GRK Mentoring Concept
Guideline for Mentors and Mentees

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Introduction

Most doctorate students encounter an environment which is based on mutual respect and responsibility within the research groups which are connected to the Graduate School.

Nevertheless it is possible that during the three-year (or more) course of work on the thesis circumstances, personal or interpersonal matters might arise that Ph.D. students would prefer not to discuss directly with the supervisor.

For such cases we would like to provide another trusted person who can help the student to prevent delays or even endangerment of the Ph.D. project.

The DFG explicitly suggests „(…) for graduate students, beside their primary mentor, to be supervised by two additional experienced scientists who are available for advice and help and, if need be, for mediating in conflict situations, and who also discuss the progress of the young researchers‘ work with them at annual intervals. They should be accessible locally, but should not all belong to the same working group, not even necessarily to the same faculty or institution. At least one of them should be chosen by the graduate student.“ [1, p. 72]

The Idea of Mentoring

The term MENTORING relates to the story of Ulysses who gave custodial care of his son Telemachos to a wise Greek man named Mentor, when he went to the Trojan War. Mentor’s duty was to accompany Telemachos and care for him with the “voice of wisdom” (by the goddess Athena). [1]

Today, mentoring describes a kind of individual personnel development, which first had been established in the economic sector to foster young professionals for leading roles in a company. Meanwhile mentoring programs are also established in the public sector and at universities.

Mentorship is a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person (mentor) helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person (mentee). [3]

“Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience and a person who is perceived to have less.” [4, p. 731]

GRK-Mentoring

Goals of GRK-Mentoring

The GRK-Mentoring program aims to support the members of the Graduate School personally and professionally during their doctoral studies, provided that they are a fellow or an associated member participating in the training and support program, in order to achieve an ongoing continuation of the doctoral studies. The program will accompany our members in the phase between the start of the work on the Ph.D. thesis (project plan) until after the Ph.D. defense (closing report).

In an ideal case the mentee can also profit from advice and get suggestions for the time after the doctorate, e.g. tips on the transition phase between the doctorate and a possible future employer, either an academic career or an alternative career in the industry.

Advantages of GRK-Mentoring for the Mentee

In an early survey among business executives about the positive effects of mentoring it was found that people who had been mentored reported higher incomes, better education, a quicker path to achievement, and more job satisfaction than those who had not. [5]
We believe that these positive effects can be transferred to people in science.

These are the most significant advantages a mentee can expect:

- Awareness of one's own strengths and expansion of academic and personal self-esteem

  While Ph.D. students discuss their project plans or explain their progress reports to their mentors, they practice presenting their research topics and methods to third parties in their own words. In doing so, they become aware of their progress and also of possible gaps which ought to be filled by specific training measures. Ph.D. students can also achieve a better self-assessment by explaining their own research projects to another professor. A potential positive feedback can be another incentive.

- Personal support in the current scientific-professional situation

  This can be caused by conflicts within the work group or by problematic behavior of one or more other Ph.D. students or PostDocs, whom the student does not want to criticize in front of the shared supervisor.

- Reflection of personal development

  In cases of insecurity or even crisis it is valuable to have an experienced discussion partner at your side with whom you can discuss topics that you would not like to take up with your supervisor. Also, changed conditions in the private life of the doctorate student can quickly become an overly burdening. Then, advice is welcome from a person who has already been in such a situations (when writing the own PhD thesis) or who knows a couple of other persons who have.

Advantages for the Mentor

Mentors profit equally as much from mentoring because the concept is based on mutual give and take:

- The fun and joy of letting young researchers profit from one's own experience and accompanying and supporting them on their career paths;
- Enhancement of one's own consulting competence;
- Enforcement of social and communicative competences;
- Unbiased insight into the situation of young academics;
- Self-reflection and
- New perspectives on interactions with one's own doctorate students.

Some mentors would have valued having an early mentoring opportunity for themselves or they, in fact, may have had a mentor who supported them and would now like to offer the same to others.

Ada-Lovelace-Mentoring-Program (ALP) in Addition for Female Ph.D. Students

The GRK clearly supports the desire of a female PhD student to participate at the one-year program of ALP. This well-structured program offers several professional soft-skills training courses to female Ph.D. students so that they can learn how to better evaluate themselves and to find a clearer perspective for their future professional lives.

Parallel to the seminar program at the university participants maintain regular contact with a professionally experienced female physicist, who either pursues an academic career or works in the industry. Through this contact, participants gain further valuable input for their professional careers.

The ALP mentoring program regularly starts in April each year.
Information is available at the ALP coordination office (http://mainz.ada-lovelace.com/).

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Phases of Mentoring

Selection and Acceptance of a Mentor

As a matter of principle all Principal Investigators (PIs) of the GRK are available as mentors. Any young research group leader, junior professor or professor, who is a member of one of the research groups that are connected with the GRK will be accepted as a mentor. This ensures that a few individuals are not overloaded with too many mentoring meetings.

Our PIs and their research groups are listed on the website of the GRK.
In case doctorate student need help selecting a mentor, they can address the GRK coordination office, or ask their supervisors or other GRK members for advice. The name of the selected mentor needs to be forwarded to the GRK by e-mail or by sending the project plan.

Matching

Not everybody is meant to be a mentor or is open to taking on this additional duty. The selection should be well-considered and should be decided based on your own acquaintance with the person or on somebody's recommendation.

For the selection it is important that the mentor

- ◊ belongs to another research group (neutrality),
- ◊ is on the same hierarchy level as your own supervisor which means he/she has a reached a similar career level or work experience (ability to judge),
- ◊ maintains an elaborate network of contacts, and
- ◊ is chosen based on an analysis of your own requirements.
  (A mentee for whom the compatibility of work and family is particularly important should best choose a mentor with children).

After a first telephone call or an e-mail a personal meeting should be agreed upon rather soon. If during this first personal meeting mentor and mentee did not experience a good chemistry, either of one can withdraw (also by the use of the coordination office).

Cycle and Mentoring Relationship

A part and parcel of the mentoring program is the personal relationship between the two involved partners. The mentoring partners may therefore meet more often than just once a year to establish an adequate foundation of confidentiality and trust.

At the beginning of a mentoring relationship it is helpful to agree on a schedule of mentoring meetings which suits both parties.

The best of all ways would be to agree on further appointments during each meeting.

The Mentoring Cooperation

Volunteerism, confidentiality and the lack of a hierarchy are the most important characteristics of a mentoring relationship.
From the GRK‘s point of view the lack of hierarchy is a *conditio sine qua non* which means that the two partners do not have a direct state of dependence as it would be with a member of the same research group or with the co-supervisor of the Ph.D. thesis.

The following topics are typical for a mentoring meeting:

- Achieved milestones since the last meeting
- Preview of the next steps
- Changed conditions…
  - → in the scientific-professional environment and
  - → of the private background
- Dealing with conflicts, hierarchies, competition in the research group [2]
- Problems in Germany (important for international students)
- Support for a future scientific career
- Suggestions for a non-academic career
- Work/life balance
- Compatibility of family and career (if appropriate) [2]

Role and Duty of the Mentor

The mentor assumes the function of a role model and as such serves as a point of orientation for the mentee. The mentor’s scientific and personal path serve as a practical example of a successful professional career.

The mentor has the duty to…

…pass on knowledge and experiences to the mentee,

…to support the mentee’s professional development,

…to jointly reflect when problems occur or in situations of crises,

…to work out solutions and options together with the mentee,

…and to support the development of the mentee’s own ideas.

Confidentiality in all discussions is a matter of course.

Role and Duty of the Mentee

The mentoring relationship is especially vivid if the mentee shows initiative to maintain it.

Therefore it is expected of all mentees to play an active role in arranging meetings, preparing for them and adhering to fixed appointments. As a mentee you commit to actively shaping a mentoring co-operation for yourself from the beginning.

It is an obligation to treat all information about personal aspects and about third parties with the highest confidentiality.

Sources

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[3] Wikipedia, “Mentorship” (Link to website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentorship)

[4] Bozeman, B., Feeney, M.K. (October 2007), “Toward a useful theory of mentoring: A conceptual analysis and critique”, Administration & Society 39 (6): p. 719-739.

[5] Roche, Gerard R. (January-February 1979), “Much ado about Mentors”, Harvard Business Review 57; p. 14-28

Further Reading:

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- Caela Farren, “Eight Types of Mentors – Which Ones Do You Need?” MasteryWorks Inc. 2006

- Brochure of the Federal Association for Mentoring Programs in Science “Mentoring mit Qualität - Qualitätsstandards für Mentoring in der Wissenschaft” June 2014] → Link to homepage [German]

- Projektträger Mentoring D, „Mentoring-Programm für Chancengleichheit in der Arbeitswelt“ → Link to homepage [German]

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Thank you, Linda!