

# Mentoring for Change



Paper prepared for UAEW by  
**Dr Jennifer de Vries**

## Introductory Note

This research was commissioned by Universities Australia Executive Women (UAEW) to provide a resource that will help ensure that development of the UAEW Mentoring Program is underpinned by current research and that this practice is extended to practitioners in the sector. The partnership of UAEW and the LH Martin Institute to develop the UAEW Mentoring Program presented an opportunity not just to have a positive impact on leadership quality and gender profiles in the sector, but also to advance and share knowledge of how such programs might be designed to ensure the most positive results for the mentee, the mentor, and the institution. The UAEW Program began in 2009 and offers: a tangible program that matched LH Martin Institute's goal of developing programs that are premised on recognition and promotion of the importance of diversity and inclusivity in leadership and management; the identified need to develop and support more female leaders in the sector and; the capacity to research both the program and the context.

For UAEW this partnership also offered the opportunity to conduct evaluation and research that would contribute to the *Universities Australia Strategy for Women 2011-2014*<sup>1</sup>.

This new resource *Mentoring for Change* prepared for UAEW by Dr Jennifer de Vries extends the evidence-based framework that was developed in early 2009 to inform the design of the program and we hope it will provide a challenging yet accessible resource for the tertiary education sector.

Mentoring resources are available at: <http://www.lhmartininstitute.edu.au/mentoring>

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March 2011

# Contents

<b>Mentoring for Change</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction and overview</b>	<b>3</b>
What is mentoring?	3
<b>Mentoring in the Australian Higher Education context</b>	<b>3</b>
Mentoring programs in Australian universities	4
<b>A critical approach to mentoring</b>	<b>4</b>
A focus on the women	4
The 'bifocal approach'	5
The gendered nature of mentoring	5
The 'Godfather' approach	6
Failing to deliver for women	6
"Why men still get more promotions than women"	6
Mentors and the mentoring relationship	6
The importance of a gender lens	7
Extracts from a European university staff development brochure	8
<b>Where to from here?</b>	<b>8</b>
Negotiating the labyrinth	8
Show me the money! A mentoring program for junior female academics at Flinders	8
The instrumental - developmental continuum	8
The vexed issue of sponsorship	9
Academic mentors taking an instrumental approach	10
Developmental mentoring resources	10
Widening the focus	10
Innovations in mentoring program design	10
Mentoring at the University of Vienna (MUV)	11
Reverse mentoring: an explicit focus on organisational change	11
Developing effective diversified mentoring relationships	12
A focus on the relationship	12
Catalyst Resources	12
<b>Questions to guide practice</b>	<b>12</b>
Program objectives	12
An interpersonal relationship	13
Evaluation against objectives	13
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>14</b>

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Paper prepared for UAEW by Dr Jennifer de Vries (jen.devries@me.com)

## Introduction and overview

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. It is designed to accompany the mentoring program and workshops being offered by Universities Australia Executive Women (UAEW) and is intended as a scholarly resource to inform the practice of mentoring within the Australian Higher Education (HE) sector. The paper is firmly positioned within a gender equality framework and is premised on women's continuing disadvantage within the HE sector. While explicitly directed at women only (WO) mentoring programs, it is nonetheless relevant to a broad range of mentoring programs. It will be particularly pertinent to those programs where a sole focus on the mentoring target group (for example women, indigenous students, racial or cultural minority group members) is proving to be inadequate because there is a need for the dominant/majority group culture to change.

The paper takes a critical approach to mentoring, believing that mentoring is currently seen as a panacea for a variety of organisational ills. Adopting this critical approach and drawing on the recent research and literature, highlights the ways in which mentoring over-promises and under-delivers. A critical approach to mentoring, by identifying this gap, enables mentoring to be re-framed and re-focused to ensure that mentoring is fit for its intended purpose. It allows for more realistic assessment to be made of the appropriateness of mentoring in different contexts and circumstances, highlights the under-explored capacity of mentoring to be used strategically and to contribute to organisational change, and focuses attention on the many design elements which need to be considered in the implementation of 'fit for purpose' mentoring programs.

The paper begins by defining mentoring and providing a brief overview of mentoring programs within the Australian HE sector. It then examines some of the key criticisms of mentoring programs, with a particular emphasis on gender and power. Keeping these criticisms in mind the paper offers a framework for differentiating between mentoring approaches, provides case study materials to highlight examples of good and innovative practice, explores program design, identifies useful resources and publications and includes an extensive bibliography for those wishing to explore mentoring in greater depth.

## What is mentoring?

Mentoring has been adopted in so many different contexts and for such a variety of purposes that the first difficulty is defining mentoring. Over several decades, mentoring within organisations has grown enthusiastically and exponentially

for everything from socializing new staff, to fast tracking high achievers, to enhancing diversity within management ranks (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007:253).

Within the organisational context it is helpful to turn to the writings of Kathy Kram (1985), an early and still influential mentoring researcher who continues to draw on her 1985 definition. She defines traditional mentoring 'as a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé's career' (Ragins & Kram 2007:5). Early work focused on mentoring relationships that were naturally occurring in the workplace, most commonly between older and younger men. Following the advent of structured mentoring programs, the distinction is now made between *informal* naturally occurring mentoring and *formal* mentoring, which is developed with organisational assistance or intervention (Ragins 1999:231). Formal mentoring is now used for a variety of purposes however an important subgroup of mentoring programs developed with the explicit aim to replicate the perceived benefits of informal mentoring and extend it to under-represented groups, such as women and racial minorities (particularly popular in the US, see Ragins 1996).

Mentoring has strong face validity as an ideal strategy to address women's lack of career success and continuing under-representation in senior organisational ranks. It is now understood that women experience cumulative disadvantage over the period of their careers, while men could be said to experience cumulative advantage. Eagly and Carli (2007) use the metaphor of the labyrinth to describe women's career paths. There is no one defining 'glass ceiling' moment, rather it is 'the sum of many obstacles along the way' (Eagly & Carli 2007:63). If the labyrinth aptly describes women's experience, then it follows that some external assistance in recognising and negotiating the twists, turns and dead ends of the labyrinth would be invaluable. Surely a mentor would be advantageous in negotiating the labyrinth?

## Mentoring in the Australian Higher Education context

The difficulties that women face within the sector continue to be well documented, and have been outlined in the companion mentoring document (Bell 2009) and the 2010 Gender Equity Framework document (Bell 2010) available on the LH Martin Institute mentoring page <http://www.lhmartininstitute.edu.au/mentoring>. Mentoring has been popularly adopted as a strategy to address continuing



gender inequality and recent research continues to highlight the relative absence of informal mentoring experienced by women within universities.

Women's disadvantage is clearly demonstrated in the work of Dever et al. (2008) in their exploration of the influence of PhD experience on post PhD employment. When reporting on their supervisory experience:

*...female graduates reported significantly less encouragement than males in those areas relevant to building academic careers...In general, assistance in gaining employment was significantly more likely to be available to male rather than female PhD candidates (Dever et al. 2008:ii).*

This translates into lower status and pay employment outcomes for female PhD graduates. The clear link between mentoring, networking and employment outcomes, led Dever et al (2008:iii) to conclude that '[t]hese results testify to the importance of social relationships and academic and professional connections in securing good employment outcomes.' This is an important finding because it demonstrates that disadvantage for junior women is not located in the past. This is consistent with one of the most important findings of MIT's groundbreaking work on women's experience of the academy (Bailyn 2003). The clear link between less advantageous academic employment outcomes and the absence of informal mentoring demonstrates how the pattern of the career labyrinth begins early in women's careers. It also points towards improved mentoring as a potential solution to address disadvantage.

## Mentoring programs in Australian universities

There is a rich tradition of targeted programs for women within Australian universities. Programs date back to the early 1990s when Federal funding was available and these programs flourished<sup>2</sup>. Not all survived the withdrawal of external funding, however over the years the majority of universities at any one time, have offered programs for women<sup>3</sup>.

In 1998 a practitioners' network (convened by UWA) was formed following the *Winds of Change* conference roundtable facilitated by Colleen Chesterman (co-ordinator of the ATN WEXDEV program). The practitioners' network, labelled sdfw<sup>4</sup> (staff development for women) remains active, meeting biannually in conjunction with the EOPHEA (equity practitioners) conference. There is a substantial but not complete overlap between sdfw practitioners and equity practitioners, with a number of WO initiatives being located in staff development or research development units within universities.

In the most recent survey of WO targeted programs, Tessens (2008) found 31 out of 36 universities had one or more WO targeted programs, and 17 of these had WO mentoring programs. A review of the published and grey literature<sup>5</sup>

compiled at the same time unearthed more than 90 documents, covering the 15-year history of WO programs within Australian higher education at that time. The literature shows a broad engagement with mentoring, including 'how to' documents (Butorac 1998; Chesterman 2001) and the adoption of a number of approaches including; mentoring as one component of a leadership development program (de Vries 2005; de Vries, Webb & Eveline 2006; Webb 2008), programs targeted at early career researchers (Casson & Devos 2003; Devos, McLean & O'Hara 2003; Gardiner 2005; Gardiner et al. 2007), group mentoring (McCormack & West 2006; McCormack 2006; West & McCormack 2003), mentoring across a network (Chesterman 2003) and collegial/peer mentoring (Pike 1995). There is a bias towards mentoring programs for academic women, however a number of programs are inclusive of all female staff.

## A critical approach to mentoring

### A focus on the women

Mentoring programs for women, by their very nature, focus on women as their target group. However, gender and organisation scholars argue that this focus on the women is fundamentally misguided. These scholars argue that rather than seeing the women as having deficits or requiring assistance to succeed within organisations as they currently exist, it is the organisations that require transformational change (Cockburn 1991; Ely & Meyerson 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher 2000). Cynthia Cockburn (1991:12) describes this difference in approach, contrasting what she terms the 'short agenda' with the 'longer agenda'. The short or limited agenda is one of 'equality for individual women' while the longer agenda is a '*project of transformation for organizations*' (Cockburn 1989:218, original emphasis) that engages with issues of power and the way in which power reproduces inequality.

A singular focus on the women can leave masculinist organisational cultures intact. McKeen and Bujaki (2007:218) conclude in their recent review of gender and mentoring that mentoring 'seems intended to assimilate women into the dominant masculine corporate culture'. Meanwhile, *informal* mentoring and networking, which are shaped by masculinity and reinforce male advantage, remain in place and unscrutinised, as do the usual ways of progressing through organisational hierarchies. Because it does not address entrenched relations of male advantage and female disadvantage, Hackney and Bock (2000) argue that formal mentoring fails to challenge the status quo.

Of greater concern than a failure to challenge the status quo is the potential for mentoring to become a vehicle for reinforcing the (acceptability of the) status quo. Helen Colley (2001:193) problematises the individual focus of mentoring in her study of mentoring for disadvantaged youth, urging

2 Further details regarding the early years of WO programs in Australia are outlined in Ivory Basement Leadership Eveline, J 2004, *Ivory Basement Leadership: Power and invisibility in the changing university*, UWA Press, Crawley.

3 Surveys were undertaken by the AVCC in 2001 and 2003.

4 <http://www.osds.uwa.edu.au/programmes/dw/sdfw>

5 [http://www.osds.uwa.edu.au/programmes/dw/sdfw/literature\\_review](http://www.osds.uwa.edu.au/programmes/dw/sdfw/literature_review)

her colleagues to remain open to 'questioning the validity of mentoring as an individualised response to problems that may rightly have more collective or structural solutions'. A focus on mentoring individual disadvantaged youth, she argued, might serve as a distraction or alternative to tackling the structural disadvantage young people experience. This raises the question as to whether mentoring programs, with their focus on individuals rather than systems or organisations, can be an appropriate strategy to address the disadvantage of target groups.

Anita Devos argues that the focus on the individual serves to obscure the organisational context and agenda. Devos (2008:195), building on the work of Colley and applying a post-structural feminist critique to mentoring of Australian academic women, argues that 'these programmes are supported because they speak to institutional concerns with improving performance in a performance culture, while being seen to deal with the problem of gender inequity'. Devos suggests that mentoring suits the purposes of the institution precisely because it 'activates the operation of technologies of self, which the women...take up to manage themselves as women academic workers'. Mentoring therefore produces 'certain sorts of self-regulating subjects' (Devos 2005:194), where women conform to male career paths and competitive norms.

Devos's (2004; 2005) critique of mentoring programs for academic women highlights the possible mismatch between organisational and equity agendas.

*An apparent focus on the women, with no corresponding focus on the need for organisational change, actually becomes an exercise in fitting women to organisational demands.*

Equity programs risk being co-opted to reinforce inequitable gendered cultures, counter to program objectives and practitioner intentions.

Devos's scholarly critique of WO mentoring programs is unusual. More commonly WO mentoring programs and WO programs more broadly have attracted little scholarly attention because of the perceived fundamental difficulty of a misplaced focus on the women. Jennifer de Vries (2010) has explored the resulting gap between theory and practice, asking; how can WO programs with their inevitable focus on the women engage with the need for organisational transformation? She has coined the term the 'bifocal approach' (see text box *The bifocal approach*), arguing that it is possible for women's programs to combine Cockburn's 'short' and 'long' agenda.

## The gendered nature of mentoring

Feminist scholars have argued that the concept of mentoring is fundamentally gendered. Ann Darwin (2000:198) sees the (masculine) history of mentoring as all about power and knowledge:

*...handing down knowledge, maintaining culture, supporting talent and securing future leadership... Thus traditionally, the mentoring relationship has been*

### The 'bifocal approach'

Jennifer de Vries (2010) has coined the term the 'bifocal approach', to highlight the need for WO programs to focus on both the women and the organisation. This avoids WO programs falling into the common trap of an exclusive reliance on a 'fix the women' (Meyerson & Fletcher 2000) approach. The bifocal approach, by playfully drawing on the notion of bifocal spectacles, opens up the possibility of focusing on both the close up vision, the shorter-term solution of developing individual women, and the distance vision, the need for longer-term transformational organisational change. As with bifocal spectacles, with practice there is increased ease and capacity to switch focal length, keeping both goals firmly in view.

The bifocal approach provides a practical framework to guide practitioners as they design and implement WO programs. It is however, as de Vries notes, the distant vision of organisational transformation that is by far the most challenging aspect of the bifocal approach. Working with the development of the women is far easier and rewarding in the short term, but success with individual women is ultimately undermined if there is no accompanying longer-term vision. The bifocal approach emphasises that it is not a case of one focus or the other, but that both individual development and organisational change are required.

*framed in a language of paternalism and dependency and stems from power dependent, hierarchical relationship aimed at maintaining the status quo.*

Ragins and Verbos (2007) (see text box, *The 'Godfather' approach*) label mentoring within this tradition as the 'Godfather' approach. Their emphasis is on reclaiming mentoring away from this instrumentalist, hierarchical and 'perhaps stereotypically masculine approach to the relationship' and towards what they describe as a more feminine relational approach. The need to differentiate between mentoring approaches will be discussed further under the instrumental - developmental mentoring continuum.

Bringing a gender perspective to mentoring requires more than exploring the nature of the mentoring relationship. Mentoring is not only a masculine construct with a masculine history, but it takes place within male dominated institutions and cultures. Mentoring has often been presented as 'contextless', therefore ignoring the organisational context and how this shapes, constrains and intrudes on what occurs within the mentoring pairs or dyads.

Joan Acker's (1990; 1992) work on the gendered organisation is useful in understanding the inevitable link between the mentoring dyad and the organisational context. Acker proposes that organisations themselves are gendered and that gender inequality is sustained through what she terms gendering processes. These gendering processes encompass not only the personal (internal to ourselves) and interpersonal gendering processes but also the cultural and structural gendering processes. In this sense individuals, workplace cultures and the organisation itself maintain the gender status quo. Neither operates independently of the other, and seeing them as interlinked reinforces the need for individual development linked to organisational change. Importantly, it also emphasises the need for a preparedness to see and address gender explicitly in multiple facets of the

program, including what individuals (mentors and mentees) bring to the relationship, the nature of the relationship and the organisational context where mentoring is taking place. Gendering processes that support and maintain gender inequality can intrude into all facets of mentoring.

### The 'Godfather' approach

Ragins and Verbos (2007:92) bring a relational perspective to mentoring, re-defining mentoring as 'a developmental relationship that involves mutual growth, learning and development in personal, professional and career domains'. They are critical of mentoring that is viewed as a one-sided relationship leading to instrumental outcomes, dubbing this the

"Godfather approach", in which a patriarchal mentor does out favours, protects the protégé, and expects allegiance in return for these favours... The relationship is valued for *what it can do* rather than for *what it can be*... this view ignores the reciprocal nature of mentoring relationships, and takes a hierarchical and perhaps stereotypically masculine approach to the relationship (Ragins & Verbos 2007:95, original emphasis).

Ragins and Verbos (2007:92) seek to reclaim what they describe as a more feminine, relational view of mentoring that overcomes the limitations of one-directional, hierarchical mentoring. In doing so they call attention to the ways that traditional perspectives on mentoring are themselves gendered.

## Failing to deliver for women

Formal mentoring was originally designed to address the shortfall experienced by women in the workplace, where informal mentoring was observed to advantage men. Research specific to formal mentoring is limited relative to research on informal mentoring or where the distinction between the two is not clearly made, however, research suggests that formal mentoring is a 'poor cousin' to informal mentoring (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007). This 'poor cousin' gap between formal and informal mentoring has been found for women across a number of studies (see Giscombe 2007). However this gap was not replicated for men. Ragins and Cotton (1999) found that while women received less coaching, role modelling, friendship and social interaction in formal mentoring programs, that this gap between formal and informal mentoring did not occur for men.

The more recent work of Ibarra, Carter and Silva (2010) takes this a step further (see text box, "*Why men still get more promotions than women*"). They find that while both men and women engage in formal and informal mentoring, women gain less career benefit from both formal and informal mentoring than men. This strikes at the heart of the hope, as expressed by Eleanor Ramsay (2001:16) that formal mentoring would replicate for women 'the informal systems for career advancement used for so long and to such good advantage by male colleagues'.

Ibarra et al's (2010) data suggests that nothing in fact has changed. While more women are being mentored, both informally and formally, men continue to enjoy more career benefits. Ibarra et al. (2010) found significant gender differences in the behaviours of mentors and the experiences of mentees, with a greater preparedness on the part of

mentors to sponsor male mentees. Clearly gendered roles, stereotypes and expectations intrude into the mentoring relationship, undermining the hoped for outcomes for women.

This intrusion of gender into the mentoring relationship should come as no surprise. If these senior sponsors/mentors (predominantly male) have been unable to bring greater numbers of women into the senior levels of the organisation in their roles as leaders and line managers, why would adopting the role of mentor/sponsor change this? This is also a cautionary tale for formal mentoring programs. Gendered advantage is being reproduced despite gender equity strategies designed to counter this. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of women only mentoring programs and the possibility that they may be misdirected or co-opted.

### "Why men still get more promotions than women"

Ibarra, Carter and Silva (2010) in their recent *Harvard Business Review* article 'Why men still get more promotions than women' grabbed the attention of many. Based on a large-scale survey conducted by Catalyst and in-depth interviews of a smaller sample of men and women, they found that women gain less career benefit from both formal and informal mentoring than men. Ibarra, Carter and Silva (2010:82) discovered that:

All mentoring is not created equal... There is a special kind of relationship – called sponsorship – in which the mentor goes beyond giving feedback and advice and uses his or her influence with senior executives to advocate for the mentee.

Sponsorship, they found was more readily extended to male than female mentees. Mentors, predominantly male, helped women to understand 'ways they might need to change as they move up the leadership pipeline' while helping men to 'plan their moves and take charge in new roles, in addition to endorsing their authority publicly'. In contrast, some women described 'how they've had to fight with their mentors to be viewed as ready for the next role' (Ibarra, Carter & Silva 2010:83).

Ibarra et al. propose that increased clarity and accountability regarding the sponsors' (rather than mentors') role will address this inequity. While this may be true, perhaps more importantly the way in which gendered assumptions and stereotypes play out within the mentoring dyad must be addressed.

## Mentors and the mentoring relationship

The commonly held view of mentoring as a one-sided instrumental relationship has resulted in a focus on the mentee and mentee outcomes. This has been at the expense of theory and research that examine the mentoring relationship (Ragins & Verbos 2007) and the role of the mentor (Ragins 2007). The early cautions of Kathy Kram (1985:195) that mentoring has been 'oversimplified as a relationship that is easily created and maintained' and as a solution to a multitude of problems, has been ignored. In addition, little attention is paid to the potential detriment for mentees (Scandura 1998) despite, as observed by Eby (2007), the obvious potential for relational difficulties.

Few studies examine outcomes for mentors or their organisation (McKeen & Bujaki 2007). This is surprising



given the significant time impost for senior mentors within organisations in fulfilling this role. Yet the need to focus on the mentor and the mentoring relationship is well illustrated in the Ibarra et al. (2010) work. In order to address their findings, they advocate training mentors/sponsors on the complexities of gender and leadership. This is an important recognition of the need to scrutinise the role of the mentor and what they bring to the mentoring relationship, in particular their (possible lack of) gender insight.

Diversified mentoring relationships (see text box, *Developing effective diversified mentoring relationships*), as defined by Ragins (1997:482) 'are composed of mentors and protégés who differ in group membership associated with power differences in organizations (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation)'. Given the demographic of male-dominated organisations, many women find themselves in cross-gender diversified mentoring partnerships. The majority of men however participate in homogenous same-gender relationships. This cross gender dimension brings with it real and perceived risks of sexual liaison (O'Neill & Blake-Beard 2002; Morgan & Davidson 2008). It also serves to limit the relationship, for example out of hours socialising may serve to strengthen mentoring relationships, but is often avoided by cross-gender dyads (Ragins & Cotton 1999). Aside from these more obvious difficulties much of the research examining gender differences in mentoring is complicated and inconclusive, often confusing formal and informal mentoring (for useful overviews see Young, Cady & Foxon 2006; Ragins 2007). What is clear however is that '...power dynamics and relationship building are more complicated in cross-gender mentoring relationships and that they may demand more from both the mentors and the protégés (Blake-Beard 2001:1).

A one-sided and instrumental view of the mentoring relationship has also obscured the potential for mentoring relationships to serve a more strategic purpose. There are passing references in the literature suggesting that mentoring may be useful in educating majority group members (Fletcher & Ragins 2007; Ragins 2002). Baugh and Fagenson-Eland (2007:253) suggest that mentoring 'provides education for the mentors with respect to challenges faced by women and minorities in organizations'. Ragins (2007:293) describes this as an opportunity 'to gain insight into the everyday experience of being "the other" in organizations'. Despite these assertions and the desirability of these outcomes there is little research to support these claims or to assist in ensuring these outcomes occur. Research examining the development of mentors in diversified mentoring partnerships remains cutting edge for WO formal mentoring programs.

This recognition of the potential for mentors to be educated by the mentoring experience can be taken a step further to examine the potential for mentors to contribute to the desired organisational change process (de Vries, Webb & Eveline 2006). It is the potential recruitment of mentors as 'constituents for change' (Kolb 2003) that makes mentoring ideally suited to the bifocal approach as advocated by de Vries (2010). Mentors, with their larger sphere of influence, can be seen as key players and partners in the required

organisational change process. Mentoring can provide the opportunity and be the vehicle for developing or enhancing the gender insight of mentors. The 'bifocal approach' to mentoring programs therefore places much greater emphasis on the mentors and the mentoring relationship. Maximising the development of gender insight on the part of the mentor becomes an important driver for mentor program design.

*For the bifocal approach to succeed, not only must mentors be prepared to listen and learn from their mentee and to re-examine their own gendered assumptions, they must also push aside some of the rosy view that comes with seniority and success in order to cast a critical eye over their organisation and to use their influence to tackle institutional barriers to women's equal success.*

While it is easy to assume that senior women are exempt from the need to develop and deepen gender insight, de Vries (2010) found that male and female mentors (all Professors) adopted very similar approaches, based on the assumption that women needed to adapt and conform in order to succeed, and with little acknowledgement of the need for the organisation to change. In addition female mentors were strongly influenced by the coping strategies they had themselves adopted to succeed based on their own life circumstances. Being a woman is insufficient to ensure the development of gender insight.

The challenge of drawing on the wealth of experience of the past, without replicating the past has been explicitly acknowledged in the UAEW Mentoring Framework, which states:

*This future orientation generates one of the most significant challenges for a mentoring program: the capacity to draw on past experience whilst simultaneously transforming that experience into leadership responses appropriate to current and future contexts (Bell 2009:2).*

## **The importance of a gender lens**

*Formal mentoring programs, in seeking to replicate for women the informal mentoring enjoyed for so long by men, have paid insufficient attention to the gendered nature of mentoring. It is now imperative to bring a gender lens to mentoring programs for women.*

Continuing practice without reference to the theory and research regarding gender and organisations leaves programs vulnerable to sustaining rather than disrupting or changing the gendered status quo. It becomes increasingly difficult to hold on to an equality agenda, and to know when programs are being co-opted for organisational purposes that undermine the original equality intent. This is particularly evident when, without firm gender equality foundations, the often-heard query of 'what about the men?' becomes increasingly difficult to counter. In Europe mentoring programs that originally targeted women are increasingly opened up to include men<sup>6</sup>, despite the obvious continuing gender disparities between men and women in universities.

<sup>6</sup> This was apparent from presentations at the European mentoring network (eument-net) Conference held in Lausanne, Switzerland in February 2010. See forthcoming publication: Helene Fügler, Dagmar Höppel (ed.): *Mentoring for change. A focus on mentors and their role in advancing gender equality*, eument-net, Fribourg, 2011.



(see text box *Extracts from a European university staff development brochure*).

Adopting this more critical stance towards mentoring and combining this with the imperative to look at mentoring through a gender lens, necessitates new frameworks, approaches and design for mentoring programs. The remainder of this paper is designed to support this re-focusing and re-framing of WO mentoring programs.

#### **Extracts from a European university staff development brochure**

The following quotes regarding a WO mentoring program illustrate a lack of gender awareness, a preparedness to blame women and not the institution for gender inequality, and the instrumental approach taken by the university and program organisers to this activity.

Quote from female mentee: 'It is not that the university discriminates. It is often down to women themselves that they do not reach the higher positions'.

Quote about male mentor: 'The mentor project is another excellent initiative...if it were up to mentor x, there would be another mentor project, this time for men'.

Background to program: 'The university is making serious attempts to climb up the Shanghai ranking...Female academics working in the higher echelons are a vital condition to securing a good international image...This is why the mentor project is so important'.

## **Where to from here?**

### **Negotiating the labyrinth**

Despite these critiques of mentoring for women the prospects for women only mentoring programs remain positive. Women in universities remain keen to engage in mentoring programs and mentoring programs are positively evaluated. (for Australian university examples see Browning 2007; de Vries 2005; Devos, McLean & O'Hara 2003; Gardiner 2005). Evaluations are primarily based on self-report, with a few important exceptions. Gardiner et al. (2007) in their article titled *Show me the money!* used a control group of women not selected to the program to show improved rates of promotion, success in applying for grants and improved publication rates for the mentees. (see text box '*Show me the money!*')

Other forms of instrumental support also show positive outcomes. For example Blau et al. (2010) in a US study also used a control group to examine outcomes for female economists who attended a two day mentoring workshop, once again demonstrating positive outcomes in terms of grants and publications. A recent evaluation of a UAEW/UOW Female Academics in Engineering Workshop show positive outcomes with participants reporting new collaborative projects (43%), greater professional confidence (69%) and valuing the importance of role models (61%). It appears that a small investment in instrumental assistance can go a long way. This fits with the notion of the career labyrinth where timely information, advice and role-modelling assist in navigating the ever-increasing complexities and competitiveness associated with building a successful career.

*However the challenge of the bifocal approach lies in dismantling the labyrinth for all women, even as individual women are being assisted to thrive and succeed despite the labyrinth.*

With an increased recognition of what is required to make mentoring successful – that is an increased focus on the mentor, the mentoring relationship and the need for organisational change – mentoring has the ability to assist women in negotiating the labyrinth *and* contribute to building more gender equitable workplaces. What kind of mentoring will assist in achieving these goals?

#### **'Show me the money!' Mentoring for junior female academics at Flinders University**

Evaluation of the Flinders mentoring program has been unusually rigorous using a multifaceted, longitudinal design including a control group (Gardiner 1999; Gardiner 2005; Gardiner et al. 2007). This approach moves well beyond the more commonly observed over-reliance on self-report, explicitly seeking objective career outcomes. In doing so it specifically targeted promotion, retention and research performance as desired outcomes, therefore adopting a largely instrumental approach to mentoring. Positive outcomes included higher retention and promotion rates, and higher average research grant amounts and more scholarly publications, all in comparison with the control group. The authors conclude:

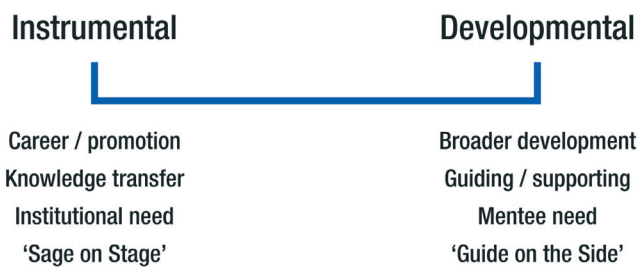
...for universities there appears to be little question that investing in well-designed and implemented mentoring schemes...provides a significant return on investment, making it an effective strategy for the university and for the women (Gardiner et al. 2007:440).

### **The instrumental - developmental continuum**

The mentoring literature has moved towards differentiating between approaches to mentoring, because this has important implications, as evidenced by the Ibarra, Carter and Silva article (2010). Are we talking about 'well meaning colleagues' who provide 'caring and altruistic advice' or highflying 'career sponsors' to ensure the next promotion? Or to use the work of Ragins and Verbos (2007); do we mean the 'Godfather' approach where the emphasis is on what the relationship *can do* for the mentee, versus a more feminine relational approach to mentoring where the focus is on what the relationship *can be* for both parties. Different terminology is used throughout the literature to describe these differences, however these can be broadly grouped into the instrumental versus developmental approaches to mentoring. Rather than thinking of these as discrete categories, situating them on a continuum is more helpful in terms of understanding what happens in practice.

Mentoring at the instrumental end of the continuum is characterised by a senior colleague mentoring a junior colleague with the intent of assisting the career of the junior colleague in her current role and context. The mentor uses their knowledge and experience to teach and/or advise the mentee how to succeed. In the case of WO mentoring, where the organisation wishes to progress women through the ranks to address the shortfall of senior women, there can

## Mentoring Continuum



be a strong focus on promotion. Based on unequal power relationships, an instrumental mentor relationship is primarily one-way, with no explicit expectation that the mentor can learn from the mentee. Mentors may even demonstrate a lack of capacity or desire to empathise, listen or offer other types of psychosocial support needed to make mentoring a safe place to learn and take risks.

Mentoring relationships towards the developmental end of the continuum would be characterised by a more open-ended journeying approach facilitated by the mentor who works hard to provide a safe, supportive yet challenging learning environment, marked by critical reflection on both the part of the mentor and the mentee. This mentoring exhibits mutuality and collaborative partnership working on a broader range of issues identified by the mentee. Both partners focus on the learning and engage in active monitoring of the learning process to ensure goals are being met. The mentor refrains from giving advice and knowing the answers, instead acting as a guide.

Instrumental mentoring has been increasingly criticised in the literature: accused of making institutional needs central (Colwell 1998); exclusively focussing on mentees' career outcomes (Greenhaus & Singh 2007); using male models of success (McKeen & Bujaki 2007); ignoring the learning process (Lankau & Scandura 2007); and emphasising one way relationships (McKeen & Bujaki 2007). The dangers of this instrumental approach include dependency, control and greater power distance (Gay & Stephenson 1998); sponsorship and patronage (Jarvis & Macinnes 2009); social control and conformity (1998); and socialisation into the majority culture (Chao 2007).

In contrast to the instrumental approach, developmental mentoring makes mentee needs central to the relationship (Colwell 1998) with an emphasis on exploring, guiding, supporting, risk taking and independence (Gay & Stephenson 1998). With less power distance, the relationship becomes more reciprocal and more conducive to mentor learning and reciprocal development (Fletcher & Ragins 2007).

Developmental mentoring, where Zachary (2000) describes the mentor as the 'guide on the side', because of the two-way nature of the relationship, opens up much greater possibility for the development of gender insight and is therefore more supportive of the bifocal approach. In contrast to this, instrumental mentoring, where the mentor

acts as 'sage on the stage' limits the openness and learning of the mentor, and is therefore less conducive to pursuing an organisational change agenda. In practice, movement towards the right of the continuum towards developmental mentoring need not mean a relinquishing of the important benefits of drawing on the knowledge and expertise of the mentor in developing strategies to negotiate the career labyrinth. It does however relegate instrumental mentoring to one aspect of the mentoring relationship, rather than constituting the entirety of the mentoring relationship.

What is apparent from Ibarra et al. (2010) is that developing greater gender insight on the part of the mentor, through training and/or the mentoring relationship is as critical to the success of instrumental mentoring as it is to developmental mentoring and the bifocal approach. Without attention to the ways in which the mentoring relationship is gendered, the desired outcomes for women are not realised.

### The vexed issue of sponsorship

Sponsorship, a strongly instrumental approach to mentoring, is increasingly being advocated as necessary for getting results for women (Ibarra, Carter & Silva 2010). According to Giscombe (2007:565) 'Sponsorship is one facet of mentoring that women, as a marginalized and stereotyped group, need to break through the glass ceiling'. Yet sponsorship is potentially risky behaviour for mentors. Gendered stereotypes operate to undermine assessments of women's competence and women are seen as more of a risk for leadership positions. Paradoxically then, in order for mentors to be prepared to sponsor women (part of an instrumental approach), the strength of the mentoring relationship and the capacity to work through gendered differences (more likely in a developmental relationship) is even more crucial. This puts a premium, according to Giscombe (2007:569) on:

*...improving mentor selection, matching processes, and participants support, so that pairs could develop deeper, more committed relationships to better approximate informal relationships and improve the chances that formal mentors will enact sponsorship roles.*

There are dangers in advocating sponsorship, particularly in the absence of a gendered lens. There has been a reticence on the part of mentoring programs, particularly in universities, to expect mentors to sponsor their mentees. There are questions that need to be answered. How does sponsorship differ from patronage, which early advocates for WO programs were keen to avoid. How does sponsorship operate within HE (in contrast to corporations, where these studies take place), both within and between universities and across the sector? Discipline silos and the importance of external assessors play a large part in the careers of academic women, and the scenario is different again for professional women. This is an important arena for future research. However the danger is that formal sponsorship, like formal mentoring more broadly, in seeking to replicate for women what happens more spontaneously and readily for men, may once again become the poor cousin to informal sponsorship.

### Academic mentors taking an instrumental approach

In her thesis examining the effectiveness of the bifocal approach in building more gender equitable workplaces, de Vries (2010) interviewed eight mentors, four male and four female professors at the University of Western Australia (UWA). Six of the eight adopted a largely instrumental style, relying heavily on their expert knowledge, networks, problem solving skills and experience to assist their mentees' career development. In effect this became an enculturation process towards the 'ideal academic' based on the message 'you too can succeed, the way we have succeeded'. They showed little interest or expectation that they would learn from their mentees, and largely dismissed gender as irrelevant to building a successful academic career.

The uniformity of approach adopted by UWA mentors was not reflected in her sample of male and female mentors in a policing organisation. In policing de Vries found a diversity of approaches located across the mentoring continuum, and identified a mentor, 'Trevor' who epitomised a 'bifocal approach' to mentoring. Trevor learnt a great deal from his mentees (three in total) regarding the situation for women in policing. His attitudes and behaviour changed as a result of his growing awareness and over time he began challenging gendered practices within his sphere of influence. He became a 'tempered radical' (Meyerson 2003), someone who works for change from within an organisation. Trevor, true to the bifocal approach, had his focus on both the women and the organisation. He wanted women to navigate, survive and thrive. At the same time he and they would be challenging the gendered status quo.

### Developmental mentoring resources

Lois Zachary has produced a trilogy of books that are enormously helpful for practitioners, mentors and mentees. Her first book *The Mentor's Guide* (2000) focuses on mentors as facilitators of a learning partnership. Zachary provides material useful for self-guided learning as well as exercises that are excellent for mentor training sessions. The book explores all aspects and phases of mentoring partnerships and points to further useful reading and resources. Zachary's second book *Creating a Mentoring Culture* (2005) is designed as a guide for organisations. Zachary takes a holistic approach to building a mentoring culture, addressing the myth that mentoring programs are easy to implement and require little work. Zachary describes her book as a 'concrete manageable roadmap' to assist in the 'journey of organizational learning'. In her final book *The Mentee's Guide* (Zachary & Fischler 2009) the focus is on mentees playing a proactive role in shaping and defining their mentoring relationship. Once again exercises and resources provide an excellent basis for training mentees to get the most out of mentoring.

### Widening the focus

Giscombe (2007:564) advocates that mentoring programs designed to advance women through the glass ceiling need to 'focus more strongly on gender'. In effect, a stronger focus on gender serves to widen the focus of mentoring far beyond outcomes for mentees, to include mentors, the organisation and organisational change. This includes identifying organisational objectives and outcomes, focussing on mentor's skills, attitudes, gender insight and accountability, increasing clarity regarding the nature of the mentoring relationship, and providing the support and training required to achieve these objectives.

The continuum noted above is a helpful guide for thinking through the approach to mentoring that best fits program objectives. Yet more needs to be said about the role of the mentor. According to Ragins, (2002:46) '... a formal mentoring program is only as good as the mentor it produces'. This degree of emphasis on mentors is a long way removed from the more commonly held and enacted role of mentors as benevolent colleagues, who kindly volunteer their time to proffer advice to more junior colleagues. Framing the mentor's role in this way has served to minimise expectations of the mentors and undermine their commitment to undertake mentor training. Not only has this served to devalue the skills requirements and role of the mentor, it has resulted in minimal scrutiny of mentors and their mentoring approach.

Mentoring programs never begin with a blank slate. The lack of clarity regarding what mentoring is and isn't means that organisations, program organisers, mentors and mentees approach mentoring with often unexamined sets of assumptions regarding the nature of mentoring and what mentoring programs can deliver. These potentially conflicting and contradictory assumptions, in the absence of appropriate training, become the basis for mentors and mentees' understanding of their roles. Many of the difficulties in mentoring relationships arise from a mismatch between the expectations and goals of the organisation, the mentor and the mentee. Mismatches between mentor and mentee occur for example when a mentor adopts a developmental approach while the mentee expects sponsorship, or vice-versa. In addition a program with a bifocal aim, but where the mentor and mentee adopt a sponsorship approach may result in outcomes that satisfy the mentor and mentee yet fail to meet program objectives.

Widening the focus and ensuring alignment between all aspects of mentoring is critical to the success of formal mentoring programs.

### Innovations in mentoring program design

Program design is critical to ensure that the potential of mentoring as a gender change strategy can be realised. There are a variety of innovative mentoring programs and resources to assist in re-designing mentoring programs that are fit for purpose.

A number of programs have moved beyond a reliance on the mentoring dyad, diluting the reliance on the mentor and building in collegial support. Mentoring programs based around a dyad, for example are often complemented by workshops and activities for the female mentees as a group, thus drawing on the politicising potential of the group (Devos 2005). Group mentoring, where one mentor meets with a small group of mentees was chosen at the University of Vienna (Nobauer & Genetti 2008) because of the advantages of combining senior and peer support. This design supported their organisational change agenda (see text box, *Mentoring at the University of Vienna [MUV]*). It allows for more careful selection and greater support of mentors, allows mentors to be compensated for their



role and doesn't overload the potential pool of mentors. For mentors it also duplicates the advantages of repeat mentoring observed by de Vries (2010), where the mentor, after being exposed to the stories of several women, begins to see patterns of systemic gendering. Nobauer<sup>7</sup> reports that for one male mentor the commonalities of experience described by his four female mentees galvanised him into action to address systemic bias.

Peer mentoring, either group or one-to-one relies on collegial relationships to provide instrumental and/or developmental support. (for a useful overview and framework see McDaugall & Beattie 1997; McManus & Russell 2007). Peer mentoring overcomes difficulties associated with the power distance between the mentee and mentor and minimises some of the problems of socialisation into the masculine culture associated with instrumental one-to-one mentoring. Mc Cormack and West (2006) at the University of Canberra found facilitated group mentoring to be effective in developing women's careers. Peer mentoring, however, forgoes the potential for organisational change associated with politicising senior organisational members.

### Mentoring at the University of Vienna (MUV)

The group mentoring program at the University of Vienna (muv) is one of a very few that explicitly articulates the links between mentoring and organisational change. Mentoring is seen as a 'politicised' practice, and the program continually seeks to address how mentoring can contribute to 'cultural and structural change in academia' (Nobauer & Genetti 2008:16). Their focus on organisational change is reflected in their program design. Mentors and mentees are both considered target groups with separate goals for each group. Goals for mentors included transfer of mentoring skills to teaching (particularly MA and PhD students), building a more supportive culture and 'heightening awareness of gender structures'. The program uses a cross-disciplinary small group mentoring model, with intakes of 40 junior academic women and ten senior academic male and female mentors.

A great deal of care is taken with the group composition and mentor matching process and meetings do not begin until mentors and mentees have completed initial training. Groups commit to meeting for a minimum of ten hours per term over a two-year period, short and long-term goals are set and minutes of meetings kept. Training for mentors includes a gender training course to 'promote gender sensitization and

A number of programs have explicitly focussed on developing the gender insight of mentors, through program design or mentor training or both. 'Upward' or 'reverse' mentoring strengthens a developmental or two-way focus for the mentoring relationship by building in an expectation that the more senior person will benefit from an increased exposure to minority group members (Giscombe 2007). (See text box, *Reverse mentoring: an explicit focus on organisational change*) According to Sodexo (2009:8) upward mentoring 'provides reciprocal growth and development opportunities. The women gain professional insight and guidance while senior leaders build their understanding of the challenges facing women in the workplace'.

The work of Ragins (2002) (see text box, *Developing effective diversified mentoring relationships*) is a useful starting point for the development of 'diversified'/cross-gender mentoring relationships. Both programs reviewed by Giscombe (see text box, *A focus on the relationship*) included cross-gender/diversity training. In addition the resources offered by Catalyst (see text box, *Catalyst Resources*) assist in the strategic framing of mentoring programs and engaging men in the gender change process.

gender equality in academia' (Nobauer & Genetti 2008:21), in addition to a range of support processes and training options for both mentors and mentees. The work of mentors is recognised by the institution through the provision of research assistants/tutors for the duration of the program.

Both the cross-disciplinary makeup of groups and the combination of vertical and horizontal relationships are seen as program strengths. The first evaluation report showed that:

critical reflections within the mentoring groups result, among other things in a substantial "acceleration" in the accumulation of individual experience and knowledge on the part of mentees due to access to "hidden" information about academic careers, and this also leads to the de-individualization of experiences (Nobauer & Genetti 2008:18).

While two extensive qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the program have been undertaken, unfortunately they are not available in English.

### Reverse mentoring: an explicit focus on organisational change

Katherine Giscombe (2007) reviews 11 private sector U.S. mentoring programs in her chapter titled *Advancing Women Through the Glass Ceiling with Formal Mentoring*. Of these one had an explicit goal to educate senior leaders on gender issues. This 'reverse mentoring' program paired junior women in the mentor role with predominantly male top executives as the mentee. As Giscombe (2007:562) describes,

...the junior-woman mentee helped build the executive's understanding of new ways of looking at policy, business strategy, and work-life issues. While one purpose of the program was to create opportunities for mid-level women to develop quality relationships with senior managers, the larger purpose of the

program was to help create a climate so that women could more easily advance by raising senior men's awareness of gender issues in the organization.

Pairs were not left entirely to their own devices; the program provided discussion topics and meeting guidelines, and the program was part of the organisation's talent management program. While it is difficult to isolate the effect of this program, one of several programs for women, the overall results were impressive. 'The number of women in key leadership positions increased over 20% in a 2-year period, with the strongest results in the line organization (positions with profit-and-loss responsibility).'



### Developing effective diversified mentoring relationships

Belle Rose Ragins (2002) provides a comprehensive overview of diversified mentoring; clarifying definitions, identifying challenges and proposing strategies for building effective mentoring relationships. This article provides an excellent starting point for addressing the training and development needs of mentors and mentees in order for cross-gender and other diversified mentoring relationships to capitalise on, rather than erase or ignore, difference.

Ragins begins with the premise that:

members of the mentoring relationship need to understand, both cognitively and emotionally the 'big picture' with respect to group differences in power, privilege and diversity in their organizations before they can understand the impact of diversity on their own individual mentoring relationship (Ragins 2002:36).

Ragins provides strategies canvassing the following topics:

- Consciousness-raising: Understanding the nature and privilege of being the 'other'. Recognising that 'the organization faced by one group is not necessarily the same organizations as faced by another'
- Stretching the comfort zone; cognitive restructuring.
- Dealing with diversity in the relationship: A continuum of strategies from avoidance to discussion and acknowledgement.
- Establishing diversity groundrules for the relationship
- Navigating the perceptions of others
- Creating organizational change through senior leadership support and diversity in the Executive group

### A focus on the relationship

One of the successful mentoring programs reviewed by Giscombe (2007) (see text box *Reverse mentoring: an explicit focus on organisational change*) had a strong focus on supporting and building the mentoring relationship. It put the onus on mentors to create an appropriate environment to build and maintain the relationship, perhaps in part because mentees were relatively junior. This acknowledges the reality that with increased power distance between the mentee and mentor, it becomes increasingly unrealistic to expect mentees to be able to 'drive' the mentoring relationship.

Support was provided at different stages of the relationship, including preparation, development and closing, in addition to providing meeting agendas. Guidelines included a focus on 'soft' skills such as communication, conflict resolution and problem solving. Unusually and importantly training was also offered 'on gender issues in the context of cross-cultural mentoring (defined as mentoring someone who is different from the mentor in one of several characteristics, including gender) (Giscombe 2007:564).

### Catalyst Resources

Catalyst, a North American based research and advisory organisation working to advance women in business provides well-researched and insightful reports and resources, some of which are available for free (others are restricted to organisational members). *Creating Successful Mentoring Programs: A Catalyst Guide* (Catalyst 2002) is their original mentoring guide, and provides an excellent overview for getting started. More recently Catalyst's mentoring publications (Carter & Silva 2010; Dinolfo & Nugent 2010) have focussed on a more strategic approach to mentoring programs, with a greater emphasis on mentor accountability, organisational outcomes and return on investment. Despite their

corporate context the rigorousness of Catalyst's work lends itself to translation across contexts. There is much to be learnt from their research and best practice examples.

Catalyst have also recognised the critical role men need to play in ending gender inequalities. Their report *Engaging men in gender initiatives: What change agents need to know* is a useful starting point (Prime & Moss-Racusin 2009) in what is an under-researched area. An earlier publication *Becoming a Diversity Champion* offers some useful tips. Both publications have material that can be usefully adapted for mentor training purposes.

## Questions to guide practice

Allen, Finkelstein and Poteet (2009) in their book *Designing Workplace Mentoring Programs* focus on two key themes; firstly, 'that organizations should develop the program with specific objectives in mind and base decisions regarding design and structure of the program on those objectives' and secondly, to remember that 'at its core, mentoring involves an inter-personal relationship' (Allen, Finkelstein & Poteet 2009:xii). Mentoring programs for women must, in addition, bring a gender lens to the program objectives (the bifocal approach) and to the mentoring relationship. Combining these themes with the application of the gender lens can usefully guide practice.

## Program objectives

The bifocal approach to mentoring incorporates a focus on the women's development and organisational change. This approach places emphasis on clarifying institutional objectives and including an intentional focus on the development of the mentor. It is therefore critical to consider the following questions:

What are the objectives of our mentoring program?

- For the mentee?
- For the mentor?
- For the institution?

Clear program objectives are critical to minimising mismatches between the goals of the organisation, mentor and mentee. Clarity and alignment of objectives will inform the nature of the mentoring relationship as previously described using the mentoring continuum. The following questions should be addressed:

- How do we define mentoring?
- What is our working definition of mentoring?

It should not be assumed that a mentoring dyad is the best or only option to meeting mentoring objectives. Consider options such as peer mentoring, group mentoring, and upward mentoring. The question becomes:

- What mentoring design would best address our purpose?

### **An interpersonal relationship**

It is imperative to focus on all parties to the mentoring relationship, and how that relationship will be formed and supported:

- What kind of mentoring relationship suits our purpose?
- What is the role of the mentor and the mentee?
- How will we select mentors and mentees?
- What basis will we use for matching mentors and mentees?
- What training and support do we need to offer mentors and mentees to achieve this approach to the mentoring relationship?

Women only programs with or without a bifocal approach need to address the ways in which gender will intrude into the mentoring program and relationship. This, as we have seen in the research of Ibarra, Carter and Silva (2010), is as important to the success of sponsorship and other forms of instrumental mentoring that have an implicit focus on organisational fit, as it is to developmental mentoring that seeks to engage mentors and mentees in a two way relationship that builds gender insight.

Ibarra, Carter and Silva (2010:85) conclude that for sponsorship to be effective, sponsors must 'learn to manage their unconscious biases'. Likewise the success of the bifocal approach depends on mentors and mentees developing greater gender insight within the mentoring program. In both cases this can be achieved through multiple means; training for mentors and mentees, resources used to guide the mentoring conversation, politicising of the women through meeting together, and public presentations by the women to

mentors and other institutional members as happens in the UWA program. Questions to consider include:

- How will opportunities to develop greater gender insight be designed into the program for the mentor and mentee?
- How can we support the mentor and mentee to make changes within their own spheres of influence?

Regardless of which choices are made in the design of the mentoring program, be they sponsorship, broadly instrumental or more developmental, the necessity to include a gender lens to ensure that gender does not undermine the effort mitigates against mentoring programs reinforcing the gendered status quo. The bifocal approach to mentoring claims a broader mandate to develop women and organisational members more broadly, therefore this approach encourages both opportunistic and planned ways of engaging with the university community. The final question becomes:

- What other opportunities exist to create linkages between the WO mentoring program and other institutional members in order to develop gender insight and further the aims of organisational change?

### **Evaluation against objectives**

Finally program monitoring and evaluation are imperative, and must be clearly linked to objectives for the mentee, the mentor and the organisation. Widening the evaluation process requires more than self-report:

- How will we evaluate program outcomes for the mentee, mentor and the organisation, and including a gender lens perspective?

## **Conclusion**

Taking a critical stance towards mentoring for women provides opportunities for the sector to review and improve practice. An increased emphasis on the theoretical foundations and design of programs is required in order to address the ways in which the gendered status quo intrudes into mentoring relationships and mentoring programs. The application of a gender lens to mentoring programs for women requires much more of all parties; organisations, practitioners, mentors and mentees will all find this more rigorous approach to mentoring challenging. Mentoring with a bifocal approach provides an opportunity for building more gender equitable organisations that has not yet been fully realised.

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