Session Title: Mentorship in Higher Education: Designing Meaningful Programs

Organization: IE University

Session Description: This workshop will bring participants through a process of learning-by-doing, where they can simulate the experience of a mentor designing an outcome-focused activity for their mentees. It will be structured in two parts: 1) context and research insights and 2) brainstorming session.
In the beginning of the session, facilitators will provide a short introduction, explanation of the key session activities and goals, as well as an overview of the subject. Afterwards, participants will be invited to partake in activities based in human-centered design principles to empathise with students, identify opportunities to support them through mentorship, and design an outcome-driven activity plan that could be suitable for a mentorship session. In this way, they will understand some of the key tools and techniques that can be used by mentors in programs. No prior knowledge of design is necessary for this activity, we just ask participants to come with an open mind and a willingness to explore the student experience and possible enhancements.

Presenter Bios

Name: Laura McDermott
Position: Director of Academic Experience & Innovation/Adjunct professor of Innovation, Design & Sustainability at IE Business School
Bio: Laura McDermott is an Irish design and innovation consultant, based in Madrid. She is the Director of Academic Experience and Innovation at IE Business School, Adjunct Professor of Innovation and Design at IE University and formerly the Design Lead in the IE Center for Social Innovation and Sustainability. Laura designs sustainable innovation projects, specifically from a behavioural lens, with educational institutions, startups and corporates.

Name: Alexandra Zografou
Position: Digital Project Manager/ Manager at the Mentor Program at the Master's in Visual and Digital Media at IE Business School
Bio: Alexandra Zografou is a Greek-born Madrid-based digital project manager, specializing in online product design and development. She is also the Manager of the MVDM Mentor Program at IE Business School and a member of the UWC International Council. Alexandra has consulted and managed a variety of projects in the field of executive education, lifelong learning, and learning innovation, having worked with world-renowned universities and European NGOs.

Links of Interest: Articles written by the presenters

1. *Mentoring as a Disruptive Tool for Cultivating 21st Century Leaders,* The CoBS (The Council on Business & Society): link to publication

2. *Circular Knowledge Models: Designing Mentor Programs for Impact,* The CoBS (The Council on Business & Society): link to publication

APPENDIX

Mentorship as a Disruptive Tool for Cultivating 21st Century Leaders: The Design and Evolution of the HST Mentor Program

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Abstract

In this article we explore the concept of mentorship from its emergence in ancient Greek times to a powerful concept of the 21st century that, if designed and implemented in a conscious way, can bring an abundance of benefits not only to the individuals involved, but also to a wider social system.

Our research suggests that by leveraging tools and technology, as well as design frameworks typically adopted in commercial worlds, the global academic community can reimagine and enhance the student experience. By doing this we believe that together we can foster more inclusive and disruptive thinking in our future 21st century leaders.

After exploring the context and current dialogue around the concept of mentorship, we share some best practices from the human-centered and service-design principles that guided our work since 2017at IE, before ending with valuable conclusions and considerations as we move forward with the HST Mentor Program.

Keywords: Mentor, mentoring, student mentoring, mentoring in Higher Education, peer-to-peer mentoring, e-mentoring, human-centered design, service design, speculative design, knowledge exchange, collaboration, inclusion, empathy, design, community, network, systems thinking

1. Introduction

In a world that is ever-changing and continuously confronted by global challenges, mentorship can be a powerful tool to facilitate knowledge exchange, collaboration, and disruptive thinking. As an academic institution which prides itself on "driving innovation", our team at IE has invested time and resources in the research, design, and creation of a mentor program to nurture future leaders across multiple disciplines.

In this article, we explore the concept of mentorship from its emergence in ancient Greek times, to a powerful concept of the 21st century that, if designed and implemented in a conscious way, can bring an abundance of benefits not only to the individuals involved, but also to a wider social system.

After exploring the context and dialogue around the concept of mentorship, we share some best practices from the Human Centered Design principles that have guided our work since 2017. In sharing these experiences, tools, and methods, we hope to contribute meaningfully to the conversation and support our peers in their quest to build new disruptive models.

2. Looking to the Past to Understand the Present

If someone attempted a historical journey to understand the evolution of the definition of "mentoring", they would find its origins traced back to Homer's Odyssey. As the story goes, the namesake protagonist, Odysseus, entrusts Mentor, a close friend senior in age, with his son's care during his absence in the Trojan war.

The nature of this relationship based on advice, wisdom transfer, guidance, and trust has led the word "mentor" to be adopted in many languages as a term meaning someone who imparts wisdom to – and shares knowledge with – a younger, typically less-experienced person. Since the first mentorship example was recorded, informal

mentoring relationships and programs would take place between mentors and protégés throughout history – to name a few: Sir Thomas More and Thomus Linacre [1]; T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound; Martin Luther King and Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays; both Beethoven and Mozart and Haydn [2]; and most recently Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg [3].

2.1 Mentorship For Professionals in the 20th Century

Despite the emergence of the mentor figure in ancient Greek times, it was not until the late 20th century that scientific research of mentoring began. According to Anderson & Shannon, the mid-70s appear to be the turning point, when mentoring for a professional career came to the spotlight as a topic for investigation [4]. Its popularity may be associated with the rise of the Human Resources Development Movement in business. Jadwick argues that since then, the idea of mentoring – both informal and formal – and its impact in the corporate world has been much discussed [5]. The rise of formal mentoring initiatives in business was triggered by the five following trends: quest for innovation, merger explosion, changing composition of the workforce, coming labor shortage, and emergence of the cross-cultural corporations [6].

Mentorship in Companies

In research developed at IE Foundation, by IE's Observatory for Demography, the authors identified that mentorship presents a key opportunity for intergenerational collaboration in companies. Research on European companies shows that there begins to be a higher prevalence of formalised programs for intergenerational knowledge sharing, mostly taking the form of mentorship (from senior to junior, from junior to senior or bi-directional).

> *If designed well, a mentorship program within a company could create a strong competitive advantage since wisdom can be exchanged in a collaborative fashion. Workers at all levels of an organization can benefit from having the insight of other generations and the skills and experience developed in diverse generational environments. From an organisational perspective, matching profiles together – profiles which may not normally interact – could provide an opportunity to maintain key knowledge and wisdom within a company. This could reduce the risk of losing key learnings when senior profiles begin to retire, while also helping junior profiles get a broader perspective or strategic view of the company.*

3. Mentorship in Educational Contexts

Mentorship in the corporate world may have had somewhat of a trajectory, thanks to the competitive advantage it presents, but the same may not be said for its adoption in academic settings. During the 90s, Jadwick acknowledged that the number of studies on the mentor-protege relationship in higher education was very limited; studies both on matched and unmatched mentor-protégé relationships had just started to develop in the US in Higher Education Institutions [9]. According to Rhodes, until 2008 only 1% of the articles were discussing mentoring of college students [10]. However, the arrival of the 21st century would see an emergence of mentorship initiatives in higher education.

3.1 Mentorship Gains Popularity in the 21st Century

Mentoring today might be considered a practice which aims to cultivate, as what SpeculativeEDU refers to, "novel educational skills and practices for the 21st century" [11], leveraging technology and the power of networks, helping students become familiar with a new environment and, ultimately, providing them with frameworks and abilities to help them navigate a complex professional and academic landscape.

According to Noakes et al., mentoring in Higher Education has come to the spotlight of academic research in recent years because "mentoring relationships are beneficial to both mentors and their mentees" [12]. At the same time, it is an affordable tool of "recruiting, retaining, and developing students through, within, and beyond the academic lifecycle" [13].

In order to better understand the status of mentorship in Higher Education as a subject of global academic inquiry, we researched databases of academic journals, using a very specific set of keywords: "university mentoring program". Gale Academic Onefile produced 233 and ResearchGate yielded 100 results of articles related to mentoring in diverse fields (medical, criminal justice, business, nursing, etc) and regions (Africa, Brasil, Warsaw, Australia, Toronto, New York, to name a few). Next, we analyzed 41 active university mentor programs[1] (our research included a sample from universities from all over the world[2]) to find out whether they have developed any case studies discussing the initiatives they designed. In addition, we sought information on any common characteristics, activities, or KPIs that had been used to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives. The research showed that almost all of the landing pages dedicated to the mentorship initiatives did not mention any success indicators or activities designed, rather presented an overview of these programs. However, it is clear that all mentoring initiatives studied fall into one – or more – of the categories mentioned below.

3.2 Categories Of Mentorship Initiatives Found In Higher Education:

1. *Peer mentoring program*, in which experienced students welcome new students into the campus in order to boost their feeling of belonging[3]. In some cases, faculty mentors (Princeton, University of Washington) and staff mentors (University of Washington) assumed this role.
2. *Alumni mentoring program*, designed to facilitate career-based mentoring relationships between alumni and current students[4].
3. *Mentoring programs targeted to a specific category of mentees:* staff[5], research staff[6], entrepreneurs[7], minorities[8] and people of color[9], women[10], faculty[11], alumni[12], exchange students[13], and male students only[14].

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[1] In this article, we are not distinguishing between mentoring available for undergraduate or graduate students.

[2] The links to each program are included in the appendix.

[3] Brown University, Columbia University, Purdue University, the Technical University of Denmark, the University of Chicago, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Lund, the University of Sheffield, the University of St. Andrews, the University of Sydney and the University of Sydney Business School, the University of Toronto, the University of Washington, University of St. Francis

[4] Columbia University, ITMO University, King's College of London, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, the American University of Paris, the University of Amsterdam, the University of Auckland, the University of Melbourne, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Sydney Business School, the University of Washington, the University of Zurich, Trinity College of Dublin, Tsinghua University School of Economics and Management, University of California, Los Angeles, University College of London, University of St. Francis, Yale College and Graduate School

[5] Imperial College of London, King's College of London, London School of Economics, University of Amsterdam, University of California, Berkeley, University of Toronto

[6] King's College of London, Paris Sciences et Lettres University, University of Oxford

[7] MIT Venture Mentoring Service

[8] University of Amsterdam, University of Cambridge

[9] Princeton University

[10] University of Cambridge

[11] University of Copenhagen

[12] New York University

[13] The University of Hong Kong

[14] International University of Japan

Almost all programs name the benefits for each party involved, though some go further and include resources and/or toolkits[15] for the aspiring mentors, and provide a training timeline[16]. This might suggest the beginning of an encouraging, structured approach towards mentorship within an academic setting.
Later in this article, we will explore the design and evolution of the IE HST Mentor Program[17], with the aim of increasing the visibility of best practices, techniques and processes that have had success in the program at IE University.

3.3 Definition of Mentorship

After obtaining a better understanding of the context for mentorship initiatives and their implementation around the world, we began to focus on how the term "mentorship" has been defined formally. For this, we began an academic literature review. Perhaps the most obvious conclusion derived from this literature review was that there is no commonly accepted definition of the term. For the purpose of this article, we will adopt the one provided by Wunsch [14]: "a systematic and comprehensive program where (faculty) mentors and protégés[18] agree to engage in a developmental relationship related to academic and career goals where activities are defined, planned, and structured and where the higher educational institution assumes responsibilities".

3.4 Characteristics of Mentorship Programs

The various mentorship initiatives we analysed had different characteristics, with mentors being responsible for varying functions depending on the program. That being said, there are some typical characteristics of mentorship and mentors that kept appearing in our literature review:

1. Mentors play many roles in the life of their mentee: connecting link, peer leader, learning coach, student advocate, trusted friend [15]; guide, counselor, advisor, consultant, tutor, teacher and guru [16]; friend, advocate, trusted counselor, or knowledgeable guide [17]; coach, counselor, and sponsor [18]; coach, positive role model, developer of talent, opener of doors, protector, sponsor, and successful leader [19].
2. It can be a peer-to-peer relationship [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25].
3. Both parties can benefit from this interaction [26], [27], [28], [29].
4. A mentor is typically more experienced than their protégé or mentee [30], [31], [32], [33], [34].
5. The mentor-protégé relationship is a "deliberate pairing". Both parties can choose each other [35], [36], [37], [38].
6. It can take the form of virtual or e-mentoring [39], [40], [41], [42].
7. The mentor-protégé relationship is an ongoing, long-term process [43], [44].
8. It can be a one-to-one relationship [45].
9. It can be both informal and formal [46], [47].

These categories, definitions and characteristics are helpful to bear in mind when designing mentorship programs and also when engaging in these types of activities as either a mentor or a mentee. The unique and personal nature of the mentor-mentee relationship is one that can be cultivated and create an impact not only in our direct social interactions, but also in a wider social system. By looking at the past and the evolution of these concepts, we can better understand how to shape our own designs and begin to speculate on what could be enhanced in order to tackle the new challenges we will face in the future.

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[15] Imperial College, the American University of Paris, University at Albany, University College of London, University of Sheffield, University of Toronto

[16] Technical University of Denmark, Tsinghua University, University of Copenhagen

[17] HST is the acronym given to the IE School of Human Sciences and Technology, where this Mentor Program was originally conceived.

[18] Throughout this paper we will use the term "mentee", though the term "protégé" has also been recorded in the literature we reviewed.

4. The Design of the IE HST Mentor Program Launched in 2018

In this section, we will explore the IE HST Mentor Program, including an overview of its development, the main process involved in its design and implementation, and a personal account from one of the IE mentors.

About the IE HST Mentor Program

The IE HST Mentor Program was designed in late 2018 with the idea of connecting incoming students with previous generations, giving the latter the opportunity to contribute to the first's learning experience, and overall strengthening the sense of community among them.

The first Master's degree in which the Mentor Program was implemented was the Master in Customer Experience and Innovation (MCXI). From 2018 to 2019, the core academic design team started testing the concept through a ten-month pilot program with a few alumni who graduated from the program in July 2018. These mentors connected on a monthly basis with groups of students and got feedback on their learning experience. This pilot engaged Madrid-based alumni to effectively collect quantitative and qualitative feedback from existing students on a consistent basis. Students felt supported and listened to during their MCXI journey. Alumni developed their portfolio and were actively engaged in the IE community after graduating.

During the "pilot" mode of the first Master in 2018-19, there were six internal stakeholders actively participating in the project (not including the student mentees). Just two years later, at the end of the 2020-2021 academic year, HST Mentor Program counted on 50+ internal stakeholders actively participating in the project, from academic and marketing teams to mentor faculties and program coordinators.

Over time, this model was shifted, so that the focus was not so much about feedback, but more about the mentors empathizing and anticipating the needs of the students, before designing value-added activities for their monthly sessions – the core idea of the Mentor Program today. Social gatherings for mentors and mentees were also held, and many of the mentees felt so supported that they began building relationships with the mentors, who helped them with career advice and presentation skills, even outside the official sessions. A year later, academic year 2019-2020, the program was piloted in two more degrees: the Bachelor in Behavioral & Social Science and the Master in Visual & Digital Media. In the 2021-2022 academic year, another pilot begins with the Master in Corporate and Marketing Communications.

Since the beginning, the academic design team at IE has tracked the satisfaction levels of the students with the Mentor Program, and has received extraordinarily positive feedback. What is perhaps most rewarding is seeing the strong sense of community flourishing, as a result of the knowledge exchange and relationship-building between mentors, students, academic directors and deans from across the different programs. Several expanded and personal accounts from the experience of mentees, mentors and mentees-turned-mentors were published on the online IE magazine "Rewire" as well as being broadcasted through IE social media channels.

> *After being an HST mentee guided by superb individuals throughout my HST experience, I took the opportunity to become a mentor myself. This program is not only beneficial for the students, but also for the mentors, allowing us to provide help and guidance to students while developing essential professional skills like workshop facilitation. What's more, it allows us to be part of a community where we get to know people from around the world and expand our network. – Dimitris Syprou, MCXI Mentee-turned-mentor* [48]

4.1 Pilot: Using Human Centered Design to Understand Participants' Needs

Although launched in 2018, the design research and development of the program began in 2017 using Design Thinking and Applied Behavioural Design. In this case of this program, a practical and applied approach was taken to develop frameworks and models that were bespoke to the IE mentors and mentees involved. This is an iterative process that still continues today, although the large portion of design research and development was done in the 2018-2019 academic year.

To begin, several months of quantitative and qualitative research (interviews, observations, forms, database analysis) was undertaken to enable the design team to empathise with the needs of the students from the Master in Customer Experience and Innovation (MCXI) during their learning journey. This was similarly done with the alumni of the MCXI, in order to understand what value they could not only apport, but also derive from a Mentor Program.

Though mentoring is fundamentally intended for the mentees, it can assist the development of the mentor too, meaning both parties benefit greatly from their involvement in the program [49]. During the process, the mentor can grow on a personal level, while the mentee receives advice, support, and knowledge from the mentor [50]. More specifically, mentors can master leadership skills, while mentees can benefit from socioemotional support [51].

In our literature review, we found suggestions that a mentorship program should be participant-specific and designed to match the needs, interests, and objectives of both parties [52]. At IE, we considered the use of Human Centered Design the most appropriate for uncovering and better understanding the needs of both mentors and mentees. After gathering observations and behavioural insights from the design research in the first year, a number of months were spent architecting a Mentor Program that would meet the needs of both parties.

Gathering Design Feedback during the Pilot

The first version of the Mentor Program was launched as a pilot in 2018, with four mentors actively designing and leading sessions with one-two groups of students (mentees). The principal focus of these sessions during the pilot was to help mentors empathise with the mentees and provide reassurance during the learning journey. Both parties gave ongoing feedback on some of the main areas impacting the learning journey within the MCXI. With this feedback, which was documented on a monthly and quarterly basis, and debrief sessions with the different stakeholders, the academic design team was able to experiment with new forms of activity plans, interventions and communication strategies to enhance the learning experience.

4.2 Pilot, Test, Iterate, Develop

While the Master in Customer Experience and Innovation was the first to pilot and develop the Mentor Program, there have been three other degrees from Bachelor and Master level who have begun their own Mentor Programs. In each case, the academic design team supports the Academic Directors of the degree in designing a model for the pilot version of the Mentor Program, which acts as a “minimal viable product” to test out if the timing, formatting and framing of the program makes sense for that particular Bachelor/Master.

After testing out a pilot of the Mentor Program for an average of nine months, feedback is gathered from mentors and mentees, which is then incorporated into the formal design of the Mentor Program the following year. Although the pilot phase is where the highest volume of researching, testing and experimentation is conducted, this iterative growth mindset is carried throughout the evolution of each individual Mentor Program.

Over time and with each iteration of the Mentor program, feedback is collected systematically and experiments are made for new activities and opportunities, all with the goal of ensuring that the program and its mentors stay in touch with the needs of the participants.

Experience of the Mentor: Alexandra Zografou

Both of the authors have had experience as mentors in two different Master's programs: the Master in Customer Experience and Innovation (MCXI) and the Master in Visual and Digital Media (MVDM).

The MVDM mentor/author participated in the pilot launch of the program (2019-2020), and then continued delivering sessions throughout the first year of the program (2020-2021).
The pilot launch of the MVDM mentors program coincided with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent global restrictions. Even though the mentorship sessions were originally meant to be held face-to-face, the circumstances called upon a shift in the initial plan.

Sessions now had to be designed and delivered exclusively online (e-mentoring), hence, a lot of emphasis was laid in keeping the sessions interactive to ensure the maximum student engagement possible. To this end, she typically used remote collaboration software, favoring whiteboards. The sessions she designed were a combination of activity and presentation-based workshops (whose duration varied from 60 to 90 minutes), and explored issues such as team dynamics, brainstorming on creative projects, and career advice. Within two academic years, she delivered 15 sessions and mentored more than 30 students.

The learning curve was high for both parties involved: the mentor had to hone a range of soft skills, such as empathy, leadership skills, problem solving, and time management; mentees, on the other hand, practiced open communication both with their teammates and their mentor, learned how to ask for help, received valuable career advice and feedback on academic assignments, and, ultimately, became familiar with Design-Thinking frameworks and methodologies.

5. Helpful Practices for Ongoing Value Creation

In this final section, we identify some of the key practices that help to guide design choices and ultimately enable high engagement among participants.

5.1 Design for the right mentors

To date, we count on seven different iterations of the HST Mentor Program across three different Bachelors and Masters, with more lined up for the coming years. Throughout these iterations we have taken a human centered approach in analysing not only the students and their satisfaction as mentees, but also the mentors. The mentors are the front-facing ambassadors of this program, who have direct contact with the mentees and greatly influence the mentee's experience during their learning experience. Considering they have such an impactful role, we need to ensure that they are not only accountable, but also have the qualities necessary for the role. This is important to highlight since, in our experience, an excellent professional does not necessarily equate to an excellent mentor or coach. According to Burrell et al. [53], some of the key traits pertaining to successful mentors are:

1. *Knowledgeable*: though they do not need to know everything, they should know more than the mentees.
2. *Credible*: they should have "successful academic and behavioral experiences", which are witnessed by the mentees.
3. *Supportive*: they should be able to "encourage, use praise, and give constructive criticism" by providing specific and formative feedback to the mentees.
4. *Facilitatory*: they should act as a "guide or coach, not a dictator"; mentees should be able to develop their own experiences, while being guided.

5. *Available*: they should be "accessible to mentees"; spending time together is vital for fostering this relationship.
6. *Empathetic*: they should be able to "identify and understand the mentee's situation, feelings, and motives"; both parties share the experience of being students in the same environment, therefore mentors should be able to relate to the mentee's challenges and fears, and empathize with them.

To ensure we find the right people to take this role in the mentees' lives, we designed several features in the application, onboarding and training process of the mentors. These features used Design Thinking and Applied Behavioural Design techniques to both detect and foster positive behaviours aligned to the program. For example:

- A 40-minute online application process creates a first filter of "self selection" and means that only those who are genuinely interested apply. Questions within this application are designed to help the team discover what type of facilitation styles the applicants have, and how they approach session planning.
- In the onboarding process, user-friendly guidebooks and communications have been designed in a way to reinforce the key, desirable behaviours mentioned above.
- Kick-off and interim training sessions are held to ensure mentors are fully comfortable with designing and delivering quality sessions. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that mentor sessions had to be held online, so several training sessions took place to help the mentors feel more comfortable with online mentoring and adapting their sessions to online formats.
- Monthly and/or quarterly reports in which mentors document their learnings, observations and conclusions also assist in building a sense of ownership and reflection among mentors.

Fortunately, we have never faced an instance in which the mentor-mentee relationship turned sour, nor have we had to dismiss a mentor. We attribute this to a very conscious choice to select the right people, train them according to the program's ethos, and have routines in order to maintain consistent, quality interactions.

5.2 Design Stable Yet Flexible Models

When analyzing the feedback reports handed in by mentors and mentees at the end of each academic year since 2018, the most common outcomes acknowledged by both are:

Outcomes for Students

1. *Feel Supported*: It is an opportunity for students to share any ideas or qualms with alumni. Since mentors have been through the experience before, they can empathize and provide encouragement and support, or simply offer an ear to listen.
2. *Network-Building*: Students can build meaningful relationships with different generations of alumni from their programs, many of whom will be valuable connections in the future.

Outcomes for Mentors

1. *Portfolio Development*: Mentors develop their portfolio and professional experience, while continuing to be an active part of the IE community. Through the use of Human-Centered Design, mentors strengthen their professional skills and leadership.
2. *Network-Building*: Mentors can build strong, meaningful relationships with the growing IE community, many of whom will be great connections in the future.

Identifying the outcomes of a program like HST Mentor – from the perspective of the participants – meant that the academic design team had some clear guiding principles when making design decisions. What is perhaps most impactful is that the expressed outcomes came directly from the feedback of the students, as opposed to being prescribed by the academic design team.

Over the seven iterations of the program there has been experimentation on the form in which the mentor sessions should take place, with questions like “who decides when the sessions take place?”, “should there be a minimum number of sessions per term?”, “what type of materials should the mentors use?” arising. Over time we explored these questions to find solutions that would provide stability and precedent, while also providing flexibility for mentors and mentees. After testing various models, we came to the conclusion that having a sense of routine (for example, each mentor meets with one group of five-six mentees once per month) while also empowering mentors, who can design their sessions differently each time, provides enough stability for the program to run smoothly, while also allowing mentors creative liberty in the design of their sessions.

Designing Relevant Content For Mentees

Since the inception of the HST Mentor Program, mentors have been encouraged to design sessions that are informal but structured. The content of the activities is not strictly determined but mentors are reminded to stay close to the needs of the students, while also promoting critical thinking and debate on future trends and societal changes. Some of the general themes that are suggested to mentors when they begin designing their sessions are: strengthening team relationships and spirit; supporting or boosting the mentees’ mental wellbeing; and bridging the gap between academic training and development of skills necessary for a 21st century job.

Empathy in content design: an example from new students

When students enter the first term of their Bachelor or Master, they typically tend to be nervous and excited, not knowing what to expect. IE is an international university with over 75% of students coming from outside of Spain. This means that many of the students have left their home countries to undertake this intensive educational experience, and the majority come alone as opposed to with friends or family. When they arrive at the beginning of the academic year, everything is new and there are many unknowns.

The role of the mentor during these first few months is best directed towards expectation management and helping the mentees overcome challenges related to, for example: settling into a routine, empathising with their diverse classmates, exploring the city, and so on. By empathising with the students and understanding how they might be feeling, mentors can design activities that help to support students, as opposed to overwhelming them with more advanced topics like what they want to do as their next job, or when they will begin the job search process. These types of topics are best left to the middle or end of the academic year, after the students have settled in.

5.3 Design To Foster Community

Like any relationship, the mentor-mentee dynamic may need facilitation and that is where the use of design can become very powerful. Since the beginning of the program we aimed to create a sense of community between various generations of the participating degrees. By having one mentor deliver sessions to small groups of approximately five students/mentees, the mentees were given the space to see and interact with each other outside of the formal learning environment, as well as engaging with someone who had gone through a similar experience in the past.

In order to facilitate mentors meeting more students, and vice-versa, we have experimented with rotating groups and mentors on a termly basis. This means that groups will have different mentors each term, while they are still encouraged to keep in contact with previous mentors. In many cases where this is done, relationships between mentors and mentees grow far beyond the specific terms they were assigned to groups. In fact, there are countless cases where the mentors stay actively in touch with their mentees and continue to collaborate on projects and initiatives even after the academic year has ended.

By architecting these interactions, both mentors and mentees get a better view of the diverse perspectives within the ecosystem.

5.4 Design for the Future

As we saw before, the Mentor Program generates outcomes and worthwhile benefits for both mentees and mentors. Although these outcomes might seem more obvious, the "below the surface" outcomes are perhaps even more impactful on a systems level. As an institution that is home to more than 165 different student nationalities, IE creates a compelling space for diversity of thought and experience. When we talk about the present moment, the HST Mentor Program provides ample support and space for individuals to grow and learn from others.

In the bigger picture, the program helps to connect different generations, nationalities, sectors together by facilitating a space and structure for co-creation. The underlying current of empathetic design means that diverse perspectives can be shared in a constructive space and in an engaging way. Unlike a traditional educational experience that relies on a linear structure of students enrolling, studying a degree and then graduating, the HST Mentor Program creates a circular model of knowledge sharing and growth for both students and alumni, mentees and mentors. It creates a constructive space where individuals from different backgrounds can come together and actively engage and question topics like the purpose of teamwork, the changing landscape of work, the difference in local and global cultures, future disruptive trends. Although from the outset the program may seem to tick many boxes in the networking or support space, in fact the program has a rippling effect on a much deeper level.

6. Conclusion

Mentorship programs, if designed well, have a great, untapped potential far beyond professional networking building. Knowledge exchange has its benefits on many levels. As we saw in the case of companies, it can be leveraged as a competitive advantage to retain intergenerational wisdom. It can also help to build professional connections and provide people with a sense of belonging. However, thinking bigger about the concept of mentorship, we see an opportunity to "connect the dots" and build social systems that foster empathetic and also disruptive approaches to the future.

On a systems level, mentorship has the powerful potential to foster empathy between diverse perspectives. In a world characterized by disruption and challenges on social, environmental and governance levels, there is an urgent need for 21st century talent to think holistically. By designing spaces that cultivate knowledge and perspective exchange, we create the opportunity for greater levels of collaboration and inclusion.

In order to achieve this ambitious vision, we call upon our peers in education and design to think not only speculatively about the future, but also creatively and empathetically. The design practices we detail have proven very impactful in our process. They have helped mentors and mentees contribute to something which is much bigger than themselves. With this article we hoped to provide a look to the past, in order to help us understand how we can shape the future together.

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Mentorship in Higher Education: the Keys to Unlocking Meaningful Mentoring Relationships

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Abstract

In this article, we present the insights of a literary review investigating the key aspects involved in a successful mentorship program in Higher Education. These include 1) the mentor profile, 2) the relationship being built between mentors and mentees, and 3) the scope of mentorship.

Although mentorship in business settings is common, its emergence as a tool in education started only recently. Consequently, this new opportunity has initiated a discussion about what mentorship and its principal elements in an academic context are. The main questions asked are associated with what mentorship involves; what the qualities of the ideal mentor are; what the student-mentor interaction entails; what the role of the mentor is; and what activities this interaction should include. These are the most common topics explored by researchers in the field; the same topics we attempt to collect and bring into the spotlight in this article.

After exploring the context and current dialogue around the origins and concept of mentorship and, we continue with addressing the mentor role and profile, the mentor-student interaction, and, ultimately, scope of mentorship, before concluding with a summary of research findings as well as considerations for educators who are interested in including such a program in the academic curriculum..

***Keywords*:** mentor, mentoring, student mentoring, mentoring in Higher Education, peer-to-peer mentoring, Higher Education.

1. Introduction

Mentorship in the corporate world may have had somewhat of a trajectory thanks to the competitive advantage it presents, but the same may not be said for its adoption in academic settings. During the 90s, Jadwick (1997, p. 53-62) acknowledged that the number of studies on

the mentor-protégé relationship in Higher Education was very limited; studies both on matched and unmatched mentor-protégé relationships had just started to develop in the US in Higher Education institutions. According to Rhodes (2008, p. 124.), until 2008, only 1% of the articles were discussing mentoring of college students. However, the arrival of the 21st century would see an emergence of mentorship initiatives in Higher Education.

2. Mentorship in Higher Education

Today, based on the literature reviewed, mentoring initiatives conceptualized and mentoring programs designed are part of an effort to cultivate essential skills, abilities, and mindset for the 21st century, leveraging technology and the power of networks, to help students become familiar with a new environment and, ultimately, to provide them with frameworks and techniques to help them navigate a complex professional and academic landscape.

Mentorship in Higher Education has been increasingly gaining popularity and has come to the spotlight of academic research in recent years because, according to Noakes et al. (as cited in Raven, 2015, p. 281), "mentoring relationships are beneficial to both mentors and their mentees". At the same time, it is an affordable tool of "recruiting, retaining, and developing students through, within, and beyond the academic lifecycle" (Ball & Hennessy, 2020, p. 19), overall contributing substantially to the latter's positive student experience.

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion derived from the literature review is that, even though a number of tasks undertaken by mentors have been described by researchers, there is no commonly accepted definition of the term "mentorship" – opinion with which Anderson & Shannon (1998, p. 39) agree with. In this article, we propose the adoption of the definition given by Lester and Johnson (1981, p. 50-51): "mentoring is a one-to-one learning relationship between an older person and a less experienced person (throughout this article, we will use the term "mentee", though "protégé" has also been recorded in the literature we reviewed) based on a modeling of behavior and extended dialogue between them". George & Mampilly (2012, p. 144) elaborate further on this definition, adding that it can be defined "as the systematic, continuous, graduated and progressive interactions […] over and above the requisite academic exchanges".

Empirical evidence shows that mentoring has a positive impact on the mentees' academic performance (Fox, Stevenson, 2006, as cited in Nimante & Baranova, p. 121). Though mentoring is fundamentally intended for the mentees, it can assist the development of the mentor too (Caruso, 1996, as cited in George & Mampilly, 2012, p. 137), as both parties benefit greatly from their involvement in the program. During this interaction, the mentor can achieve personal growth and the mentee receives advice, support, and knowledge from the mentor (Falchikov, 2001, as cited in Colvin & Ashman, 2020, p. 56). According to Heirdsfield et al. (as cited in Nimante & Baranova, 2019, p. 125), mentors can master leadership skills, while mentees can benefit from socioemotional support. Therefore, Burell et al. (2001, p. 25) were correct to assert that a mentorship program should be participant-specific and designed to match the needs, interests, and objectives of both parties.

3. Mentor Profile

Alleman (as cited in George & Mampilly, 2012, p. 137) defines a mentor as "a person with greater rank, experience and/or expertise who teaches, counsels, inspires, guides and helps another person to develop both personally and professionally". For successful mentoring, it is crucial that the mentee perceive the mentor to be a "competent, reliable advisor", and that the relationship that is developed between the two parties is "personal and trusting" (Campbell and Campbell, 1997; and Crisp and Cruz, 2009, as cited in Sandner, 2015, p. 228). Such a relationship requires that the mentor provide information to the mentee that the latter would otherwise not obtain or ignore (Sandner, 2015, p. 228).

Other skills that came up in the literature review were organization, knowledge, attitude, and willingness to instill these qualities to the mentees. In particular, according to Burrell et al. (2001, p. 25) mentors need to be:

1. Knowledgeable. Though they do not need to know everything, they should know more than the mentees.
2. Credible. They should have "successful academic and behavioral experiences", which are witnessed by the mentees. Credibility is a very important trait in the mentor's personality, as evidenced throughout the literature reviewed (Colvin & Ashman, 2020, p. 55). As a matter of fact, students may not even reach out to a mentor if they do not consider them credible and helpful (Packard, 2003, as cited in Colvin & Ashman, 2020, p. 55). Collier (2017, p. 14) agrees that this relationship can get complicated if questions of expertise, legitimacy, and credibility arise. In the research conducted by Colvin & Ashman (2020, p. 62-63), students associated credibility mainly with trust, which relates to ideas such as "belief in the mentor" and "the honesty of the mentor", and experience, which referred to "experience, knowledge, and applicable credentials". In summary, the research concluded that, in an academic setting, students often defined credibility of a mentor as "being trustworthy and having experience" (Collier 2017, p. 14).
3. Supportive. They should be able to "encourage, use praise, and give constructive criticism" by providing specific and formative feedback to the mentees.
4. Facilitatory. They should act as a "guide or coach, not a dictator"; mentees should be able to develop their own experiences, while being guided.
5. Available. They should be "accessible to mentees"; spending time together is vital for fostering this relationship.
6. Empathetic. They should be able to "identify and understand the mentee's situation, feelings, and motives"; both parties share the experience of being students in the same environment, therefore mentors should be able to relate to the mentee's challenges and fears, and empathize with them.

3.1. Mentor Roles

The mentor roles have been the subject of discussion by many authors. As coaches, mentors help to develop their mentees' skills, and as counselors, they provide support and help strengthen their mentees' self-confidence. Mentors can support their mentees through "listening, providing structure, expressing positive expectations, serving as advocates, sharing with their protégé and making it special" (George & Mampilly, 2012, p. 140). Identifying these roles can help both the mentor and the mentee manage their expectations and understand

the impact they have on this relationship, as well as the way "the legitimacy and credibility of the mentor is developed by mentors and seen by mentees" (Colvin & Ashman, 2020, p. 57).

Collier (2017, p.14) has determined five specific roles that peer mentors play, which we believe are fit to be included in this study:

1. Connecting link. Mentors help mentees connect to activities and resources on campus, and understand the academic environment and campus in general.
2. Peer leader. Leadership has been recognized as a necessary quality for a mentor to have. Leadership can be expressed as "setting an example, sharing personal stories, leading activities, being inspiring, and being an overall leader".
3. Learning coach. Learning coach activities refer to "teaching learning techniques and strategies, challenging students, explaining concepts, and relating lessons to students".
4. Student advocate. The student advocate role consists in "helping, explaining things, being a go-between, and answering questions as being a student advocate".
5. Trusted friend. Being a trusted friend involves "caring about students, relating to them, being there to help, listen, give advice, and in general being trustworthy".

Nachimuthu (as cited in George & Mampilly, 2012, p. 137) shares a similar opinion; according to his study, a mentor can act as a counselor, advisor, consultant, tutor, teacher, and guru.

Cohen (1995, p. 29-31) too studied the aspects of the mentor role. In his Principles of Adult Mentoring Scale (PAMS), he evaluated the six behavioral facets of a mentor's role: relationship emphasis, information emphasis, facilitative focus, confrontive focus, mentor model, and student vision:

1. Relationship emphasis refers to "creating a climate of trust that allows mentees to honestly share and reflect upon their personal experiences";
2. Information emphasis refers to "directly requesting information and offering specific suggestions to mentees";
3. Facilitative focus refers to "guiding mentees through a review and exploration of their interests, abilities, ideas and beliefs";
4. Confrontive focus refers to "challenging mentee's explanations for or avoidance of decisions and actions";
5. Mentor model refers to "sharing life experiences as a role model to mentees so as to enrich and personalize the relationship"; and
6. Student vision refers to "stimulating mentees' critical thinking in regards to envisioning their own future and to developing their personal and professional potential".

Colvin & Ashman (2020, p. 64) mention another aspect of the mentor role: example, which refers to their ability to act as an example for the mentee.

Despite benefits and rewards reported above for both parties, mentoring does come with challenges too. Therefore, as highlighted by Terrion & Leonard (2007, p. 152-154), there are some prerequisites for successful mentoring, such as the ability and willingness to commit time, the same university experience, and the academic achievement of the mentor.

In regards to the ideal age gap, it has been suggested that the mentor should be eight to 15 years older; otherwise, the relationship could become "peer like" (Levinson et al., 1978, as cited in George & Mampilly, 2012, p.139), opinion with which Gehrke (1988, p. 43) also agrees.

4. Scope of Mentorship

Gehrke (1988, p. 43) considers the mentor-mentee relationship as a "unique opportunity for personal growth", while Anderson & Shannon (1988, p. 38) see mentorship through a set of five individual but integral processes:

1. An intentional process. The mentor fulfills their responsibilities intentionally.
2. A nurturing process. The mentee's personal growth and development is cultivated and facilitated by the mentor.
3. An insightful process. The mentee learns from and applies the experience of the mentor.
4. A *protégéctive* and supportive process. The mentor supports and advises the mentee.
5. A role modelling process. The mentor serves as a standard of behavior for the mentee to emulate and follow.

Ball & Hennessy (2020, p. 22-23) have defined four core categories in which mentoring can be subdivided:

1. Aspirational mentoring, which refers to "converting" students, in other words, influencing their decision to accept a place at a university after receiving an offer and before enrolment.
2. Belonging, identity, and development, which refers to mentors helping cultivate a sense of belonging to the university and to the program of study among students.
3. Career planning, which refers to increasing the mentees' professional skills and self-confidence through mentoring.
4. Professional contribution, which refers to mentors as experienced staff with the role of supporting students whilst on placements. Peiser, Ambrose, Burke and Davenport (as cited in Ball & Hennessy 2020, p. 22-23) emphasize on how workplace mentors are key to assisting knowledge transfer "from the codified information presented in university to practical application".

Alleman & Clarke (2002a, as cited in George & Mampilly, 2012, p.140) found that mentors use a set of specific multi-faceted activities, which contain items assessing nine activity categories:

1. Teaching the job
2. Counseling
3. Endorsing activities
4. Sponsoring
5. Protecting
6. Teaching organizational politics

7. Career helping
8. Challenging tasks
9. Friendship and demonstrating trust.

These activity categories can be further organized into three broader categories:

1. Guiding activities, which include "teach the job" activities, "challenging tasks", and "teaching politics" activities, which refer to the mentor's task of developing the mentee's skills;
2. Helping activities, which include "career help," "protecting", and "sponsoring" activities; in other words, "the practical help provided by the mentor to enable career advancement and showcasing of the mentee"; and
3. Encouraging activities, which include "career counseling," "friendship", and "trust", which refer to the mentor's role in "developing the mentee's confidence in themselves and in colleagues".

An important aspect of mentoring effectiveness is relationship quality (George & Mampilly, 2012, p. 141). According to Burrell et al. (2001, p.25), indicators of an effective mentoring relationship are purpose, creativity, and personal investment.

About the benefits of such an interaction between a mentor and a mentee, various have been encountered throughout the literature we reviewed. When studying the benefits of peer mentoring, Sanders & Higham (2012, p. 21-22) found that they could include the acquisition of skills related to "self-management, leadership and communication"– the latter is a skill that is also emphasized by Ylonen (2011, p. 807) and Hudson (2013, p. 780-781) too.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to collect and summarize the context and research around the most critical elements of mentorship according to the literature we reviewed. These are: the definition of mentorship, the ideal mentor profile, and the scope of mentorship. Mentorship programs generate outcomes and worthwhile benefits for both mentees and mentors, and provide ample support and space for individuals to learn from others. In the bigger picture, such programs help to connect different alumni generations together and create a circular model of knowledge-sharing and growth for both students and alumni, mentees and mentors. Making this information available to fellow colleagues in the educational space will hopefully trigger reflection about the origins and evolution of mentorship, as well as proposals to enhance the students' learning experience while studying. In sharing these tools and methods, we hope to contribute meaningfully to the conversation and support our peers in their quest to build new disruptive models.

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The creation of the HST Mentor Program

Talent & Leadership 3 mins

Laura McDermott, the founding lead of the HST Mentor Program, describes how an idea that surged while studying the Master in Customer Experience and Innovation became a program that now helps students grow through mentorship.

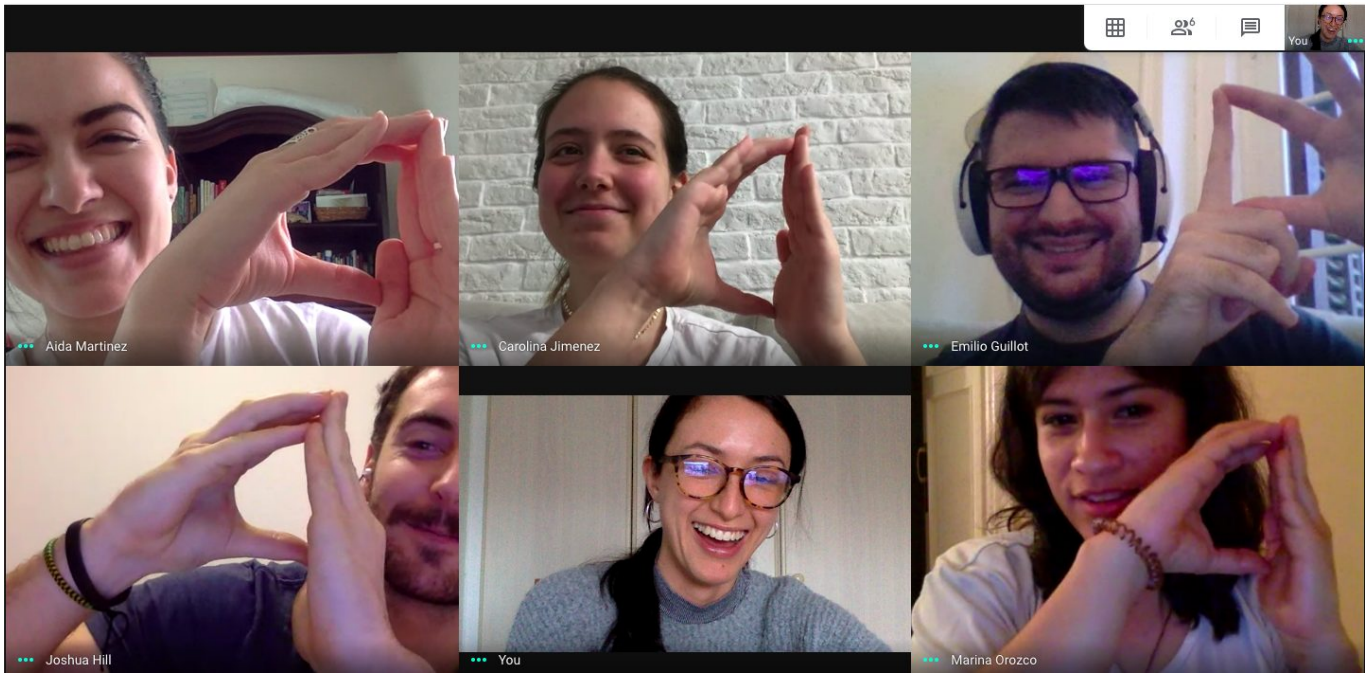
In September 2017, I moved to Madrid to begin the Master in Customer Experience and Innovation (MCXI) at **IE School of Human Sciences & Technology** (HST). Our academic director, Andrew McCarthy, would constantly repeat his mantra “trust the process”. This presented a challenge for most of us, since the actual content we were studying—innovation, creativity, design and emerging technologies—has an inherently high-level of uncertainty and change!

From ideation to realization

In the second term of the MCXI we did a project-based course on Social Impact. It was one of my favorite courses of the master and in fact, it led me to begin working in Social Innovation at IE!

For our final Social Impact project, my team developed a 'buddy' or 'mentor' scheme for marginalized teens in the outer suburbs of Madrid. The project leveraged behavioural design and positive peer influence to help these teens aspire and strive towards higher goals, while providing support from role models who had gone through similar experiences.

When I graduated from the MCXI, I reflected on the incoming cohort of students and the rollercoaster ride they would face during the master. Having just completed the Social Impact project and appreciating the incredible value of the master, I thought that connecting incoming students with previous generations—who had been through a similar experience—could be very powerful. And so the idea was born...



From pilot to meaningful mentorships

From 2018 to 2019 we started testing the concept through a pilot program with a few alumni who graduated from my class. These mentors connected on a monthly basis with groups of students and got feedback on how their experience was going. Over time, we shifted this model so that the focus is not so much about feedback, but more about the mentors empathising and anticipating the needs of the students, before designing value-added activities for their monthly sessions. We also hold social gatherings for mentors and students, and many of the students feel so supported that they build strong relationships with the mentors, who help them with career advice and presentation skills, even outside the official sessions.

Since the beginning we have tracked the satisfaction levels of the students with the mentor program, and we have extraordinarily positive feedback. It's reading words like this that helps us see the value and meaning that we're bringing to the students.

When we asked students from MCXI 2019-20 About what stood out to them about the HST Mentor Program, they answered:

> *The ease with which you could reach the mentors. All of them were always reachable, kind, always willing to help. It was great having them as they had the experience of being in our shoes. [MCXI Student, 2020]*
>
> *The organization and structure of the sessions and the fact that the mentor really took the time to know what we wanted to explore during the mentorship program. [MCXI Student, 2020]*

What's more, in 2019 and 2020 we piloted the program in two more HST programs: the Bachelor for Behavioral & Social Science and the Master in Visual & Digital Media. We're quickly building a strong group of mentors, who we select and train with care to ensure they feel both comfortable and confident delivering valuable sessions to their mentees.

Just the beginning

Designing and managing the HST Mentor Program has been incredibly rewarding and I've learned so much in the process (Andrew McCarthy's "trust the process" mantra rings true). What is perhaps most rewarding is seeing the strong sense of community flourishing, as a result of the knowledge exchange and relationship-building between mentors, students, academic directors and deans from across the different programs.

Of course, all of this wouldn't be possible without the support of HST and specifically the Faculty Student Experience team, which innovates in not only the student experience, but also that of the HST faculty. I'm sure this is just beginning for the MCXI mentor program, and as it scales to other programs over the years, its value for students and mentors will continue to blossom!

*Laura McDermott is an Irish design and innovation consultant, based in Design Lead in the Center for Social Innovation at IE Business School, Project & Design Lead for the Faculty and Student Experience at **IE School of Human Sciences & Technology**, and Adjunct Professor and Mentor in the MSc. Customer Experience and Innovation at IE. Laura consults on innovation projects, specifically from a behavioural lens. She has published articles in The Beam and Global Voices, as well as receiving two IE Awards for the Humanities for her writings on ethics, democracy, behavioral design and sustainability.*