Academic Mentoring at SLU –
A Humble Attempt of a Personal Initiative
To Help Others Tread a Stony Path

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SLU

Why?

▶ Disorientation among MSc, PhD students and junior faculty staff,

▶ Line management does not provide the type of guidance needed,

▶ Sitting between chairs,

▶ #MeToo, competition, bullying at work and burnouts increase $\rightarrow$ pre-emptive, counteracting, raising awareness,

▶ Increasing job satisfaction and inspiring content and peacefulness,

▶ Passing on experience and skills,

▶ "Pay back" for the good oneself has received from others.

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Mentorship?

Relationship: More *experienced* or more *knowledgeable* person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. A *learning* and *partnership* development between someone with vast experience and someone who wants to learn. Mentorship experience and relationship structure affect the amount of *psychosocial* support, *career guidance*, *role modelling* and *communication* that occurs in the mentoring relationships in which mentees and mentors *engage*.

Wikipedia

Precise definition is elusive ...

Academic Mentoring?

Academic Mentoring provides sequential, *guided discussion* and *fosters mentee reflection* about individual *educational* and *career path* issues. Research shows that guided discussions of issues that impact mentees' *sense of control* over their *academic outcomes* enhance overall work success.

Otis College of Art and Design

The goal is to promote *academic* and *personal development* among new or recently appointed academic staff by *connecting* them with others who can advise, coach, guide.

Supporting academics as they move from *novice* to *competence*.

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What Mentoring Is Not ...

- ▶ Coaching or any other in-house training,

- ▶ A compulsory, formalised programme,

- ▶ A parallel line-management system undermining authority,

- ▶ An option for evading uncomfortable decisions and tasks,

- ▶ An alternative to supervisory committees, *medarbetarsamtaler*,

- ▶ A trade union approach,

- ▶ A channel for making complaints.

What Is Mentoring Then?

Supervisor	Line manager

Research community, networks

PhD student, postdoc, young faculty staff ← **Mentor**

Research	Grants	Teaching
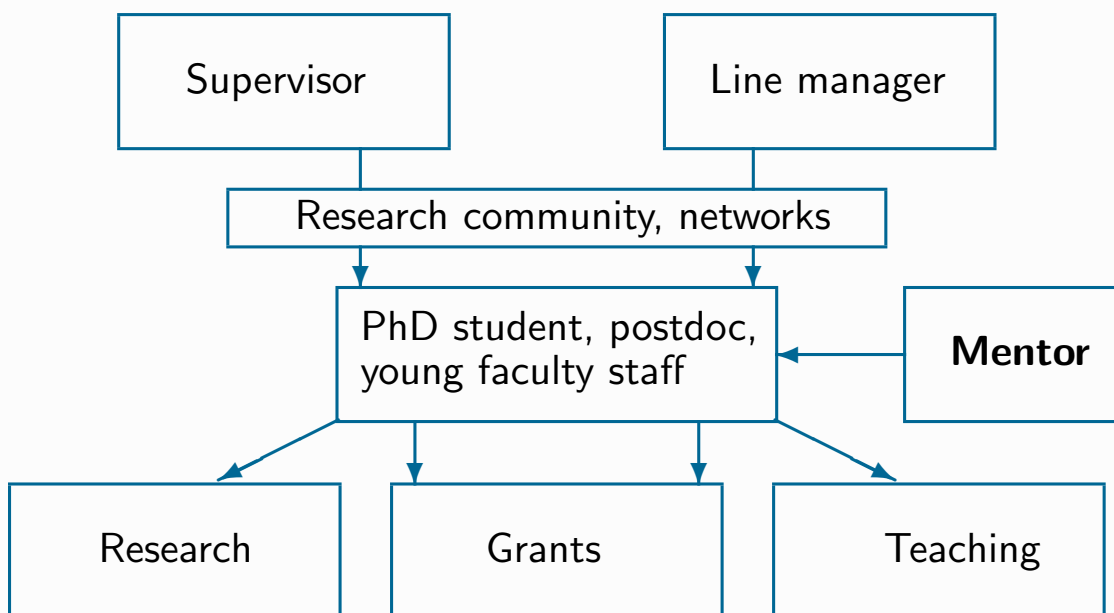
Independent facilitator taking a professional interest in developing another person's career and well-being without personal agenda: Sharing guidance, experience and expertise.

Role of a Mentor

▶ Help set short-term and long-term goals,

▶ Act as guide to help build skills and expand vision,

▶ Help navigate inner workings of the University,

▶ Open doors of opportunity,

▶ Direct to resources,

▶ Facilitate networking,

▶ Provide feedback on teaching and research.

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Mentor-Mentee Partnership
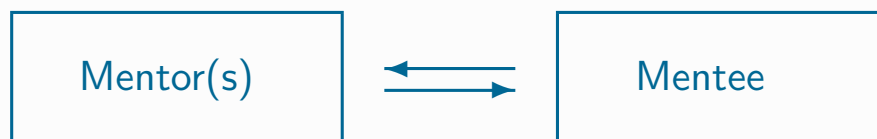
| Mentor(s) | ⟷ | Mentee |

▶ Mentee selects mentor or is matched with a mentor based on best fit,

▶ Mentee calls for meetings ("mentees must take ownership of the process"),

▶ Mentor guarantees strictest confidence at the discretion of both parties, professionalism and integrity,

▶ Mentor inspires ethical behaviour, role models and peaceful solutions of mutual benefit,

▶ Mentoring is separate from other SLU processes, e.g. probation, promotion, *medarbetarsamtal*.

Mentoring Focus

Mentor(s)	⇄	Mentee
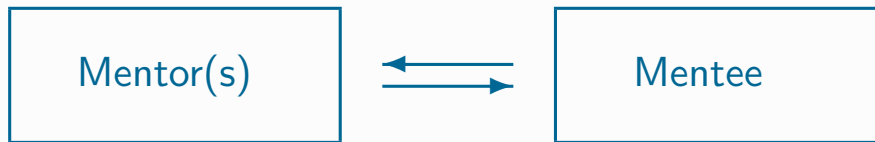
Whatever the focus, the *mentee decides*. Options include:

- ▶ Time management and career development,
- ▶ Develop intra- and interdisciplinary networks at SLU and internationally,
- ▶ Devising scientific ideas and research visions,
- ▶ Publications pipeline, targeting external funding, teaching & research portfolio,
- ▶ Balancing/prioritising academic tasks, editorial experience,
- ▶ Research trends and frontiers, team-building & interpersonal skills,
- ▶ Job applications and conflict management.

Place and Time

- ▶ Book a pleasant meeting room with a transparent door or walls,
- ▶ Place a table between mentor and mentee,
- ▶ Offer off-campus meetings in difficult situations, e.g. a café,
- ▶ Aim for a time when both are not too tired,
- ▶ In difficult situations invite an independent witness,
- ▶ No mobile phones, emails etc. Listen!

How Did it Go So Far?

Humble Guide for a Successful Career in Research at Universities

Draft Version

(www.pommerening.org)

Arne Pommerening

Umeå, January 2018

My personal FAQ document

- ▶ Learning by doing,
- ▶ Formerly part of a research school, now independent,
- ▶ 10 mentees since 2017,
- ▶ MSc, PhD, researchers,
- ▶ Mixed nationalities,
- ▶ Mixed gender,
- ▶ Positive stories,
- ▶ Raising awareness among senior SLU staff.

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What Were the Meetings about?

- ▶ Majority: Career development,

- ▶ Two cases of conflict management,

- ▶ Several meetings about the meaning of science and research,

- ▶ One case about the general question, academic career or working outside university,

- ▶ One case on proposal writing.

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Forms and Formalities?

- This may defeat the purpose (relaxing atmosphere, safe space, confidentiality),

- The mentee's call,

- An academic mentor committee can prepare forms but voluntary use.

Example from a UK research mentoring programme (around 2005):

- Current position in terms of research outputs and indicators of esteem for next RAE,

- Reflect on your research aspirations, potential. Any world class output?

- Outputs, indicators in the pipeline? Priorities.

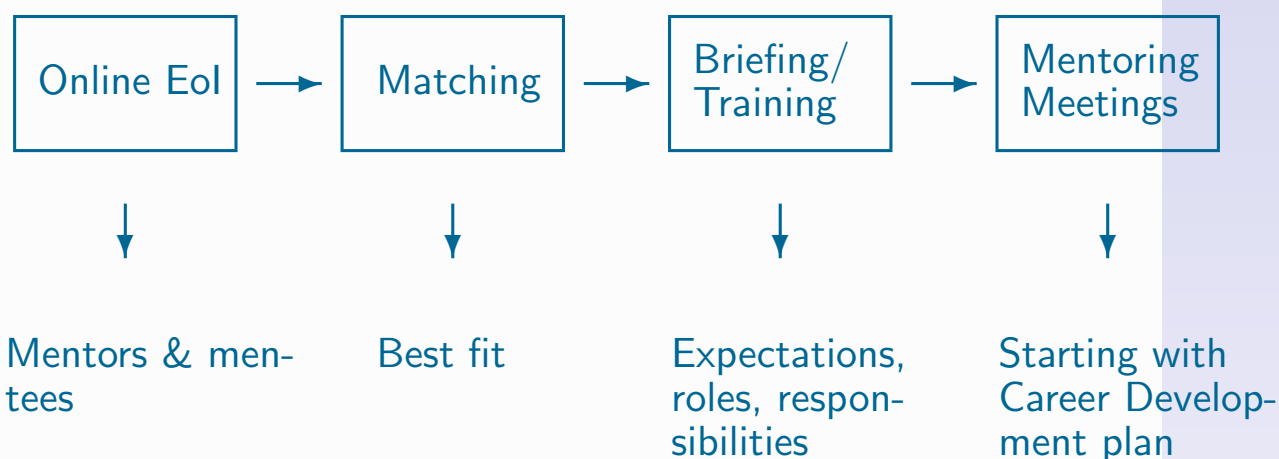- Targets for next 12 months. Reflection on these, threats, assistance? Comments on mentoring meeting.

Process of Mentoring Programme

Partnerships are not necessarily from same faculty; emeritus staff may help out.

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Online EoI → Matching → Briefing/ Training → Mentoring Meetings

Mentors & mentees   Best fit   Expectations, roles, responsibilities   Starting with Career Development plan

Conclusions and Suggestions

- No doubt this is important,

- Education Department takes lead supported by central SLU,

- Important, but low-intensity process based on volunteers,

- Induction courses offered by Education Department; offered also as DL option,

- I am happy to help out with the design and implementation.