Mentor or Coach? Examining development interactions in libraries and archives

In libraries and archives, professional competencies develop from higher education and practical experience, often through practicums or on the job training. Development may be enhanced through mentoring, coaching, internships and cooperative experiences. However, there is no agreed upon definition of mentoring and what mentoring includes, or does not, is still under debate (Eby, Rhodes, and Allen, 2007).

D'Abate, Eddy and Tannenbaum (2003) identify mentoring experiences as "developmental interactions" and go on to identify mentoring as a long term developmental relationship while coaching is more concerned with short-term goals and support. Mentoring programs, especially in academic environments, have developed to assist new professionals gain the knowledge they need, however, many of these programs focus on attaining a goal, like completion of a degree or tenure and promotion.

This presentation examines library and archival literature on "developmental interactions" investigating the types of interactions identified, comparing definitions and constructions to identify what types of activities are taking place and who is involved in the programs and compares it to survey data about mentors and the mentoring experience from 740 librarians and archivists in North America.

The lack of a clear definition of what mentoring is identifiable in the library and archival literature as well as in the survey data. Kuyper-Rushing (2001), Henrich and Attebury (2010), and Goodsett and Walsh (2015) discuss mentoring programs focused on achieving tenure in academic libraries. Similar programs were identified by survey participants in the open ended question "why do you mentor?". While many participants identified mentoring as a way to "give back" or assist others, participants also identified mentoring as something that was part of their job, and in some cases "forced" to do. As part of required service, survey participants specifically mentioned mentoring colleagues on the path to tenure in academic libraries. Interactions that, according to D'Abate, Eddy and Tennenbaum, would be classified as coaching activities, directing a person in order to achieve a goal. Goodsett and Walsh (2015) discuss the difference between mentoring and coaching, yet classify the interactions as mentoring, without taking into account commonly agreed upon mentoring attributes, like reciprocity in the mentoring relationship.

The presentations compares international library and archival literature on mentoring with survey data and mentoring literature to identify current concepts on "developmental interactions" in order to detect gaps and inform future research on perceived mentoring and coaching. Examining the characteristics of mentoring and coaching activities within library and archival environments may provide definitions within the discipline and a framework for comparing mentoring programs across institutions.

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