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Visibility from invisibility: The role of mentoring in community-based tourism

Abstract

Much has been written about the importance of developing endogenous models of tourism development for destinations and models of desirable practices in tourism development have been created that reflect the vision, aims and objectives of local communities world wide (Haywood, 1988; Inskoop, 1991; Gunn & Var, 2002). This research reinforces the research and practical active policy creation and planning that have emerged as tourism has become a key opportunity for development, for regeneration and for community democracy in the past two decades (Joseph, 2001; Jackson & Morpeth 1999; Selman, 1998; Simon 2003; Docherty, Goodlad & Paddison, 2001). This paper identified the potential learning resources that mentors provide to proteges in an informal environment and is therefore focused on the needs of tourism operators in the vicinity of the Peak District National Park. In 2004 a group of small business operators, tourism planners, and not-for-profit organisations reported their needs to the researcher who subsequently identified and prioritised some critical factors to achieve success in regeneration through tourism with a special emphasis on small business and visitors. Since that research was completed (Wiltshier, 2005) the author has turned to the key players in developing endogenous tourism in the Peak District and identified the skills and competencies shortages that must be addressed by the stakeholders before development can be implemented. Mentors have been perceived as offering critically important skills and imbuing stakeholders with their attributes in business and other organisations (Kram, 1983; Torrance, 1984). The role of the mentor in rural tourism communities is examined and some characteristics identified that can be formally and informally recognised to build a best-practice example for emulation elsewhere.

Keyword:

tourism; endogenous skills; competencies; mentor; mentee; protégé

Introduction

In this research, the role of the mentor in supporting entrepreneurial, community and a largely nascent rural tourism industry in Derbyshire is examined. The mentor is the focus in this report. The mentor has a substantial role in providing easily accessible learning to new small-business owners. Tertiary training institutions can learn much from what is currently informally and largely invisibly provided to develop tourism human resources. The researcher takes the opportunity to thank the participants who supported this project. A series of recommendations follow that are based largely upon the experiences of these mentors and protégés and reflect the small but growing body of evidence in practices in mentoring to support and enable tourism in Derbyshire.

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Upwards of 60,000 people, 22% of the active workforce is directly involved in the tourism industry in Derbyshire and more than a quarter of all the accommodation stock in the East Midlands region is located in the county. Tourism is a growing opportunity for many farming families as well as a recognised regeneration mechanism for the county and wider Peak District (NOMIS data Jun-Dec 2005). In the Peak District of the East Midlands up to 24% of all employment is in tourism and related services and £1.3 billion is derived from tourism activity (personal communication, J.Moore, CEO East Midlands Development Agency, October, 2007). The East Midlands region is England's third most 'rural environment' and tourism is becoming a highly organised, cost-effective and visible opportunity for many communities within the East Midlands region.

Over the past twenty years both practitioners and academics have recognised the importance of possessing a skilled, enthusiastic and change adaptive workforce in tourism for a sustainable future (Haywood, 1988; Jackson & Morpeth, 1999; Freeman, 2000; Foley & Martin, 2000; Saxena, 2005, 2006).

Mentoring, both formally through education and informally through networks, partnerships and business to business links has received attention in the last forty years as new business opportunities are created in the former manufacturing, mining and industrial areas of the East Midlands and Peak District (Peak District National Park Management Plan Strategy, 2000-2005; Destination East Midlands The East Midlands Tourism Strategy 2003-2010, 2003; EMDA Rural Dimensions, 2006).

There have been accounts of successful formal mentoring through the government and private agencies such as the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC is responsible for coordinating the education and liaison between education and business and the destination community. The LSC has espoused a vision to create by 2010 a competitive knowledge economy by developing relevant and essential skills levels.

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs works with LEADER+ ('Liaison Entre Actions pour le Developpement de L'Economie Rurale') to support the socio-economic and cultural wellbeing of rural communities through funded projects. Even the tertiary education sector has mentoring through delivery of vocational skills for hospitality and the tourism sector (HATTS) and the newer product allowing people in business to upskill academically whilst at work (Learning through work). In addition there are many action groups receiving funding for the betterment of rural communities through the development and planning and subsequent implementing of new business opportunities. Tourism and leisure have often focused in such endeavours. Fewer accounts exist of the informal mentoring that surely exists between entrepreneurs, risk-takers, venture pioneers and those involved in establishing alternative service industry businesses in the same locations.

In previous research the author identified five key issues that small business must address to achieve measures of satisfaction and success. The first measurement is of the strength of any relationship between the business owner and partnerships in both public and private sector. An informed owner/operator can expect to be more satisfied with his extrinsic and intrinsic rewards in the tourism environment. There is a distinct lack of clarity about the rewards that might be available through such partnership relationships (Wiltshier, 2005) and quite possibly mentors can assist develop clarity and devise a partnership approach that will satisfy.

The second measurement is resource poverty. This agenda item relates to the sufficiency, effectiveness and quality of training and professional development support in communities. Grant fund finding is one example of a difficult and daunting process for owners and operators. Mentoring may offer a solution in that impartial and unbiased advice can assist small business to decide on strategic approaches to staff and skill issues.

The third issue is communications planning. Fortunately European Union funds have been directed towards developing and maintaining datasets and managing information technology but either formal or informal mentoring could eliminate much of the trial-and-error approaches about upskilling using available technology.

Market planning and competitiveness is the fourth agenda and is linked with the first. The nascent Destination Management Partnership (DMP) may well shortly address the lack of integration in destination marketing. However the public/private partnership approach to developing a brand and image has been slow to emerge. There is still doubt in the destination's small businesses in tourism (SBTs) about who is responsible and responsive to their individual and collective needs.

Finally, the absence of any large or medium sized enterprise in the destination is possibly hindering momentum in maintenance of current market share. The lack of such enterprises may well also hinder the development of a tourism culture. Such a culture, as is evident in York, Bath, London, Edinburgh and Blackpool is attributable to the presence of MNEs.

Literature review

The role of the mentor has been well appraised from two perspectives. The first is the mentor relationship established between peers subordinates and managers within the workplace and there is a substantial body of evidence to indicate the effectiveness of these relationships (Ragins, 1989; McKenzie, 1995; Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999; Chell & Baines, 2000; Ram, 2001; Coulson-Thomas, 2001; Betts & Pepe, 2005). The second perspective is that discussed within academic communities and relates to the teaching and learning environment and the intent has been focused on improvements in delivery and outcomes (Matlay, 2000; Bennetts, 2001; Carter, 2000; Schultz, 2001; Hobson, 2003). These appraisals of mentoring have been conducted with a view towards quality and outcomes and both perspectives and the paradigms emerging from them. The two approaches would broadly be concomitant with a market-forces model of development that focuses on improved efficiency and the desirability of meeting and exceeding client expectations and competition.

A number of key authors with reference to formal and informal mentoring have been consulted in the preparation of this report. Broadly speaking the authors fall into one of two camps; the educational and didactic – predominantly reflecting the acquisition of skills and knowledge in either a classroom or virtual learning environment; or the corporate business environment – reflecting a more formal continuing professional development agenda that has become central to human resource strategies in post-modern thinking and practices. Unfortunately, the informal and largely unreported mentoring that occurs within discipline areas like ours reflects neither the formal didactic process nor the industry norms. The literature reviewed has focused the researcher on the practice and theory of mentoring in education organisations and in corporate business.

What is missing from debate is the unofficial, or informal, often unrecognised role of mentors in communities where there are few effective measurements of efficiency and no models of delivery and outcomes that would, essentially, be identical to those pursued by either business or the formal education environment.

Current practices in the service industry now reflect more the public sector's engagement of the concept of endogenous planning, policy creation and development and simultaneously the public sector's encouragement of local and devolved responsibility from the public to the private sector for both development and conservation agendas (see examples in Selman, 1998 or Simon, 2003). Inevitably the process of endogenous planning and devolved development and conservation responsibility comes at a cost to the private sector. Key factors for tourism and the destination include developing competencies that are relevant and clearly defined for the future strategic role of the destination. These competencies are developed through formal and informal education, learning and perhaps from ethical approaches to succession planning in business (see, for example Ram, 2001). Such competencies appear to be somewhat difficult and complex to acquire in a simple manner without the involvement of formal education and or training. Without doubt endogenous development plans and policies are central to European Union member states' continued prosperity and appear to be relatively well understood, if not practised (see for example a discussion on rural development in Italy by Doria, Reho & Vettoretto, 2003).

Another significant research area is that concerning communities and the lifestyle concept and family business. These lifestyle and family businesses are also showing trends towards an entrepreneurial focus (Getz, Carlsen & Morrison, 2004).

This research is also predicated to some extent on the existence of an over-arching and under-pinning belief in the concept of lifestyle as being central to tourism in this rural destination. Lifestyle encompasses themes of desirable wealth and achievement of satisfaction with what might have been earlier conceived of as under-achievement (Lynch, 1996).

Academics and small business can create valid partnerships that reflect the skills and values recognised by small business and the competencies aforementioned that are desirable, in fact, essential to sustain investment and return on investment from small business (Freeman, 2000). Freeman concludes that there is a mismatch between business graduates and small-businesses; the former anticipate working with multinationals or at least large businesses, the latter have been discouraged from hiring business students as they presume them to be too expensive and too specialised. Paradoxically that is exactly the problem that formal education has yet to solve. Small business cannot sustain itself without injections of new initiatives and opportunities to capitalise on a systematic approach to strategic management and a systematic approach to dealing with competition.

Through much of the available literature there are some perceptions and expectations associated with the role of mentor and mentee or protégé that this research aims to challenge and contradictorily uphold. The mentor is perceived by many as a life coach or as a stage in life coach to encourage, provide help and support where other structures may or may not exist (see for example Kram in 1985 or Ram in 1999 relative to small-business, contractual or consultancy roles). These life coach or stage-in-life coach situations are usually time limited and effective for specific times and spaces.

In another context there is the mentor as the provider of structures. This role is especially resonant in the work of Ragins (1989) where she identifies mentors in a benevolent, worldly, almost Machiavellian role within the organisation. A further series of perceptions would accord to the discourse on mentors as purveyors of personal development. Perhaps these are common in higher and further education (such roles are observed by Bennetts, 2001 and by Waters, McCabe, Kiellerup & Kiellerup, 2002). The difference in this research is the degree of informality observed, and informality possibly preferred, in female dominated tourism and hospitality microbusinesses. This wish to remain anonymous in mentoring and aloof from mainstream hierarchical approaches (Ram, 2001 or Carter, 2000) might typify some of the perceptions of informants for this project.

Formal mentoring as occurs in corporate environments may well be strongly associated with career development and achieving corporate goals (Conway, 1995; Ram, 1999). The informal relationships developed through psycho-social bonds are more commonly linked with the twin agendas of rural England: regeneration and small business development (Egan, 2004). The mentor relationship can possibly be defined as existing either through the bonds of career-development including legal, technical, financial and marketing, or through the psycho-social factors deemed to include friendship, emotional support, satisfaction and personal development (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Waters et al., 2000, McCabe, Kiellerup & Kiellerup cited in Waters et al. 2002). The research conducted in Australia was pioneering in that it systematically and empirically detailed the relationship between mentoring and successful new business start up (Waters et al., *ibid.*). This is considered in this context as important as the regeneration agenda depends to a large extent on the pool of skills, talent, resources and finance available at the site for developing business.

There may well be other factors to consider in terms of determining the importance of mentoring at the location such as age of respondents, previous experience, pool of skills and competencies available to protégés close to the location and the opinions of both mentor or mentee (or protégé) need to be considered. These latter opinions are divergent (Waters et al., *ibid.*). An unrelated study conducted in Cambridge, UK, revealed that change management and boosting organisational culture were key indicators developed in a model of mentoring benefits to organisations (Singh, Bains & Vinnicombe, 2002). In this study the area where females were more concerned with mentoring related to cultural development and the perceived importance of an enhanced organisational culture emerging from mentoring (*ibid.*). It would be interesting to note whether organisations and destinations in the context of the tourism industry, have relevance and parallels in this current investigation.

The concept of developing tacit knowledge is elaborated in the Cambridge, UK, research. Knowledge as a product is one of the outcomes of the mentoring experience derived from the research (*ibid.*, p. 399). The Cambridge City Council research (Singh et al., 2002) did not give valid factor analysis on mentoring relationships but has identified following issues:

- Skills transfer and organisational knowledge sharing
- Succession planning
- Development of organisational culture
- Providing role models

Any organisation using the mentor approach to capacity building will anticipate the relatively low cost of the development whilst relishing potential productivity gains and

improved profitability commensurate with the creative and capacity building outcome (Britnor Guest, 2001). Soft-skills including communications and change management and adaptability have also featured as factors in this research (Conway, 1995). In the New Zealand research conducted by McGregor and Tweed (2002) the factors rating highly in positive mentoring experiences include networking and building personal confidence. Again cost and value added are significant in the equation for mentoring in business as the mentor can aid achievement of predetermined professional development objectives and assists capacity building at relatively low costs (Overman, 2004). Yet again research identifies soft-skills and expertise gains as a result of mentoring that produces two-way benefits in increasing loyalty and providing a base for collegiality (Britnor-Guest, 2001).

Bennetts (2001) identifies the following factors as important for negotiating the value of the mentoring relationship. Firstly the research considered the way in which the relationship is formed and the structure of the relationship. She also considers significant the ties and bonds that cement and extend the relationship and a quotient measuring the value attributable by the mentor and mentee to the relationship. Bennetts continues to assert importance in the degree to which self-actualization is an important component of the relationship (a psycho-social role) and perhaps, most central to this research task, the way that the relationship is not constrained by formality.

Cope and Watts (2000) discuss the methodological approaches to studying outcomes from entrepreneurship and how issues such as mentoring are best observed from interpretative and qualitative approaches. Waters et al. (2002) debate the literature pertinent to greater career-related support offered by formal mentoring and the relatively unimportant psychosocial aspects. Kram (1985) comments that mentoring relationships must include the following key indicators for career and psycho-social development purposes:

- Responsiveness to current job and personal needs or indicative of a need to change (personal circumstances of career path)
- Development of esteem at times of personal or professional crisis (overlooked at a time of promotion)
- Networking and partnership development (often minority or female mentors)
- Overcoming obstacles such as the reward system, task design, performance management systems, organisational culture.
- Rate of staff turnover and retention.
- Relationships within peer groups/cohorts and between age cohorts

Methodology

Participant observation and grounded theory approaches, (Glaser, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) form the basis for the epistemological approach to the subject. An inductive approach to the possible modelling of mentoring reinforcing micro or small business is the desired methodology.

Thirteen mentors were identified through research into small business development issues in 2005. The interviewees were canvassed for responses to mentoring and informal education practices in Derbyshire during 2005 and the first quarter of 2006. Interviewees were offered some key words identified from both the literature on academic mentoring and business development and unstructured interviews were transcribed and sorted through those same key words with a view to identifying repeated themes and ideas and presenting these in this report.

All individuals thus consulted and interviewed understood the purpose of the enquiry and therefore some bias and partiality is acknowledged in terms of respondents' idiosyncratic perspectives and limitations to the findings of this report.

Throughout the process of engaging both small business and the space and place of operation it was necessary to question and establish the key concepts and paradigms recommended by the literature. These themes are listed below and further discussed in the section that follows. Respondent mentors' frank, and occasionally exciting, comments are detailed in the text rather than in an appendix. Therefore the identity and personal characteristics are not included in this paper to preserve anonymity and assure respondents of confidentiality. Respondents were all aged between 35 and 55 years and representative of the tourism, hospitality and related services industries in Derbyshire.

The following were key themes and remained as central prompts to the investigation in line with the grounded theory approach. However, the primary research activity followed the Strauss and Corbin (1998) coding sequence which involved identifying open coding. These codes were in-vivo coding where properties and dimensions of transcripts led to the creation of these categories:

- Social interaction and opportunities
- Skills transfer and organisational knowledge sharing
- Providing role models
- Essential or necessary stimulus
- Gender specific issues
- Portfolio entrepreneurs

Findings

THEORY VERSUS REALITY: SOCIAL INTERACTION – OPPORTUNITIES

Mentors appreciate their key role in creating lifestyles by both developing communities and designing stages for actors to perform upon (Urry, personal communication, December 2003). Under this umbrella, the report's respondents considered the nature of their own character and explored the discourses of a psycho-social versus career and business development focus. On several occasions the mentors accord with one voice that like attracts like and that it is a set of personal attributes that heavily leans towards a social orientation as antecedent of mentoring in tourism communities such as the Peak District.

"My friendships have supported me in my business venture.. We're sniffing around each other like dogs."

There is a strong element of volition in this social interaction and a personality-type is becoming important in the predictive factors associated with psycho-social bonding:

"I'm quite gregarious .."

Already the respondents acknowledge a level of self-evaluation and analysis in terms of their capabilities, orientation and implicit personal and professional needs:

"It's about lifestyle – I'd rather have people in than be on my own.."

The second element of the psycho-social is that broadly labelled as lifestyle preference. When we ponder lifestyle and small business the central shared theme is of being in this together and not in anyway being alienated or isolated by possessing a microbusiness at the margins or boundaries of socio-economic communities. This is despite the very real

observation that distances separate mentors from their mentees/protégés and such spatial barriers whilst attractive to the mentor and mentee/protégé are possibly counter-productive to forming effective partnerships in business.

"I don't have a lot of trust in people that are supposed to be helping tourism businesses. Personally, I've had very little help from people that were supposed to be helping me.."

The political role of the mentor in the relationship emerges (Ragins, 1989) as many of these respondents have now started to acknowledge the informal learning environments in which knowledge transfers have occurred in their own practice (Matlay, 2000). In summary, the following are relevant and distinctive in creating a climate that is supportive of new micro-businesses:

- Simplification of essential systems and strategies for coping and success in a difficult marginal business opportunity through interaction.
- Offering networks of like-minded individuals coalescing to form a fairly tightly-knit and cohesive although somewhat invisible and highly informal resource for new business owners, protégés or mentees.

THEORY & PRACTICES: SKILLS TRANSFER /KNOWLEDGE SHARING/ ROLE MODELS

Among several informants there was an emergent reality of separateness, of distinguishing characteristics of space and time at a distance from urban environments and the real need to create alternatives to conventional knowledge sharing practices such as are offered through secondary and tertiary traditional learning environments.

The mentor has acknowledged the need for empowerment and for alternative ways and systems to obtain knowledge and skills for the competitive service sector. Apparently, without deliberation, respondents concur with the need for sustainable communities espoused in the eponymous UK government paper of 2004 (Egan, 2004).

"What sets us apart is our ways of tackling things."

The informants in this study were predominantly recognising within themselves the ability to mentor others through many different methods. Those methods were seldom explicitly mentioned or discussed. As Bennetts (2001) identifies these mentors are reflective individuals with tenacity and vigour. They amply demonstrate by their own outcomes that others can model their pathways. This modelling is largely of the 'sitting with Nelly' type skills acquisition. The mentor identifies that as journeymen they provide a framework for many outcomes that diversely include finding funds for new ventures (both for remuneration and altruistic) and largely are dependent on excellent communication and networking aptitude.

This concept of knowledge sharing and developing networks for skills and competencies sharing is an emergent reality as not all respondents can so eloquently discuss structures in communities.

On policy makers and planners and developers:

"Dealing with the gamekeeper and the poacher."

A wide range of interpersonal skills can be acquired through mentors' frank, open and honest appraisal of relationships in the profit and not-for-profit organisations that are involved.

"Characteristics of someone who is both a parish clerk and a successful business person? If they haven't got any idea – no business acumen – no interpersonal skills and they can be amongst the most important you can have when dealing with people."

The adoption of coping mechanisms and strategies for skills transfers and life-coaching by mentors and potential mentors reflects the earlier research conducted by Kram (1985) and Ram (1999) in the US and UK respectively. What is perhaps more interesting is that mentors, once acknowledging their own skills-sets and reflective processes regarding their own success stories, are questioning the ethics and associated responsibility that they may face in the course of the knowledge transfer and skills development in others:

"I want people to know what my motives are. I will speak passionately about a person that I believe in so that people are not confused about what I am coming from."

"I want to live in a healthy society that is enterprising and vibrant and people are exploring their potential and understanding where they live and sustainability and all that.."

The emergent theme is one of distinctiveness and directness of character and how respondents have used, and been used by, mentees/protégés for their distinct and direct qualities. To summarise this factor in the success story of mentoring the following issues are therefore relevant and reinforced in a partnership approach:

- Identifying success stories in a range of diverse backgrounds, visions and beliefs.
- Excelling in communication success stories to others (like attracts like).
- Therefore disseminating the invisible and informal to create awareness and reinforce visibility in the community.
- Growing awareness of ethical and responsibility issues connected with life coaching and mentoring other people in similar business settings.

THEORY & PRACTICE: STIMULI NURTURING – EMPATHY

The dissemination of useful practices in micro-business management by open and frank exchanges and an almost brutal honesty and directness is typical. Trust, meeting expectations, not letting other people down in transactions are core characteristics of this successful mentor/protégé relationship.

"In a way I want to keep innocence there and I'm dealing with new people all the time and if I can get down to a level of openness and innocence with that person then you can establish that level of trust. It's about me saying what I am going to do and always try doing to what I say I want to do and say what I will do or will try and put them onto someone else. It is about meeting peoples' expectations and not letting people down and making things happen."

Mentors identified the origins of their nurturing and stimulating skills through their occupations. There are artists, teachers, farmers, salespeople, marketers, communications specialists, information technology experts. The range is eclectic and defines the approach of being committed to, and integrally proselytising, continuing personal and professional development. There are gendered issues as well, such as:

"These people like mummy doing everything. Totally different context when people want to get on with their own business. Why should they leave, as they need me and I need to extract myself from it?"

There is also a clear implication for further research that mentors do see the need to disengage from their mentoring and they identify when their protégés can be cast adrift or cut loose.

In summarising the nurturer and the clear focus on lifestyle and becoming proactively involved in supporting the ambitions of others within the community the following are important:

- Mentors are proactive and have a future focus.
- These responses are not those of the faint-hearted or even the amateur.
- The mentor initiates the action and stimulates for a response.
- Nurturing and empathy may seem natural bed-fellows and they are specific attributes for positive learning and skills acquisition within the community.
- The mentor facilitates learning, identifies when networking and partnership skills have been achieved by the protégé and when it is timely to release the protégé from the unwritten contract.

GENDER ISSUES

Having identified that many of the mentors in this study were aware of their nurturing role and these informal partnerships being of value to both the mentor and protégé as part of CPD it may be useful to examine the gender stereotype.

In this section the differences between genders are emphasized and each recognises the capability and strength of the other. Some stereotypes are reinforced with females acknowledging males' hard-skills and females' soft-skills in communication, empathy and yet shared and separate values regarding family and friendship. The findings tend to reinforce the sets of indicators identified by Kram in the 1980s:

Mentors see that being a woman is a pre-condition for realising potential:

"If I am asked about how I operate and what I do it's most bizarre answer. I am a mummy and it's all about liking people and having a mothering instinct about things. See potential and see that potential to allow people to grow confidence and blossom and push them out into the outside world and then start anew with something else. That's what I am interested in."

Women are passionate about other people's growth path:

"I will speak passionately about a person I believe in so that people are not confused about what I am coming from."

Mentors, in this case a woman, are innately passionate about the sense of exploration of new frontiers in development:

"I want to live in a healthy society that is enterprising and vibrant and people are exploring their potential and understanding where they live and sustainability and all that. Some people would be shy about that sort of thing and I am shy person."

Some perceive being male as counter-productive in development:

"On business development and seeking help having males aboard is not the best. A bit of a problem not having any women aboard."

"The District Fair. I'm the chairman of the group for the Fair and at the moment – it is so funny and enjoyable at those meetings. I get everything done and it is such fun and a huge hoot. I can't explain it – something light and enabling and hugely generous. It's jokey, ongoing fantastic AND every item we discuss is very business like and hugely funny. Get a bloke in there and it's gone. There are other meetings that are not as hysterically funny. If we

do have a man it must be quite intimidating because they are teased – if they leave we do tease them and talk about them. Men are very pragmatic. T is brilliant and we work in the same way. Women and men network/differently."

The public sector acknowledges the significance of the role of women in mentoring and the role of the domestic partner in rural destinations:

- Competencies in the rural sector are identified through gendered dialogue.
- Informal learning is now acquiring public acknowledgement.

PORTFOLIO ENTREPRENEURS

Respondents identify through a degree of self-analysis or reflection that they possess certain skills and attributes that accord with a hunger. This hunger can be compared to restlessness, a need for variety and a need to create order where there has been chaos. Throughout the interview process few respondents expanded on mistakes and errors but most illuminated with their discussions of multiple business success stories or community-focussed activity. Ironically and somewhat paradoxically respondents were also uniformly self-critical. Skills developed in one sector are discovered to be transferable and valuable in multiple organisational roles.

"In our industry 80% of businesses are micros-businesses and how did we get into this. What seems to be happening is that the formal businesses and establishments are not connecting."

The portfolio entrepreneur as mentor is fearless:

"The entrepreneurial thing – how do people run their business – or a new opportunity and how will that idea work here/ all the time thinking that that's just available there. Amazing that people have security in their jobs and don't worry about money or pensions. I'm quite motivated by worry – not motivated by money although I should be."

The mentor recognised the need for soft-skills development in the context of building confidence:

"Anything we can do is work with people to give them confidence and self esteem and make them love themselves and to you have to this first. Have to make people feel liked and trusted and that whole thing before they will be as entrepreneurial in the way I see it. You can have people driving businesses that don't have that integrity but I don't think people can teach that."

Successful mentoring helps the mentor to identify what empowers the entrepreneur and how the mentor acquired knowledge to help themselves and then others.

"I am a good team worker and trust other people to do what they want to do. I am happy to have labels like 'innovator' and it explains to me my role at the front."

"It's about recognising where other people's visions are and where they want to be and recognising the end route/destination. About pointing people in the other direction."

"We are just keen to fill the yawning gap in front of us."

Mentors have a role and they relish the responsibility that the role gives them. They also appear to be exceptionally flexible in changing roles and responsibilities without much lasting fear or concern.

Emerging from the dialogue on portfolio entrepreneurs are the following key coded themes:

- Entrepreneurs in the destination are identified in formal and informal ways through membership of Learning Skills Councils, Village and Parish Agent responsibilities.
- Busy mentors are quickly exhausted through the formal and informal channels.
- Mentors repeat performances and reprise roles and responsibilities according to the location and the demand for learning in the community.
- There are no clear repeated patterns to the portfolio entrepreneur although there are correlations yet to be examined between success in micro business and the dual role of mentor to others within the supply chain and spatial networks.

Conclusions and recommendations

The informal and invisible now become adopted within new ways of learning and skills enhancement. Institutions using public funds incorporate some of the issues highlighted in these findings to reinforce work-place based learning. Learning has moved beyond 'sitting with Nelly' and stronger links between regional development funded business development projects and institutional learning show the emerging partnerships in mentoring. Stories of successful mentoring are recognised and celebrated in continuing professional development learning. Mentoring needs to be further structured for visible and measurable results in the community to reward and recognise the contribution being made by success stories.

"A thing that you do is to devolve responsibility to those individuals. You can actually explain to them – the more you can inform them – the better you can tell them about their situation – the more respect and information and data you can give them – the more informed they can be about their future and position."

What this report set out to identify is that skills and knowledge available in the public domain, in small rural communities like the Peak District of the East Midlands, are a source of rich initiative and endeavour that is insufficiently accessible to potential new tourism entrepreneurs, as Britnor Guest identified in 2001. The tertiary training sector in vocational specific learning is not yet identifying and harnessing the people and passions available at low cost with relatively high people-skills specifications. The informants to this research are resourceful, tenacious and adaptable. Not all of them acknowledge the role of the mentor in their own success but most recognise that informal and usually invisible learning derived from the mentor/protégé relationship.

More research is required to identify at several levels the effectiveness of informal and invisible mentoring. There appears to be cost-effective ways of delivering competencies and driving up skills-levels for rural economies in mentoring. Current formal and highly visible learning is not discounted as being effective in the rural context. The next step is to tackle widening participation in learning and skills acquisition without increasing public-sector costs. This paper recognises the value of the informal and largely invisible learning that occurs through mentoring. It suggests to public sector funded institutions that the invisible and informal partnerships established at many levels through mentoring can be incorporated into the work-place based learning espoused in the Leitch report (2006).

This project identifies how mentoring in the Peak District of Derbyshire helps small business in tourism to compete, enhance skills in small, relatively dispersed communities, empower those communities and enable success stories. Those success stories, emerging from the narrative, can be factored into a framework for developing connections and for minimising contradictions that are highlighted in the literature.

Inevitably in a neo-liberal, market-forces driven economy small business people must acquire specific skills for success to maintain their existence, lifestyle and the inherent factors which make their services attractive to the consumer.

The author believes that the recommendations below in Table 1 are underpinning the new dialogue that has been created by the neo-liberal political agenda. SBT entrepreneurs must compete, must enthuse about their business and its opportunities and should seek ways to practice the theory espoused in political white papers like the Egan report of 2004, the Haskins report of 2003, the Leitch report of 2006. Moreover the SBT entrepreneur and mentor should be content to seek a wider awareness of the invisible contribution that they currently make to the skills and competencies of colleagues in tourism.

Table 1

RECOGNISING ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL MENTORING AND DEVELOPMENT

Issue	Action
Skills transfer/ knowledge acquisition: Learning on the job/ learning whilst at work	Work-Place based learning: tertiary education. Resolving issues with marketing planning skills
Stimuli/Nurturing and empathy: Going beyond 'sitting with Nelly'	Partnerships between tertiary establishment and chamber of commerce/business link. Resolving issues with cross-border communications difficulties
Portfolio entrepreneurs: Making the invisible 'visible'	Identifying success and celebrating it through discourse. Substitute for skills acquired in silos in MNEs
Psycho-social issues: Acknowledging informality	Organisation recognises and undertakes key personal development objectives
Successful and enjoyable mentoring. Pathways created, opportunities are illuminated and protégés become directed and focused	Community based organisations. Improved communications and networks become established and recognised

In this research, key characteristics of mentors that can be encouraged and further examined include alternative learning practices, moving beyond acquiring skills at someone's kitchen table (sitting with Nelly), making the invisible partnerships and networks attributed to rural mentors more defined and visible. Outcomes from the described characteristics are presented in Table 1 and include alternative ways of encouraging learning in new methods of delivery and acknowledging the huge enjoyment that mentors report in creating well-being with mentees/protégés. A successful mentor sees development as part of that enjoyment and motivation driven from the lifestyle choice. These communities benefit immeasurably from cost-effective mentoring.

The Peak District can use mentoring to mitigate the effects of poor marketing planning and communications, cross-border public sector anomalous support for business planning and the absence of transferable skills and resources from multi-national organisations.

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Appendix 1
SYNOPTIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Author	Issues/Findings
Kram, 1985	Informal relationships within organisations
Ragins, 1989	Political roles; counsellors, friends, role-models and coaches
Conway, 1995	Corporate: recruitment, identifying skills and competencies
Wheelock & Baines, 1998	Dependency and self-reliance
Ram, 1999	Project Based Consultancy, Team Working, Informal processes
Matlay 2000	Knowledge transfer within/ between SMEs
Bennetts, 2001	Lifelong learning, learning alliances derived from reflexivity, nurturing, negotiation, empathy, facilitation and insight
Carter, 2000	Gender imbalance, developing networks, female personal skills shortage, peer mentoring
Chell & Baines, 2000	Networks developed by SMEs 'fortress enterprises'
Reynierse et al., 2000	Change orientation, personality type, entrepreneurial orientation
Cope & Watts, 2000	Critical incidents and business development
Coulson-Thomas, 2001	New income stream generation
Ram, 2001	Family flexibility, successional planning issues, transfer of personal knowledge and networks
Waters et al., 2002	Psycho-social support and mentoring correlating frequency of contact with perceived level of support
Carter & Ram, 2002	Multiple business ownership
Singh et al., 2002	Mentoring as a communication process
Oakley, 2004	Evidence base for fostering creative industries
Whitmore, 2004	Coaching management
Blackburn and Ram, 2006	Expectations of social exclusion and entrepreneurship
Carter, Tagg & Dimitratos, 2004	Portfolio entrepreneurs and multiple activities

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