

MENTORING & LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CASE STUDIES FROM BAHRAIN

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ABSTRACT

Studies confirm that developing leaders is how we build a strong community of individuals that can work together to achieve goals. Nowadays, universities develop and implement mentoring programs in line with their goals of the professional development of staff. Mentoring provides benefits for not only the mentees, but also for the mentors and the university as a whole. Mentors are usually leaders in their fields and mentoring enhances a more collaborative atmosphere in higher education and is a highly effective way to help the mentees to use the full range of their abilities. Teaching staff mentoring has been recognized as an ever more important function within the area of human resources as it helps staff to grow, develop and learn new skills from the guidance and direction of an expert.

Community gains a wide range of benefits through their productive interaction with universities. These includes enhanced human and social capital development, accelerated economic growth, professional and intellectual infrastructure in communities. Universities also benefit from effective engagement with their communities, as their reputation can be significantly improved through effective engagement.

Therefore, in this paper, we have used a comprehensive approach to reflect our experience in higher education for more than three decades in terms of mentoring and development of others and leading community engagement. The significance of this paper can be recognized through concentrating on the important roles of both mentoring and community engagement in Higher Education.

KEYWORDS: *Mentoring, Situational Leadership, Community Engagement, Education Quality, Proactive Engagement, Kingdom of Bahrain*

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INTRODUCTION

We have a long academic experience in Business Administration field, as we have worked as academics in universities for more than 30 years in both governmental and private sectors. Our leadership style reflects our personal values which are openness, honesty, integrity, passion, fairness, enthusiasm, respect and aspiration. This situational style of leadership has impacted on both colleagues, students and community, improving the quality of teaching and colleagues experience across the university. The subsequent case studies reflect on some of this in more depth in relation to our roles

as mentors and academic leaders.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK LITERATURE REVIEW & DISCUSSION

Case Study One: Mentoring and the development of others

It is notable that the functions and roles of mentoring may differ by source and that students may benefit from having more than one mentor who provides different forms of support. For example, D'Abate (2009) indicates that faculty regard their role to include teaching, sharing information, providing advice and feedback, and academic goal-setting tracking, whereas roles such as introducing, may be better provided by peer mentors.

Most research focuses on formal mentoring programs on university campuses (Erickson et al., 2009). However, mentoring may be informal and develop spontaneously and naturally (Eby and Allen, 2008). Throughout our several decades in higher education, we have experienced both formal and informal mentoring. Working as a teaching and learning mentors for a long time in several universities and in different countries provided us a good chance to apply several styles of mentoring depending on the nature of support needed. However, there is no one optimal style of mentoring that should be applied in all situations, the relationship between mentors and mentees can be developed in different ways, Parsloe and Wary (2000) point out that the mentoring process consists of four main steps:

- Establish learning needs and set up a personal development plan.
- Enable the mentee to become an independent learner.
- Evaluate the relationship between mentor and mentee(s).
- Mentor should facilitate the accomplishment of learning objectives. Our situational style of leadership has importantly affected our mentoring function in various HE institutions. For instance, in all universities we worked in, we were selected as mentors for a group of new colleagues who had less experience in higher education programs. In fact, I like to support and contribute in developing our colleagues to improve their skills and support our students.

This idea is supported by Rosser and Egan (2005, P. 123) who consider mentoring as “a protected relationship in which learning and experimentation can take place. Potential skills can be developed on and results can be measured in terms of competence gained by mentees”. Academic mentoring refers to informal and formal efforts to guide and support faculty members in higher education. Mentoring has been assumed to take place informally because of the tiered progression of academic careers (De Janasz and Sullivan, 2004). Further, Roberts (2000) describes mentoring as a formalized process through which a more experienced person stimulates a supportive role learning in a less experienced person so as to facilitate their career and personal development.

Mentoring positively influences mentees' outcomes such as:

- Sense of belonging (O'Brien et al. 2012),
- Capacity for socially responsible leadership (Campbell et al., 2012),
- Deep and strategic learning approaches (Chester et al., 2013) and
- Self-confidence in professional skills and abilities (Thiry et al., 2011).

To accomplish this role, we managed to conduct several meetings and workshops for different groups of mentees. I presented the important concepts on how to plan and design teaching and learning tasks, different methods of assessment, feedback to students and the related skills that are important in education. We provided one-to-one support for teaching and assessment at each one requirement. Having done that for one academic semester, more than 90% of all mentees got benefited from our mentoring, according to their feedback and to the heads of departments' reports as well as the formal feedback by students.

The spreading culture of education quality in our college relating to mentoring had a great effect on students' learning experience as shown by student's feedback relating to their satisfaction on the program which increased from 52% (satisfactory) in 2013 to 90% (excellent) in 2015, especially in teaching and learning as well as personal support.

Being situational leaders assisted us to adopt the "Mentoring Up" approach in mentoring others. Lee et al. (2015) defines mentoring up as the mentee's proactive engagement in the mentor-mentee relationships so that both parties mutually benefit from the relationship and move forward towards an agreed-upon purpose or vision. Another major mentoring contribution to which we applied the situational mentoring was focused on the HEA fellowship. In 2017, we attended the workshops of the professional Certificate of Academic Practice (PCAP) done by representatives from Higher Education Academy (UK) held in Bahrain sponsored by the Ministry of Education of Bahrain as preparation for the HEA fellowship, and we were chosen by the Higher Education Council in Bahrain to be a mentor for our colleagues during the workshop of the HEA fellowship to help them, facilitate and clarify any difficult points they may have. We put with our mentees an executive plan, using the dimensions of the UKPSF. We helped them to be independent learners by reviewing each area of the HEA application. Also, we provided them with a continuous feedback to improve their work. We evaluated the relationship between us as mentors and our colleagues as mentees to discover any chance of improvement. They all prepared their applications and got the HEA fellowship (Most of them from the first trial and two only from the second trial).

We also play a role of mentoring through my supervision for a number of Master students with different topics of business studies such as Total Quality Management, Strategic Planning, Organizational environment and Human Resources Management. We make ourselves available to help them at every stage from formulation of their research project until possible publication of dissertations. We guide them in the methodology, data analysis and writing theses. We encourage them to pursue their own ideas to the extent that is possible and to make presentation of research results. We establish a good relationship with students based on caring, compassion, enthusiasm and autonomy. We give them trust and show respect as our relationship depends on mutually open, committed and respectful relationships.

Further, we work with them on developing schedules and we furnish them with a guide that acquaints them with the expectations. We meet them weekly to revise each student's progress. We share techniques and practice that have been useful and don't insist there is only one way. We provide guidance as we are accessible to them for consultation and discussion of their research. We keep track of our students' progress and achievements creating opportunities for them to demonstrate their competencies. Our Master students reported in a survey conducted by ASU, a number of benefits of being supervised and mentored by me such as gaining competence, becoming more self-confident, self-esteem, being able to create big goals for themselves, reducing stress in writing their researches and more academic achievements.

We have benefited a lot at both the personal and professional level along more than 25 years as mentors. All our skills relating to teaching, learning and assessment have greatly benefited through playing the role of a mentor for others.

We hope we can continue playing this role of being a good mentor and a successful leader in the future.

Case Study Two: Leading Community Engagement Office (ASU)

At ASU, One of the authors was appointed as the director of Community Engagement Office for three years (2013 – 2016). Bandewar et al. (2010) indicate that “community engagement (CE) has been broadly defined as a process of working collaboratively with a group of people on a shared goal or common interests” (P. 35).

The Carnegie Foundation (2013) defines university community engagement as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, and global) for the exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research and creative activity, enhance curriculum, teaching and learning, prepare educated engaged citizens, strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility, address and contribute to the public good.

Our role was to lead the team of Community Engagement to accomplish specific goals according to the university vision, mission and policies. Our overall goal was to support and enhance the university’s scientific, material and human resources for the sake of local community. University Community Engagement is done via the responsible management of the educational cognitive, labor and environmental impact from the university, as a result of interactive dialogue with society and its communities in order to promote sustainable human development through education (transforming knowledge), provision of service, research, teaching and scholarship. All of these underline an ethical collaboration with the university’s community (Esfijani & Chang 2012 a, 2012 b; Esfijani, Hussain & Chang 2012; Reiser 2007).

This case study explains our leadership and collaboration with community engagement team and colleagues to achieve the intended goal. As mentioned earlier, we consider ourselves as situational leaders and believe that developing leaders and leadership are important factors to realize community engagement objectives in higher education. The three core competencies of a situational leader are “diagnosing, flexibility and partnering”. It seems then that flexibility in leadership style is crucial if a high level of leadership effectiveness is desired and required by the situation (Silverthome & Wang, 2001. P. 400).

Our leadership style improved our team members’ morale since they shared in all decisions relating to community engagement activities. This made them motivated to give extra work that help much in realizing the office goals. Teamwork is defined by Scarnati (2001, P. 5) as “a cooperative process that allows ordinary people to achieve extra ordinary results”. Harris & Harris (1996) also explain that a team has a common goal or purpose where team members can develop effective mutual relationships to achieve team goals, P. 26).

To realize the goals of community engagement in ASU, The community engagement office aimed to achieve the following tasks:

- Conduct field studies on the Bahraini society to determine socio-economic problems educational needs, and development barriers and try to find solutions to them.
- Publish the results of the office’s field research.
- Provide studies and consultancy services to ministries, government bodies and individuals.
- Organize workshops, seminars and conferences in relation to the objectives of the office.

- Prepare and submit a draft budget for office.
- Identify volunteering opportunities and social participations and provide them to the staff and the students.
- Issue Patrol/electronic message about the office and its activities.
- Prepare an annual report on the activities and achievements.

This had to be done with different partners such as students, faculty members and staff, employers and the top management of ASU. Teams provide diversity in knowledge, attitudes, skills and experience, whose integration makes it possible to offer rapid, flexible and innovative responses to problems and challenges, promoting performance and improving satisfaction of those making up the team. (Sales, Rosen, Burke & Goodwin, 2009, P. 62).

As leaders, We had several meetings and brainstorming sessions with our team to decide how we could work together to achieve community engagement goals successfully and to handle all other challenges that were facing the team members, as managing the impact on workloads for the academic staff or the lack of strong incentives for them to include the community engagement in their academic portfolio. We listened to every member's input and guide all of them toward meeting our office goals and objectives, empowering them by encouraging to offer ideas about decisions, respecting their opinions and ensuring that all members receiving the same treatment.

We made extensive notes and conducted comprehensive analysis of all ideas, suggestions and comments resulting in all meetings and I presented the findings at the meeting college council. Team members must be flexible enough to adapt to cooperative working environments where goals are achieved through collaboration and social interdependence rather than individualized competitive goals (Luca & Tarricone, 2001, P. 370).

We coordinated the team to fulfill the different tasks and ran a series of workshops and provided individual support. We assigned different tasks to every one or two members of our teams, according to their background and expertise along with a time schedule for each task. We used workshops and conferences taking place in ASU to consult stakeholders. Including students, managers and staff to get their opinions and perspectives on different activities related to community engagement.

Our main goals were accomplished; we led the teams through the action plan of the community engagement office in ASU successfully. Having led the CE team, We gained a comprehensive understanding of the leadership skills in HE, QAA's Higher Education Qualification Framework in addition to other relevant subject standards.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper showed that mentoring at universities has a positive impact on mentees' commitment, retention and practices, and also on students' achievement. Also, highlighted the benefits of university community engagement activities in realizing university's vision, mission and policies. In this article, the authors have shared their decades of experience in Higher Education relating to the areas of mentoring and community engagement. We have gained a lot of benefits, as we could develop our leadership skills and we hope to continue to be effective academic leaders in the future.

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