

From Someone Who Has Been There: Information Seeking in Faculty Mentoring

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Introduction

In a viable and effective mentoring relationship, mentors and mentees are constantly exchanging information. By considering what barriers there may be to that information flow, we may identify some best practices for mentoring programs on university campuses.

This study investigated the information behavior of tenure-track faculty members in their relationships with mentors. Aspects of mentee information behavior were identified, as well as some of the information seeking barriers they encounter. The study also identified mentees' ideas as to what makes a mentor-mentee relationship successful and how their information exchange with their mentors might be facilitated.

Theory

- Meaning and truth are based on unique interests and experience (Dervin, 2003).
- Information needs are individual and contextual (Kuhlthau, 1991).
- Constraints prevent information seeking outside a small circle (Chatman, 1991).
- A sense of self-doubt creates library anxiety (Mellon, 1986).
- Browsing and berrypicking describe ideal information-seeking behavior (Bates, 1989; Ellis, 2005).

FINDINGS

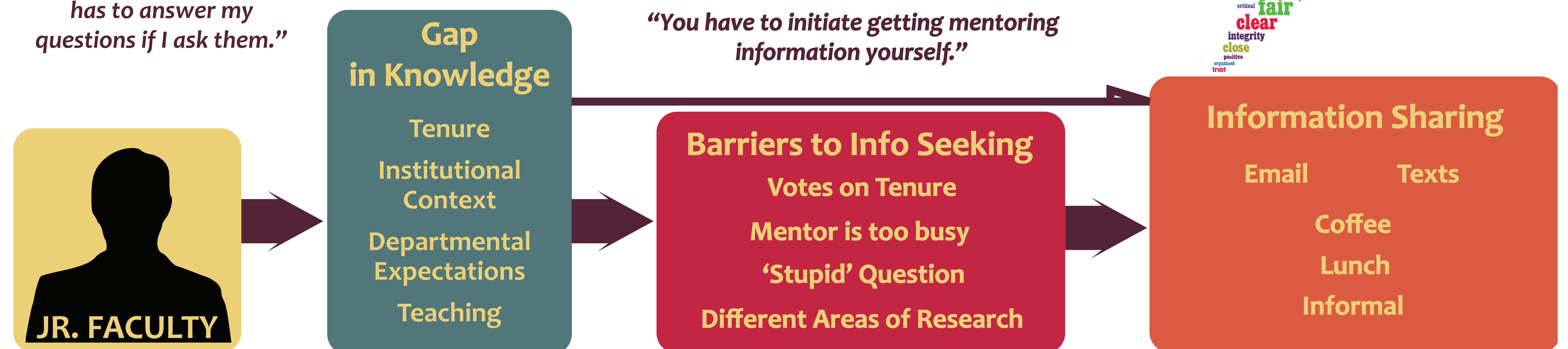
"In grad school, you get very good at doing research, but there's a lot more to being a professor than just doing research."

"There's sort of this contract that he has to answer my questions if I ask them."

"I think he sees his role as just making sure that I get up and started in a way that makes me an independent researcher."

"He gives me advice on a lot of different things – not just on the research, but also how to set up a lab, how to recruit students, teaching."

"You have to initiate getting mentoring information yourself."



"...in the beginning, it feels pretty lonely, and if someone isn't there to guide you along – someone you know that went through the whole process and succeeded..."



Research Questions

1. What motivates people to look for information within the context of the mentoring relationship?
2. What are the barriers to information seeking within the context of the mentoring relationship?
3. How do people share information within the context of their mentoring relationship?
4. What makes for a successful mentoring relationship?

Methodology

This inquiry was a mixed-methods study involving an online survey and follow-up semi-structured interviews. Participants were invited to take the survey by email. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 103 respondents. Interviews provided information of greater depth and increased personal relevance. The sampling frame was all tenure-track faculty members at a major mid-Atlantic university.

The survey instrument collected the respondent's general attitudes toward mentoring, the details of the respondent's relationship with his or her mentor, and other sources of information the mentee has consulted. Data collected through the survey were analyzed using of SPSS and Excel. The interviews were intended to gather more qualitative detail. Data collected through interviews were analyzed using NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software.