On the other hand, coaching has been popularly used for many years in the sport and business context. Coach sometimes has to be strict during performing their duty in order to discipline the athlete for them to success in their missions or games. Coach also at times, has to react as a consultant and motivator in order to instill morale of athletes. This situation could also be applied in graduate student supervision, in which the student must have a very determined objective throughout the training period. It is also similar to the coaching approach in business and music which a coach focuses on building the trainee’s skills to improve the trainee’s performance. In other word, being a graduate student, he/she has to accept various approaches given by his/her supervisor whether it is bitter such as a supervisor wanted a prompt and urgent progress.

As stated in the literature, mentoring is a long term relationship as compared to coaching. Therefore, it is very interesting that the graduate student supervision could be placed in the middle between those two approaches. It was due to the fact that the focus of the graduate student supervision is varying depending on level of education process of the student either Masters or PhD. If the student is studying Masters Degree, the relationship of both parties would last for at least one and a half year on full time basis. However for full-time PhD students they normally take about four years to complete their study. The focus on coaching might be narrowed as compared to mentoring, therefore, Masters Degree student-supervisor relationship would be more closed to coaching approach and as for PhD student-supervisor relationship, mentoring approach could be more meaningful. The relationship for PhD students and their supervisor must be very close in order for the students to get more benefits personally and professionally. Supervisor should apply different approach in supervising graduate students whether the approach is suitable to instruct or counsel the students. If the supervisor using more instruction approach, therefore the supervisor is using coaching style and if counseling approach is being used, it would be closed to mentoring style. Both approaches are good, however they would be more meaningful if the supervisor could supervise the students depending on their ability and level/progress of study because some students might be very independent and some might be not.

Literature also stated that, counseling is one of the important elements in coaching and mentoring since the approach is more towards personal related help which could make the student felt more comfortable in their relationship. As an example, The Counseling Model for Effective Helping is using the counseling skills to enhance the achievement of students. Egan (1998) describes the three stages of counseling as: (1) identifying and clarifying problems situations and unused opportunities; (2) goal setting with the developing of a more desirable scenario; and (3) action and moving towards the preferred scenario. Integral to the process is the concept of client self-responsibility, which is strengthened by success, modeling, encouragement and reducing fear or anxiety. Successful counseling will be depending on enhancing the ability of the trainee to be self-aware and engage in constructive self-appraisal of his or her practice. Therefore, both, the supervisor and student should know and understand their responsibilities in order to ensure their successful relationship. Students must be able to communicate well with their supervisor, report their study progress and meet their supervisor regularly. Whatever the approach been used, the main objective in coaching or mentoring must be to improve student’s performance towards achieving their goals. As a conclusion, coaching and mentoring approaches could lead the graduate student and his/her supervisor improving their supervision practice.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the effective practices model between supervisor and graduate student must include the steps identified below: (1) Student and supervisor should identify, clarify problems situations and create suitable desired objective; (2) Student and supervisor must develop interaction and understanding and both should emphasize on personal feelings and interpersonal relation as well as the objectives concerned; (3) Student should discuss her/his progress and the supervisor has to give feedback and advice on the student progress using the counseling approach; (4) Supervisor should use negotiations and problem-solving method to solve the student’s problem and a student should develop new skills; (5) Student must self evaluate her/himself and the supervisor should encourage student to achieve the objectives within the time available; and (6) Step six recycles into step one, with both parties either focusing on the original improvement goal or setting a new one.

Figure 1: The Graduate Student Supervision Model in Improving Practices in Supervision

Step one begins with student and supervisor should identify, clarify problems situations and create suitable desired objective. In maintaining a good relationship, the supervisor and supervisee must have certain goals or objectives and making realistic plans. Antonioni (2000) states that a coach should help to crystallise visions and values, clarify and define strategy and coordinate resources to achieve goals. Therefore, the mentor’s/coach’s/supervisor’s role is to help learners to achieve their goals by acting as counsellor, facilitator, advisor and guide. It has been focused in mentoring and coaching that in helping learners, one should be a good counsellor by consulting them in an appropriate manner.
However, in making the plans realistically the students should expect to work within deadlines (Phillips and Pugh 2000) and to have a planned timetable (Frischer and Larsson 2000). This action plan or timetable is essential for better planning and in order students to manage and occupy their time more effectively. Therefore, by having clear goals, both a student and supervisor could move to the next stage smoothly.

Step two in this model proposed that student and supervisor develops interaction and understanding and both should emphasize on personal feelings and interpersonal relation as well as the objectives concerned. The relationship built must be on trust, respect, empathize and honest with each other (Ridlehuber 2001). By having a good relationship with the supervisor, a student can work in conducive environment and can make both parties comfortable by sharing ideas or knowledge towards the supervisee development. Therefore, in having a good relationship, both parties should have regular meeting. In mentoring and coaching, meetings vary widely, in frequency and overall length. At the same time, the frequency of meetings depend on the urgency of the goals and the level of involvement of the person being supervised and can be either once a week to every two or three weeks (Bolch 2001). Clearly, McQueeney (1996) identified that the nature of the graduate student-supervisor relationship will be influenced by the duration of the research, the level of research undertaken and the stage the student is at in the research project. Therefore, step two focuses on the interaction between two parties in order to develop the relationship. If this step can be implemented effectively, it is easier for both parties to proceed to step three.

Step three in this model proposed that student is to discuss their progress and the supervisor suppose to give feedback and advice on the student’s progress using the counselling approach. In mentoring context, Wilkin (1992) highlights that the mentee should report their progress and discuss it with the mentor. In addition, Antonioni (2000) mentions the importance of giving prompt feedback on coaching. An effective supervisor will have access to a range of teaching and learning methods, and will be able to adapt to individual supervisees and to provide clear advice to facilitate learning using the counselling approach. Counselling is an important function because it can lead to an improved relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. This counselling approach may consists of support, feedback, providing counsel, consultation, teaching, evaluation, motivation and the monitoring of professional issues. However, in the graduate student supervision context, supervisor should give advice on direction, completeness, clarity, methodology, topic selection (Spear 2000) and feedback is given on progress of written work (Russell 1996). If student and supervisor could play their role effectively, they may have a very effective relationship towards achieving the objectives. Therefore, the next step proposed that student could gain benefits towards the relationship.

Step four in this model proposed that a supervisor is to use negotiations and problem-solving method to solve the student’s problem and a student should develop new skills. As stated in The Counselling Model for Effective Helping, the negotiation and problem-solving is important in sorting out conflict. This model suggested that all parties involved are able to maintain their self-esteem at all stages in the negotiation and at the end student should be able to develop new skills of negotiation (Egan 1998). As mentioned by Seifert (2004) among the skills that learner should gained from coaching are: (1) enhance his self-awareness, learning from mistakes and successes; (2) identify and overcome obstacles; (3) develop new ideas and strategies; (4) build self-confidence and self-reliance; (5) develop and apply new skill; and (6) design action plans, and follow them through in order to advance the career. In mentoring, many authors highlight the new skills should a student inquire which include analytical skills like interpretation (Fisher 1994) and creative thinking (Brooks and Sikes 1997). As a graduate student, one must be diligent, conscientious and hardworking, open to criticism, willing to listen to others and to talk openly (McQueeney 1996). If students could develop new skills, they may achieve a part of their objectives due to their performance have been improved. Negotiation is important to ensure that the relationship is not an emotional intense. The next step then proposed on checking the effectiveness of the relationship by evaluating the student’s performance.
Step five in this model proposed that student should self-evaluate and the supervisor should encourage student to achieve the objective within the time available. It has been mentioned that successful mentoring could be defined by reference to evaluation by the mentee. Carter and Lewis (1994) take the view that a mentor needs to be able to support a learner having regard to his particular strengths and weaknesses in the process of development. Whatever the specific functional or technical skills, at the end of the process or relationship, a learner will probably need to employ some of the following: (1) learning skills; (2) setting goals; (3) identifying own learning needs; (4) planning own learning; (5) listening; (6) accepting help and feedback; and (7) risk taking. However, in the coaching context, Seifert (2004) suggest that if a coachee can make an evaluation of himself, at the end of the day, he can expect to: (1) enhance his self-awareness, learning from mistakes and successes; (2) identify and overcome obstacles; (3) develop new ideas and strategies; (4) build self-confidence and self-reliance; (5) develop and apply new skill; and (6) design action plans, and follow them through in order to advance the career. Therefore, as a graduate student one must be able to make their own judgment on their personal and professional progress and development.

Step six will be recycled into step one, with both parties either focusing on the original improvement goal or setting a new one. By identifying the mistakes, both parties could check the reason for the failure. Therefore, both could improve the necessary aspects and take it into account in order to improve practice in supervision.

**CONCLUSION**

It is hoped that the model which has been designed in this research and several aspects of this article will contribute significantly to the development of higher education and be useful to the people involved, whether they are academicians, students, departments/schools, universities, researchers or trainers in order for them to play their role effectively. Mentoring and coaching have their strong characteristics in it. Each of these elements could be very meaningful to be adopted in the graduate student supervision in order to have a very well-managed relationship in graduate student supervision practices. These two approaches with the selected elements in each of them can be seen as the best combination to be implemented in the graduate student supervision practices. The model proposed is a guideline which could lead the relationship goes well throughout the agreed time-frame.

**REFERENCES**


