



Development of a Questionnaire on Mentoring School Principals

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Abstract

The Quebec jurisdiction in Canada has undergone a reform of its education system in recent years. Following this reform in a study conducted in 2006 by the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* of Quebec, school principals expressed needs related to the development of their leadership and their ability to perform on the job. In order to fulfill these needs, they reported in first place the importance of being accompanied to succeed in their professional integration. So, an importance is given to practical support and guidance for the establishment of new school administration (1).

To develop leadership capacity and improve job performance of school directors, school boards in Ontario, Canada "have developed and implemented a mentoring initiative for newly appointed school leaders" (2). Mentoring can be defined as an interpersonal relationship and a caring support between an experienced team and another that is less experienced (3) which facilitates the transfer of knowledge, skills and values between an experienced and a novel practitioner. Mentoring takes many forms such as coaching, supervision, counseling, professional management and tutoring.

Mentoring is an essential support to the directions of the schools in Ontario, but which has little or not been developed in Quebec. In addition to the authors' knowledge, there is no specific questionnaire for measuring the mentoring received by school principals. The objective of this study is to develop such a questionnaire that relies on the seven steps proposed by DeVillis (4).

This research focuses on the first five steps. The determination of the object of study, mentoring received by school principals, is the first step. The second step is the generation of items. Based on the results of interviews (three school principals) and drawing questionnaires found in literature, a draft questionnaire was developed consisting of five dimensions: coaching, supervision, counseling, professional management and tutoring.

The third step is used to determine the size of measurement: scale of 4 points Likert (1 = does not correspond to 4 = perfect match). The fourth step is to check the clarity of the items of the questionnaire with a sample of experts (five school principals). Finally the fifth step, a pretest was conducted with a sample of respondents whose characteristics are similar to those of the target population (university students enrolled in a university course in organizational behavior). The last two steps are item analysis and validity of the factor structure of the questionnaire with the real population will be made after this communication.

In conclusion, the questionnaire was developed to better target the needs of school principals for mentoring and provides avenues to assist policy makers in different countries.

Introduction

The Quebec jurisdiction in Canada has undergone a reform of its education system in 2000. The Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec (FCSQ), Canada, published a guide in 2002 to assist school administrations in developing succession plans. In addition to emphasizing the training of school principals, the succession plan contains an entire chapter on the guidance that newly appointed school administrators require while integrating into their positions (for a period of three to five years). During the 2004 assessment of the succession plan, the need for practical support and guidance had proved to be an important need.

In a study conducted in 2006 by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) of Quebec, school principals expressed needs related to the development of their leadership and their ability to perform on the job. In order to fulfill these needs, they reported in first place the importance of being accompanied to succeed in their professional integration. An importance is given to practical support and guidance to integrate new school principals (1).

According to Isabelle (2008), "As we are faced with a large-scale renewal of principals and vice-principals in schools across Canada, there is an urgent need to study the types of training that better suit the needs of these new administrations in order to allow them to remain in function and to



accomplish their duties efficiently” (5). In order to fulfill their duties in an efficient manner, school principals expressed their need for practical support and guidance during the integration period. The success of this mission lies in part in the necessity to continually take into account the social context as well as the needs of the newly appointed school principals (6). Mentoring presents great benefits for professional development (7).

To develop leadership capacity and improve job performance of school directors, school boards in Ontario, Canada “have developed and implemented a mentoring initiative for newly appointed school leaders” (2). Mentoring is an essential support to the directions of the schools in Ontario, but which has little or not been developed in Quebec. In addition to the authors’ knowledge, there is no specific questionnaire for measuring the mentoring received by school principals.

In spite of existing support and guidance practices for newly appointed school principals in Quebec jurisdiction in Canada, school principals and vice-principals are expressing their need for further guidance. This reality raises some questions: To what extent are mentoring practices meeting the demands and needs of school administrators? Which types of mentoring are being used?

The purpose of this research is to develop a questionnaire on mentoring received by school principals based on the literature and the 7 steps to develop a questionnaire by DeVellis.

Theory

Ashburn (1987) define mentoring as “the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance” (8). This approach facilitates the transfer of knowledge, skills and values between an experienced and a novel practitioner. Mentoring comes in many forms such as coaching, supervision, counselling, professional management and tutoring. These different types of mentoring are based on a helping relationship of an other professional, technical or personal nature, which aims to support new school principals. Guidance is required during the first years, especially during periods of doubt (9).

In recent years, great importance has been attached to mentoring, especially when it comes to newly instated school principals. Mentoring aims to develop professional abilities, particularly leadership abilities (7). Lusignan (2003) goes further with a definition that puts emphasis on the relational aspect: “a form of guidance in which an experienced person supports a novel practitioner through cooperation during their transition into a new environment and towards the development of their personal and professional potential (10).”

According to Kram (11), the different types of mentoring center around two functions: career and psychosocial. The career function is aimed at developing and improving professional abilities and the psychosocial function focuses on personal growth. Both functions are carried out by different types of mentoring. The career function is carried out by coaching and supervision, and the psychosocial function is carried out by counselling, tutoring and professional support.

According to Queuniet (2001), coaching is defined as “providing need-based guidance in order to assist a person in unlocking their potential and acquiring abilities and know how” (12). Coaching practices focus on the valorization of the individual and are meant for professionals who need to solve a particular problem or are taking on a challenge. The benefits of coaching include efficiency at work (productivity, motivation), performance improvement (operational) and professional excellence.

As defined by Girard and McLean (1992), supervision is a “process of managing function intended to improve learning skills [...] through a relationship of help and direct support [...]” (13). Supervision implies maintenance planning, observation and intervention. It leads to improvement of professional skills.

Counselling is defined as “meeting with a person who is facing temporary or recurring difficulties and needs one-time or prolonged assistance in order to gain a more objective overview” (14). It is then a question of mobilizing the person’s resources to integrate them into their environment, all the while helping them to keep their problems separate from their professional life. Counselling holds the advantage of dealing with both the professional and the personal aspects of the mentee’s life.

Tutoring centers around two functions: socialization and learning improvement. Maela (2002) defines tutoring as a “relationship between two people in which one provides help to the other in order to facilitate a learning process and an integration into the workplace” (15). Two types of support are associated with this practice: psychological support (encouragement, security, information, etc.) and educational support (guidance, evaluation, training, etc.) This type of mentoring helps the mentee improve their critical thinking, analysis abilities and leads to a better comprehension of their experience.



Lastly, there is professional support, a “process by which a person [...] supports and guides another person who is learning about or going through training for a new occupation or career” (16). This form of mentoring provides the mentee with a number of possibilities for professional and personal growth as it instills a sense of responsibility and leads to empowerment (17).

In all of its various forms, mentoring refers to a relationship governed by reciprocity and solidarity. This demand meets personal needs and develops during a process of personality building and autonomy seeking. It is linked to the training process and professional growth.

The objective of the present study is to develop a questionnaire on mentoring that relies on the seven steps proposed by DeVellis (4): (a) clear determination of the object of measurement using its underlying theory, (b) generate an item pool, (c) determine the measurement scale, (d) have the item pool reviewed for clarity by a sample of experts, (e) administer items to a pilot sample of the target population (pre-test), (f) items analysis, (g) validation of the questionnaire's factor structure. This research focuses on the first four steps.

Methodology

The determination of the object of study, mentoring received by school principals, is the first step. Two dimensions have been retained: types on mentoring and their benefits. The second step is the generation of items. In order to evaluate the forms of mentoring received by school principals, individual interviews are conducted with members of school principals (two principals and a vice-principal). The principals are required to identify the types of relationships formed with the mentor, the different types of mentoring received (coaching, professional or personal support) and the benefits of the mentoring they received. Based on the results of interviews (three school principals) and questionnaires found in literature, a draft of the questionnaire was developed consisting of 5 dimensions (87 items center around the different types of mentoring: coaching, supervision, counselling, tutoring and professional support) and 3 open questions about helping relationships in general.

The third step is used to determine the size of measurement scale. A four points Likert scale (1 = does not correspond to 4 = perfect match) was retained. The fourth step is a review of the clarity of the questions by a sample of experts. In order to review the items for clarity, the preliminary version of the questionnaire was submitted to five school principals who had to judge the clarity of the questions using a four points scale: (1) very low, (2) low, (3) strong, (4) excellent. Only the questions that were judged strong or excellent were retained, which brought the total of items down to 27.

The fifth step will consists of conducting a pre-test with a sample of respondents whose characteristics are similar to those of the target population (university students enrolled in a university course in organizational behavior). According to DeVillis, this sample is representative of the target population. These students are either: principals, vice principals or future principals. This sample target was chosen because of their need for mentoring at the beginning of their career. The last two steps are items analysis and factorial validation will be completed by with the real population. The last three steps will be carried out after this communication.

Discussion

In conclusion, the questionnaire was developed to better target the needs for mentoring of school principals and provides avenues to assist policy makers in different countries.

This study will make it possible to measure the different types of mentoring received by school administrators. It will determine the efficiency level and the benefits of each form of mentoring.



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