THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP IN INTERNSHIPS

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Undergraduate hospitality programs typically integrate a work-integrated learning (WIL) component such as a co-op placement, practicum, or internship. Mentorship is one practice in the workplace that offers opportunities to enhance both psycho-social and career development support. This qualitative study explores undergraduate hospitality management students' perceptions of the role of mentorship in their internship workplaces. Students' impressions of mentorship are described with a particular emphasis on the role of supervisors as mentors in the workplace, how the mentorship starts, the degree of formality for the mentorships, and key benefits and learning outcomes. The study sample was a purposefully selected group of six Bachelor of Arts students who had recently completed their internships and graduated from their degree program. The research employed a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews. To bridge this research to course development, this study includes the authors' critical reflections to support students, with the objective being to establish mentorship opportunities and maximize opportunities during their internships.

This study explored undergraduate hospitality students' perceptions of mentorship in their internship workplaces. The purpose of the study was to generate insights into how mentorships in internships in the hospitality sector start and develop, with a particular focus on who mentors in the workplace, the degree of formality for mentorships and the key benefits of mentorship.

In undergraduate hospitality management education, work-integrated learning (WIL) is a frequent curricula component and may be structured field placement, co-op placement or internship. Within WIL, mentorship is recognized as a form of social learning that can be a key contributor to career support and psycho-social transition (Kram, 1985). Smith-Ruig (2014) found that students who embark on an internship benefit from a range of psycho-social support, for example, role modelling, mentors, and friendship building. Furthermore, this career transition period from education to the workplace has been identified as highly significant for the early career professional (Pavlova et.al., 2017). In a study of hospitality students and mentorship in WIL, 96.2 percent of student survey respondents indicated that mentorship was a necessary component in a work-integrated learning course (Keating, 2012). Moreover, the research participants also attributed a lack of mentorship to the future possibility of changing to another career direction or not reaching completion of the WIL course. Student mentorship, guidance and associated psycho-social factors are significant for student success (Keating, 2012, Smith-Ruig, 2014).

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Situating the Study

Questions that arise from a review of literature on mentorship in internships are associated with the following contextual characteristics of mentorship for students completing internships in the hospitality industry. First, mentorship may be affected by the seasonality of the hospitality sector, and in particular, the busy season when students typically complete their internships. There is also a question about the roles and positions of those who provide mentorship in hospitality organizations. A survey of hospitality students and placement organizations completed by Keating (2012) indicated that students tended to conflate the role of mentor and supervisor. This survey focused primarily on structured, or formalized internship programs with attention on mentorship offered to students from senior managers or training managers. This is an example of a more formal approach to mentorship designed to link students with a senior-level industry mentor.

In this study, the researchers' objective was to understand what was occurring in internships and how mentorship rested on a continuum from informal to formal programs. In addition to the seasonality of the sector, who mentors during the internship, and the degree of formalization of the mentorship, this study also sought to explore the key benefits of mentorship as reported by students when they reflected on their overall experience during their internship. In a study of findings on mentoring in education, Lunsford et al. (2017) detailed the perspectives of undergraduate students and mentorship in WIL contexts and noted that empirical studies of mentoring for undergraduates are predominantly defined at the administrative or program level.

The Function of a Mentor

This inquiry explores the benefits of mentorship for students in WIL through a social learning lens to elaborate on the content of career-related support and psycho-social support for the hospitality management students completing internships in the hospitality sector. For this study, we define mentoring as a form of social learning in a work-integrated context. Mentorship as a form of social learning has dual functions (Kram, 1985):

1) Career-related support – to help the mentee advance through the organization
2) Psycho-social support – interpersonal aspects between mentor and mentee

Who Mentors During WIL?

In the aforementioned study by Keating (2012), survey responses indicated that students expected the role of supervisor and the role of mentor to be the same. Keating (2012) however made a distinction between these roles and argued that while "the role of mentor and that of the supervisor is often expected to be the same by the student. It is, however, quite different, since the supervisor is an operational figure whose relationship to the students would be that of tasks and operations, whereas a mentor forges a strong supportive relationship" (p. 98).

The authors of this paper question this statement as it seems reasonable to expect supervisors to be able to navigate both mentorship and supervision roles, especially in short internships. Lunsford et al. (2017) noted that in Canada "the tension between supervision and mentorship is one of the fundamental differences in mentoring constructs" (p. 322). Considering the relatively short internship duration, typically 420 hours and a minimum of 12 weeks, it is understandable that a student may look to a supervisor for both operational supervision *and* mentorship.

In a study of the links between mentoring and work-integrated learning, career-related support provided by mentors related to education in organizational culture, and in particular the values, norms and behaviours within a particular workplace was imparted through role modelling and conversation (Smith-Ruig, 2014). This finding suggests that those in a supervisory role in the workplace are positioned well to be able to offer both role modelling and situated insight regarding workplace organizational culture.

Mentorship in WIL Settings and Hospitality Occupations

Research on mentorship typically identifies two forms of mentorship, the formal and the informal. Studies on mentorship in WIL have tended to focus more on formal internship programs. For example, in a study of a formal mentoring program for female business and law students Smith-Ruig (2014) emphasized formal mentorship and mentorship training, planning, and oversight. Ralph and Walker (2013) proposed a mentoring model named 'adaptive mentorship' developed to reflect and support mentorship potential in professional settings where mentorship practices are embedded in supervision and occupational training. This model offers insight into how mentors can adapt their approach to a mentee by considering (1) the psychosocial support needs of a mentee and (2) task-related needs (Ralph & Walker, 2013, p.78). The psychosocial support needs are related to confidence and the task needs are related to competence. The model (see Figure 1 in Appendix A), and the studies that informed both the development and validation of the model are particularly suited to the context of mentorship when embedded in internships.

Research Design
In this study, the researchers sought to understand who acted as mentors for the students and if the students could readily distinguish between mentorship and supervision in their reflections on who mentored them, and the content of that mentorship. Students had completed a minimum12 week, 420-hour work term for their internship course. During this time, each student had a high level of task-related learning to carry out the core function of their role. This study explored the function of mentorship in an internship, and thus offers an opportunity to reflect on the adaptive mentorship model created by Ralph and Walker (2013).

Research Questions
The research questions for this study were as follows:
1. What is the function of mentors in WIL hospitality internships and in what ways do they support students?
2. Who mentors in hospitality workplaces?
3. Are mentors a part of a formalized mentorship program or are they more self-directed by the student and organic in their development?
4. What are the key benefits for hospitality students who have mentors in their WIL internship?

Methodology and Methods
The University Research Ethics Board (REB) reviewed and approved this study for ethical research involving humans in research. The researchers applied a qualitative methodology to explain the subjective meanings that each of the participants used to describe and make sense

of their experience with mentorship in their internship workplace. The researchers applied a semi-structured interview method for data collection and the interviews were conducted either in person or virtually using synchronous web-conferencing software. The semi-structured interviews were conducted between December 2019 and June 2021 and were 15 minutes to 30 minutes in length.

Participant Profile and Selection

The research population were students from a Bachelor of Arts in International Hotel Management program who had completed their internship course in 2019 and had subsequently graduated. Participant recruitment was undertaken with a purposeful sampling strategy through an invitation by email. Invitations to participate were extended to 25 students and 6 responded positively to the invitation. The internship course enrollment in 2019 was 25 participants and the sample size represented 24%.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

To elicit rich perspectives on the experience, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants following completion of their internships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using a transcription service. The semi-structured interview protocol included the following stages: welcome, overview of the purpose of the study, and a review of the participant information sheet and consent form. An analysis of the interview transcripts identified responses to the study research questions.

For research questions one and two, the participant prompt was: When you think about a mentor, what comes to mind? Can you tell me a story about a mentor you've had in your life? Have you mentored other people? To inquire into research questions three and four, the participants were asked: How has your mentorship experience affected you? Participants were invited to share their perceptions of the mentorship experience and make recommendations for improvement: Is there anything you would like to see changed about this mentorship experience?

Findings and Discussion

The discussion considers four themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' perspectives of their internship experiences, together with the related literature. The four themes included 1) Mentors having expertise in their field; 2) Mentors were viewed as role models; 3) Informal mentorship is valued; and 4) Teamwork is essential in mentorship. The findings are shared, organized, and discussed by research question.

The Function of a Mentor (RQ1)

Participants pondered the question of when they think of a mentor, what comes to mind? This question was not limited to the workplace and therefore responses were varied and included instructors, parents and various employers. Interestingly, all responses included a key theme of mentors possessing expertise. This expertise was linked directly to providing guidance leading to successful pathways for the participants. It was evident in the findings that the participants were open to having mentors in their lives and discussed a desire for more time with their workplace mentors. One participant drew a strong visual description of a busy executive chef mentor as a role model, "He is such a nice guy and supports me so much, shows me all the good tricks to some things like ten times easier." This participant was also offered management training as

something that comes to mind when they described the role of a mentor and suggested the function of the mentor might be more about management skills and training, "how to train people properly, how to take the stress off yourself and assigning tasks to others." These findings suggest mentors were under observation by their mentees.

A role-modelling theme also emerged suggesting mentors have attributes of bringing positive attitudes to their role. This was evidenced by a participant who suggested their mentor was "really good at reading the best way of how I take feedback, but she(sic) did it in a nice, positive way. She(sic) even sugar-coated some things so it wouldn't be taken as negative things but always as positive feedback, as a gift".

When participants were invited to relay a story of a mentor in their lives, most participants instantly referred to childhood mentor relationships and then drew on workplace mentor/mentee experiences thereafter. One participant was very clear that their biggest influence was a teacher mentor in higher education who had told them to, "make all my own mistakes, make fun of myself, and understand that it is OK to fail but get back on your feet." These views would support Keating's (2012) formal mentorship survey results but do not support, as outlined earlier, the supervisor and mentor relationship found in Keating's study as participants could see supervisors also as mentors. The findings do support the adaptive mentorship model developed by Ralph and Walker (2013) and the role of mentors in supporting competence development related to a student's role and tasks. In another instance a participant needed more time to think about a story, having trouble identifying anything significant. This was interesting because it took more questions about *who* mentors, for the participant to return to this question later and relay stories of mentorship during their internship that supported effective role-modelling to the corporate culture and attendant organizational behaviours.

Who Mentors During WIL (RQ2)

Participants' views were varied in their responses referring to their own attitudes and assumptions about who should be guiding and leading. The themes of valued informal mentorship and teamwork in mentorship emerged. In one instance the participant shared they assumed the role of mentor, informally, by helping their co-workers in the absence of formal mentorship. The participant offered, "It's hard to mentor (others) because I had to make sure their emotion is good, and they don't have anything against me." This participant's experiences indicated a dedication to a job well done and a hope that co-workers would take on a team approach, "Their ability is really good, they can handle things pretty well, but they just cannot work in teams...so like they need someone to tell them how to work in teams."

The observation also touches upon organizational culture and values as discussed by Smith-Ruig (2014) and is worth further discussion regarding the question of who is mentoring whom during the internship course.

There are opportunities from our research findings that align with the work of Werder et al. (2012), of students-as-partners (SaP) in the mentorship experiences. Role modelling has emerged in terms of who is mentoring. Examples include students mentoring co-workers and students mentored by supervisors. Findings also indicate the role of teamwork in the workplace. The question of who mentors was answered in ways that suggest that working on teams, informal peer mentorship and looking to those with expertise, all contributed to the mentee experience.

The Formal to Informal Continuum (RQ3)

Participants indicated that they were positively affected by informal mentorship relationships contributing to rich experiences in work-integrated learning. It is evident that there is a tendency to look for informal mentor relationships where people with expertise in their field are able and available to offer advice and guidance. This was evident when one participant commented that they "wish I could have gotten more one-on-one, more feedback." In this case, the informal mentorship provided additional avenues for the mentee to learn from others in addition to the formal mentor role. One participant also felt they were in charge of their learning by offering to take the initiative, "I would ask for feedback, but I think it was really my initiative that got the mentorship to be formal and then into the informal stage. And I think the fact that it keeps on going has to do with my initiative." This statement supports the view of students as partners (SaP) in their learning and, in this way, could be tied more closely to a learning outcome.

In higher education, SaP is a well-documented practice gaining global momentum (Matthews, 2017). Described as making way for "respectful, mutually beneficial learning partnerships" between students and faculty (p.1), SaP can be viewed as a desired workplace practice as well, based on participant views of formal to informal experiences between students and employers (Matthews, 2017, p. 1). Asking for more one-on-one feedback, taking initiative with the formal structure and moving it on the continuum to a positively viewed informal structure suggests that there is space for a partnership practice in an internship similar to an academic setting where students are viewed as partners in the learning. The participants did not discuss formal mentorship relationships, rather, they were more focused on thriving informal relationships where they were a partner in the learning.

Key Benefits (RQ4)

Participants were asked to comment on how their mentorship experience affected them and if there was anything they would like to see changed about this mentorship experience. This inquiry was aimed at the key benefits of internship experiences as perceived by hospitality students. There were some comments on personal growth as a result of the informal mentorship relationship, "She(sic) really taught me a lot about how to grow up in a society, because the society is different than university, and everyone has their own things to do. And not everyone will support you because they have their lives." A further comment involving management styles with underpinnings of leadership development,

> The executive chef showed me so many culinary skills and made me a better cook…The General manager affected me as she told me that being a chef is not about — mastering every single task in the kitchen; it's about managing. I think being a manager is not about knowing how to do everything, it's about managing.

These reflective comments are insightful and are recommended for further exploration of the internship experience. Other benefits that were discussed included a suggestion that the university invite graduates back to the classroom to talk with the students before the start of their internship, "I think that's a really, really good idea. Sharing some mentorship experience, workplace experience, give them the general idea of what the workplace will look like." This participant's comment also provides additional insight into ensuring all students have received some form of work experience prior to their formal internship course to proactively support the mentor/mentee relationship.

At the heart of the hospitality internship is the guest interaction. When invited to comment on the benefits of the mentorship experience, one participant offered insight into how

they were viewed by the mentor when engaging with hotel guests. These insights are helpful to reinforce the purpose of an internship experience and provide opportunities for further recommendations to strengthen the mentorship support. The participant commented that their manager would:

> notice little things that I would do regarding a guest, such as customer service, how I could elevate it. And I think she really took the effort just to personalize that with me, and we have – well, it was also part of the internship and we would have a one-on-one talk of these are the great things that I'm doing and feedback on how other people see me.

Recommendations

Based on our experience, semi-structured interview data, and reflections, we offer several general recommendations to support mentorship in undergraduate hospitality internship courses:

- **Dual Supervision and Mentorship Role:** To support undergraduate students consider the potential for linking both supervision and mentorship. As the distinction from the mentee's perspective of the lines between supervisor and mentor are blurred, it may be beneficial to describe and illustrate the possibilities for a dual role of supervisor *and* mentor. We recommend that by providing role descriptions for mentors and mentees it will assist in recognizing that a mentor may also be a supervisor. Linking a supervisor as a mentor to the university undergraduate student(s), may also provide long-term benefits to both employees. As many supervisors progress to the next position when they have been able to develop potential successors, linking the supervisor and undergraduate student can become a clear succession planning strategy and provide a professional development opportunity for supervisors.

- **Professional Learning Portfolio & Showcasing:** Allow students to profile their education and accomplishments during the internship period. Students appreciate the feedback and recognition that is associated with profiling what they have done and achieved with their supervisors and mentors. There are numerous opportunities both within the internship organization and externally to celebrate the accomplishments of a mentee and a mentor. Opportunities to profile learning in internship, and in traditional courses, connect theory into work practices. Examples include conducting a presentation to the supervisor or the department and/or arranging small projects that build connection between education and the internship work.

- **Consider Students-as-Partners:** An internship can be challenging for a learner. There is a significant adjustment in a new organization, and time is needed to settle into the role, culture, tasks, and relationships. Encourage employers to work with students as active partners in the internship. There is evidence that students will thrive in this arrangement as in the findings when mentees' confidence grows while becoming competent at the tasks at hand. The examples of the chef sharing their skills and the general manager offering caring advice created a partnership in the learning. A shift away from a transactional supervisory relationship to a more developmental approach between supervisors and student interns offers potential space to develop mentorship relationships embedded within supervision.

- **Peer to Peer:** Invite graduate students to join the class and/or hold an event to celebrate mentorship. Students are influenced by those who are close to their experience and are a 'little' ahead of them. Invite graduates within a recent time frame of 12 to 24 months to the class, or to an online web-conference conversation. Invite students to suggest questions for the graduates related to internship and mentorship and facilitate a conversation.
- **Invite students to explore the functions of mentorship in their future internships:** This activity could be part of a career management preparatory course or alternatively, a course in human resource management or leadership development. Invite learners to brainstorm the potential functions of a mentor - what kinds of support could an intern reasonably develop by working with a mentor in their internship workplace? For a list of mentoring functions developed by Levesque (2005) and usefully summarised in list form refer to Smith-Ruig's summary of 16 broad groupings of mentoring functions (2014, p. 772). Or, introduce the model by Ralph and Walker (2013) and explore how it can usefully guide the mentor/mentee relationship in an internship.

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Appendix A

Figure 1

Adaptive Mentorship (Ralph & Walker, 2013)