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How can coaching and mentoring help HE staff to maximise their performance?

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Abstract: This paper demonstrates how coaching and mentoring approaches can be effective methods of developing capability in university management. This is a work in a progress case study from one full-range UK business school. The research shows how the literature on coaching and mentoring theory and practice was used to construct a way to address management and development issues within the school. The paper charts how the coaching/mentoring needs of the school were identified and how these have been used to create a coaching and mentoring scheme. The early findings indicate that such an approach to staff development was already being used for junior staff but, that until this intervention, there had been little individual support for senior managers and those who were preparing to become senior leaders. The intervention shows that this approach can be designed to address EDI, productivity and motivational issues within the workforce.

Paper: This paper proposes that coaching and mentoring can be effective methods of developing capability, and maximising performance in university management. Via a case study from a UK business school, the paper demonstrates how the literature on coaching and mentoring theory and practice was used to construct a way to address management and development issues within the school.

The school has just been part of a restructuring. This has given it time to refresh its strategy, introduce a new inclusive culture, and ensure maximisation of staff productivity.

The researcher first undertook a review of the coaching and mentoring literature. This suggested that such a scheme would provide strong strategic alignment (Trevor, 2019), ensuring that staff focus their work in the direction that the organisation needs them to go, and which maximises efficient and effective use of resources.

Academic staff are motivated by the psychological contract, driven by the wish to make a difference, and undertake a role which is personally satisfying to them (Rousseau, 1995). A scheme which invests in this motivation via appropriate one-to-one mentoring/coaching, is likely to resonate well with these staff.

Coaching and mentoring provide tools as part of workforce strategy which would suit HEIs in managing the whole life-cycle of a staff member within the institution (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969), which would facilitate the best performance of staff throughout their career.

A comprehensive coaching/mentoring scheme is appropriate to the nature of our knowledge economy business. Coaching unlocks people's potential to maximise their own performance (Whitmore, 1992) and mentoring guides more junior staff (Gibb, 2014). Both these mechanisms invest in staff to stimulate their motivation (Rogers, 1959) and addresses what is holding back their performance.

Furthermore, it will show an impact by empowering staff, and giving them a sense of responsibility. This coaching triangle of awareness, choice and responsibility is liberating for an institution (Sherman and Freas, 2004).

Finally, such a scheme will provide clarity of strategic purpose, and it will upskill middle and senior academic managers, who are to a large extent accidental managers (employed for their teaching and research and now allocating staff and other resources (Esque, 1999).

Additionally, there are a number of effects that coaching and mentoring can have on organisational culture (Schein, 2017).

Creating a positive work environment: Personal motivations can feel respected, such as psychological and safety needs, the need to belong and be recognised, as well as self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943).

Clarity of purpose: This evaluation shows that coaching and mentoring can ensure clarity of purpose and values, which in turn creates a high-performance culture. They can be a simple way of providing strong strategic alignment (Trevor, 2019), ensuring that staff members focus their work in the direction of the desired purpose and organisational culture, which maximises efficient and effective use of resources.

Resilience in times of change: Furthermore, at this time of pandemic, it will increase resilience (Hone, 2017). A mentor can become a support network at a time of crisis or change, allowing the mentee to be stronger. Hunt (2016) suggests that key aspects of organisational culture can be strengthened by means of coaching work on purpose, preparation, power, positive attitude, perspective and partnership. Shillcutt (2019) suggests a similar approach in her failure and resilience model, which outlines ways of embracing failure, sharing it, taking responsibility, and turning vulnerability into strength.

The researcher undertook a survey of staff in the school to see how widely coaching and mentoring were taking place.This indicated that 40% of staff had a mentor and that another 20% would be keen to have one.A further audit of what was happening showed that most mentoring was taking place at

junior levels, that the systems adopted were very informal and not comprehensive, and that coaching was almost non-existent.

Based on the audit of needs and the literature the researcher has introduced a coaching and mentoring scheme across the school based on the following principles.   All Executive team members to take on a coach

- All Executive members to mentor other staff
- Training of staff who would like to be coaches and mentors
- Ask for volunteers to be mentored and coached in a first wave

The paper will present more details of this implementation and initial findings of their effect within the school, towards its core values and objectives. Initial findings indicate that staff valued being invested in, they responded to the extra individualised support, and were motivated by it.

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