

Key Determinants in the Relationship between Young Researchers and Their Mentors

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Literature in the field of quality in higher education provides different approaches and describes best practices in mentoring process. However, review of the literature shows that little research attention was paid to factors of relationship between mentors and their postgraduate students that would increase the likelihood of developing discipline-specific research skills and acquiring generic skills needed for employment and career development inside or outside academia by the latter. This article addresses quality determinants in relationships among postgraduate students with a »Young researcher« (YR) status and their mentors from academia and business enterprises.

More specifically, it explores mentors' perceived roles and responsibilities in their mentoring relationships with YR as well as perceived variables that impact the experience and research outcomes of postgraduate studies according to young researchers. Thus, a comprehensive study was conducted to determine factors of quality supervision.

The problem was explored quantitatively with a survey and qualitatively with focus groups method, which deepened our understanding of results provided by the survey and helped us to gain insight into the specific experience during the training and the relationships between mentors and YR. Altogether 11 YR and 6 mentors of YR took part in focus groups. The survey comprised of a 30-unit questionnaire that was tested in an expert group and published using an on-line service (LimeSurvey). The survey targeted all the people included in the programme and the sample included 3763 addressees, 478 complete questionnaires were returned (14,2 % response rate).

The survey included two aspects of the mentor—young researcher relationship. The first was assessment of mentorship. YR are on average satisfied with their mentors and were given good guidance both in contents and methodology for their research and dissertation. Differences can be observed regarding inclusion in research project, where mentors of young researchers in economy scored lower. The second aspect was the role of mentors in knowledge transfer to practice. With factor analysis we identified mentorship as the most influencing factor (13,5 % variance explained) in the programme. This factor is significantly correlated with the assessment of the programme as suitable for practicing the (current or desired) profession. Mentors' influence is almost twice as high for YRs in economy compared to academic YRs ($\beta_{YR}=0,2$; $\beta_{YE}=0,38$).

Analysis of focus groups indicated diverse experiences in mentoring both groups reported about. Participants' impressions were divided into three categories: mentor personal characteristics (e.g. support, accessibility, openness to different views), the attitude of a mentor to the candidate (e.g. leadership, collegiality, establishing a relationship of trust) and barriers to mentoring (process/YRs programme barriers as well as obstacles of a personal nature).

It was concluded that mentors who encourage the transfer of knowledge are exceptional in their ability to communicate and are teamwork-oriented; they foster active involvement of the candidate in the research group and projects. During cooperation in projects with different stakeholders they also strengthen various employment skills. Due to the non-stimulating social environment and unsupportive employability of young PhD graduates both sets of skills are equally important.

Keywords: relationship, young researchers, mentors, developing skills

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