



Mentoring for gender equality and organisational change

Mentoring for
gender equality

Jennifer de Vries and Claire Webb

*Organisational and Staff Development Services,
University of Western Australia, Crawley, Australia, and*

Joan Eveline

Business School, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Australia

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Abstract

Purpose – There is considerable literature about the impact of mentoring on the mentees but little is known about the effect of the mentoring relationship on the mentor. This paper aims to address that gap.

Design/methodology/approach – Interviews with 15 mentors and survey responses from 128 mentees are used to examine a formal mentoring programme. Most emphasis is on the perspective of the mentors, raising questions about how they view outcomes for themselves and their mentees, as well as the effects of mentoring on the workplace culture over time. Questions about the mentoring relationship, including gender differences, are analysed against the background of a decade-long organisational change strategy.

Findings – Mentors report significant benefits for themselves and the mentee as well as the organisation itself as a result of their participation. The findings suggest that a long-term mentoring programme for women has the potential to be an effective organisational change intervention. In particular, men involved in that programme increased their understanding and sensitivity regarding gendering processes in the workplace.

Practical implications – The importance of the impact of mentoring programmes on the mentors is an under-investigated area. This study suggests that programme design, together with careful selection and targeting of mentors, enables mentoring to become a critical part of a culture change strategy.

Originality/value – The paper assists academics and practitioners to conceive of mentoring as a core element in an effective organisational change intervention. The innovation is to move mentoring away from assuming a deficit model of the mentee. As this programme shows, a focus on what needs to change in the dominant organisational culture, practices and values can lead to key players in the organisation becoming actively involved in the needed change process.

Keywords Mentoring, Gender, Universities, Organizational change

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Formal mentoring programmes for women have become a popular strategy to combat some of the difficulties women face in a male-dominated environment, including lack of easy access to informal “old boys” networks, shortage of appropriate mentors, lack of access to sponsorship and patronage, and inability to navigate the political maze

Mentor interviews were conducted by Marie Finlay. The LDW participant survey was designed, conducted and reported on by the University’s Institutional Research Unit. Many thanks to the mentors who so willingly gave of their time and likewise the LDW “alumni” who completed the survey.



(Palermo, 2004; Ramsay, 2001). Formal mentoring programmes work to re-create the informal partnerships that have always occurred in the workplace, particularly for men, and to make these partnerships available to women and other groups who would not normally be included.

In this paper we examine a formal mentoring programme from the perspective of the mentors, with the aim of assessing how they see it affecting themselves, their mentees and their workplace culture. Because we are interested in showing how mentoring can become part of a process of organisational intervention, the focus of our discussion is on the mentors rather than on the mentees. We explore gender differences in the way male and female mentors may experience mentoring, as well as potential barriers to successful mentoring.

This mentoring programme is best understood as a key part of a leadership development programme for women, which has been running for 11 years (1994-2005). That programme, called the Leadership Development for Women (LDW) Programme at the University of Western Australia (UWA), is based on feminist theories of strategic intervention into gendered organisations. We outline that theory below.

For the first three years of its life the LDW Programme was funded from Commonwealth Staff Development funds. When those funds dried up the University of WA itself subsequently funded it. LDW was not the only women's development programme funded by the Commonwealth staff development programme at that time, and in fact all four public universities in Western Australia gained programme funding. However, LDW has been the only in-house programme funded through to the present time.

The LDW Programme owes its organisational survival to several factors. Key among them was the support of its female Vice-Chancellor of the time, the ongoing champion it found in her male deputy (Eveline, 2004, pp. 84-5), and the strength of its mentoring programme, which was used strategically to increase its complement of male supporters (Gale, 1999). Since then, the programme has gone from strength to strength in many ways, giving it high status among Australian universities and seeing it used as a model for many other such programmes, both in the university sector and the wider public sector (de Vries, 2005). To mark the tenth anniversary of LDW, a comprehensive documentation and evaluation of the programme was undertaken in 2004. This paper is largely based on material reported in the UWA publication *More than the Sum of Its Parts: 10 Years of the Leadership Development for Women Programme at UWA* (de Vries, 2005).

To give a sense of how the mentoring programme links with the overall leadership development of women, the paper begins with a brief summary of the LDW Programme. This is followed by a section outlining the literature on mentoring, coupled with the theory of gendered organisation which underpins the LDW Programme. The third section gives an account of the methodology, followed by an analysis and discussion of the data on the mentoring component of the programme.

Setting the scene: a decade of women's leadership development

The mentoring programme we review here is an essential part of the Leadership Development for Women Programme at the University of Western Australia. The LDW Programme was introduced in 1994 in response to the continuing under-representation of women at senior levels of university decision making. When

the programme began women constituted only 22 per cent of academic appointments and 56.6 per cent of general staff (an all encompassing term for technical, professional, administrative, management and some research) appointments. In both cases women were clustered at the lower levels, and many forms of discrimination existed (Crawford and Tonkinson, 1988).

The programme's mission from the beginning has been threefold:

- (1) to enable women staff to develop the leadership skills and knowledge required to increase their participation in the University's decision making processes and to facilitate their leadership at all levels;
- (2) to contribute to a culture change in the University that encourages and welcomes women's involvement in leadership and decision making matters; and
- (3) to encourage an organisational culture that recognises the value of self-development and reflection, and that encourages inclusive management styles.

This dual focus on developing the women and changing the culture has been vital to the success of the programme and to its long-term effectiveness. As we show below that dual focus has much in common with the strategies developed by researchers who set out to intervene in making a gendered organisation (Acker, 1990) more accommodating of women's advancement.

Since the Commonwealth funding was designed to assist academic women (Eveline, 2004) initial group intakes consisted of 20 academic women and 10 general staff women at levels 6 and above. Under the subsequent University funding the ratio of general to academic staff in the programme was equalised, and the barrier for general staff was lowered in 1999 and eventually removed in 2001. The programme is now open to all female staff at UWA with a fractional appointment of 0.5 or more and a minimum contract period of one year, with groups of 30 women selected to participate in each year-long programme. Over 360 women participated in LDW between 1994 and 2004, with an almost equal spread across academic (47.6 per cent) and general (52.4 per cent) staff groups. Fifteen percent of all female staff currently employed at UWA have participated in LDW. Since 2001, the programme has been streamed to better meet the diverse needs of those eligible to apply, with one stream focusing on "developing personally and professionally" for less experienced and established staff, and another focusing on "leadership and management", for more experienced and established staff. These programme streams are run in alternate years.

The programme is substantial, comprehensive and multi-stranded, approaching development from a number of perspectives. Its core features include a launch by members of the University Executive; a two or three day core programme; a series of one-day leadership skills development workshops; the formation of peer learning groups based around the skills workshop topics; a review workshop; peer learning group presentations to the wider University community; and the mentor scheme. There are also optional and ongoing career information sessions; "How the University Works" sessions; networking lunches; workshops and forums.

Mentoring women in the gendered organisation

Developing leaders through mentoring is considered an efficient instrument for individual career success and knowledge transfer (Cox, 1994, p.198; Ragins and Cotton,

1999, p. 347). Mentoring relationships can provide mentees with “reflected power” (Kanter, 1977), insights into organisational politics and access to information that is typically provided in the “old boys network” (Ragins, 1989). Much of this career development is fostered through “informal” mentoring processes (Ragins and Cotton, 1999), and it is this developmental support which women often lack (Burke and McKeen, 1990). Many studies indicate that, for a range of personal and organisational reasons, women experience difficulty finding informal mentors (Noe, 1988; Cox, 1994; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). A reliance on informal mentoring presents ongoing problems for women with informal arrangements tending to support conservatism, favouritism and empire building, all of which invariably favour men (Ragins and Cotton, 1999) through homosocial practices (Kanter, 1977). Providing structured and formalised mentoring programmes, which seek to mimic the form and benefits of informal mentoring practices, becomes important if the goal is to provide equal access for qualified contenders (Moberg and Velasquez, 2004).

Many organisations profile their formal mentoring programmes as helping women in their careers (Phillips Jones, 1983). To be successful such programmes must buffer women against different forms of discrimination (Vinnecombe and Singh, 2003). The question is, however, whether such programmes can systematically counter the forms of discrimination that women face in their everyday work, given the problems of working lives based on a masculine model of organised work (Acker, 1990).

A similar criticism of inadequate attention to organisational norms and practices is made of women’s leadership programmes *per se*. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) for example, describe leadership development programmes as fitting into what they see as an inadequate frame of analysis, which focuses on women as the problem which must be fixed. Leadership development, they claim, simply attempts to “equip the women” rather than challenge the underlying gendered structures that continue to marginalise and exclude them. This paper draws on the theoretical frames used by Meyerson and Fletcher while challenging their simplistic framing of leadership development programmes. Our argument is that a leadership programme can teach women themselves how to challenge the marginalising practices of the gendered organisation in which they work. Further, we suggest that the mentoring strategy, a significant component of the overall programme, plays a significant role in mounting that challenge. As earlier research has shown (Eveline, 2004; de Vries, 2005), the basic strength of the leadership programme we analyse here is its capacity for highlighting and challenging the gendered organisation.

For Joan Acker (1990) an organisation is “gendered” when its structure, work activities and culture is patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Acker (1990) showed that organisational structure is not gender neutral, and that gender is not an addition to ongoing organisational processes but an integral part of those processes.

Kolb *et al.* (1998) build on Acker’s work to show why gender equity frameworks do not achieve lasting gains and are only partial solutions. They propose four frames through which organisations can understand gender equity and organisational change. The first three frames, namely, “fix the woman”, “celebrate differences” and “create equal opportunity” are traditional approaches to promoting gender equity. Although each has been effective in advancing some aspects of women’s interests, all have proved to be insufficient for making lasting benefits.

Kolb *et al.*'s fourth frame, however, is a new category which acknowledges the complex role of gender within an organisation's structure and culture. Based on Acker's (1990) argument that organisations are inherently gendered, Kolb *et al.* (1998) show that work practices regarded as "normal" have a tendency to privilege characteristics that are socially and culturally ascribed to men and devalue traits ascribed to women. This includes cultural norms and assumptions in the workplace that value specific types of work processes, define competence and calibre of staff, and shape ideas about the best way to accomplish work tasks (Kolb *et al.*, 1998, p. 13). In addition, systems of reward and recognition are also gendered as they may promote specific kinds of behaviour; so are systems of communication and decision-making which bestow power and influence on some staff while excluding others (Kolb *et al.*, 1998, p. 13). In order to see how an organisation's structure, knowledge, practices and culture privilege the masculine at work Kolb *et al.* (1998) suggest the need to look through a "gender lens". It is this gender lens approach which provides the foundation for LDW participants as they collectively investigate and discover the underlying assumptions, values and practices within the organisation.

By enhancing the women's capacity to view their organisation through a gender lens, the LDW Programme at UWA seeks to avoid the "equip the women" approach to leadership development critiqued by Meyerson and Fletcher (2000). LDW assists the women to "read" and challenge the organisational status quo, while also building participants' skills and strategies in career development. The formal mentoring programme is one of the ways in which women acquire the networks, corporate knowledges and skills to challenge those traditional practices.

Methodology

This article draws its data from two main sources: primarily from interviews with 15 mentors who had been involved with the programme for periods varying from one to ten years, and secondly from a survey of LDW alumni, which covered participants from 1994 to 2003.

The interviews with mentors are the most significant for this paper, because they were designed to elicit answers to a specific question: what impact does involvement in a formal mentoring programme have on the mentors? This question was framed on the basis of anecdotal evidence which led the Programme's Planning Group to hypothesise that mentors, in particular senior male mentors, are changed by their experience of being a mentor, becoming more informed about the impact of gender on the women they mentor, and to some extent on the organisation in which they work.

While the practitioner literature conceives of mentoring as being mutually beneficial, there has been little exploration of how the mentoring experience might change the attitudes and behaviours of mentors. This is particularly important when considering formal mentoring programmes, often put in place to redress imbalances perpetuated by informal mentoring in the workplace. We knew for example, that it was male mentors of the programme who had supported and voted to provide an ongoing budget for the leadership programme when the initial external funds ceased. Several mentors had also publicly referred to their increased understanding regarding gender dynamics resulting from their mentoring relationships.

In order to explore this issue of gender learning, interviews were conducted with a sample of 15 mentors in December 2004. While mentors with a long-term commitment

and who were key supporters (including the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor) were selected, consideration was also given to balancing gender, seniority and staff category (academic and general). The resultant composition of the group was seven male mentors and eight female mentors; nine academic staff members, and six general staff members. Of these, five were holding senior positions such as Heads of School, Directors, Deans and members of the University Executive. While seniority in this context refers specifically to positions held, many mentors interviewed are longstanding members of the University at levels such as Professor or Manager. Most are well established mentors with 11 of the 15 recruited before 2000, and five of them involved since the first intake in 1994. They have mentored between one and eight times, and between them have mentored 59 times. An external consultant conducted the interviews, and each interview took approximately one hour.

The mentors were asked a variety of questions, including: why they had agreed to become a mentor; what they felt they had to offer; the nature of the mentoring relationship; what their expectations of mentoring were; what positive outcomes the mentoring had provided for them, their mentees and the organisation; and why they continued to be involved as mentors. Interviews were recorded and partially transcribed, in order to allow examination of themes whilst preserving the voices of the mentors.

The survey material comes from 128 respondents (of the 293 women who were still contactable) who had participated in LDW from 1994-2003, which constituted a response rate of 44 per cent. In this 2004 survey, focused on all aspects of the LDW Programme, one section was devoted to the mentoring relationship. Questions asked included the number, frequency and regularity of meetings, the clarity of purpose and expectations of mentoring, the nature of the mentoring relationship, and benefits of mentoring to the mentee. Of the survey respondents we found that 64 per cent had been matched with female mentors and 36 per cent with male mentors; this closely matches the gender breakdown of all LDW mentoring partnerships. More of the academic women in the survey were mentored by men (43 per cent), than the general staff women (34 per cent), reflecting the greater proportion of men in academic positions overall, and particularly at more senior levels. As a preliminary to our interview findings, which we occasionally articulate with survey data, we provide background information about the mentoring programme.

The mentoring programme

Good mentoring programmes rely on both an understanding of the “business” and the complexities of mentoring (Alleman and Clarke, 2000). While LDW relied on external consultants in setting up the original mentoring programme, over time in-house provision became the preferred model. This strategy allowed the existing knowledge, networks and understandings of the University held by the LDW coordinators and Planning Group members, to be built into mentor relationships.

Mentoring is presented to LDW participants as one way of expanding their networks, with mentors most often being selected from a part of the University to which the mentee would not normally have access. Occasionally, informal mentoring relationships are formalised through the programme but, most often, women are encouraged to keep their informal mentoring intact and to use the LDW opportunity to access a formal mentor. This approach is supported by Ragins (1999) who suggests

that favouring formal over informal mentoring relationships can be harmful for women and minority groups. Since no one mentor can magically meet a person's needs, formal mentoring is only one component of a healthy network and support system.

More than 178 staff members have mentored women from the LDW Programme since 1994. The 115 female mentors have mentored 212 mentees (66 per cent of mentor matches) and the 63 male mentors have mentored 110 mentees (34 per cent of mentor matches). Mentor matches that cross classifications (general staff mentoring academics or vice versa), account for 48 (15 per cent) of the mentoring pairs. Thirty-nine male mentors and 28 female mentors are senior academic or general staff, holding positions such as Heads of School, Directors, Deans and members of the University Executive.

Clearly there is an extensive network of mentors across campus. When LDW began, the female Vice-Chancellor of the time insisted on finding and using male mentors, firstly because there were so few women at the top and secondly because she wanted the men to be "educated" about the problems women faced (Gale, 1999, p. 142). Despite the emphasis on using male mentors where possible, female mentors outnumber male mentors. However the number of senior men in key positions involved in the programme is high with 62 per cent of male mentors in senior positions. There is a wider spread of organisational levels among the female mentors, in part due to the involvement of past LDW participants mentoring women from the more junior stream of the programme. In some cases women request a female mentor.

The significance of role modelling by executive staff has been important in achieving the commitment of senior staff. Mentors also report delight and surprise at being invited to be involved. Seventy-seven of the mentors have mentored at least twice, with a smaller band of 14 mentors who have mentored four times or more. Two mentors, one of them the current male Vice-Chancellor, have mentored eight times. The level of ongoing involvement and commitment on the part of mentors has been outstanding and is a vote of confidence in the worth of the mentoring programme.

Making the mentoring happen

Mentoring pairs are matched on criteria identified by the mentees who are also encouraged to suggest names of potentially suitable mentors. Information is combined for the whole group to eliminate overlaps, and mentoring matches are finalised drawing on a combination of mentee suggestions and the knowledge of the LDW coordinators. Once the matching process is completed by the coordinators, mentees are encouraged to arrange the first meeting with their mentors and to be proactive during the partnership.

Training is offered to new mentors to assist them in clarifying roles and expectations, and identifying common pitfalls. A further workshop is provided for mentees in order to assist them in gaining the most from the mentoring opportunity.

The matching process is highly individualised and in some cases is very time-consuming. Over the years it has become increasingly customised to meet the "wish list" of LDW participants. Mentees are encouraged, on the basis of their goals, to identify the background, skills and experience they would like to see in their mentor. Anyone employed by the University is in the "pool" of potential mentors and new mentors are recruited and trained every year. This intensity of "customisation" of the mentor matching aspect of the programme is in contrast to some mentoring

programmes where matching can be cursory, sometimes even computer-based on a very limited set of dimensions.

The importance of ongoing support and monitoring of mentor relationships is highlighted in the literature (Noe, 1988; Scandura, 1992). LDW processes have become increasingly sophisticated in this regard. Mentees and mentors are contacted by email at different stages during the scheme to confirm that the partnerships are working well. In addition, an email questionnaire, designed to assist in the closure process is sent to both parties at approximately nine months. The questionnaire encourages mentors and mentees to review what they have gained and to provide feedback about the mentoring process.

The findings

Mentoring: mutual benefits?

The philosophical dual focus of LDW on assisting women as well as challenging and changing the culture, resulted in a programme looking outwards and beyond the current programme participants. Mentoring, with its capacity to have an impact on both mentors and mentees fitted in well with this approach. Anecdotal evidence over the years confirmed this pleasing result was worth further exploration.

Mentors in their interviews noted that benefits occurred at many levels: for them personally, for people in their workgroups, for the mentees and for the broader organisation. Male and female mentors mentioned benefits to themselves such as their enjoyment of “colleague-making”, enhancing “networks”, the satisfaction of helping others and “seeing them achieve”, repaying assistance they have received and the new perspectives they gained, including a more accurate picture of how the institutional reform agenda is going. Some of the benefits were personal, such as “reflection on own skills”, “clarifying through articulating” and “developing better listening skills and coaching skills”. They commented on how their own skills became more visible to them. As one male Professor reflected “I learnt that I had some skills and knowledge that I hadn’t been aware of”.

Mentors claimed that the stated benefits impacted on others apart from the mentee, and often included better management skills when dealing with their own staff. Mentors noted they had “increased awareness of importance of mentoring for own staff”, “I find it instructive about how I assess my staff”, and “I have picked up approaches you can use with others”.

Six out of the seven male mentors articulated changes in their understanding of women’s issues. They mentioned: “greater awareness and understanding of barriers”, “awareness of benefits of the programme”, “recognised it’s been tough going for women”, and “got a better sense of what the work environment is like for women, particularly women administrative staff”. Several emphasised that they were now “better informed of issues”. Such comments included:

Acknowledged women were disadvantaged by the organisation and need to find ways to overcome relative disadvantage (Male Dean).

I am a lot more aware of the issues women face in the workplace, almost all have children. It is difficult to combine career and family. Role of man in society hasn’t really changed – it’s the next major challenge (Male Executive).

Mentor feedback through these interviews confirms how this increased understanding of issues for women has impacted on their attitudes and behaviour, leading to a “ripple-on” effect in the workplace:

It has been interesting to me how many senior women find it hard to express their views in meetings – it is the one unifying theme. Now I’m more responsive to people in the meetings I chair (Male Executive).

Mentors, when interviewed regarding benefits they noted for mentees, most often cited changes in working life as tangible outcomes, including promotions, secondments, reclassifications, new jobs (sometimes outside UWA), career progress and career plans. Several noted assistance with grant applications, research proposals, work projects, and acting as a referee. Another group of outcomes mentioned were about resolving problems, managing a difficult leader, taking action, and moving on. Setting priorities, better use of time, a different perspective, developing networks, gaining a sounding board, feedback and advice were also mentioned. Male mentors mentioned more tangible benefits for the mentee while female mentors mentioned more of the less tangible benefits. In terms of less tangible outcomes, increased confidence was the most mentioned, with others such as different attitudes regarding opportunities, clarity of goals, knowing what they want, capacity to trust, ability to ask, a shift in thinking, willingness to speak out, and a “big picture” view.

This focus on career and self-confidence is also reflected in the data from the LDW participant survey, which shows that mentees are generally agreed on the benefits they gain from the programme. Sixteen percent of survey respondents cited the mentoring scheme as the most influential LDW Programme component in regard to their leadership development. In all, sixty-eight percent agreed or strongly agreed that mentoring had contributed to their leadership development.

Why mentor?

Mentors involved in the LDW Programme often informally remark on their enjoyment of being a mentor, saying things like “I don’t know what the mentee got out of it, but I really enjoyed it”. In interviews we pursued that information by asking mentors why they had first agreed to become a mentor:

I was flattered to be invited. I thought, I am getting older and had useful experiences. When asked I was surprised, I felt that someone had recognised I was capable (Female General staff).

This is the most important aspect of the [LDW] Programme: to connect with someone, help them and make a colleague (Male General staff).

[I] want to learn more – this is a growth experience for me (Male General staff).

I appreciate the knowledge I get and the personal satisfaction in developing a relationship with someone outside the faculty (Male Dean).

Many expressed positive feelings. Examples included “a warm, collegial experience”, “makes me feel like a good corporate citizen – warm and fuzzy”, “enjoyed the interaction”, and “found it interesting”. Most of the mentors interviewed have mentored multiple times and identified a number of reasons for their continued involvement as mentors:

I like people – I must get a lot out of it (Female Professor).

Still derive pleasure from doing it. . [it] has benefits to the organisation (Male Executive).

[It] helps me professionally – tests me with coaching and management skills (Male General staff).

Grateful for the opportunity to pass on positive experiences I had in the past. I feel appreciated (Male General staff).

While male mentors mentioned organisational benefits as one reason to be involved, female mentors more explicitly spoke about their commitment to the programme, and their desire to support women into leadership. Several of the female mentors had participated in the programme themselves or been involved with the LDW Planning Group:

Part of the organisation's response to inequality (Male Dean).

Committed to the programme and the concept of leadership of women (Female Professor).

It's my responsibility to do so and to support other women (Female Executive).

Both men and women recognised mentoring as an important part of their own professional development. Some interviewees made a point of highlighting their mentoring roles in applications for promotions, new positions and the like.

Gender differences in mentoring

We were interested to explore any differences in the way male and female mentors experienced mentoring. This was specifically examined in relation to a range of issues, including mentoring roles, the frequency of meetings and commitment to the mentoring process.

In relation to mentoring roles, the literature (Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988; Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Scandura, 1992) identifies three main types of role:

- (1) psychosocial support (e.g., acceptance, confirmation, counselling, friendship);
- (2) instrumental/career support (e.g., sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, challenging assignments); and
- (3) role modelling (appropriate attitudes, values and behaviours).

It has been suggested that effective mentoring relies on both the psychosocial function and career functions being present.

When interviewed, LDW mentors were asked to reflect on these roles in relation to their own mentoring practices. Broadly speaking, mentors responded that they used all three, with the balance between them depending on the mentee and their goals, and the stage in relationship. Several mentors were hesitant about role modelling, noting that it was up to the mentee if they saw the mentor in that way. A female executive member noted the critical importance of senior female role models in the broader University context.

Differences in outcome depending on the gender of the mentor have also been explored in the literature (Noe, 1988; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). There is some evidence that female pairs emphasise the psychosocial aspect, while opposite gender pairs utilise the relationship more effectively. O'Neill *et al.* (1999), in their overview of the

literature, acknowledge the general expectation that men will give instrumental help and women psychosocial support, but suggest that this is actually not the case. In the interviews conducted with LDW mentors, there was no apparent difference in the emphasis on psychosocial support between male and female mentors. This was confirmed in the results of the survey of LDW participants, where many of the “relationship” items, for example rapport, friendship, trust, and confidentiality, were scored highly by the mentees as being present in their mentoring relationships, regardless of the gender of mentor.

In regard to instrumental support, O'Neill *et al.* (1999) go on to suggest that seniority and gender may be confounded in recent studies, and that rather than male mentors offering more instrumental support, it is actually the senior mentors who offer more instrumental support. This may well be the case in our research where male mentors, who are more senior overall, noted more instrumental benefits to the mentee.

Feedback from LDW participants indicates slight gender differences in relation to the frequency and duration of meetings. According to data provided by the participants in the survey, male mentors met mentees slightly more often (mean 5.6 times compared to 5.0 times for female mentors) and spent longer with their mentees (mean 8.8 hours compared to 7.3 hours). In examining mentoring relationship data for the whole group, 41 per cent met on a regular basis and 40 per cent met on an intermittent basis as both parties were busy. For male mentors the figure was higher, with 47 per cent meeting regularly. On average 39 per cent of mentoring relationships continued beyond the formal mentoring period of nine months. This rate was higher for male mentors and for general staff, indicating that female academic staff may spend less time in formally mentoring others. Data collected from the mentors themselves is not specific to any one mentoring partnership. When combined with the smaller sample this lack of specificity makes it difficult to identify gender differences from the interview data. The surveys also indicated that mentees saw their mentors as more committed to the mentoring process than themselves. Moreover the rating for mentor commitment was slightly higher for male mentors (89 per cent) than for female mentors (82 per cent).

In summary, the use of male mentors, particularly when carefully selected through a collaborative process between mentee and coordinators, would seem to be beneficial on several counts. Other university programmes at the time LDW was established avoided using male mentors, apparently in order to avoid issues of patronage, and the possibility of men imposing a masculinist approach to leadership on their mentees. While certainly the possibility exists for male mentors to give advice, and to model behaviours that would not work for the mentee, no concerns over this issue have emerged at UWA over the years of LDW. This may be because the mentor training deals with authority and power as an issue. Our interviews showed that most mentors seem well aware of the need to listen to the specific needs of their mentees, rather than imposing their own ideas and values. As one said:

There's a problem if the mentor wants to recreate themselves – got to step back from that. Being a mentor is listening to them, working out what they want. Mentees don't all want to be in the same place (Male Executive).

Barriers to mentoring

It is important to acknowledge that mentoring partnerships are not always successful, something which, as Kram (1985) noted, tends to be glossed over in the literature on mentoring. Common barriers identified by both mentors and mentees in this study include time and workload pressures; reluctance by mentees to take up mentors' time; unclear expectations; lack of or unclear goals for the mentoring; and deference or lack of confidence on the part of mentees. Such barriers can result in less than satisfactory mentoring relationships. It has also become apparent over the years that some LDW mentoring relationships never get established. This is of concern both in terms of the lost opportunity for the mentor and mentee, as well as the time, effort and commitment that has been made to organise the mentoring pair. Any mentoring programme must continually ask the question "what else could be done to support and encourage productive mentoring partnerships?"

Impact on the broader university culture

Does a longstanding mentoring programme such as LDW, which has involved so many of its senior staff and Executive over time, influence the culture of the institution?

The majority of mentors (6 female and 4 male), in commenting on the benefits of mentoring to the University workplace, referred to the positive impact on the institution of having more female staff. They saw LDW as improving retention, as well as assisting women to better position themselves. Responses regarding the women included: "retains high quality people creating a much better workforce". They referred to the mentees as "diverse", "dynamic", "intelligent", "motivated", "successful women", and noted that there were "more women in senior positions", "more role models", and "more developed staff members". One male general staff mentor commented positively that LDW "produced a whole lot of more assertive women". A female member of the University executive described this as having "a good cohort of women to take on the roles". LDW alumni were seen as "valuable employees who stayed and developed good careers".

Mentors again noted the ripple effect in commenting on institutional change. They referred to "mentoring of own staff spreading throughout the organisation" and saw the programme as "changing the academic/general staff divide". In the assessment of one male dean "the critical mark of a mentor is supporting objectives in their own area". This indicates that mentoring extends beyond the one-on-one relationship and implies broader responsibilities on the part of the mentor. There were also signs that mentoring could make mentors confront and reshape their old attitudes. As one senior male mentor said, it gave "insight into how the world is, not how you'd like it to be".

A theme, which featured strongly in comments by four male and three female mentors, was changes to the culture of the University. Some saw this as a tangible benefit in greater numbers of women employed and retained. For others it was an intangible thing, a "qualitative change in the culture" which was "intuitively known". Mentors commented that LDW has been "part of a major stimulus to changing culture", that there has been a "shaping of the culture" and that LDW has been "a transformational programme. . . that has completely changed the shape of UWA". Some saw the programme as "challenging the status quo", "giving the organisation a more positive vibe". Female mentors particularly commented on the positive benefits to the

organisational culture of having a “more committed workforce”, “loyal staff”, “people who feel more a part of the organisation” and linked this to “reductions in workplace stress” and “improved morale”. Through LDW, UWA is seen as “doing the right thing by staff”, and “being a good employer”.

The accumulated benefits of mentoring to the mentees, and the increased understanding of mentors, which ripples through to their own staff, is seen by most mentors as a clear benefit to the institution as a whole:

More people open to managing roles, performance and careers – lead to a better organisation (Male General staff).

Having better informed, confident and assertive employees who are realistic about their opportunities in the organisation (Male General staff).

If the staff become more knowledgeable and more self-aware and self-confident, then this is a considerable benefit to the University (Male Professor).

The institution is all of us. . .the friendship and networks are advantageous to all of us (Female General staff).

Without exception, mentors gave examples of how the mentoring programme benefited their mentees, themselves and the way in which their behaviour and organisational practices subsequently became more insightful and effective. For many their descriptions also showed considerable enthusiasm for the programme.

Conclusion

How effective is mentoring as a culture change strategy? Our interviews with committed and experienced mentors show that they see mentoring as impacting on their attitudes and behaviours and that this has a ripple-on effect to their workplaces, and more broadly to the institution. Mentors clearly articulated the benefits to themselves, to their mentees and to the institution, and were committed to the mentoring programme and to LDW. Male mentors said they were more aware of gender issues than they had been before their mentoring began and most said they had an increased understanding of what it is like for women working in the University, gaining insights and information as to what still needs to be addressed for women, as a result of their mentoring. Given that many of the mentors interviewed hold senior positions and are key players in the organisation, the significance of their perspectives for the continuance of the programme and ongoing organisational change should not be underestimated.

Slight gender differences in the way male and female mentors experienced mentoring were identified, with male mentors tending to spend more face-to-face time on the mentoring relationship, meeting more regularly and more likely to continue beyond the formal mentoring period. Although these differences were small there is evidence that the staff classification and seniority of the mentor are factors at play. Future researchers interested in exploring gender differences should pay particular attention to the seniority of mentors and the seniority gap between mentor and mentee.

Formal mentoring programmes have become a popular development tool to advance women and minority groups within the workplace. There is a great deal of useful practitioner literature available for those who wish to set up or “fine tune” existing mentoring programmes. However, this literature fails to note the potential for

organisational change. Much of the potential strategic impact of mentoring and its capacity to change the organisation can be lost without careful design. LDW has both recognised and capitalised on mentoring as a strategic culture change initiative. The benefits of mentoring for mentors has not been sufficiently recognised. More emphasis in the future needs to be placed on the potential for educating mentors regarding women or minority groups, and the ways in which mentoring benefits organisational equity goals over time.

The strategic decision to position mentoring as a learning experience for both mentors and mentees, stemming from the early days of the LDW Programme, has influenced the way that both mentoring and the leadership programme have developed over time. Mentoring has always been an integral component of LDW. As noted above, it was seen as a critical way of involving other UWA staff in the programme, and, unlike some other mentoring programmes, LDW actively sought to involve male mentors from the start. According to the mentors themselves, mentoring has kept the institution connected to LDW, has created supporters and champions, has made a space for men to hear women's stories and has changed men's understandings of gender and the gendered organisation. Importantly too, as Fay Gale the Vice-Chancellor when it began predicted (Gale, 1999), it can spread the load and the responsibility for mentoring junior women, which too often falls on the few senior women. Senior men can share that load, as well as the learning and understanding it brings.

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Corresponding author

Jennifer de Vries can be contacted at: jdevries@admin.uwa.edu.au

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