

# ***Mentoring of emerging supervisors: The university looks good on paper, but it did not work as expected***

*Puleng Motshoane*

*Centre for Academic Technologies, University of Johannesburg, pulengm@uj.ac.za*

## **Abstract**

In South Africa, as anywhere else, there is pressure to increase the number of doctoral graduates to compete in the so-called 'knowledge economy. With the rapid rise in doctoral numbers comes increasing pressure on supervisors. In this paper, I present how mentoring through co-supervision and informal relationships enabled emerging supervisors to develop their confidence. Emerging supervisors in this study refer to academics who have been supervising for less than five years.

The study was primarily qualitative and exploratory. The data was drawn from 20 higher education institutions and 186 supervisors who responded to a survey, and 54 who agreed to be interviewed. It offers a critical and social realist account of how South African institutions develop emerging supervisors. One of the study's key findings was about the use of mentoring as a means of the development of emerging supervisors. The need for transformation was much evident in the findings of my study.

The South African higher education system is differentiated, and institutional history and type issues were considered when analysing the study data. Furthermore, multiple subculture institutions, including the culture of postgraduate supervision and the agency of the supervisors and their ability for self-reflection, all came into play in the mentoring arrangements and relationships reported. Close-up research with detailed, in-depth qualitative analysis from different institutions was essential to understand what conditioned the mentoring relationships.

Throughout the study came concern about the lack of support for emerging supervisors. The data reflected various supervision development workshops and courses and the use of mentoring as a form of supervision development. It is this last aspect that I focus on in this paper. Mentoring emerged in the data in various forms. For some, mentoring entailed a formal, institutionally arranged relationship between an emerging supervisor and senior staff member. There was also evidence of informal mentoring arrangements developed through the agency of the novice, who sought out an experienced academic for guidance. The study data suggest that formal and informal mentoring relationships often included guidance and support on issues beyond supervision.

In all cases of positive reflection on mentorship experiences, these were not institutionally arranged or required. Instead, the mentorship relationship, sometimes with a co-supervision aspect, emerged through the interplay of the agency of individuals seeking or offering mentorship and the culture of collaboration and support in the department, faculty or university.

## **Keywords**

Mentoring; Doctoral Supervision; Higher Education; Structure; Culture; Agency