MENTORING:

Its role in organizational change

and Area Management in N.S.W.

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RATIONALE

What exactly is mentoring, and how is it relevant to Area Management? Before addressing these questions, we need to examine some of the ramifications of this new structure, and their effects on the personnel at the coalface of institutional management.

The implementation of the new inmate management system under Area Management is a radical departure from traditional strategies. Consequently it will threaten existing attitudes and managerial techniques. Also, as with any new system, it will require the acquisition of additional skills. On the positive side, this change, by demanding that officers learn new skills, will create a space to enable individuals to explore and develop their potential, and strive to achieve greater personal and professional integration. The results then, are beneficial for both the individual and the organization.

However, change itself is a demanding process which pushes back boundaries and demolishes existing structures, rendering obsolete current strategies and technology. Not surprisingly then, change is actively resisted, even sabotaged. It then gathers its own momentum, imposing itself on populations floundering for survival. Eventually change becomes the norm, reducing scattered reactionary forces to powerless insignificance.

Change then, is revolutionary; it impacts on individuals; it challenges their prejudices; and it insists that they extend themselves beyond the boundaries of self-limitation. And eventually, as individuals mobilise themselves to meet the challenges of change, they simultaneously become its facilitators.

Given all these factors, it is now appropriate to examine what contribution mentoring could make to the successful implementation of Area Management throughout the correctional system in New South Wales.

What is mentoring?

A mentor has been defined as "a wise and trusted counsellor" (Macquarie Dictionary). Perhaps some may find this concept too "soft," in direct conflict with perceptions of hard-nosed managerial styles. The most pristine application of mentoring can be best understood from Greek mythology. When Ulysses undertook his ten-year journey some 3,500 years ago, he entrusted "the education and development of his son to a wise and learned man named Mentor" (Gehrke and Kay in Coombe, The Mentor System).
Traditionally, mentoring is a term which has been reserved for a person who has taught the young through positive influence. To access the full wisdom of parables and mythology, the literal interpretation must be placed in the realm of metaphor. So the concept of son can be extended to include anyone who has lately entered a new environment, and is therefore vulnerable to both positive and negative influences. It follows then, that the nature of these educational influences will have significant input to the development of a fully integrated human being.

**How is mentoring relevant to the implementation of Area Management?**

Education and development can, and should take place in any environment. Dramatic changes, such as those which will occur in correctional locations in New South Wales with the introduction of the new inmate management system, will render a whole culture vulnerable in the transition stages. Such a population would benefit from mentors, individuals who will teach through positive influence.

It is imperative that key principles be understood, communicated and maintained. If new machinery or technology is introduced to the workplace, the rationale for correct implementation and education is obvious. It should be no less obvious in the correctional system where the safety and well being of the entire population hinges on effective implementation and educational strategies.

The concept of teaching through positive influence should not be restricted to the literal application of education; rather it needs to be extended to include, as Ulysses did, the development of the individual. Perhaps we should look at some more contemporary interpretations of the role of mentor. They have been described as

**Teacher, sponsor, counsellor, developer of skills and intellect, host, guide, exemplar, supporter and facilitator of one's dream and an advocate who helps one express, pursue and finalise career goals (Merriam in Coombe).**

It has also been found that good mentors are people-oriented and sensitive to the needs of those under their care, fostering and nurturing individual diversity.

Mentoring then, has enormous potential in the area of human resource development, and as such, has played an important role in professional, business and government organizations. In one form or another, mentoring continues to enhance individual and organisational development.
How have organizations used the concept of mentoring?

Mentoring has been adapted to accommodate a variety of needs in various organizations and departments. It is the parent of the protege relationship in education; the "buddy" system used by the police; the preceptorship system in nurse education; the tutor system at the N.S.W. Police Academy; and the coach and senior adviser in private and public sector organizations.

Education.

Mentoring has been used in the education system for the benefit of both teachers and students.

Students

I will deal with students first for two reasons; firstly, they are more closely aligned with the etymology of mentoring; and secondly, because of a contemporary program called Mentor Links which the Department of Education has recently initiated in New South Wales.

This program has been designed to assist gifted children achieve their potential. Children have many gifts, from cartoon drawing and writing through to a mature grasp of mathematical and scientific concepts. The school system has few resources to access gifted young people to greater developmental opportunities. It should not, then, be confused with a remedial program.

The mentor does not have to be a teacher; the role may be filled by a parent, or anyone who has become an expert in their field. The role is a voluntary one for both parties, and student and mentor meet outside school hours.

A regional Mentor Links Committee is the liaising body between student and mentor.

Teachers

Studies have shown that new and inexperienced teachers have benefited in terms of self-confidence and creativity, as well as in the practical area of administrative skills when they have been mentored by more experienced colleagues.(Gray and Gray in Coombe).

Police

Academy based tutor system.

While this system's connection with mentoring is more tenuous, it is worth mentioning because of its guiding and nurturing aspects. These aspects form part of the basis of the "buddy" system, which is integral to Phase Two of recruit training, and is also relevant in a slightly different form to Phase Four.
During Phase I of recruitment, a tutor is appointed to each class of students at the Police Academy. The tutor has a responsibility to access the students to appropriate academic and/or pastoral support.

One of the duties of a tutor is

"to establish and maintain professional and supportive relationships with all Student Police Officers in their class."(Job Description: Tutor. Courtesy of the Police Academy, Goulburn)

They also have to

"identify Student Police Officers in need of special attention (counselling, discipline, support" and "model professional practice"(ibid).

throughout the training period.

"Buddy" system.

Phase II consists of an eight week induction into the field. This is a very different environment from the classroom situation, and is the recruit's first contact with the realities of operational procedures. This phase is regarded as critical in the learning and development process, and consists of a one-to-one intensive professional relationship with a field training officer. This relationship is described as


Phase IV

This is the extended Field Training Phase where the probationer, while still linked to the Academy by way of formal examinations and assignments, has to undergo an extensive field training component. How probationers perform in this phase will have a major input into their overall assessment. This time they are precipitated into the total reality of police work, with all its dangers and frustrations.

Yet these officers are still really "external students of the Academy"(ibid p.22), so field training is

"an 'apprenticeship' under the tutelage and mentorship of a Field Training Officer, who models for the probationer in an operational context, the skills, attitudes and behaviour considered appropriate"(ibid.p.23).
Preceptorship in Nurse Education

Nursing students in tertiary institutions have less access to clinical practice than those trained in the hospital setting. Like the police, they have to bridge a gap between theory and practice in stressful situations, often involving life and death cases.

A preceptor is a staff nurse "who instructs by demonstrating or applying precepts....The preceptor role is conceptualized as embodying that of role model, mentor and resource person" (Perry. Preceptorship in clinical nursing education: a social learning theory approach).

A preceptor is not exactly synonymous with a mentor, but the role provides the basis for mentor relationships (ibid). Like the police and the "buddy" system, the relationship between student and preceptor is unequal; the preceptor must be senior in academic status, and must be an expert who engages in ongoing development of her/his expertise (ibid).

As with the police, student nurses based in the hospitals are still external students from an academic institution. It is critical to their education then, that they are exposed to professional, ethical, clinical practices.

Mentor relationships in the formal organizational environment.

It has been established that mentoring has a positive function in the business environment of both private and public sectors. Not infrequently, the terms "sponsor," "senior adviser," and "coach" are also used to describe the process of mentoring. The responsibilities of mentors in these organisations are described as career advisers, counsellors, sponsors and mediators, providers of constructive feedback and role models (Klaus). As in the previous situations, the mentor must be a superior, at least two levels above the advisee.

Mentoring has been particularly beneficial in assisting individuals make transitions from one role or level of management to another. The outcomes of mentoring are even more positive when the problems of mid-life crises render individuals even more vulnerable in this transitional phase. This is particularly relevant when linked with the identified factors related to the theories of adult educational and psychological development.

Now, as organizations find themselves having to undergo dynamic evolution to accommodate contemporary changes, the role of manager is also becoming synonymous with that of teacher (Wisdom..."
& Denton). However, this role has been extended beyond that of teaching, to include developing the employees. In fact, it is now mooted that

"The most successful corporations of the 1990s will be something called a learning organization..." (ibid).

It follows that this organization will require a culture conducive to the learning process, featuring such characteristics as "patience, tolerance, openness, and trust" (ibid). Importantly, it has also been stated that workers will be given access to other resources, including mentors.

Similarities with correctional institutions.

Like all organizations, correctional institutions in New South Wales must continually evolve to avail themselves of the advantages of new ideas and technology. This is particularly important in the light of the changing profile of an inmate population escalating in numbers, and of the community's insistence on a higher degree of accountability from correctional managers. And for those who feel a little cynical about this, all this is occurring at a time when Australia is experiencing negative growth in a depressed economic climate.

The kinds of upheavals which will be imposed on both staff and inmates will generate resistance and/or feelings of inadequacy in many individuals. Resistance will manifest in attempts to sabotage any new scheme, while feelings of inadequacy will inhibit individuals from engaging in new projects and acquiring new skills.

Sabotage can take many forms, including the withdrawal of the resources required on any pretext. This includes giving low priority to the training up of new skills in officers; or allowing training to be executed by personnel who have little understanding of the new concepts. In fact, they in turn may be reactionaries against the changes.

This produces an environment contrary to one needed to promote learning, so any feelings of inadequacy in individuals are allowed to continue to erode confidence. And if personnel who lack an in-depth understanding of the new concepts do the training, then the skills taught will not adequately equip the trainees to participate in the new system, which will only further increase feelings of inadequacy. Expected organizational outcomes will then not be met, and institutions will once again reverberate with the age old chorus, "it doesn't work."
How could mentoring facilitate a smoother transition?

A group of higher-ranking officers could, under the auspices of the governor, be given intensive training in the new system. The trainer should identify and address individual problems. If it became evident that the problems are insurmountable, it may be that the selection criteria have not been met. In this case it would probably be appropriate to counsel the officer and refer him/her back to the institution, whose responsibility it would be to select another officer, paying close attention to the guidelines.

If a field training officer in the police system is found to be wanting, that officer is shown the door. It is imperative that identified personnel have a receptive attitude to the concepts and philosophy of the training program.

Back at the institution, these officers would each be responsible for a caseload of officers, taking on the roles of teacher, counsellor and adviser in matters of professional and personal development.

Like the police and the nurses, the officers would still be in a learning phase, so would still be linked to a learning institution. The academic body could then act as a support group for the executive officers. In this way, any problems could be addressed in a culture where "patience, tolerance, openness and trust" (Wisdom & Denton) are the dominant features. This will facilitate a constructive monitoring of the new inmate management system. Problems and inconsistencies could be identified and rectified, and those involved in learning the new skills would be supported and nurtured through the vulnerable transitional phase.

Other Advantages of mentoring

Mentoring has advantages for both the mentors and the proteges. It has been found that many executives and top officials had been mentored, which has provided

"a formal mechanism to develop mid-level employees for more senior management positions" (Klauss).

Again,

"young teachers who have a mentor relationship tend to cope better with the pressures of the professional world" (Coombe).

But there are also benefits for the mentors. Being involved with the process of sharing knowledge with, and providing support to subordinates, allows the mentor the scope to practise and enhance the human resource development skills which make a good manager.
Mentoring also facilitated a broader perspective of different operational levels, so the mentor-executives could better assess strengths and weaknesses in the system. Developmental needs of future executives could be noted and planned for, and human potential could be utilized for the benefit of the both the organization and the individual (Klauss).

Gender differences

While there does not appear to have been a great deal of research done on the mentoring for women, it is important that we should retain an awareness of the impact this may have on women. As Klauss found,

"...if sponsors or mentors are important for the success of men in organizations, they seem absolutely essential for women at senior levels."

In his research he found that, of thirty women managers employed in twenty-seven companies, twenty-four had male mentors, and these women were better paid and younger than those who had not had mentors. Apparently, at the organizational level women need more encouragement than males, while at the higher level, mentors of women had to spend more time "selling" their proteges.

Because there are typically fewer women than men at senior management levels, both women and men will have limited access to female mentors.

Corrective Services is a male-dominated culture, and in the interests of equal opportunity special care should be taken in accessing women to, and monitoring the effects of, any mentoring program.

Equal opportunity also plays an important role in the employment opportunities of aboriginal and ethnic peoples. Suffice it to say that, at this stage, I have not been able to find any literature which addresses the obvious advantages and difficulties inherent in the mentoring process for these populations. That in itself is discriminating, so any mentoring program which may be set up would also need close monitoring to ensure that it allows equal access and equal opportunity.

Pitfalls in mentoring

There are also problems associated with mentoring. These negative connotations arise from many areas.

One of the problems is that it could degenerate into "cronyism" or "mateship."

Of course, with the male/female mentor relationship there are always the usual fears of sexual entanglements and favours.
Neither should mentoring be used as an underhand assessment process. Where there has been a tendency to formalise mentor relationships, problems have surfaced in the selection criteria and subsequent appointees. Formalising the relationship as a rank or an exclusive role has the potential to erode the principles and ethics behind the concept (Coombe).

Additionally, mentoring works best when it retains as many informal features as possible. For example, it is ideally a voluntary relationship, and has worked best when the adviser and advisee have had some choice in the process (Klauss). While it would be unrealistic to expect that personal choices could always be accommodated, it would be equally unrealistic to match two obviously conflicting personalities.

Care needs to be taken that a balance in the relationship is preserved. Because mentoring is a relationship based on one person's superior expertise and knowledge, care must be taken that views and options are not imposed on the less experienced protege.

**Evaluating a mentoring system.**

While there are obvious personal interactive benefits in a mentoring relationship, it should produce results. There is a danger that the process will be reduced to an exchange of pleasantries, and meet neither individual nor organizational goals. People should know what is expected of them in a mentor relationship.

"There should be clearly defined goals, to prevent the program from becoming directionless and ultimately meaningless" (Dr. C. Eales, S.M.H.21/11/92.p.81).

While "mentoring can't be qualified by t-tests" (Geiger. Measures for Mentors), it is important that the program's effectiveness be measured, particularly at a time when business survival depends on results. As some work has recently been done on evaluating mentoring, it would be appropriate to avail ourselves of current methods.

**Conclusion**

Implementing the new inmate management system will present some exciting challenges for institutional staff, although it is recognised that challenges are often synonymous with headaches. The logistics in imparting, on such a massive scale, new skills to all institutional staff are almost beyond comprehension. A mentor program would assist quality training to take place at institutions, which would still maintain supportive links with a formal academic body.
All staff will experience various degrees of vulnerability during the transitional phase. Mentoring could minimise feelings of inadequacy while maximising the potential for human resource development. Institutional accountability for the selection of mentors, together with the additional overseeing by the academic body should counteract attempts to sabotage the new management system.

Because of its potential to focus on individual development, such a program will enhance the Department's official policies relating to Equal Opportunity and Ethnic Affairs. Indeed, it may be that Corrective Services could become innovators in these areas.

While there are some inherent problems in mentoring, in one form or another it has played, and continues to play an important role in training and development. Measuring the process would provide feedback on its relevance to individual and organizational goals.

More than most organizations, Corrective Services is about the development of human potential. Such an environment would seem ideal for the implementation of a mentor system.

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