Mentor and Mentee Relationship in Library and Information Science Profession

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring has been recognized as an effective and efficient method of helping newly recruited information professionals to deal with the job challenges facing them. In most library and information science schools, the curriculum does not address the issue of mentoring as a human resource development strategy, thereby leaving new graduates to their fate in their various workplaces. Mentoring, therefore, becomes the ideal practical solution to tackle the problem headlong. This opinion paper x-rays the concepts, types and strategies, essentials, as well as challenges of mentoring in the librarianship profession. The article concludes that mentoring is a two-way mechanism in that, the old can mentors the young and vice-versa to achieve the desired changes expected. The paper recommends among others that, there should be evolving practices that mandate practicing librarians to organise and attend job-related training at all levels to build staff capacity capable of rejigging library services to retain the best brains that can sustain library activities meaningfully.

Keywords: Mentoring; Mentor-mentee relationship; Library; Profession; Collaborative job; Problem-solving.

1. INTRODUCTION

Library and information science is a noble profession that is full of people passionate about meeting the information needs of individuals. As opined by Aboyade and Aboyade (2017), librarians tend to be passionate about their career choice thus leading to a better professional role. They feel they have a "*calling*" to connect people with information. Librarians learn about everything and appreciate helping people and enjoy moving with people, technology, and information (Chrysoula, Georgios, Miltiadis, & Grigorios, 2018). This means that, at every point in the service life, the mentor-mentee relationship is central and germane for librarians

Mentoring, according to Ossai-Onah, Oduagwu, Emmanuel, and Oduagwu (2013), is a human resource approach that is effective in

helping new workers to develop and progress in their chosen careers. It is an important weapon for decision-making and encouragement at work taking into consideration, career development and job productivity. McKinley (2021) also defines mentorship as a relationship in which a more experienced person helps to guide a less experienced person. This definition as presented can be complementary from the mentor to the mentee or vice versa.

Culpepper (2001) describes mentoring as a close relationship between two individuals in which there is a high level of sharing, advising, and evaluating by the mentor. Mentorship could then be considered an intentional act when the mentor deliberately wants to provide on-the-job training for the new or inexperienced subordinate (mentee), and the inexperienced subordinate wants to be under the tutelage of the mentor.

Lacy (2009) opined that mentoring relationships allow individuals to pass on knowledge gained from work experience that cannot be taught through academic programmes. By the virtue of the relationship, librarians expose subordinates to organizational culture and align them to professional expectations thereby sharing knowledge that would make the mentees experienced, effective, confident, and successful at work (Lee, 2009).

2. ESSENTIALS OF MENTORING IN THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION

In the field of library and information science, continuous education of library science graduates is crucial. Brewerton (2002) argues that the future of the profession rests more on the upcoming librarians who have a passion for the job, hence the need for mentoring. Mentoring however could be two-way dimensional, that is, the young mentoring the old professional and vice versa. Nwabueze and Anike (2016) have identified many benefits that come from a good mentoring relationship which include: increased scholarly productivity; successful transfer of knowledge; resource maximisation; attitudinal changes; skill acquisition; career progression, and improved organisation performance; among others.

As specified by Sodipe and Madukoma (2013), basically mentoring in the librarianship profession enhances library services, while mentors use the service opportunity to pass on their skills to younger professionals in case of retirement, death, or infirmity. Ragins (1999) is also of the opinion that the older generation of professionals can also learn from the hybrid librarians who have better knowledge of new and emerging technologies.

3. EXPECTED ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

According to Goldman (2011), and Byars-Winston and Dahlberg (2019), mentoring relationships are characteristically part of staff support for individuals and organisations willing to learn in a safe learning environment. Standards that are supportive of individuals are consciously reinforced by mentoring in several forms. By implication, information centres have to grow in terms of materials,

structure, users, and staff to transform and blend with societal wants, demands, and changes (Kuyper-Rushing, 2001). Some of the critical areas that call for serious mentoring in the librarianship profession include but are not limited to the following: dependability; reliability; trustworthiness; sacrifice and obedience; collaboration; capacity development, etcetera.

4. FORMAL, INFORMAL, AND TRADITIONAL MODES OF MENTORING IN THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION

As put forward by Goldman (2011), formal mentoring in the field of library and information science entails the role of the passive receiver during the acculturation process to the organization. In a recent study, Sodipe and Madukoma (2013) opined that there should be a more active experience for mentees with more emphasis placed on formalized mentoring processes.

Informal mentoring, according to Goldman (2011) is less structured and focuses more on building a relationship between the mentor and mentee. This method allows a mentee the opportunity to choose his or her mentor through a personal relationship. The implication, according to Brewerton (2002) is that mentees can choose mentors with whom they have a personal connection as well as a professional attachment.

In the views of Goldman (2011), traditional mentoring involves a one-on-one situation with the mentee. It is a situation where a mentee and the mentor are matched together in a relationship. Succinctly put, the aim of formal, informal, and traditional mentoring is to facilitate a supportive learning environment for the protégé that benefits the mentor, mentee, institution, and profession. In the process, it is imperative to note that, there are certain demonstrable characteristics found in a healthy mentoring relationship. These include reasonable expectations of commitment in time; a good attitude; humility; and respect by both parties to listen and learn.

Some strategies for good mentoring include: peer mentoring, in form of peer-group mentoring, facilitated group monitoring, and team monitoring; role modeling; nurturing; apprenticeship, and; electronic or online mentoring.

5. SOME ATTRIBUTES REQUIRED OF A LIBRARIAN MENTOR

A good librarian mentor must:
    (i) have good communication skills;
    (ii) be ready and willing to share knowledge;
    (iii) not hoard information;
    (iv) be able to interact with the mentee, be open, honest, and respect ideas;
    (v) devote time to train the mentee;
    (vi) be able to adequately demonstrate his leadership traits and skills;
    (vii) be able to induce subordinates to work with confidence and zeal (Dixon, Belrap & Albrecht, 2010).

6. EXPECTATIONS FROM LIBRARIAN MENTEE

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that mentoring is keenly about the transfer of knowledge, most especially the process that supports professional and personal development. For learning to take place, there are expectations from the mentee. As stated by the United States Office of Personnel Management (2008), regardless of types or forms of mentoring, the mentee must:

(i) have listening ears;
(ii) be ready to learn from an experienced professional;
(iii) have all the confidence required to pay attention to the training;
(iv) have lifelong learning skills to be relevant and useful in their positions in the changing era of emerging technology;
(v) be humble;
(vi) not have a phobia for openness to possibilities; and
(vii) be aware of his/her personality, attitude, ability, and capability and be able to adapt as the case may be.

7. SOME SKILL MENTORING AREAS IN LIBRARIANSHIP

There are areas in librarianship that need mentorship. These include entrepreneurship, service, emerging technology, and modern library marketing skills.

7.1 Entrepreneurship Skills

Entrepreneurship plays an important role in the career success of many professionals. It is the act of setting up a business and taking financial risks in the hope of making a profit in the new dispensation. Entrepreneurship skills are therefore required by library professionals to help drive change with innovation. Mentors can train young librarians and information professionals on entrepreneurship skills to improve cash flow for the survival of library professionals. The motive is to improve staff welfare and maintain vitality and vigour. With entrepreneurship skills, the librarian becomes a potential employer or a potential employee.

7.2 Service Skills

Major areas of library services that require mentorship include: normal library routine services such as circulation, reference, reprography, current awareness, collection development, etc.; research; entrepreneurial; ICT; library and the law (ethical use of information resources) among others

7.3 New and Emerging Technology Skills

Librarianship as a profession requires creative skills and the ability to be able to provide information that is relevant to the needs of the users and the community it serves according to Philips-Jones (2009). In this era of science and technology, information professionals should desire to be able to think analytically to develop new procedures for workflow. Therefore, the knowledge of computers, the internet, and commercially available library software is considered

essential in the mentor-mentee relationship. Examples of new technologies are:

(i) Blogging; Online selective dissemination of information;
(ii) Resource network;
(iii) Online literature search;
(iv) Online indexing and abstracting;
(v) Database management skills;
(vi) E-resources management skills;
(vii) Computer Disc Read Only Memory (CD-ROM), Digital Video Disk (DVD), and Management skills; and
(viii) Website development and management skills.

7.4 Modern Library Marketing Skills

In a modern library setting, the mentor-mentee relationship in marketing library services is very essential. Libraries are always looking for ways to engage and connect with patrons. A study from Aboyade and Aboyade (2017) reveals that marketing and promotion of library and information services play a vital and crucial role in creating awareness for library and information products and services. The assertion was supported by Ozioko, Nwabueze, and Igwesi (2014). They were of the view that information can be passed down the line to users using their profiles, while social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc., can be deployed as important strategic components to get the library services marketed. Library services such as reference; referral; circulation; current awareness; electronic services; interlibrary loan; indexing and abstracting; etcetera are service areas where marketing is required to achieve optimum user satisfaction. The objective is to promote the library commodity known as information (Uzoagba and Okeke, 2019).

8. CHALLENGES IN MENTORSHIP

Olaniyi (2018) opines that pairing mentors and mentees can be difficult at the initial stage because of the methods of training. The parties must be ready to adapt and adopt certain policies that would be of help. For instance, the informal method of mentoring allows the mentee to choose whomever he or she wants and this could have its limitations. In pairing, Hadi and Rudiyanto (2017) noted that experience can be a pointer to the matching process. Again, the researchers suggested that age and career stages shape different peer relationships and this needs to be factored into the mentoring programmes. Other factors as stated by Ozioko, Nwabueze, and Igwesi (2014), Sodipe and Madokoma (2013), and McKinley (2021) include but are not limited to:

(i) excessive time commitments by the mentor and the protégé;
(ii) unrealistic expectations placed on the mentor sometimes, lack of skills needed to mentor;
(iii) unfair manipulation of the mentee by the mentee;
(iv) over-dependence of the protégé on the mentor;
(v) inadequate Information and Communication Technology skills (ICT);

(vi) Feeling of inferiority complex on the part of the protégé if mentored by a highly productive, reputable, and experienced mentor.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, mentoring has a critical role to play in career development, team building, dream achievement, and job management. Sometimes, the library school does not prepare graduates for the challenges inside and outside the library school, leaving them wanting knowledge and skills. Therefore, mentoring which can be a two-edged sword (old professionals mentoring young professionals and vice versa) can contribute significantly to affecting the personal, social, psychological, and professional growth of information professionals. In this era of rapid development in science and technology, both the mentor and mentee stand to gain tremendously from teaching and learning on the job if there is a cordial relationship. Consequently, if mentoring is effectively carried out, it can be a continuous professional development technique for the individuals, the users, other professionals, organizations, and vicariously, the nation at large.

This paper has conceptually identified the following possible ways as recommendations in promoting a profit-oriented mentor-protégé dyadic relationship in the librarianship profession.

(i) Librarians need to establish, develop and pave way for the formal mentoring program which will meet the needs and yearnings of both present and future information professionals.

(ii) There should be evolving practices that will mandate practicing librarians to organise and attend national and international training to build quality service, rejig library services and retain the best brains.

(iii) Information professionals still need to adopt promotional strategies to improve their products and services to rebrand, regenerate, refresh and retain professionals that would work to satisfy patrons' needs in the constantly changing information world.

(iv) Administrators of information professionals must have a formal policy on mentoring staff as part of their continuous development programme to produce future professionals who will be confident and wholeheartedly function as expected so that library users will not suffer service shortcomings. This will address the issues of brain drain and lack of professional continuity.

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