

MENTORING AS A TOOL FOR RE-SKILLING THE 21ST CENTURY LIBRARIAN

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of mentoring including its imperatives as means of re-skilling professional librarians in Nigeria. This is a literature-based opinion paper advocating for the use of mentoring as a leverage for re-skilling the 21st century librarians. Mentoring for re-skilling librarians is about using people, in other words, colleagues to re-tool, and improve the competences of co-workers. It identified new courses of professional actions, through the use of new technologies which will invariably further the career goal of individuals and strengthen the organization. Mentoring utilizes full advantage of existing expertise to develop new potentials. It is generally believed to be cheap and effective method of enhancing the professional circumstances of staff. The subject of mentoring for re-skilling librarians is critically and exhaustively treated with a view to developing a formal mentoring blue print.

Introduction

In a country like Nigeria where the debut of librarianship as a profession is very recent and where the number of internationally acclaimed librarians is abysmally infinitesimal, the need to mentor junior and the newly employed librarians becomes indisputable and irresistible. This is because mentoring functions highly as a great tool for enhancing career satisfaction, professional advancement and capacity building. Again, in the present era of knowledge economy, knowledge management and globalization, libraries stand out to be the most critical and essential spring boards. So, following their exalted position as the citadel of research, teaching, learning and recreation, staggering volumes of information that are generated and processed on daily basis appear very enormous. As these are churned out, other tremendous developments are taking place in libraries thereby demanding new skills and knowledge from the newly employed librarians and from the old whose trainings have not covered the current changes (Shea, 1994).

In other words, beginning a professional career can be a stressful experience. Career success involves much more than having Master in Library and Information Science (MLS) degree. Career is a constant journey; take advantage of it as much as one can to ensure he is successful, happy and productive. Mentoring has traditionally been defined as a relationship in which a more experienced person guides the career of a junior member as he or she “navigates” the world of work. It has also been called academic socialization and a collegial process that helps shape the academic community. However, a mentor is most commonly

defined as someone who guides you through a particular point in your life and or/career. A mentor is someone who gives support and encouragement as well as constructive criticism.

The bright side of Mentoring

To become successful and advance professionally, "one must develop a network of people who, open doors" (Moody 2004). You also need someone who can be an import resource in your satisfaction, greater career advancement and less work conflict. But it isn't only the protégé who benefits. The organization also benefits from mentoring relationship because mentors help create an atmosphere that is conducive to positive socializing. They also promote leadership skills.

The dark side of mentoring

Although the advantages of monitoring are numerous, mentoring is not without disadvantages. In fact, "mentoring relationships can be characterized as dysfunctional or destructive" (Johnson 2007). One hopes that if a mentoring relationship does not produce the desired results, either the mentor or the protégé will discontinue the association before it becomes harmful.

Exploitation: When the mentor uses his or her position to get something from the mentee. Exploitation is also experienced when a mentor uses the mentee to do his or her research for a publication and does not credit it to the mentee.

Frustration: The protégé feels frustrated when the mentor is not accessible or has not been active mentor.

What Does a Mentor Do?

The role of a mentor can be multifaceted. Some act as coaches, others confidants, while the rest act more like guidance counselors. A worthy mentor can do the following things. Provide support by being an attentive listener, offering encouragement about your potential for being willing to collaborate on projects, and increasing a safe environment that encourages less risk taking and provides the opportunity to develop professionally and personally.

Initiate sponsorship and share power by encouraging participation in professional committees, to co-author papers or presentations and endorsing your research. Demystify the

system by explaining how the library or organization works, who is who on the call within the community, what skills and competencies, are needed to advance and excel.

Nurture your dream and support aspirations by affirming your strengths and potential. Foster networks by introducing one to other people in the field and encouraging one to seek their advice.

What Makes a Good Mentor?

Interestingly, not everyone can be a good mentor. If one is going to invest his time in establishing a productive mentoring relationship, it is important to have a mentor who is to the best of your belief a successful person. Mentors need to:

- a. Exhibit empathy
- b. Possess personal integrity
- c. Show respect
- d. Be committed to collegiality
- e. Embrace honour.
- f. Have a fundamental orientation to helping others
- g. Possess a positive emotional disposition.

Tips for Mentee's Success

Simply having a mentor does not make someone successful. As a mentee, you must show a reasonable sense of responsibility that will help a relationship to be productive and successful. One must ensure that he/she is comfortable with the mentor in such a manner that the two of you can talk freely with each other.

Other factors that usually contribute to mentee's success include honesty and straightforwardness. Make sure your mentor knows what you need. In other words, one should not assume his mentor will intuitively know what the mentee needs. Lastly, conduct a self-analysis to know what your strengths and weaknesses are.

Types of Mentoring

- (1) Formal
- (2) Informal
- (3) Semi-formal, semi-structured or facilitated

- (4) Group mentoring
- (5) E-mentoring

Formal mentoring takes place when the relationship is facilitated by the organization. Mentees are systematically matched with mentors based on parameters set by administrators who have little personal knowledge of the mentors and mentees.

Informal mentoring takes place when the relationship is created spontaneously and maintained informally by the pair. It is less structured and focuses on building a relationship between the mentor with whom they have a personal connection or social network. This scenario is preferable for the mentees as they choose a mentor with whom they have personal connection and with whom they feel comfortable having candid conversation about professional issues (Ragines & Switter, 2007).

Semi-formal, semi-structured, or facilitated mentoring: In this case, all recognize that mentoring is occurring within the workplace, but in designing a mentoring program, the organization allows for flexibility, while providing structured tools and support to show the organization's commitment.

Group mentoring takes place when more than a pair of individuals come together, with one or more in the group providing support or direction to others.

Co-mentoring takes place when members recognize the shared benefits for all in the relationship.

E-mentoring takes place when the relationship occurs primarily or exclusively on-line. It is pertinent to say that the best place for a mentee to begin to look for mentors is within their immediate or current extended professional network, and also by attending paper presentations with topics or speakers of personal interest. Long-tenured librarians or former supervisors are excellent mentors. Moore (2007) is of the opinion that the most effective mentoring model for professional success involves seeking out a variety of mentors. He said that it is unlikely that one person can act as a sole source of support, so mentees should seek out several individuals who might each play a part in their professional development and skill building. It is also his

opinion that the mentee should not be on the receiving end of the relationship as through mentoring, mentors can grow and develop. Again, to create and maintain balance in the relationship, it is vital that both parties impart knowledge based on their skill set, recently acquired or otherwise.

Need for re-skilling Librarians in Nigeria and how mentoring can be applied

In the present millennium, coping with technology and change are the principal driving forces of the emerging information age librarians. The emphasis in special libraries and indeed all kinds of library is shifting from collection to access and the explosion in the quality, quantity, cost and communicability calls for new responses. Among these responses must be a willingness to embrace information and communication technology and accept change.

Today, very few organization can isolate the positive effect and return from investment in information technologies. Anyakoh (2004) stated that the ICT revolution is sweeping through the world. The strong wind of change has even caught up with developing countries like Nigeria. Every individual, every facet of the society and every profession is striving not to be left out. The librarian and other information professionals have also felt the bandwagon effect and are being enriched by enormous dividends of the revolution.

No doubt, traditional roles of librarians are changing. Information world was dominated by librarians whose major concern was management or (essentially stable) book collections. As the boundary lines are blurring, in the very near future the job of computer scientists and systems analysts will be growing faster than that of librarians (Cochrane, 1990). This is not necessarily predicting that librarians are passing out. It is rather pointing to the fact that they should as a matter of urgency and necessity be in line with and responsive to the current realities of information transformation in today's technology age. The in-thing in information world is the provision and expansion of the scope of information available to users irrespective of their location. This has the advantage of ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in the service delivery (Okiyi, 1998).

Nwegbu (2004) said that the library's clientele continue to increase year after year while the complexity of their information needs continues to increase and the urgency with which the information required is to be supplied might be crucial to the success of activities for which the information is needed. For this reason, librarians have to turn to mentoring in ICT, seeking its aid in the solution to the complex information problems which they have to face daily. When

people think of investing in a library, they usually think of investing in its collection, equipment, and physical facility. These expenditures are fundamental, but staff are at least as important as an investment for the library. The best collection and latest technology are useless without outstanding service-oriented staff (Turen & Raskin, 2004).

An organization can invest in staff by taking time to hire well, by training, by providing development and growth opportunities and by mentoring staff. Libraries should be prepared for the changes that are inevitable in the current environment. This can be accomplished through effective mentoring.

Brown (2008) emphatically noted that survival in today's world of work is a function of what one can offer, one's potential and ability to be in-charge of his/her career. Thus, Dahl, Banejee and Spalti (2006) warned that library centers that persist in the traditional services model in this era of ICT driven environment, flat budget and rising cost of resources may not succeed and are advised to embrace the realities of the time.

Since Nigerian library professionals are part of the global community affected by the above factors, there is need for re-skilling. Our observation as members of library profession in Nigeria reveals that mentoring as a strategy for re-skilling is imminent for the professionals due to:-

(1) Change in users' needs

There are disparities among people in the areas of economics, culture, geographical dispersion, politics and other physical challenges" (Minishi-majanja, 2008). Their information need must be attended to. Again the way and manner users seek information have changed. To them, space and time should not be barriers while the era of print resources is gradually becoming obsolete.

(2) Competition

The costly assumption that librarians know best and that users would supinely continue to accept the service they had always been given is no longer valid. This is because new and diverse professionals are taking over library job and teaching users how to search for information. Thus, librarians have to brace up with the challenges posed by them as well as commercial search engines which users consider as the first port of call when searching for information (Bannerman, Nwogu & Anunobi, 2007).

(3) Providing opportunities for training and continuing Education

- (a) The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) organizes at least one annual conference and two workshops every year. At such programmes, experts, nationally and internationally and knowledgeable resource persons are invited to discuss and demonstrate contemporary issues in the profession. Institutions and Library and Information Science (LIS) centers should expose their staff to training and continuing education nationally and internationally. For instance the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan has exposed 7 and 18 staff to national and international training respectively in areas of needs. Majority of the librarians working in multinational organizations in Nigeria always have the opportunity for international training. They later in most cases act as resource persons for some national training.

Libraries should have training units which will identify training needs of staff and negotiate for their actualization. Monthly meetings should be held in information centers to discuss re- skilling needs and how to achieve them.

It should be a policy in libraries that trainees on return from training will expose other staff to the acquired skills.

Employees are helped to develop their expertise in areas of interest through re-deployment to their units of interest and by providing them with opportunities for re-skilling in such areas.

- (b) Opportunities should be provided for young librarians to be aware and develop their skills through the institution of Young Librarians Award by Nigerian Library Association (NLA). Through the award, professionals who are 5 years and below in the profession are sponsored to National conferences.
- (c) Training should be provided by donor agencies, software and hardware vendors. Training on such areas as WINISIS software provided by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), use of E-Granary; Information Training and Outreach center for Africa (ITOCA), training on the use of Health Internetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI), Access to Global Online Research (AGORA), Online Access Research in the Environment (OARE) etc, professionals are explicitly or implicitly exposed to diverse and new skills.

(4) Listserve

Online discussion forum is available for all library professionals in Nigeria. Through the forum, information such as sites where grants could be provided, types, nature and location are made available to members. Diverse views on re-skilling issues are discussed. Literature is also posted to forum members. All library professionals are encouraged to join the forum. Interest groups have their own forum where the less skilled are helped through mentoring. Through the use of electronic mails, individuals are engaged in mentoring by more exposed professional colleagues. By so doing the issue of distance as a barrier to mentoring is removed.

Conclusion

As libraries increasingly encounter new and diverse challenges, it behoves the librarians to acquire the requisite training and skills that will enable them to remain relevant to their user community. Mentoring is one of the veritable skills. The underlying philosophy of any mentoring initiative is when the mentee learns the rudiments of conducting research and publishing. These range from conception of researchable topic, literature search, research methodology to adopt and appropriate medium for publishing the research efforts. As such, young or newly employed librarians in particular and indeed every information professional should be adaptive, receptive to new ideas, committed, humble and have respect for the mentor for the mentoring relationship to be beneficial to mentee, mentor and the library.

Recommendations

Based on the impact of mentoring as discussed in this work, the writers make the following recommendations.

- (i) Library authorities in Nigeria should develop formal mentoring programmes which will meet the needs of both the Organization and staff and such needs include ensuring the continuing existence of the library as well as career satisfaction of staff.
- (ii) In a bid to reflect more diversity in the subject background of librarians, individuals who have qualifications in other fields other than librarianship are usually employed and so, to get them grounded on their jobs, mentoring as a tool for re-skilling should be encouraged.

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