Module Four: Case Studies in Mentorship

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Sub-group on Mentorship

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Workshop I: Case Studies in Mentorship

In the first three modules of this series, the concept of mentoring was introduced, the relational dimensions of mentorship were discussed, and opportunities to apply these concepts to different settings were offered. This module offers tools for facilitating effective workshops in academic or community-based settings that can be used with any of the exercises presented in this series.

Key Messages

1. Workshops can be effectively facilitated with the use of a few simple tools and guidelines that are easily applied to a variety of settings.

2. Workshop facilitation is a skill that can be developed.

3. Mentorship is a complex and dynamic experience

Learning Objectives

Individuals or groups working through this module will be able to:

1. Describe the difference between a workshop and a group activity or meeting.
2. Describe a five-step approach to workshops that can be applied to any possible question or issue.
3. Understand a series of facilitator competencies that contribute to effective workshop facilitation.
4. Apply the concepts covered in Modules one and two to specific case examples.
5. Discuss some of the challenges that may arise in mentoring relationships through the use of a case study.
6. Discuss the application and effects of different forms and approaches to mentorship through the use of a case study.

Five-Steps for Effective Workshops

Workshops are process and outcome-oriented. The term workshop, however, is used to describe a number of things that are not necessarily process or outcome-oriented. 'Workshop' may be used to describe a group discussion, a brainstorming session, a long meeting, a public forum for discussion, or a panel discussion at a conference. One effective and proven approach to workshops that ensures the focus on process and outcomes is the consensus workshop method, used by the Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs for more than forty years in fifty countries.

Consensus is "a common understanding which enables a group to move forward together" (p. 5) that is reached when all participants are willing to move forward together, even if they don't agree on every detail. The method enables people to think, plan and work together in teams through honoring and respecting the value of each individual's contributions and wisdom. Its inquiry is appreciative because it acknowledges the realities of each participant, listens to the group's realities and finds ways to work within each. Consensus workshops are transformative and empowering, enabling participants to let go of their individual views and expand their insights through the process of synthesis.

The method works best when there are actual decisions to make and real problems to solve. In a consensus workshop, those who participate in the consensus shape the workshop and implement the plan or outcome. The method actively involves members of a group in planning, problem solving, individual or group research and decision-making. It can be used to gather ideas, identify patterns through dialogue, summarize group insights, and establish consensus on a resolution.

The consensus workshop method is a five-step approach:

1. **Context the group:** Sets the stage and calls the group to attention.

- Describe the topic and rationale for the workshop.
- Outline the role of the facilitator.
- Explain the process and timeline for the workshop.
- Facilitate introductions if appropriate.
- Introduce the product (question or issue).
- State the desired outcome(s).
- Highlight the focus question(s) for the workshop.

2. **Brainstorm:** Gathers all relevant data (ideas) from the group and puts in front of them.

- Ensure the question is understood.
- Set rules for brainstorming: No criticism of ideas, go for lots of ideas, build on each others' ideas, and wild ideas are OK.
- Provide a few examples of possible responses to trigger brainstorming.
- Using a focus question, encourage the group to generate ideas about the question (See Box 1).
- Ask participants to write their ideas on a card or sticky note . Cards should have one idea per card, be written in big letters, and have 3-5 words.
- Allow a few minutes for individual brainstorming.
- Move into team brainstorming (if you have group >40) by having teams discuss their individual ideas. Instruct the teams to write their best ideas on cards.
- As a group, the clearest ideas are selected and the cards are collected in one space, such as a white board, a wall, or a large piece of paper.

3. **Cluster the ideas:** Groups ideas generated with brainstorming into 'clusters' of similar ideas.

- Once the group has placed their cards on the wall or other space, ask the group to identify pairs of cards that point to similar answers/responses to the focus question.
- Place similar pairs of cards in columns.

- Ask the group which column each card belongs to, moving the cards into their respective columns as directed by the group.
- If the group is unsure of where a specific card goes, leave it until later.
- If cards remain outside of any column, read it again for the group and create a new column if necessary.
- Select a cluster that is relatively clear and easy to work with first.
- Read all of the cards in the cluster to the group.
- Ask the group to identify key words in the cluster.
- Discuss the ideas as a cluster to clarify and gain insight. the group what the cluster is about and what the main ideas are.

4. Name the clusters: Assigns a name to each group or cluster of ideas to establish a comprehensive picture of the ordered relationship between generated ideas.

- Ask participants to summarize the insights discussed with one word or phrase.
- Encourage the group to be clear and descriptive.
- Write the agreed-upon name of the cluster on a card.
- Place the cluster name at the top of its row.
- Repeat for each cluster.

5. Resolve to implement the results: Confirms the group's commitment to the decisions made in the workshop and moves into action.

- Read through the title cards for each cluster.
- Reflect on the group's reactions to the clusters and their names.
- Reflect on the workshop, offering focused questions to guide the group's decisions about what to act on.
- Decide on next steps.
- Determine how the workshop will be documented

These five steps, their rationale and other hints for running effective workshops are discussed in detail in Stanfield's The Workshop Book. Stanfield provides details about how to approach different settings, group sizes, and challenges that may arise in workshops. This book is recommended for groups who wish to learn more about the consensus workshop or facilitation.

[1] *Alternatively, smaller groups can use a flipchart or whiteboard and use symbols rather than columns to identify clusters.*

The Role of the Facilitator

The role of a workshop facilitator is to guide a process that brings out participants' best ideas and helps them to organize those ideas so that they can be used. Facilitators act as catalysts to heighten the interaction between the ideas generated by the group and the participants. Facilitators constantly encourage the creativity and participation of individuals in the group. Facilitating workshops requires a number of skills or competencies (Table 1).

Table 1: Competencies for Workshop Facilitators

Competency	The Facilitator...
Process	• Is competent in designing and leading larger or smaller groups. • Is familiar with the process of creating and sequencing questions • Can distinguish process from content. • Is able to identify group needs.
Intentionality	• Checks the space out ahead of time. • Knows how to select and use a space. • Can create an environment conducive to group discussion. • Skillfully selects focal points for the group to encourage participation and create a comfortable atmosphere.
Evoking Participation	• Believes in the wisdom and creativity of the group. • Creates a climate of participation. • Involves the whole group in taking responsibility for its decisions. • Easily relates to different kinds of people.
Honour	• Honours the group and affirms its wisdom. • Celebrates the work of the group.
Objectivity	• Is self-aware. • Sets aside personal opinions of the group's ideas. • Is conscious of their reactions to the group.
Observant	• Is skillful and practiced in reading the group's dynamics. • Is sensitive to the group's non-verbal cues. • Listens carefully to what is said and not said.
Energizing	• Establishes rapport with the group. • Creates social icebreakers. • Shifts the pace and mood of the work to maintain momentum. • Is aware of and responds to critical points or issues that arise, addressing these before moving on
Focused	• Gently discourages side conversations. • Maintains a focused discussion and avoids argument. • Deals with conflict in productive ways
Adaptable	• Is flexible. • Knows how to balance the process with the results. • Harmonizes participation of group members. • Thinks quickly and is comfortable making decisions on the fly. • Adapts the methods to the context as needed.
Documentation	• Works with an assigned documenter to ensure the process and outcomes are accurately reflected in a written record of the workshop.
Trust	• Is trusted by the group and is detached from their own opinions and listens without bias or judgment. • Trusts that s/he is detached from his or her own opinions. • Does not manipulate the group towards their own answers.

Case Studies

Consider the case studies offered below. As you read through, underline or highlight points that evoke a reaction, emotion, or remind you of an experience of your own. A series of questions follows both case studies. These can be used to guide independent reflection or to facilitate group discussion of the case studies. If reviewing the case studies as a group, consider sharing initial reactions before discussing the questions. You may also wish to consider asking group members if they are comfortable sharing their own experiences with mentorship as well. Each case study will require approximately 90 minutes to discuss, depending on the size of your group.

Jane and Josie

In the first month as a new assistant professor, Jane met many of the other faculty in the department and found that there were two others who shared her interest in global health. One in particular, Josie, seemed willing to 'show her the ropes' and help connect her with other people working in the University of Canada and across the country in global health research (GHR). Josie invited Jane to attend a meeting of a group of students and faculty who were working together to build opportunities and strengthen skills in GHR on campus. The group was larger than Jane thought it would be—there were so many people working in GHR!

Josie continued to provide counsel, encouragement and support to Jane over the next year, especially in issues related to teaching, ethics, research methodology, and the politics and policies of the University of Canada. Jane's involvement in GHR both locally and nationally grew as she found more and more opportunities to network, attend national conferences and specialized training events—much of which was facilitated directly or indirectly by Josie. Josie enjoyed the interactions with Jane and felt that she too was learning, particularly when Jane brought challenging questions forward. Josie was contemplating how she could incorporate Jane into a large program of research that had been developing over the last three years.

At the end of the academic year, Jane was nominated for consideration for a new faculty award. Jane was thrilled and considered the award an encouraging sign of her future promise. When she received the award a month later, her acceptance column in the campus-wide email announcement spoke of her own determination and hard work as a new faculty on her own in an unfamiliar setting. She didn't mention the support she received from Josie. Josie had been hurt by Jane's lack of acknowledgement for her support, but wondered if she was being petty and had decided not to confront Jane about it.

Over the next two years, Jane continued to go to Josie for questions and sometimes just to 'vent' about something that was frustrating her. She often asked for Josie's advice about what to do, how best to proceed, or what advice she should give to the students she was supervising. Josie sometimes felt drained by the interaction and even felt her stomach sink when Jane would knock at her door. She kept her door closed most of the time now—a major change after fifteen years of a well-known 'open-door' policy she held with her students. Josie didn't know what to do about it though. She thought she was making a big deal out of nothing, but didn't have anyone to talk to about it because she was worried it might be considered unprofessional to speak of a colleague in a negative way.

A month later, at Josie's promotion evaluation meeting, she was disappointed to learn that the department was divided about whether she met the promotion requirements or not. Thinking she had more than met the standards for promotion, Josie asked what concerns the department had about her qualifications or productivity over the last four years. The department replied that it wasn't to do with either. Instead, the concerns were over one of the confidential peer evaluations included in her application for promotion. The evaluation brought up concerns over Josie's ethical conduct that the department had to consider. Josie was shocked to learn this. She immediately followed up with the two peer evaluators she'd asked months ago. Both long-term colleagues and supporters willingly shared their evaluations with Josie, neither of which revealed anything that could be considered less than forthright praise and admiration.

Josie attempted to contact Jane, but Jane did not reply to her messages. After following procedures to have the content of the third evaluation released to her, Josie learned that Jane had accused Josie of plagiarism. Jane said that Josie consistently 'pumped her for ideas' and 'used these for her own benefit'. Josie felt betrayed, angry and violated—how could someone she supported so freely and willingly behave in such a dishonest way?

Josie began to question her own motives and interests in supporting new faculty. She thought over her interactions with Jane and wished she'd kept some notes to refer back to. After months of deliberation, Josie was able to demonstrate that the peer evaluation was not completed with her beneficence in mind and eventually received her promotion. Josie never engaged in mentoring a new faculty member again.

Questions for Consideration

1. What kind of mentoring relationship is reflected in the case study?
2. What alternative approaches to mentoring can be identified?
3. What went right in this mentoring relationship?
4. What went wrong in this mentoring relationship?
5. What relational elements influencing a mentoring relationship are reflected in this case (see Module Two, Table 4)?
6. As a mentee, how would you have responded to an award nomination such as Jane received?
7. As a mentor, how would you have responded to the feelings of discomfort expressed by Josie after Jane won the award?
8. What about the nature of Jane and Josies' mentoring relationship contributed to the situation Josie found herself in during her promotional review? How could this have been changed?
9. How would you respond to the situation Josie found herself in during her promotional review?
10. What institutional or environmental supports were (a) available and (b) missing for both Josie and Jane in this situation?
11. What administrative strategies and individual strategies (see Module Two, p. 10-11) could have been used to avoid the Josie's loss of interest in mentoring?

Abhey

Abhey was looking forward to his first week as a master's student. He'd worked hard for the last year to find a project, supervisor and funding. He'd finished his undergraduate medical training a few years ago and had chosen to work in public health. After three years struggling with health policy development, he returned to university to learn, build skills and knowledge, and find out how to influence policy making in a positive way. He'd decided to focus on health policy development, hoping that he'd be able to develop some skills in influencing the health policy agenda. He had been fortunate to receive a two-year fellowship from the Health Policy Leadership (HPL) Program, which included a scholarship, special training and courses, and a mentoring program with faculty experienced in health policy.

In the first two weeks of his program, Abhey was invited to a meeting with his assigned mentor from the HPL program. These meetings were scheduled into Abhey's academic schedule every four months for one hour each time. His mentor, Aleda, had been assigned to Abhey based on the alignment of research interests, including the countries in which Abhey wished to do his research. During that first meeting, Abhey and Aleda discussed what his first impressions of the program and the return to university in general. Aleda helped Abhey to identify specific goals he had for his masters program, the HPL program, and the mentoring relationship. They mutually agreed upon two of the goals to focus the mentoring on and developed a plan of action for the next four months.

Over the next year, Abhey's schedule filled up quickly and the mentoring meetings seemed to come with little time to complete the tasks and readings that Aleda would identify as helpful resources. The meetings felt a little rushed, too. They were always productive and positive, but Abhey felt like they never had as much time to talk about some of the more philosophical and ethical questions being raised through his experiences in the HPL fellowship and his coursework. As his coursework came to an end and Abhey began to immerse himself more deeply in his thesis, he found the meetings to be more engaging, informal and less rushed. They started to spend more time discussing challenges and issues related to research, ethics, and health policy. Aleda began to share more of her own personal experiences in health policy advocacy.

After two years in the HPL program, Abhey moved into a PhD after Aleda offered to incorporate him into a multi-institutional research program involving six universities, four ministries of health, and three international non-governmental organizations across the Americas. The research team was large and involved health policy analysts, academics, health workers, and policy makers. Through the network offered by this research program, Abhey met six other doctoral students who were part of the team. Each of these students was working to strengthen health policy in resource-limited settings. As they got to know each other and began sharing ideas and experiences, the group of doctoral students discovered they all were lacking knowledge and experience in global economic policy and its interplay with health. They identified specific topics as a group, dividing the topics amongst each other for further investigation.

At the next week-long research team meeting several months later, the students organized a series of peer-learning workshops in the evenings. The six students co-facilitated the workshops using the resources, materials and knowledge that each student had investigated. They were surprised when many of the other team members asked to join their workshops. At the end of the week, the group decided to use part of the research team's shared webspace to continue their discussions. The group chose to keep the topic of global economic policy open and add other topics of interest as they emerged. Within a short period of time, members from many of the non-governmental organizations, ministries of health and other institutions were accessing the site and joining in the discussions. Sometimes, two or three people would identify a key interest topic and pursue it in a manner similar to how the doctoral students had done with global economic policy.

The research team considered the innovation of the six doctoral students an excellent idea and was very supportive. Several experienced researchers and policy analysts agreed to be active participants in the online discussions and began sharing their knowledge in a new way. Over the next three years, the research team joined in identifying areas of interest for building new knowledge and skills. As Abhey reflected on the evolution of the shared webspace and his academic career, he felt the experience of the research team was worth sharing. Abhey approached Aleda with the idea of writing a paper on the group's experience. Aleda loved the idea and together, they brought it to the research

team for consideration. True to the team environment of co-learning, the paper was published by the research team in an open-access journal the next year with plans for a series of modules on team learning and co-mentorship listed among the research team's goals for the following year.

Questions for Consideration

1. What kind of mentoring relationships are reflected in the case study?
2. What alternative approaches to mentoring can be identified?
3. What about the mentoring relationships in this case facilitated positive growth for both the mentor and mentee?
4. What about the mentoring relationship contributed to expansion of the mentoring to other contexts?
5. What qualities of a good mentor are reflected by Aleda (see Module Two, Table 1)?
6. What qualities of a good mentee are reflected in Abhey (see Module Two, Table 2)?
7. Are there aspects of the shared webspace that distinguish it from other types of teaching-learning interactions (See Module One, p. 4)? What could be done to facilitate mentorship in this setting?
8. What about the nature of Abhey and Aleda's mentoring relationship contributed to the transition from formal mentoring to informal mentoring?
9. What kinds of capacity building (See Module 3) are demonstrated in this case?
10. How is sustainability fostered by the informal mentoring that emerges later in the case study?
11. What environmental or cultural supports could be offered by the research team to ensure sustainability?

Recommended Reading

1. Development of a mentorship programme for new graduate nurses in mental health *Andrea McClaughen and Louise O'Brien (2005) (2)*

This article describes the experience of a university and three local mental health services as they collaborated to develop a mentorship program for new graduate nurses in the under-resourced area of mental health. The program was initiated in response to severe nursing shortages and consistent recruitment and retention challenges in mental health. A brief description of mentorship is followed by a detailed overview of the mentorship programs' working group, philosophy, and model of 'facilitated mentoring'. The authors discuss the criteria used to select mentors and the training and resources provided to mentors. Though the process of developing this mentorship program is discussed from a somewhat generalized perspective, the article is a useful starting point for groups initiating their own process of building a mentoring program.

2. The department as mentor *Samuel Becker (1995) (3)*

Becker provides a provoking argument for the role of the department in facilitating success for new and experienced faculty, challenging the traditional culture of competition in academia that creates an unsupportive, self-defeating environment. He highlights some of the difficult experiences junior faculty often encounter in the first few years of their academic career. Furthermore, Becker argues that the benefits of one-to-one mentoring produces limited results because it is built on a model of individualism that fails to recognize the critical role of community. He calls for a system or culture of mentoring that takes advantage of the power of community and names university departments as one such community. Several barriers to achieving this culture of mentorship within academic departments are discussed. Becker ends by providing a parable for reflection, calling faculty and department heads to consider how their individual roles in their academic setting contribute to creating a culture of mentorship.

3. **Creating a teacher mentoring program** *National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (2001).*

This resource manual, though directed at mentoring programs for teachers in a grade or high-school setting, offers a reflective and comprehensive overview of the elements common to effective mentoring programs. Several sets of questions are offered for groups to consider as they establish or refresh mentoring programs. A number of strategies for addressing challenges are offered. This resource complements (and informed) the content of this module and may be helpful for groups who wish to explore some of the concepts and questions presented here in more detail.

References

1. Stanfield RB. The Workshop Book: From individual creativity to group action. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers; 2002.

2. McCloughen A, O'Brien L. Development of a mentorship programme for new graduate nurses in mental health. International Journal of Mental Health Nursing 2005;14:276-284.

3. Becker SL. The department as mentor (Keynote Address). In: Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association; 1995; New Orleans, LA; 1995.

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