Exploring senior academicians' perspective on mentoring in Malaysian higher education institutions

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Abstract

This study describes and examines the nature of mentoring system as a component of leadership development and how mentoring plays its roles in fostering leadership in higher education institutions (HEIs). Using a qualitative approach, data were collected using interviews from three participants from three Public Universities in Malaysia. Three core themes for the current mentoring practices were identified and these include informal, voluntary-based and humanistic. Also, four roles of mentoring emerged in Malaysian higher education institutions namely, role-modelling, supporting, inspiring and, creating a conducive environment. The study recommends the establishment of a proper mentoring process in Malaysian HEIs so that every academician will have the same opportunity to guide and be guided.

Keywords: Mentoring; leadership development; higher education institutions; academic leadership

1. Introduction

Leadership development is an important element in any organization. This is especially critical in higher education institutions since higher education facing many challenges arising in the fast-changing interconnected world. Also, leaders in higher education face multiple changes and transformation at strategic and operational levels. Thus, there is a dire need to develop academicians to face these challenges to ensure higher education is still relevant.

Mentoring or developmental relationships can be used as a tool to develop effective leaders (Truter, 2008) and therefore, it is employed by many organizations to foster such development. In general, mentoring is an effective method of sharing and transferring knowledge, skills, and experience from one individual to another. It has been identified as a worthwhile technique in developing an individual's response to their community (Roland, 2008). Both leadership and mentoring fundamentally involve relationships between more experienced and less experienced individuals and

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have been associated to positive outcomes such as employee attitudes and performance (Scandura & Williams, 2004).

As a knowledge-sharing method, which makes it particularly valuable for organizations developing leaders for their succession pipelines, mentoring is usually implemented in HEIs to provision the learning of new leaders (Bochner, 1996). The nature of these institutions in supporting learning, inquiry, and development for individuals of the society, makes mentoring as an important tool for enhancing learning, inquiry, and development, particularly for academic members (Knippel Meyer & Torraco, 2007). However, the effectiveness of mentoring for developing high potentials leaders is largely dependent on the quality of the relationship, mentoring program, and the manner in which the mentoring program is developed and maintained. Additionally, it is possible that developmental relationship is not consistent with what people might expect given the relatively stressful nature of academic leaders. Likewise, time constraints may affect the implementation of this initiative. For instance, many existing department chairs do not have time to train their colleagues in the position (Morris, 2008).

Additionally, the mentoring initiative must have a purpose and a strategic application. Poor in handling and integrating these methods in an organization, especially HEIs could possibly create problems. For instance, the absence of a thorough analysis of the current and required skills in a mentoring session could result in a failure of addressing skill development areas. Also, the inability to recognize obstacles to mentoring can hinder its effectiveness for the organization. There is also a discrepancy of expectation between mentor and mentee, incompatible roles as a manager and a mentor, and emotional involvement. All these problems create a barrier to the development of the successful implementation of developmental relationship initiatives.

Hence, HEIs need to review their process and application of mentoring efforts. Also, substantial effort needs to be dedicated to a structured process of matching participants based on shared background and interests, protégé developmental needs and mentor expertise, and job level. A proper assessment is also important to ensure the effectiveness of developmental relations. Thus, higher education needs to consider every aspect of the developmental relationship process and implementation.

In short, the success of mentoring in developing future leaders is determined by many factors. Also, to be effective as a mentor, one must develop specific skills. Despite the relevance of mentoring in higher education, little is appreciated about the influence of mentoring programs as an impactful predictor of mentees' performance in the mentoring research literature (Ismail & Khian Jui, 2013; Bernier et al., 2005; Allen & Finkelstein, 2003). This is occasioned by the fact that most of the past studies have dwelt attention on the internal attributes of mentoring programs, at the expense of its influential role. Hence, previous studies have not tendered adequate information to be utilized as precepts/benchmarks by practitioners to formulate strategic policies to enhance the modelling as well as the deployment of mentoring programs in higher education (Bernier et al., 2005; Dutton, 2003; Ismail & Khian Jui, 2013; Ismail & Ridzuan, 2012). Therefore, this scenario prompts the study to further investigate the nature of mentorship in higher education.

The context for this study focused on the mentoring element in Malaysian public higher education institutions. This study is critically important because it will contribute to the breadth of literature on leadership development and how a mentoring component can enhance leadership development, especially in higher education institutions. The significance of this study is rooted in the fact that leadership development is critical for progression, success, and long-term retention of academic leaders.

2. Objectives

The objective of this study is to understand the nature of the mentoring system and how the process of mentoring is exercised to foster leadership development in higher education institutions in Malaysia.

3. Method

Since the primary purpose of this study is to understand the phenomenon, this study employed qualitative methodology as a strategy of inquiry. This strategy is seen as the most accessible mode of entry for a study searching on how individuals create meanings through their unique experiences. The purpose of qualitative analysis is to interpret the data and the resulting themes, to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This interpretation can lead to a deeper understanding of the results and new ideas or theories about relationships and/or about how and why the innovation was or was not effective.

To answer the research objective and research questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with experienced faculty members who have been in leadership positions and have been exposed to leadership development. Interviews focus on past and present situations, and personal issues. The interview session started with open interviews to get a broad 'picture' of what is going on. Participants were encouraged to speak freely. As the interview evolves, subsequent major and subordinate questions become more focused. All interview sessions lasted between 80 to 90 minutes.

Participants are encouraged to share their own unique experiences being involved in the process of establishing their leadership qualities through mentoring. In particular, participants will be invited to reflect and share their views and knowledge on mentoring from three perspectives: (1) what has been done? (2) what is being done? and (3) what and how it should be done?

For this study, this research adopted a purposive sampling technique. Participants should have:

1. Knowledge about the importance of having good quality leadership in higher education institutions

2. Experience being a leader at different organization levels

3. The willingness and ability to serve as a key informant for this study.

The above criteria indicate that a key set of relevant actors for this study should be selected based on their work positions and experiences. All interviews are recorded, transcribed, and analysed according to the research objective that has been set at the beginning of the research. This information will help to explain the current practices and types of effort needed to establish strong leadership quality in Malaysia's Higher Education Institutions.

The interpretive analysis was conducted in 3 stages: deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction. These stages occur after preparing the data for analysis, i.e., after transcription of the interviews and verification of the transcripts with the recording.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Profile of participants

To get the overall picture of the study, we need to start with the participants' background. As suggested by Creswell (2009), participants are selected who best can inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study. Thus, one of the most important tasks is to

identify appropriate participants. Decisions concerning selection of participants are based on the research questions, theoretical perspectives, and evidence informing the study.

The first participant (mentor 1) is a Rector at one of the HEIs. He has vast experience in a leadership position. He also had experience as Vice-Chancellor is one of the research universities in Malaysia; a member of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Expert Advisory Panel on Drug Policy and Management and WHO Scientific Committee of Tobacco Product Regulation. He is the 1st Asian to receive the prestigious 2017 Gilbert Medal and the 7th internationally from Universitas 21, a group of renowned research-intensive universities focused on fostering global citizenship and encouraging institutional innovation. He also received a lot of awards as recognition for his contribution to people's development in the academic world.

As a member of the Board of Trustees in various charity-based organizations, he is also the Chairperson of the first home-grown educational services organization. Since 2013, he has been appointed to the Performance and Delivery Unit (PADU Corp) Board of Trustees to monitor the Ministry of Education Blueprint. He was the Chair of the Independent Review Committee to give input into the Malaysia Education Blueprint; was appointed a member of the Advisory Board of Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT). He has been writing weekly columns for various Malaysian dailies on issues relating to education, health, and current events.

The second participant (mentor 2) is a Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) in the oldest university in Malaysia. He has initiated many programs for students' development and the head of one Research Centre. Higher education was the director in one institute, deputy dean, head of the department, and also a coordinator. He wrote a lot of books and academic journals.

The third participant (mentor 3) is a professor in one of the research universities. He has more than 30 years of experience in academics. He also one of the excellent academician's recipients. He has devoted his time to develop junior academicians. He is the Director of Centre for Development of Academic Excellence. He received the inaugural Excellent Educator Award and in 2010 and received the Anugerah Tokoh (Distinguished Person) in Anugerah Sanggar Sanjung. I also was the recipient of the prestigious Anugerah Akademik Negara award (National Academic Award) in for teaching and recently Malaysia's Rising Star 2015 Award (Highest Research Citation in Agricultural Sciences/Food Science & Technology). He is also a master trainer for the Academy for Higher Education Leadership (AKEPT) and also involved as a trainer in the technology-mediated learning workshop. I have conducted more than 100 workshops especially on using technology in teaching and learning in a university in Malaysia.

These participants able to inform important facets and perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied. They are representative participants by role (senior leaders in an institution), perspective (those who involve in mentoring), experience level (senior academician), and diversity (from different HEIs). The most important thing is these participants willing to share their thoughts. The greatest topic in the world cannot be explored without cooperative participants.

The responses received from the leaders were analysed in the context of the extant literature on leadership in HEIs. Before contacting the leaders, relevant literature was perused and a short semi-structured interview was prepared. The interview schedule contained 16 questions that sought responses from the leaders on various aspects of mentoring and leadership development (see Appendix 1 for the interview protocol). The study found wide variations in what each of the leaders understood by "mentoring" and their practice of leadership role.

4.2 Current Mentoring Practices

This section will answer one of the research question of this study: what is the current status of mentoring practice in higher education institutions? The aim of this section is to understand the current status of mentoring in higher education institutions. In specific, the researchers want to identify whether mentoring system was implemented in HEIs and if there was a mentoring system, how the program was designed and implemented in HEIs. The data revealed two key themes: (1) informal (2) voluntary-based and (3) humanistic elements in mentoring

Informal mentoring

The researchers started the conversation with respondents by asking them to provide the overall implementation of mentoring system in their institutions. All respondents provided quite similar response to the questions. They revealed that mentoring system was implemented informally in their institutions. This can be seen from the following statements:

"As far as I am concerned there is no specific system that guide mentoring in my institution".

(Mentor 2)

"Mentoring in a more indirect approach I guess. Again there is no, difficult to say".

(Mentor 1)

"Previously when we were being accredited we were asked whether we have systematic kind of mentoring program. So we don't have it. We don't have a proper one".

(Mentor 3)

The above statement shows that mentoring system was employed in HEIs but the process of implementation was designed informally. It means it develop naturally, as opposed to formal mentoring programs wherein relationships are arranged and mentee are assigned to mentors. Also, in formal programs, mentors are typically trained, and are most often unknown to the mentee prior to the match.

Informal mentoring consists of less structured interactions between a mentor and mentee that foster a relationship over time (Bottoms et al., 2013). This means that HEIs do not have a standard mentoring system. In this study, it would be safe to conclude that the formal mentor-mentee relationship is invisible from the mentor's institution. Scholars noted that in the event where formal system is missing or limited, the informal mentoring relationship become prevalent and mostly established based on voluntarily basis (Bochner, 1996; Inzer & Crawford, 2005; Nottingham & Mazerolle, 2018).

Also, the Mentor 2 believes that there is no structured or right way to mentoring. Instead he said

"Mentoring in a more indirect approach I guess. Again there is no, difficult to say …. I want to mentor you until that I understand I am better than you. And that is not a good thing. When I feel that I am more than anybody, then I'm not already a good leader [mentor] you know. So that kind of relationship that is very difficult kind of relationship…. You know when we said that we are an expert as if we are putting ourselves higher education than anybody else".

He also added:

"So in the level that I am talking about, the mentoring may happen when we talk about problems. How to solve problems. It's just a question about learning what the new things are. But there is no overt way of trying to systematically mentor the person the way I did for Shikin. Shikin is the same thing. I told Shikin okay you want to do this, that's fine. You write to me what you want to learn. I'm

not going to tell you what I want. You tell me what is it you want to learn then I probably can help you".

Voluntary-based mentoring

The Mentor 3 mentioned about the invisibility of formal mentoring relationship in his institutions. He also believes that mentoring is basically conducted on a volunteerism basis rather than informal or structured system. In sharing his experience, he said:

".. We don't believe to have a kind of proper program. Because to have a proper mentoring program it would be too costly…. you feel that mentoring would be effective if done voluntarily…. We want a volunteer basis, because things are done on mutual willingness and understanding. Then they can be effective. I like you, you like me.

Hence most of the time mentoring occurred spontaneously and naturally as stated by scholars (ie Abugre & Kpinpuo, 2017; Bochner, 1996; Foster et al, 2001; Inzer & Crawford, 2005; Leavit, 2001; Nottingham & Mazerolle, 2018). For instance, while talking about problem to be resolved as what has been experienced, the Mentor 2 said: "So in the level that I am talking about, the mentoring may happen when we talk about problems. How to solve problems. It just a question about learning what are the new things. But there is no right way of trying to systematically mentoring a person".

Before the informal mentor-mentee relationship take place, both parties had sort of information about each other. In other words, they already known each other (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Yet, not all people that the mentors known would be selected as a mentee. As mentioned by Inzer and Craword (2005), mentors were likely selective in selecting their mentee. Mentor 2 said he known his mentee before had the mentor-mentee relationship. Most of them were his Ph.D. student or his ex-Ph.D. student who in the end join his faculty and his junior faculty members. What drive him to select them as his mentee is their leadership quality. He said:

"I have several Ph.D. students. I can see their potential. Some of them willing to come to the front. Some of them are not. For example, when we invite embassy people, some of them distancing themselves, as they do not have the confident to deal with the embassy people. So I see their response. There are people like this. But there also people that we can groom them. This people can do task given. When we discuss these people would have their own thought. They are a thinker. They know number of things. They are not a follower. I don't want my junior to be follower or in other words, a yes man. Yes man for the right thing I have no problem with that. But yes man for the wrong reason I would have a problem with that. There would be negative impact. When that happen who would be responsible? Would we want our junior to be like that?"

In term of relationship, the first mentor who had vast experience as a vice chancellor stated that he is basically could work with anybody and guide anybody. Yet, while he can work with just anybody he is strongly hold to the element of trust. He said:

"Everybody who works with me, first thing I that I 'give' is the level of trust. …If you work with me, I want to start with you at the level of trust. I can trust you, you can trust me. That's it. That is our relationship. As we go along, let say you break my trust then you have got minus point. At the end of the day is your trust point of low, then you are telling me that you are not ready to be a leader because you cannot have that element of trust. For me leader without trust, that's it. You cannot. That's the value you start out with. You don't have that value of amanah and I don't mind taking people without impressive qualification. For me they could be trained. But people without trust you cannot teach them. Especially when you are at the matured age. Difficult". That shows that relationship to build based on trust.

As for the mentor 3 stated that his institutions encourage mentoring at the school level. According to him, at this level "peer mentoring is probably more effective. Because they understand each other".

Based on the above discussion, this study found that the selection of mentee within the informal mentoring setting practiced by the mentors was not grounded on gender or racial bias which were highlighted by the current academic mainstream (ie Bochner, 1996; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Fountain & Newcomer, 2016). Such mainstream derived largely from the western context. In the western context, gender and minority might be common issue in mentoring. But this is not the case of this study. In commenting about gender and race bias, the third mentor said that, "gender is not a big issue you know. In fact, same gender mentoring is more problematic due perception differences".

Humanistic element

We identified several personal characteristics of effective mentors. Most commonly, participants mentioned that mentors should include humanistic element. Within this context of the study, the mentors were being selected because their informal mentoring system is driven by humanistic values or people-oriented approach. Humanistic values are about "treating people equally, that is the first recognition that you need to recognize. That is all human being is equal", said the second mentor.

For the Mentor 1, humanistic values are about respect. He said:

"In university I always remind my people to respect others, especially when we're are at the top. When you are at the top, stop being snobbish, arrogance and do not oppress people. Being at the top in university is not the same as being the top in other government agency. You can just be an ordinary academician once you lost the post. So what is wrong to be good to others? Am I right?"

Whilst the Mentor 3 said humanistic values is about having high empathy. This mentor said he is now "having a very high empathy. In fact, when I got training workshop I would emphasise empathy again and again and again. Until now, empathy, empathy, empathy". When asked why humanistic values, all of the mentors said mentoring is all about human. The third mentor for instance said, "Because it's related to how we deal with people. Similarly, the second mentor said, is about "treating people equally. That is the first recognition that you need to recognize. That is all human being is equal, and making human being more human". Hence it could be understood that humanistic values are about developing a mentee not merely to heighten their competencies leader, but to see them rise as a good human being. The mentor not prioritizing the mentee's best interests can lead to a failed mentoring relationship.

As mentors in this study are driven by humanistic values, their informal mentoring style is very much lean toward family or friendship mechanism (Bochner, 1996; Brady, 2018; Inzer & Crawford, 2005; Nottingham & Mazerolle, 2018). The Mentor 1 said, "I run my department like a family. Because I always wanted people to be comfortable with me. I don't want to create anxiety". Mentor 1 also view other people in his office as his family and friends. He said:

"I think I see my people as a friend. For example, my personal assistant (PA). She is not even my PA. I don't need a PA. But we work together as a team. Whenever she could help me, she would help me and vice versa…. so this relationship we build. We also work as team, a family teamwork. That is why I don't treat people differently. People are able to give and take. No selfishness. They perform based on 100% of sincerity".

As mentors adopt the humanistic values, their mentoring style follow accordingly. In this regards, mentors seem to adopt positive psychosocial activities which has been highlighted by Inzer and Crawford (2005). Amongst positive psychosocial activities are counselling, facilitating social interactions, role modelling, and providing friendship. In this study, apart from acknowledged and recognized mentee as family or friends, mentors in this study also facilitate juniors about work

expectation, engage them with various activities at school, university and international level, inspired them, and provide them with necessary and continuous advises.

Active role of mentee in mentoring is also crucial according to the mentor interviewed. This point is similar with the point discussed by Horiya and Adel Mahmoud (2018) and Nottingham and Mazerolle (2018). In this study mentors mentioned that mentees would be someone who is able to complete task given, have their own thought, seek for more personal guidance, and always be inspired.

Based on this, it is concluded that the informal mentoring system is the currently being practice at least within the context of mentoring of the mentors interviewed. However, the practices are based on trust and willingness. That's mean on voluntary basis. Also it includes humanistic element in nature.

4.3 Mentoring and leadership development

This part answer the objective on how mentoring plays it roles in fostering leadership development in higher education institutions. Mentor has a significant role in helping the development of leadership in higher education institutions. There are several mechanisms that often being practices by mentors in developing leadership quality skills among junior colleagues or peers. Four major themes emerged to answer the final objective: role modelling, supporting, inspiring and creating conducive environment.

Role Modelling

First, participants found the mentor should be a role model. A role model is an individual whose actions or behaviours serve as an example for others (Adejare, 2018). To develop leadership in any organization, requires a mentor that can be refer as a role model and references to mentee and other colleagues. A model plays an essential part in individual positive development. In the context of this research, respondents have indicated the importance of being a role model. The process starts with a good relationship between a mentor and mentees. Such relationship will help to foster potentials of individual mentees. In order to create relationship in an organization, mentor… mentioned that an individual should become as a referred person. This can be seen from following statement of Mentor 2:

'I always being referred by my mentees since they were my' students until now although they are becoming lecturers at the same university now'.

He is being referred because of his character and good example. As a punctual person and performed well in his job, his mentee may have a high respect to him.

In order to become a role model, mentors mentioned about the criteria as a good mentor. It can be concluded into six main characters;

1.   Excel in academic and management

'I think I am so fortunate being surrounded with very good mentor and excellent boss at my early career as USM. At that time, I just come back from study leave and was being given administrative task in my department. So, at this time I need to manage my time well, so that I can excel in my academic work as well as productively deliver my administrative work'.

…I would select one or two colleagues in my own school, they are more senior than me. These are the same people that provide mentoring and guidance, without string attached. I get inspired by their achievement.

2.   Reading

'I am a person who love to read and write to let my work idea and research can publish. I had my senior colloquies that always encourage me in doing work'.

3.   Collaborate with others

'They always challenge me to think differently in solving problem and provide opportunities to collaborate with them in publishing work. They not just only work with me but also work with several others too'.

4.   Discipline and hardworking

This people actually can be young at age, but they achieve more because of their work ethic. When we talk to them, how they put their effort. They are at their level by design not by chance. I was inspired by few people. I easily inspired by people who achieve something by their effort and discipline.

5.   Being a mentee to others

In order to serve as model, sometime mentors need to act as a mentee to work with professional or knowledgeable colleagues. The process begins with build a relationship with knowledgeable colleagues by having discussion and join academic activities development.

'I had also great experience and encouragement from my formal dean that younger that me but very cool and have humanistic approach. I am learning a lot from him how to be a good role model to superiors as a director now. My experience had good mentor and excellent boss were helping me in given advice, wisdom, monitoring and provide directions to me and their mentees advance in careers. They will create opportunities for mentees in research, teaching, build networking, teach on human values such as respect others, sincere and many more. All these experiences that I received from informal mentoring has driven me to help next generation to be great leaders too'.

6.   Sincerity

Good mentors avoid exclusive focus on their own professional needs, such as by promoting their own agenda instead of the mentee's (Belcher, 1998). This element revealed by Mentor 3: "If I guide people, I will guide with no hidden agenda. I never ask mentee to put my name in their work. My intention clearly just to help them, to ensure they perform well. As for my KPI, I have my own work and achievement. I never ask anything in return, even 'thank you' word from them".

 Mentor 1 also commented on the element of sincerity as proposed by Belcher (1998). According to him: "I always ready to see people and guide them, even until late evening. I will try to answer all their questions. I will do my writing at night".

He also added: "as a Muslim and as a Malay, we have adab. If we are aware of adab as a Muslim and Malay, we will be a very good people, we will give the best to others". That's may be the reason behind the emphasis of sincerity, their own background.

Support

One of the role of mentoring is providing a proper support. In this study, we can conclude support in term of providing recognition and ensuring a proper engagement. One of the respondent (Mentor 1) mentioned about the potential leadership recognition practices in HEIs in terms of;

'I give recognition to the administrative and academic staffs who working hard to improve self-potential and support any programs at department. Usually, staffs are narrowly focus on their duties. They rarely look at the system as a whole. Thus, if there are staffs able to fits their work in larger picture such as build a team and project and join competition to promote the university, than these particular group will get recognition. So, staffs who are passionate, have a good attitude, caring, committed, multitasking and have way forward can be considers have signs of good potential leadership.

The concept of employees' engagement is to get mentees involved in activities and programs for individual development. In the context of the study, several respondents are mentioned on employees' engagement as part of their strategy to develop leaders. As an informal mentor at the higher institution they are really understand the nature of academic work and how to meet the university' vision now and in the future. While, as a head of institution, the respondents are aware their position needs to grow all employees together to fit with institution target. As they share their experience from young age to the leadership path having education in different fields, remarkable working experience including non-governments agencies, involve in voluntary activities at national and international partners that provide them an understanding on people have different strength need to be grown. Mentor 1 share their experience as below;

'I was given an opportunity to my junior academic staffs to organize an academic conference. At the first time, I engage junior lecturers as team member and next following year appointed them as leader in organize conference. The staffs were need to arrange on sponsorship supports, location, technology tools, event planning exercises, speakers, call for papers, logistics and so on. So, the staffs had to do the research and monitored the event progress as scheduled. As a leader, I was guide them and provide support such as closely monitor on risky project, have fun, rewarding opportunities that really challenged and kept staffs motivated. By engage employees and giving them opportunities for growth at various stages of academic careers that build their confident to lead the project and really understand the nature of their work'.

Mentor 2 engage his mentee by giving more authority and exposure to his mentee: "I always engage them (mentee). I give a full trust to them. I told them if you one to do something (task)…you need to do like this… I engage them and I also will bring them while I'm travelling"

Also Mentor 2 mention about willingness to take responsibility:

"When there is a visit from embassy or other important event, I will engage my mentee. Yes, there is a mentee who reluctant to take a responsibility. However, I   try to select those who can hold the responsibility and have their own thought. That's the one that I can groom. They need to be a thinker and always capable of doing things, any task..."

Inspiring people

Inspiring person is   as an action or behaviour shown by successful person that become example or role model to inspire others. Great mentor has ability to build them self as example that can motive others to achieve target. Effective leaders as mentors are able to convey inspiration through their behaviour that shape strong characteristics of mentee to success and have moral character. According to the Mentor 2, he has different approach in inspiring people as below;

'I believe on inspiring people by bring them together into the current working system. As a head department I always works in team spirit, so that all members feel the responsibility and building capability together in running project. For example, when I were started new department known as Japanese Studies Department at University of Malaya, I was collaborating and sharing the responsibilities with other colloquies, give autonomy and trust to them to perform work. I let my employees to find partners at other universities and bring their team in discussion with partner from industries too. In this regards, employees able to gain new skills by learning from seniors on negotiation skills, approaching and convincing partners in the discussion. By involve in this kind of program, mentee can easily inspire and understand methods used by mentor in negotiation skills'.

 Meanwhile, 1st mentor emphasized on moral and ethical characters of leader need to be encourage in working culture of higher education.

"The basic aim for higher education is providing excellence teaching and learning with insan approach. However, it's not means that we should ignore the technology driven learning too. Indeed, staffs at the higher education should blend traditional and contemporary method of teaching to create interactive lessons learning. Further, mentor also should able to inspire students or other staffs through mentoring, coaching and counselling them to execute their duties with insan approach. It means that staffs need to commit and participate in learning activities that able to build strong heart, soul of their mentees or students. As a result, mentees will have independent role depending on circumstances, always ready with help and advice, pass wisdom of success person and ability to work on other shoes. Having practices all these techniques will partly contribute to well-being community with strong judgement and insan.

He also added that:

"To me, the first thing is leader should be inspirational. Should be very inspiring. And what we have now in VC that's basically the inspiration leader…that will be a starting point. You are able to inspire people. Then people will start to feel willingness to join the journey together"

Mentor 2 also will inspire all his mentee once he carries the responsibility. He claims that:

I'm not keen to hold any post, but once I'm in power, I will inspire people. I inspired all my mentee in the system.

Inspirational also means unconditional mentoring. For mentor 3, it is transparent and straightforward mentoring:

"...Our dean at that time, very charismatic. Not be seen as bias, he will call everyone to clarify things. He will specify what I need to do and will advise. So with that kind of mentoring, we can say as unconditional mentoring. So I emphasize to my staff, if you want to find a mentor, find mentor that don't have any interest. In the past, my senior never expect anything from me".

Also, unconditional mentoring means:

…actually I said to my junior, if you want to help or guide others, don't even expect thank you from that person. If people don't say thank you and there is no hard feeling, that's the real sincerity.

Similarly, Mentor 2 described the need for unconditional mentoring:

"For me, to be good doesn't mean that we need to tolerate with something they need to do but they didn't. If they didn't perform, we need to tell them. We need to ask them why other people can fulfil all the requirement but you are not up to the level".

Creating conducive environment

Creating conducive environment is one of the vital element in ensuring leadership development. Mentor 3 confident that their organization is creating a conducive environment:

"...Our strength is creating environment where facilitating our people to perform well. It is by providing them whatever the necessary to move forward"

He also added his point:

"So personal growth normally from the supportive, conducive and non-toxic environment. Then people will grow. So I think the success of any organization is creating the environment that promote growth"

Conducive environment also means availability of teamwork. According to Mentor 2:

"If we work as an individual, we will succeed too. But if we work as a team, our portion won't reduce. So from there, I can see the right model for us to adapt is, model as a team".

As a conclusion for the mentoring as a component of leadership development, there are a lot of issues related. The question about what is the current status of mentoring at the institution represented by the mentors brought an understanding that informal mentoring relationship is much more prevalent than the formal mentoring approach. Data derived from the interview understood that the formal mentoring relationship   is invisible at least within the HEIs represented by the mentors.

5. Conclusion

Our study has provided an overview of how mentoring in HEIs. In pursuing this work, researchers performed qualitative research and collected data from an academic leader from different institution and background. Our study focused on understanding the nature of mentoring in HEIs landscape. We observed a range of specificity of mentoring in Malaysian HEIs and we suggested how to chart mentoring for future. We emphasized that we do believe there are a few key attributes of HEIs mentoring relationships. These core attributes distinguish mentoring in HEIs from other kinds of mentoring relationships. We encourage researchers to consider how contextual factors such as occupations and work settings might constrain both the construct of mentoring and the experience of mentoring relationships for protégés and mentors. We hope that our analysis and observations will be helpful to future scholars who pursue these important research questions.

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