mentoring to support work-integrated learning

A source book for strengthening conservation professionals, practice and organisations
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Introduction

Mentoring has always been a key organisational strategy to develop professional capacity, improved practices and, consequently, stronger organisations. Most of us could probably recognise some form of mentoring in our organisation, whether these are formal or informal processes. Mentoring is, however, often fraught with a range of challenges. Some of these include a shortage of mentors, a lack of mentoring capacity (both competence and experience), a reliance on traditional approaches that may not work as well as they did before, uncertainty about working with different mentees, structuring the mentoring interaction and working with the younger generation. These and many other questions arise in our mentoring practices and approaches.

This source book has been developed in response to these many questions. It draws on experiences of both mentors and mentees participating in the Cape Action for People and the Environment’s (C.A.P.E) Capacity Development Programme, and shares insights gained through mentoring in the workplace. Some of these questions explored include:

- What is mentoring?
- How does mentoring differ from coaching?
- How does mentoring relate to counselling, training and management?
- Who needs mentoring, and is it the same when working with staff at different levels?
- How can we approach mentoring in a resource-constrained environment?
- Where do we start, and how do we make mentoring work?

The source book offers guidelines for mentoring in the workplace. Drawing on case examples, it includes illustrations of mentoring that may work as is or may need to be adapted to suit your particular work and mentoring context. It is also offered as a framework for reflecting on your own mentoring practices, and to explore new and innovative ways of mentoring to support work-integrated learning.

The vignettes shared are offered as pieces to a puzzle – a puzzle best constructed in your particular work context. We encourage you to draw on these “puzzle pieces” to construct your own picture of mentoring, as it may suit your organisational context, your mentoring style, the mentee with who you work, the purpose of mentoring, and so on.

The source book can be used in many different ways to support mentoring in your organisation. We suggest that it be used:

- As a guide to individual mentors in working with mentees;
- As a framework for developing and implementing mentoring programmes;
- As a resource for training mentors in the workplace.

We hope that it will provide some guidance and stimulate deeper thinking and strengthening of mentoring in the workplace.
Jeff completed a honours degree in Environmental Management and a Master of Science degree in Ecology. He was appointed to a one and a half year internship with the Botanical Society’s Conservation Unit in 2005. To strengthen his capacity in land use planning, Charl was assigned as his mentor.

Charl’s approach was to create opportunities for experiential learning, ‘… creat[ing] an intimate work relationship with Jeff … the approach was open and allowed the relationship to grow at different levels … creat[ing] opportunities for experiential learning and involv[ing] Jeff in all aspects and levels of work … he was given opportunities to write proceedings of meetings and workshops, to organise information and statistical data and to co-present a paper, … for deliberate learning and exposure to people and forums’.

Jeff and Charl both experienced the mentoring interaction positively. Jeff feels that much of the success can be ascribed to assigning the right mentor in the right organisation, linked to his career interest of land use planning.
After completing matric, Gaynor was employed at the Gold Fields Environmental Education Centre (GFEEC), at Kirstenbosch, as an Assistant Education Officer (AEO). She was supervised by Sally, who co-ordinates the centre’s gardens-based school programme. During this time, Sally came to know Gaynor as ‘… show[ing] initiative …’.

After her first year as an intern, Gaynor was accepted to do a learnership in Environmental Education, Training and Development Practices (EETDP). Sally was appointed as her formal mentor for this learnership. Through the course, she was required to develop and implement a learning programme for use in her work context. This workplace-based learning provided Gaynor with structure for learning and development, complemented by the mentoring provided by Sally.

Further structure was provided through weekly meetings with other AEOs, to plan and develop lessons offered through the gardens-based programme. Formal mentoring took place through meetings and weekly planning sessions. Gaynor interacted very closely with all staff at the GFEEC to complete specific tasks. She feels this was informal mentoring amongst peers. Sally describes mentoring Gaynor as being a ‘… hands-off approach … because of [the] initiative and independence [shown] …’.
Sven completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental and Geographical Science, followed by a honours in Social Anthropology. He was appointed to an Environmental Conservation Officer internship and mentored by Luzanne at the Edith Stephens Wetland Park. He focused on the socio-economic interface with conservation. Both Luzanne and Sven experienced the mentoring as a process of co-learning, each bringing a different area of expertise to the interaction.

Luzanne recognised and drew on Sven as a team member, noting that ‘... he brought his sociology skills and understanding of community relationships to our team ... he is open to learning and also sharing ... he has contributed to the way we plan and report ... he has challenged the way we do things and this has contributed to growth ...’.

Sven describes the mentoring as ‘... fairly new to both of us ... not really sure what to do ... no formal mentoring ... we bounce ideas with each other ... the arrangement is rather tacit and not very deliberate, and no set structure or formal process is followed ...’.
While completing her National Diploma in Journalism at Tshwane University of Technology, Neo was appointed to an internship with Flower Valley Conservation Trust to complete the required one year of experiential learning. Since her studies were in classic communications, with no exposure to the conservation sector or to communications in this context, Neo was assigned three mentors. Lesley provided guidance and support in getting to know the conservation sector as a whole; Roger provided guidance for the specific Flower Valley conservation context; and Ronel stepped in with guidance and support for communications, a field of expertise not held by the other two. Neo refers to her team of mentors as the ‘… killer team … all 100% experienced in their fields …’.

Neo spent the first five months of her internship with Lesley at the Head Office of Flower Valley Conservation Trust, in Bredasdorp. Her interactions with Ronel around the technicalities of communications were ongoing. To give her exposure to the sector as a whole and to different partners working together, Lesley took Neo to many meetings. Feeling that the small town of Bredasdorp limited her exposure, Lesley arranged for Neo to be placed with a public relations firm in Cape Town for one month. This was followed by another month with the C.A.P.E. Co-ordinating Unit at Kirstenbosch, working with the communications staff. Neo feels this rotation provided good exposure to the various dimensions of the job which ‘… helps one to see if you are suited to it …’. She spent the remainder of her internship at the Flower Valley farm, learning more about operations and approaches to conservation with Roger.

Neo speaks very highly of the dedication and commitment of her mentors – both to the work they do and to her development and well-being.
Sabelo at Harmony Flats Conservation Site

Sabelo qualified with a National Diploma in Nature Conservation and was appointed to the position of Site Manager at the Harmony Flats Conservation Site, managed by the City of Cape Town’s Biodiversity Branch. Before this appointment he worked at Bontebok National Park as a Field Ranger for one year, preceded by a year as a Conservation Facilitator with a skills development agency. Since Sabelo did not come into the position of Site Manager as a complete ‘freshling’, Roy (as his line manager) recognised interest, potential and enthusiasm for his development in the area of community conservation initiatives. Working with Roy, Sabelo’s case was one of mentoring through management and supervision.

Because Sabelo’s development was focused on community conservation initiatives, he was encouraged to participate in a year-long course to support the development and implementation of a programme, since he did not have the experience in the required depth. Roy played the role of mentor to enable, support and unlock opportunities in the workspace. In Sabelo’s words ‘... Roy made things possible at work ... [provided] support for implementing the programme ... when support was not forthcoming he would recommend an alternative to provide support ... he always makes a plan ...’. Sindiswa, Sabelo’s second mentor, provided guidance through learning and development of the programme in the course context.

Sabelo’s mentoring was further complemented by Bongani, Roy’s counterpart in a different geographic area. This aspect of mentoring was set up to minimise the potential impact of tensions between Roy as manager and mentor at the same time. This is a different relationship to the other two that focused on ‘... general stuff ... not mentoring specifically ...’. Sabelo felt that time-constraints did not allow for the development of an ‘... established ... relationship with Bongani ...’.
‘... Working in an urban context is ... fairly new ...’ in the field of conservation. As the field of urban conservation grew in the City of Cape Town’s Biodiversity Branch, ‘... support with ... conservators in understanding and communicating with ... communities ... was needed ...’.

Conservators working in urban conservation in the City of Cape Town all qualified with a National Diploma in Nature Conservation, some advancing to a Bachelor of Technology. Though each of them came with a fair amount of conservation experience – approximately seven years – they were all less confident in engaging urban communities in conservation initiatives. In response to ‘... no support ... we started a team gathering ... the purpose of the group was to ... discuss ... share and ... support’. ‘... from our own informal team gatherings ...’ ‘... Cape Flats Nature came in as a partner ...’ to provide support to the Nature Conservators in the work they do with communities.

Described as a Peer Learning Project and facilitated through Cape Flats Nature, this offered conservators ‘... an opportunity to share ... experiences and knowledge through case studies ... and ... exposed us to the community aspects which was different and scary ...’. As a form of facilitating ‘... learning in practice ...’ the Peer Learning Project used a case study methodology ‘... to assist in the capacity building of conservators ...’. Through documented case studies, conservators reflected on their practice and shared understandings, challenges and insights in regular meetings, ‘... every Monday initially but now we meet every second month ...’.

Paula ‘... as the facilitator ...’ says that ‘... we brought a lot of ourselves to the process ...’ for which ‘... you need [a] safe space ... you need to trust the people you work with ...’. All participants experienced this process positively, which encouraged them ‘... to think out of the box ...’. This methodology of learning together is being taken up into individual workspaces: ‘... I have commissioned my staff to do case studies which [are] chosen strategically ... this has allowed us at the reserve to reflect and add what is missing in our work ... we have space to evaluate our work and see gaps and ways to move forward ... it creates a space for development ...’.
Rhett as a mentor/manager in Goukamma Nature Reserve

With approximately 30 years of experience in conservation management, Rhett has lost track of the number of students and young professionals he mentored over the years at CapeNature. His approach to mentoring was shaped by his own mentor when he started with the organisation as a student. He was encouraged to keep a diary/journal, which he describes as ‘... a formative process ...’ that he really values and sees as ‘... a brilliant tool in the mentoring process ...’. Rhett showed an amazing commitment to mentoring young entrants in the conservation field and, despite many years of experience in mentoring, constantly ‘... wanted to learn other ways of mentoring people and learn new skills ...’. Natalie and Deon are two conservators who had the privilege of being mentored by Rhett as new entrants into conservation.

Rhett describes himself as having ‘... strong ethics when it comes to work ... I teach by example ... I lead by being that example ...’. He says he was their supervisor and mentor and ‘... gave them different tasks that provided opportunities to learn ... they were exposed to specific work tasks which they had to learn, as well as other things which I considered part of their holistic development as nature conservators ... such as audits, writing, presentations ... they were also thrown into the deep end so that they could learn to cope with different crisis situations ... I have a fairly relaxed way of mentoring, but ensure that I am available if needed ...’.

Both Natalie and Deon speak highly of Rhett as their mentor, recognising his dedication to supporting the development of young professionals, his willingness to share his experience, his steady focus on the holistic development of individuals and his respect for everyone. In Deon’s words ‘... Rhett gave me the space to grow and experience new things ... he is a hard, but very fair person ... he knew his content and is highly experienced ... he treated me with respect ... taught me many life lessons and [gave] advice ... [he] was willing to share all he had ...’.
Collegial interactions in the boland area of CapeNature

Dian manages the boland area of CapeNature, which consists of four reserves, one additional office and 75 staff members, 15 of whom report directly to him, including 12 managers. Dian notes that there has always been ‘...a culture of working together and supporting the work of others ...’. There is an emphasis in this management area on ‘... [building] a strong team ... managers are wanting to learn more ... to use [every] opportunity to develop staff and self ... staff are keen to learn ...’.

Dian says that staff stability in the area is fairly constant and this supports the development of strong collegial relationships, ‘... there is great significance in working together over time ...’. Over time, staff have been supported in career development, and these individuals in turn work with younger professionals joining the organisation. Arnelle, for example, worked in reserve management and was mentored by Deon, who was previously mentored by Rhett. When she moved into conservation services, she worked more closely with Dian and her new function was complemented by her reserve management experience. Despite her career move, and through consultation with two managers, Arnelle agreed to mentor some of the ‘... 75 field rangers [who] need to develop capacity in reserve management ...’. Arnelle was joined by Garth, another conservation services staff member. Both were described by Dian as ‘...strong individuals ...’. ‘... Hermien came in and worked to support them, and learnt the ropes through this ...': Garth and Arnelle also supported Leandi and Christina, who are based in another office. Dian says that ‘... because they are in the same area they work to support each other ... they avail themselves to give advice and the others often called [on them] to raise and discuss issues ...’. Christina values the opportunity to ‘... be able to call on reserve staff for support and getting them more involved in stewardship ...’.

Dian’s approach is to use all management meetings as opportunities for reflecting, learning and growing together as professionals in their practice of conservation. Monthly management meetings are convened to discuss strategic management issues, and ‘... junior staff are invited to these meetings ...’. Weekly meetings between managers and their respective staff ‘... translate ...’ discussions and decisions from ‘...monthly meetings down ...’.

Team building is emphasised in the area through ‘... ongoing interactions with staff ... [talking] to staff on site visits, [providing] ongoing communication [and a] supportive base for working together as a team and [working] with what people have and their interests ...’.
Learning in communities of conservation stewardship

‘... The field of stewardship is fairly new ...’ and ‘... the staff needed training ... we needed to find a way to build that capacity ...’. A peer learning network was set up as a forum ‘... where staff can share their knowledge and experience ...’. Since 2004, the forum has been convened annually and it has increased to a biannual meeting of CapeNature staff and others from partner organisations, such as South African National Parks and the Department of Agriculture. This approach to improving conservation practice ‘... has turned into a network of learning ... reserve managers also wanted to come to the gatherings ... [it] has encouraged the formation of other groupings in the organisation ... community conservation staff also meet in this manner ... at least quarterly ...’.

The network was co-ordinated by Kerry, the Stewardship Programme Co-ordinator, and participants included Arnelle, Garth, Christina, Adri, Johan, Graham and Anita, all of who experienced the network as ‘... [providing] connection opportunities for people ... a network for learning and sharing ...’. The programme for the two-day workshop was structured around a list of topics and themes drawn up by the participants, which Arnelle feels was ‘... focused and relevant ...’. Christina says that senior management would also be present in these sessions to share things from a different perspective, which she found to be particularly useful. This peer learning ‘... was a springboard for other skills development opportunities ...’ including ‘... opportunities for inter-province exchanges ...’. Kerry says that ‘... peer learning provides one of the critical organisational training opportunities ...’ with the potential ‘... to change the culture of the organisation ...’.

Learning and development amongst professionals and the practice of stewardship were complemented by a formally structured mentoring programme. Ben, with experience in the agriculture context, mentored professionals in engaging with farmers around conservation objectives. For the 15 mentees with who Ben worked, mentoring was mutually beneficial: they learnt from Ben about extension in agriculture and he learnt from them the technical aspects of contracting for conservation. Christina says ‘... I involved Ben during my interactions with landowners ... I found his input and presence to be useful during these visits ... he would participate in the negotiations and afterwards give me...’.
Zishaam completed a Bachelor of Science Honours degree. After a two year internship with the City of Cape Town, he joined the Cape Research Centre of SANParks, with Melodie as his assigned mentor. He is ‘… responsible for the information management systems of species information …’. He interacts closely with others at the centre, as ‘… he needs to assist other staff and therefore needs a basic understanding of what they do and how they do it …’.

When Zishaam was recruited, the intention was to give him opportunities to further strengthen his information technology skills and to provide him with experience in fieldwork. Melodie recognized that Zishaam ‘… has a specialised skill …’ in information technology. ‘… He is valuable to the organisation for his skills …’. They agreed to shift the focus of his internship to information technology and supporting the centre and colleagues in this area of expertise. Zishaam is ‘… compiling species lists which are critical for the organization …’.

Melodie says ‘… his outputs [are] task-based … ’and she ‘… created deliberate exposure to different jobs within our work context to help him understand the organisation and what his colleagues need to do …’. He regularly accompanies staff members on field trips, and he and Melodie ‘… meet on a weekly basis …’ to ‘… have after-event discussions to place things in context … ‘ and ‘… report on what has been done and what is still outstanding …’.

A third aspect of learning and development for stewardship and extension was a structured course with a workplace-based learning orientation. Christina says ‘… the [learning] processes provided different perspectives looking at the things from different angles …’. These three learning opportunities appear to have worked well in strengthening the capacity of the stewardship and extension professionals both individually and their practice collectively, as evident in ‘… the best extension team has been developed through this process and their skills and experience are now in high demand …’.
What is mentoring?

The term ‘mentoring’ has its origins in Greek mythology, where Odysseus, in preparing to go off to war, entrusted his home and the well-being and education of his son to a friend, called Mentor. Mentoring is generally understood to be the passing on of wisdom and knowledge by a mature and experienced person to a younger, less experienced individual.

Words typically associated with mentoring include lead, instruct, guide, coach, advise, teach and counsel, amongst others. Mentors typically fulfil one or more of these roles at some time during the mentoring interaction. Depending on the level of experience of the mentor and mentee, the aim of the mentoring interaction, the task at hand, the relationship between mentor and mentee, the workplace context, etc., a collective of all or some of the above make up the mentoring interaction. Mentors guide and support the development of mentees through various work-related processes. Some mentoring interactions are more instructive and others more flexible in providing opportunity for the mentee to grow professionally and towards their chosen career.

Mentoring in the workplace is …

... a developmental relationship, focused on the professional practice of the mentee to increase and strengthen competence through support, guidance and appropriate opportunities for personal, professional and career growth and development ...

This orientation to mentoring highlights a few key aspects of the interaction.

Developmental in nature

Mentoring is synonymous with growth and development. It means personal and professional growth of one individual, supported by another or a group of people. Mentoring is more than simply the relationship between mentor and mentee. It requires purposeful processes and interactions that enable the development of the mentee, and at times the mentor too. In thinking about mentoring, the key driver is the development of professionals for stronger work practices.

The aim of the conservation stewardship peer learning network was to develop and improve conservation stewardship practices amongst professionals and organisations in the C.A.P.E. programme. Kerry says that, through this process, ‘... the best extension team has been developed ... and their skills and experience are now in high demand ...’.
Rhett’s approach to mentoring was to give his mentees ‘... many different tasks which provided them with opportunities to learn different things ...’.

Charl says that ‘... I created opportunities for experiential learning and involved Jeff in all aspects and levels of work ... he was given opportunities to write proceedings of meetings, organise information and statistical data, co-present a paper ... deliberate learning and implementation activities ...’.

Relationships of guidance, support and trust

Traditionally, mentoring is seen as a one-on-one relationship between a single mentor and a single mentee. In many of our organisations mentoring needs are often broad and diverse, and a single mentor rarely has the experience to meet such breadth and diversity. This is almost always coupled with limited mentoring capacity, both in terms of the number of people and their collective experience. In addition, much of our work is characterised by innovation and change, further challenging our mentoring capacity. In response, we need creative and innovative ways of stretching our mentoring capacity. The stories of mentoring offered as an introduction reflect a range of alternative mentoring relationships that respond to some of these challenges.

Stewardship is a new and evolving approach to conservation. It aims to work with various stakeholder groups in different contexts towards defined conservation objectives. In CapeNature, most professionals have a sound background and experience in conservation. Their work in stewardship is mainly in the agriculture context and requires ongoing engagement with farmers. Most stewardship professionals are less familiar with this context. To support the development and strengthening of stewardship practices in the agriculture landscape, Ben was appointed as a mentor to 15 professionals. He has extensive experience in agriculture extension, gained through many years with the provincial Department of Agriculture. Whereas Ben’s experience in conservation was limited, he provided valuable guidance and support to these 15 mentees in understanding and engaging with landowners in the agriculture context.

Mentoring relationships often require more experienced mentors working with less experienced mentees. This approach can be useful in showing the mentee the ropes, but it can also be limiting in a work environment with rapid changes in work practices. In such an environment, the ‘been there done that’ mentor could potentially stifle development for change. This environment would demand a different kind of mentor, one prepared to critically engage with traditional practices and encourage the mentee similarly to explore new and innovative work practices.

Charl, in mentoring Jeff in the evolving landscape of land use planning and decision making, ‘... insisted that I read as much information about the field as possible ... he swamped me with readings ... after six weeks of close mentoring, he gave me space to explore on my own ...’

Mentees should ideally be provided with the opportunity to develop within themselves. They should be allowed to explore new and creative ways of thinking about and doing their work.
For a less experienced and less confident professional this can be most effective in safe and secure spaces. This implies a certain measure of trust in the relationship between mentor and mentee. The mentee should be confident in the opportunities created and the guidance and support provided for growth. The mentor should also be confident that the mentee will respond optimally and professionally to the opportunities, guidance and support provided. This relationship of trust is perhaps evident in the many descriptions of mentors as being a ‘…trusted friend, counsellor, teacher … wise and trusted guide and advisor … teacher and trusted counsellor …’. 

Commenting on Lesley’s mentoring style, Neo says ‘… her way of mentoring was 'holistic', not only concentrating on my work but also [on] how my personal life was going … this was great for me, as it made me open up more to her and [feel] more free to tell her my honest opinion and ideas …’

Mutually beneficial opportunities for development

Mentoring can be mutually beneficial to both the mentor and mentee and has the potential to support growth and development for both. It should be seen as a learning opportunity, with all participants open to learning in diverse ways.

In reflecting on his own role as mentor, Charl says that ‘… mentoring in the workplace should take place where there will be mutual value … where … mentee and mentor … can jointly develop and grow … a mentor must grow and be interested … both must learn and find out together …’.

Sindiswa writes that Sabelo ‘… challenged me a lot … he always found a reason to challenge me with regards to advice or comments that I had given him … he brought wild energy and kept me on my toes most of the time … although a bit of an irritation sometimes, I found this sort of interaction most useful for my self-confidence … I was encouraged to speak up more and stick to my guns where there was a need for it … and I have been carrying this new attitude with me ever since … interactions with Sabelo strengthened my competence with the course and content … it increased my experience and improved my confidence … most people on the course were older than I am … as time passed, I became more confident in supporting them …’.

Luzanne writes that Sven ‘… brought his sociology skills and understanding of community relationships to our team …he is open to learning and also to sharing … he has contributed to the way we … plan things … he has challenged the way we do things and this has contributed to the growth of our reserve …’.

Responsiveness

Mentoring needs vary in different situations and consequently require different responses. In some cases, content-based experience is required, for example in environmental management, land use planning and conservation management. In others, contextual experience is more important, for example to support an orientation to and understanding of particular contexts. Others might require a focus on interpersonal skills to support the work done. It is therefore important to make a clear assessment of the developmental needs of the mentee and to design a mentoring interaction that responds to these needs.
Five months into the internship, Lesley felt that the small town of Bredasdorp limited Neo’s exposure to the real world context of communications and public relations. Therefore, she arranged for Neo to be placed with a public relations firm outside of conservation for one month and with the C.A.P.E. Co-ordinating Unit at Kirstenbosch for further exposure.

The focus of Zishaam’s internship shifted after three months, when Melodie recognised his skills and interest in information technology. This similarly responded to the pressing need for IT support in the organisation.

Mentoring as a manager

In our resource-constrained environment, it is not always possible to separate the mentor/manager roles and the manager often has to act as mentor as well.

The mentor is primarily concerned with the growth and development of the mentee. The job at hand is considered in so far as it guides and supports the mentee’s growth and development. The manager, on the other hand, is concerned with the job at hand and the required deliverables. Their job requires that they must be more concerned with achieving the organisation’s objectives. They sometimes need to call on the mentee to step up to the plate and deliver on set objectives. The mentee’s needs are then shifted into second place.

Rhett mentored Natalie and Deon in a supervisory capacity and notes that ‘… mentees need to be kept motivated and given work challenges … this draws out their abilities …’.

Management and mentoring objectives are not always the same, and filling both roles at the same time could cause tension in the mentoring relationship. Since resource constraints are unlikely to offer the luxury of separating these roles, the mentor-manager needs to be creative in how they manage subordinates to meet both mentoring and management objectives.

In the City of Cape Town’s Biodiversity Branch, Bongani and Roy set up mentoring relationships that minimised the potential tension between the role of manager and mentor. Both are Area Managers with the same key performance areas. Bongani mentored staff in Roy’s management area and Roy mentored staff in Bongani’s. Both felt this worked well for both the staff and themselves.

In summary

Mentoring is synonymous with development. It could be focused on the professional development of the individual, the development of a community of specific or general conservation practices, and the development of organisations and their capacity to deliver on conservation mandates. Mentoring, whether deliberate or coincidental, has developmental outcomes for both the mentor and the mentee.

Mentoring is made up of relationships and interactions, between two or more people. All positive mentoring experiences reflect good interpersonal engagements, based on mutual trust and respect. These seem to be essential ingredients for an effective and positive mentoring experience.
Purposes of mentoring

Mentoring is often approached from a point of deficiency. Individuals, practices and/or organisations are considered to be lacking, and mentoring seen as a way of ‘plugging the gap’. While this is appropriate in some cases, changing trends in thinking about and implementing mentoring reflect shifts from the deficiency to the developmental model. Purposes that underpin a developmental approach to mentoring include the following:

Strengthening competence in key work areas

In the context of changing work practices, mentoring is critical to strengthening competence in key work areas.

Paula says that ‘… working in an urban context is a fairly new field … the City needed support with their conservators in understanding and communicating with communities … peer learning through case studies … was initiated as a means to assist in the capacity building of conservators …’.

Neo took the position of an intern while still in formal training. Ronel was appointed specifically to ‘… provide technical support based on communications and PR expertise …’ in conservation.

Patricia came into CapeNature as a Field Ranger with an interest in community conservation and working with the rastafarians who harvest indigenous flora from the reserves. At the time, this was an increasing and evolving field of work in CapeNature. Deon and Arnelle were key in providing her with support as she moved into this area of work. Deon, as her line manager, provided the reserve management expertise, and Arnelle, having moved from reserve management into conservation services, provided guidance in both areas. Patricia has now moved to another organisation, but says that she still calls Arnelle for guidance and support in her new position as Community Conservation Officer at Paarl Mountain Reserve.

Mentoring to support a transition from learning to work

There is often a weak link between learning in higher education and the real world of work. Mentoring is highly effective in providing new entrants with an introduction to the authentic
work context, and also has the potential to support new entrants in exploring the field and finding their career niche.

*Jeff’s experience with Charl exposed him to ‘… opportunities … in this conservation field … the experience has influenced my choice of career …’.*

*By accompanying Lesley to as many meetings as possible during her internship at Flower Valley Conservation Trust, Neo was exposed to conservation, a field she had not been familiar with before the internship. She was also exposed to conservation and communications in different organisational contexts through rotation. Neo says ‘… I was very naïve about the sector … I had visions of bright lights and television journalism, but … this experience has shaped my career in conservation …’.*

**Supporting career development**

Mentoring to support career development is focused on the future, the job to come and the longer-term career development of an individual.

*Roy recognised Sabelo’s interest in engaging communities in conservation. He supported Sabelo’s participation in the Rhodes University/Gold Fields Certificate Course in Environmental Education. Through regular discussions, Roy guided and supported Sabelo to develop a vision for surrounding communities in conservation and unlocking opportunities to implement these ideas and develop professionally in this direction.*

**Strengthening practice**

In response to the need to support changing conservation practices, mentoring is seen as a key strategy.

*In CapeNature, the peer learning network was initiated to strengthen the practice of conservation stewardship and support new and developing individuals in finding their way into the field of conservation stewardship.*

*In the City of Cape Town, the peer learning group was initiated to strengthen conservation practices at the interface with complex socio-economic and urban spaces in Cape Town. Through their sharing and learning, young conservators feel they grew in strengthened community-based conservation practices.*

**Supporting career progression, succession planning and talent management**

Individuals seen to have high potential are identified for accelerated career progression (vertical mobility), at times being groomed through succession planning in the event of the retirement or departure of a more experienced individual. These approaches are normally prompted in the interest of strengthening the organisation for the future.
Zishaam had strong expertise in information technology, which corresponded to the need of the research centre. He was mentored in this field to meet the growing need of the organisation.

Showing strength in the area of land use planning, Jeff’s internship led him into a contract position with SANBI as the Land Use Planning Programme Co-ordinator of the C.A.P.E. Programme. From there he was seconded to the Department of Economic Affairs and Development Planning to support Land Use Planners in considering biodiversity priorities in development decisions. In a relatively short space of time, Jeff was appointed to the position of National Environmental Management Co-ordinator at SANBI.

In summary

As reflected above, mentoring has various specific purposes in the bigger scheme of supporting development and growth. It is critical to clearly define the purpose of mentoring, as this comes to define the approach used to support interns.
Questions are often asked about the difference between mentoring, coaching, counselling and training, and what is appropriate to use and when. Mentoring is a collective of all of these developmental approaches to address different needs at different times in the pathway of growth and development.

The diagram below shows a continuum of mentoring over the long-term, with specific interventions of counselling, coaching and training at different times to address specific needs. This is not meant to suggest a timeline or a linear relationship between these interventions. It aims to show the focus of interventions across the longer-term mentoring interaction that includes counselling, coaching and training. Coaching, for example, might be appropriate during an induction into the organisation or job function, and can also be revisited as circumstances in the job change and the need arises, even in the longer-term.
Counselling

Counselling involves reflection on a job already done and draws on experience to improve practice. The focus in counselling is on behaviour and/or competence displayed in yesterday’s job. Counselling is generally seen as remedial in nature, but could also be approached as a proactive way of improving practice.

Ben’s approach in working with the stewardship professionals in CapeNature was to accompany them on site visits and observe their engagement with landowners. After these visits he would engage them in reflexive conversations on the strengths and limitations of their interactions and explore ways in which to improve these interactions in future. This is an example of counselling in the broader mentoring context.

Coaching

Coaching focuses on the current job and is more instructive in nature. It generally focuses on competence required in today’s job and could take the form of demonstration, modelling and/or explaining expected levels of competence required for the job.

Ronel’s approach with Neo in the Flower Valley Conservation Trust was to assess and provide critical comment on communication pieces written, prior to their release. Ronel provided guidance on ways in which Neo could improve her writing from a communications perspective.

Mentoring short-term

Short-term mentoring has its focus on a more immediate goal of preparing an individual for tomorrow’s job. Whereas counselling and coaching focus on the task at hand, mentoring goes broader to focus on the person and his/her development as well. Mentoring in the short term draws on reflection on past work (counselling) and existing competence and extends to values and beliefs that would better prepare the mentee for taking up a particular position in future. Short-term mentoring would be more definitive in terms of its intention.

Jeff was initially mentored by Charli in BotSoc in land use planning and decision-making. After Jeff’s internship he was appointed to SANBI’s C.A.P.E. bioregional programme as the Land Use Programme Co-ordinator. Shortly after he was seconded to the Western Cape Department of Economic Affairs and Development Planning, where he worked to guide and support land use planners in development decisions. This mentorship was directly focused on land use planning and preparation to follow a particular career stream. It included teaching, informal training, coaching and counselling at various periods during the full mentoring interaction.

Mentoring long-term

With a futures focus, mentoring in the long term is framed in the career and life of the individual. Mentoring is aimed at grounding the individual in experiences that would allow growth and development in a particular career field.
After mentoring with BotSoc, Jeff continued to interact with Charl on a less formal basis. Through mentoring, Jeff’s reading, supported and guided by Charl, ‘... tremendously increased my knowledge of the field ...’. Charl was preparing Jeff for a longer-term career in land use planning. Four years after his internship, Jeff was appointed as National Environmental Management Co-ordinator in SANBI and notes that the internship played a significant role in defining his longer-term career path.

Rhett mentored Natalie for one year at CapeNature’s Goukamma Nature Reserve. He says ‘... Natalie had to learn how to use a chainsaw, which was not really needed for her immediate work ... she was exposed to specific work tasks which she had to learn as well as other things which I considered a part of her holistic development as a nature conservator ...’.

Roy describes mentoring Sabelo as focused ‘... beyond the professional to the personal as well ...’. He says as a mentor one needs to ‘... look at the person’s career as a whole and where they are headed, not just at the job at hand ...’.

Rhett says that ‘... mentoring continues with students long after they have qualified and moved on in their careers ...’. Natalie talks of her mentoring with Rhett as ‘... not focusing on a particular field but acquiring a broader knowledge on all conservation issues ...’.

Training

Training generally teaches a specific skill and improves levels of proficiency in a specific area of work. Training often takes place off-site and is often decontextualised, resulting in a disjuncture between what is taught and learnt and its application in the workplace. Mentoring becomes critical in supporting an application of learning in the real work context.

In relation to the diagram above, training can take place at any point along the central axis, as a part of counselling, coaching, preparing a mentee for the next level of advancement in his/her career, and to support growth within a particular career path.

Like mentoring, training is traditionally approached from a point of deficiency. It too can be approached more proactively and seen as a way to strengthen and grow existing competence, rather than only responding to a lack of competence.

The environmental education course that Sabelo attended has a strong workplace-based learning focus. It provided the space for him to develop a programme for involving surrounding communities in conserving the Harmony Flats. He was supported in the course by presenters who provided theoretical perspectives to guide his ideas and open his thinking to new and different ways of working with people in conservation. He was further supported by his course tutor, Sindiswa, who provided him with critical comment and guidance as his ideas developed and were implemented through the course assignment. In the workspace, Roy, as his manager/mentor, was instrumental in supporting Sabelo to implement his ideas in the communities where he worked.
In summary

Mentoring at any point in time encompasses some or all of the above. This is usually defined by the experience and orientation of the mentor, the mentee’s development needs and aspirations, the key work areas, the organisational mandates, strategies and programmes and the opportunities available for development, amongst many other factors that shape mentoring.

Ideally, a development plan will take these various learning interventions into consideration to support the holistic growth of a mentee. Integrating a suite of strategies also introduces variety into mentoring and allows the mentee to learn different things in different ways – and, potentially, in different learning contexts too.
5 Key attributes of mentors and mentees

Mentoring is based on relationships and interactions between two or more people. Whereas there are no specific criteria for a good mentoring relationship, some personal attributes, values, beliefs and competences do make for more effective mentoring. Through an evaluation of mentoring in the C.A.P.E. Capacity Development Programme, interviewees – mentors and mentees – reflected on the value of the following key attributes that contributed to an effective mentoring interaction.

Expertise and experience

In the work context, mentoring focuses on the professional development of individuals. This makes subject/content expertise and experience critical. All mentees who had a positive experience see their mentors as role models from who they can learn a lot. The expertise and experience of the mentor similarly instils confidence in the mentee and makes for more effective learning.

*Sabelo says that ‘... I was always confident with the guidance I received from Sindiswa ...’ in their course interactions to develop and implement community-based training programme.*

*Jeff says that Charl is ‘... an expert in his field ... much of my viewpoints have been shaped by Charl ...’.*

*Deon says that Rhett ‘... has a lot of experience and this is important in learning ...’.*

*Natalie notes the most significant thing in her mentoring as having had ‘... the opportunity to learn from someone who has been in the conservation field for many years ...’.*

Availability

All mentees talk of the availability of their mentors to guide, comment on and support ideas and actions. This they describe as an open-door approach that helped them to access their mentors when needed.
In the extremely busy schedules typical of our work environments, some mentors arranged regular and frequent meetings to allow this availability.

Sabelo says, ‘... Roy was always available to listen, give guidance and support’.

Patricia, mentored by Deon in the Lemietberg Nature Reserve, says that he is ‘... a very good listener and, in spite of his very busy schedule, he gives his full attention to help others ...’.

Charl and Jeff met weekly, defined specific tasks and activities and reflected on the week; this provided for availability in a more structured way.

**Space to innovate**

Mentees valued having been given the space to grow with their own ideas and ways of doing things. Mentors use the term ‘... thrown in at the deep end ...’, while maintaining a close enough presence to provide a safety net.

Luzanne says that she encouraged Sven to think critically and to share his opinions. She also allowed him the space to ‘... swim in the deep end ... to learn ... and experience things for himself’.

Jeff says Charl ‘... allowed me room to grow and explore ... after six weeks of close mentoring he gave me space to explore on my own ...’.

Roy says that he allowed Sabelo the ‘flexibility and openness to engage with me ... and the latitude to experiment ...’. He says it is important to ‘allow people the freedom to push boundaries ... to engage with something even if contrary to mainstream ...’. Sabelo ‘... has been allowed the freedom to express himself and experiment with his ideas with some guidance ... my role was to provide a safety net as he innovates and tries out new things ...’.

Deon had Rhett as a mentor for six years and says ‘... he threw me in at the deep end but provided a support net if I so required ... he did not micro-manage ...’ ‘... Rhett gave me the space to grow and experience new things ...’.

**Affirmation**

Many mentees speak positively of being affirmed in making a real and meaningful contribution to the work of the organisation.

Jeff says ‘... I was surprised at how much I was asked for my opinion, and that I was trusted for it’.

Neo says that she ‘... had no experience and was trusted to do things ... my friends from technikon experienced mentoring very negatively, saying they were given insignificant and unnecessary tasks ... I was given the space to do real things as required and made a contribution to the organisation ...’ and ‘... what I brought to the job mattered too ...’.
Deon and Natalie both note the value in ‘… being treated like a staff member …’. Deon says ‘… Rhett did not make me feel like a student, but allowed me to feel like a colleague … this was really valuable, as it gave me the freedom and space to explore and also to share my thinking and ideas about things …’.

**Reflection**

Most mentees note the significance of being able to have ongoing discussions with their mentors, to reflect on their work and explore better ways of working. Meetings for review and assessment of activities and further development seem to be a useful way to build structured time for reflection and development of ideas and practice.

*Sindiswa feels that Sabelo’s ideas were sometimes too big and vague and that through ‘… a safe space for disagreement and debate …’ she was able to help him ‘… tone down his big ideas and focus on what he wanted to do practically …’.

The weekly meeting between Jeff and Charl was a successful way for planning and review.

The conservators in the City of Cape Town initially met weekly, which, over time, was reduced to once every two months. Through the process, they were ‘… encouraged not to be afraid … to make mistakes … and to learn from these …’ ‘… The case study methodology … is based on a phased level of support and is reduced as the conservators grow in skills and experience …’.

**Listening**

Most mentees list one of the key attributes of their mentors as being available to listen and advise.

*Sabelo says Roy ‘… is a good listener, supportive …’.

*Paula says she was required to make a ‘… real effort to listen and not to judge … we brought a lot of ourselves to the process …’.

**Support and exposure**

Some mentees talk of the significance of support in the form of resources and time to try out different things. This includes exposure to the sector as a whole, organisations and practices in which they work.

*During her internship with the Flower Valley Conservation Trust, Neo attended all meetings with Lesley to provide her with exposure to the biodiversity sector, organisations, role players and initiatives. Neo says that this experience shaped her career choice and she ‘… will stay in conservation even though communications … is quite difficult …’.

*Sabelo says that ‘… Roy provided support for doing the course work and implementing the programme … making resources available and time to do the course …’.
Professionalism

All mentees recognise the professionalism of their mentors. Through leading by example, these mentors have become key role models in their own careers.

*Sven says that Luzanne ‘… sets a good example of how one needs to work together …’.*

*Rhett says that he tries ‘… to teach by example … I lead by being that example …’.*

*Neo says her mentors ‘… were all highly professional, highly dedicated, and cared about me as well as the job at hand … what I brought to the job mattered …’.*

Commitment to learning

Mentoring requires the mentee to be open and committed to learning and being guided by the mentor.

*Jeff thinks the effectiveness of his mentoring was the result of ‘… dual commitment from mentee and mentor to the process of learning and mutual respect …’. Charl similarly describes Jeff as having an ‘… eagerness to learn … the capacity to learn quickly … an easy student … positive and open to learning …’.*

*Sally, who mentored Gaynor at the Gold Fields Environmental Education Centre at Kirstenbosch, describes her as having ‘… a hunger for knowledge … easy to work with and prepared to learn … quick of mind … eagerness, initiative and ability to commit …’.*

*Melodie describes Zishaam as being ‘… easy to manage …’ and someone who is ‘… enthusiastic …’ and ‘… wants to learn …’.*

*Gaynor describes herself as having an ‘… openness to ideas and experiences …’ as well as a ‘… willingness to give and not just to receive …’.*

*Paula describes the nature conservators of the City of Cape Town as bringing ‘… an incredible ability to engage … [with] their own work … [with] honesty, openness, laughter … they came to all meetings …’.*

*Sabelo reflects on his own role and says that he brought in his ‘… own ideas …’ but was ‘… however open to learning …’ and ‘… allowed people to provide critical inputs and take these into consideration as I went along …’.*

Enthusiasm and energy

Enthusiasm and energy (called by different names) are also key features cited by mentors as contributing to positive interactions with mentees.

*Roy describes Sabelo as bringing ‘… energy, enthusiasm [and] willingness to try out different ideas…’ into the mentoring relationship. He ‘… comes across very positive and enthusiastic … he came into the job with a particular interest in extension and training …’ and used the opportunity to develop further in this field.*
Flexibility

Mentees are sometimes required to work with more than one mentor, making it necessary to adapt from one to the other. They might be required to work with a variety of tasks that are different in nature and interact with a number of different people in a unit or department, across units and departments, and possibly across organisations. Flexibility and adaptability are key features that can support their interactions at multiple levels as they learn and grow.

*Neo says she brought flexibility into her mentoring. ‘... I was naïve about the sector, which made me eager and open to learn ... very keen to learn ... I really wanted it to work ... [I] was grateful for the opportunity and wanted to make the best of it’.*

*Lesley reiterates this, noting that ‘... her strength is her adaptability ... she was a city girl who moved to the small town of Bredasdorp and made the most of the opportunity ...’.*

In summary

Irrespective of the form it takes, mentoring is about relationships and interactions among individuals. Inevitably, the personalities of these individuals come into mentoring as well. These attributes might provide some insight into the expectations that both mentors and mentees have and might shape engagements among them. It also provides a framework for shaping better mentors and mentees in professional spaces.
Most of us will agree that mentoring needs far outweigh the organisational capacity to meet these needs, severely tipping the scale at the best of times. This requires us to be more creative about how we mentor to support professional growth and development and strengthening practices and organisations. Whereas the traditional approach to one-on-one mentoring is ideal, circumstances might require alternative approaches such as group mentoring, peer mentoring, mentoring in a network of mentors, contracted mentors and/or mentoring supported through structured learning, amongst many other innovations in the field.

Before turning to the various forms of mentoring, we reflect briefly on some of the factors likely to shape approaches used. These factors include:

- The purpose of the mentoring interaction (see section 3);
- The availability of mentors inside and outside the organisation, field and/or sector;
- The background and experience of mentors inside and outside the organisation, field and/or sector;
- The professional development needs of mentees, individually and collectively;
- The professional requirements in the field of work, relative to organisational mandates, sector trends, etc.;
- The relationships with other organisations, fields and sectors.

You may have some additional considerations that might shape mentoring in your particular work context. It is useful to reflect on these prior to considering a form of mentoring that would work best for you, your colleagues and mentees with whom you work.

**One-on-one mentoring**

Mentors and mentees in a one-on-one mentoring relationship enjoy the luxury of focus and individual attention. This approach to mentoring is more common in smaller organisations and/or units, like some of our NGO partners and public organisations, where smaller staff complements make this possible. Examples of this approach are evident in the cases of Luzanne and Sven, Jeff and Charl and Gaynor and Sally, amongst others. In most of our bigger organisations this approach seems less feasible, given larger staff complements, the scope of need and available mentoring capacity.
Key features of one-on-one mentoring include:

◆ Mentoring could be focused on a specific and key work area such as land use planning decision-making or environmental education in the school context.

Jeff says ‘… the exposure at BotSoc has influenced my choice of career … I completely changed my career path …’.

Gaynor says ‘… I gained practical work experience … decided to study in the field of environmental education …’.

Luzanne ‘… together with Sven … developed a plan which focused on what he needed … his expectations … what I needed to expose him to and what he wanted to learn …’.

◆ Ongoing, regular and frequent engagements are possible around this key work area.

Jeff and Charl ‘… had a planning and review meeting every Monday …’.

Gaynor says ‘… we had weekly planning meetings and I had to balance my work and studies …’.

◆ It allows the mentor and mentee to get to know each other really well over time.

Charl says ‘… this relationship was a highlight for me … a mentor must be aware of the student’s background and history … the approach attended to the personal relationship before the professional relationship …’.

Gaynor and Sally ‘… developed a relationship during the first year that she was an AEO …’.

Sven describes Luzanne as a ‘… very calm and collected person …’ who ‘… connects at a personal level …’.

◆ Interactions could be specifically focused on the career development of individuals.

Sally ‘… as a mentor … plans mentoring based on the needs of the individual intern …’.

Gaynor reiterates this personal focus in that ‘… I had one-on-one mentoring attention and it was good …’.

Sven says that he and Luzanne ‘… co-designed my tasks as she was not really sure what exactly I required for my own growth … I had to co-develop [my tasks] to ensure that my own needs are met in this internship …’.

◆ Strategies can be easily adapted relative to the specific development needs of the mentee and the availability of the mentor.

Charl says ‘… where the mentoring falls flat is where things are rigidly established … I continually revised how to relate to Jeff … the approach never gave Jeff any reason to feel alienated …’.

Luzanne says that after Sven had been with them for six months ‘… we changed his KPAs so that he is also involved in conservation practices …’.
Mentees could be assigned specific tasks through, for example, homework assignments with the space for review and critical comment from which to learn and grow.

Gaynor ‘... had opportunities to prepare for lessons and to teach ...’

Some of the tasks given to Jeff included writing proceedings of meetings and workshops, organising information and statistical data and co-presenting a paper. He received specific homework tasks supporting learning and growth, much of which was structured around the volumes of reading he was given.

Close interactions allow for intensive monitoring and assessment of tasks, development and growth.

Regular weekly meetings between Jeff and Charl helped them to reflect on and assess work activities of the past week and plan learning opportunities for the following week.

The effectiveness of mentoring is highly dependent on the personalities of the mentor and mentee and how these work together. This dependence on personality could sometimes create a negative experience for either the mentor or mentee, or both.

The mentors have the potential for ‘reinventing’ or ‘cloning’ themselves, without critical input from others.

At an organisational level, this form of mentoring can be resource-intensive, using mentoring capacity for the benefit of only one individual.

A network of mentors

In some multidisciplinary fields, more than one mentor is required to support the development of mentees.

Biodiversity information management requires professionals with proficiency in information technology as well as biodiversity conservation. Few universities allow for undergraduate studies that integrate these disciplines.

Environmental education is another field that requires competence in two distinct disciplines, one being environmental management and conservation and the other education, training and development.

Some universities respond to this multidisciplinary need, but only at a post-graduate level. In the changing context of environment and conservation, most professionals are required to work beyond the natural sciences and straddle into social sciences as well. The multidisciplinary nature of environment and conservation is often not a strong feature of pre-service training. In these and other cases, a network of mentors might be required to address the multidisciplinary needs of mentees, their practice and organisational needs.

Key features of a network of mentors include:

◆ The mentee benefits from a range of diverse expertise, all contributing to his/her broader career development.
Neo says ‘… each mentor brought their own experience … all different and together they were good … professionally all of them knew their field and were able to guide me …’. She says they were ‘… all highly professional, highly dedicated and cared about me as well as the job at hand …’. Though ‘… Ronel was not based at Flower Valley, she helped me a lot with my writing and professional etiquette …’.

Each individual mentor enables development in specific complementary spaces of work and learning.

For Sabelo, his mentors brought ‘… something from a different perspective … each played a different role … Sindiswa was specific to the course and programme development … Roy provided the support for doing the course work and implementation … complementary support worked well together in improving and implementing good practice …’. Roy described his ‘… role as a line manager … to enable what [Sabelo] needed to do at an organisational level …’.

Interactions with the network of mentors need to be focused and set up in response to the development needs of the mentee.

Neo’s interactions with the three mentors were clearly defined: Lesley provided an orientation to the sector, role players and programmes as a whole; Ronel focused on the techniques of communication; and Roger provided an orientation to and insights into Flower Valley’s operations.

Sabelo’s interactions were clearly defined, with Roy as mentor and enabler in the workspace and Sindiswa as mentor in the course. Clear reference is made to the value realised from these interactions. His interactions with Bongani were more general and open-ended.

Because all mentors are seldom found in the same organisation or physical space, mentees could sometimes struggle with accessibility to all of them.

Ronel comments on the time-constraints that limited her engagement with Neo. Because she worked for Flower Valley Conservation Trust on a contractual basis and was based in Somerset West, while Neo was based in Bredasdorp, she ‘… didn’t have much time …’. Neo ‘… needed a lot more guidance, which I was not able to provide in the given time space …’. Their interactions were predominantly through electronic communication and ‘… monthly meetings for reporting, planning and reflection …’.

Sindiswa and Sabelo were based in different physical locations and ‘… there were often informal interactions during course sessions … comments made on assignments … phone calls to discuss comments … always healthy debates … during social meetings we would also talk around work …’. However, Sindiswa feels that ‘… time available was one of the biggest constraints … if we worked for the same organisation it might have been easier … working in the same environment, an intern can learn by watching the mentor do things … [there] would have been more ongoing engagement, rather than occasionally …’. She felt there was a ‘… need to set up more structured interactions to meet regularly …’.
Interns working with a network of mentors require high levels of flexibility and adaptability, as they work with different individuals and personalities.

Neo ‘... worked with five different individuals as mentors and had to deal with these different personalities ...’, which she found to be the most significant part of her development, but also the most challenging. Each mentor worked in different contexts, so it took a lot of effort to adapt each time she engaged with a different mentor, but she says that this ‘...was good in terms of my own development and exposure to different people doing different things ... I have learnt to adapt quickly... and to act quickly in my work ...’.

Group mentoring

Constraints in mentoring capacity are best approached through group mentoring, where one mentor is assigned to a group of mentees. Examples of group mentoring include the conservators in the City of Cape Town and the group of conservation stewardship professionals in CapeNature. The central focus of group mentoring is often developing professional practice to strengthen organisations. Key features of group mentoring include:

- Effective group mentoring requires a specific focus on a group of professionals and their practice. The focus could be to improve practice in an organisation, and similarly to support career development of a group of professionals. It is unlikely to focus solely on the individual.

  In the case of the stewardship professionals in CapeNature, Ben’s mentoring aimed at strengthening the capacity of professionals as they worked in the agriculture landscape. He observed the professionals in their interactions with landowners and made critical inputs to assist them in planning follow-up interactions.

  In the case of the urban conservators in the City of Cape Town, the focus was similarly on the work they did with surrounding urban communities and their involvement in conservation in and around the reserves managed by the City. Case studies were developed and deliberated around this specific area of work to improve these engagements.

- Through focusing on the community of practitioners in and across organisations, group mentoring has the potential to develop a strong team of professionals, conservation practice and, ultimately, the organisations. Group mentoring also has the potential to establish expanding learning units in organisations that enable ongoing learning and growing together.

  Kerry says that the stewardship group ‘... turned into a network of learning ...’ that ‘... has encouraged the formation of other groupings in the organisation ...’. It also encouraged staff from outside the stewardship group to participate in these interactions, such as ‘... Reserve Managers [who] also wanted to come to the gatherings ...’. In addition, it led to the development of a strong team whose skills and experience ‘... are in high demand ...’.

  Lewine says of the conservators’ experience in the City of Cape Town: ‘... the peer learning project focused on us as conservators ... the community aspects were different and scary ... case studies ... posed ... questions ... [which were] dealt with in group discussions ... the process allows me to walk away with options for solutions ...’.
Luzanne says ‘… this has allowed us at the reserve to reflect and add what is missing in our work … we have the space to evaluate our work and see gaps and ways to move forward … [it] creates a space for development …’.

Adele says ‘… we see this programme as a benefit … we were taught to look at things differently …’.

Because a single mentor is working with a group of mentees, group mentoring can be resource and time intensive.

In CapeNature, Ben worked with 15 stewardship professionals, all located in different geographic areas across the Western Cape. The biggest challenge in this arrangement of group mentoring was that time constraints in the nine-month contractual mentoring agreement did not allow him to get to all of them on a regular basis. Many resorted to simply calling on Ben when they needed to. Christina says ‘… the interaction … was on an ad hoc basis and at my request …’.

Paula’s job focused on capacity development in the City of Cape Town urban context, which meant greater availability to work with the conservators. As opposed to Ben’s approach of working on a one-on-one basis with the 15 stewardship professionals, Paula worked with the conservators through a structured programme facilitated on a regular basis.

Group mentoring requires a high level of flexibility and adaptability on the part of the mentor, given the multiple personalities and varying levels of experience within the group. This places emphasis on the character of the mentor and the ensuing relationship that develops between the mentor and group of mentees.

Adri and Johan describe Ben as ‘… an open person … approachable … available when you needed him …’, which might be a very necessary requirement in working across a group of mentees with different personalities, levels of experience and needs.

The City of Cape Town conservators all speak highly of the safe space provided in their group mentoring sessions. Their comments also suggest a great measure of trust in Paula and Tanya as facilitators and in each other. Adele ‘… always felt supported and was therefore able to explore and challenge my perceived limitations … I knew I would always have guidance should something go wrong …’.

**Peer mentoring**

Constraints to mentoring capacity could also be addressed through peer mentoring processes. Peer mentoring allows colleagues to learn, grow and develop through interactions with each other. These interactions can be formal, such as in the case of the peer learning sessions amongst conservators in CapeNature and City of Cape Town, or less formal through interpersonal relationships amongst staff members, as in the case of the education staff with who Gaynor worked at the Gold Fields Education Centre or the 75 colleagues in the Boland area of CapeNature. Like group mentoring, peer mentoring is focused on strengthening communities of practice in and across organisations.
Key features of peer mentoring include:

- Peers participate on an equal footing, sharing and learning through discussions about their practice.

  Arnelle says that ‘... the topics for the sessions are decided on by the group, and a committee eventually makes the final decisions after having received all suggestions ...’. In this way, it would respond to the specific needs of individuals participating in the group.

- In the boland area, when Hermien joined CapeNature, she worked with ‘... Garth and Arnelle ... Hermien worked to support them and learnt the ropes through this ...’. This shows an example of development through collegial interactions.

  Gaynor also experienced peer mentoring as an intern at the Gold Fields Environmental Education Centre, and says ‘... I worked with other staff ... I was able to go to anyone for help ... the staff were interested in helping me ...’.

- Peer learning can be confined to the levels of experience of peers in the group. This could be limiting in exploring new and innovative approaches to work. Peer learning is best organised around a clear structure and process of facilitation to stretch exposure beyond current practices.

  In the CapeNature’s stewardship network, technical experts were invited to make inputs ‘... we also include critical technical information which we know must be made available to the ... staff ...’.

  The Stewardship and Extension Course introduced new ways of thinking about and implementing stewardship. Christina says ‘... I found learning the skill of how to dissect a particular situation useful ... I could analyse the situation and make better decisions as a result of what I learned in the course ...’.

  In the boland area, the usual management meetings became spaces to reflect, learn and grow in practice. This provided the structure for learning together across the group of professionals in the area.

- Peer mentoring allows for a pool of complementary competences to be shared amongst peers in a learning space.

  The conservators in the City of Cape Town say that they brought a lot of themselves into the process and ‘... we got to know each other ...’. They describe each other as ‘... Luzanne is the thinker and person with ideas ... Lewine is the practical one who brought this skill to the group ... she is also the mediator and we could all learn this skill ... Charline is very organized and we could learn this from her ... Sabelo is a go-between and he plays this role ...’.

- Peer learning is highly reliant on individual participation in the group to stimulate thinking, learning and developing new ideas of working.
Arnelle says ‘... the fact that not everyone comes to the meetings is what has not worked that well ... we then have fewer people to share knowledge and experiences and the gatherings are not that rich anymore ...’.

Peer learning amplifies the significance of group dynamics amongst peers.

Amongst the City of Cape Town’s conservators ‘... we learnt the skill of understanding yourself and others and the trust allowed us to share ...’.

Paula says ‘... we brought a lot of ourselves to the process ...’. It took ‘... real effort to listen and not judge ...’.

Training and mentoring

In many cases, training complemented the mentoring. Sabelo, for example, participated in the environmental education course, drawing some support from the course presenters and tutors. Gaynor participated in a learnership and her development was supported through structured learning. Some of the participants in the stewardship group participated in the Stewardship and Extension Course. In addition, many of the mentors in these cases participated in the mentors training. Some of the key aspects of support offered through the range of courses include:

- Training provides a structure for workplace-based learning and development, with specific outputs relevant to the day-to-day work of participants.

  Sabelo says ‘... my job entails working with schools and communities around the nature reserve, therefore the course has major relevance to my daily work ...’.

  Sabelo’s mentoring with both Sindiswa and Roy was focused on his assignment in the course to develop the community engagement programme for the Harmony Flats Conservation Site.

  Ben says that the mentoring course ‘... was very much hands-on and practical, with a clear task-focused approach ... [it] gave me practical tools to implement and the theoretical guidance on how to design a mentoring plan for each mentee ...’

  Lesley says ‘... I found the programme to be a real eye-opener ... I’ve always been interested in capacity building ... this programme has given me a way to organise myself better to plan and deliver a more appropriate approach, depending on whether training, coaching, etc. is needed.’

- A course brings individuals and their colleagues (from their own organisation and others) into safe spaces in which to explore new and innovative work practices.

  Participants in the Stewardship and Extension Course experienced it as providing ‘... opportunities to share and learn in a non-threatening space ...’.
In summary

Mentoring need not be one or another of these different forms. In many cases a combination is possible. A combination has the potential to strengthen mentoring support to individuals, their practices and organisations.

*Sally was Gaynor’s designated mentor, but she also drew support from the broader group of colleagues, like Roleen and Benjamin at the Gold Fields Environmental Education Centre. She also had added support through participation in the learnership.*

*The stewardship professionals in CapeNature benefited from one-on-one mentoring with Ben, group mentoring through the facilitated interactions co-ordinated by Kerry, and peer learning as they constantly drew on each other for support. Some also drew support from the course in which they participated.*

*Sabelo participated in the course and was supported through one-on-one mentoring in the workplace by Roy, receiving inputs from Sindiswa as a tutor, participating in group mentoring facilitated by Paula, and through peer learning as relationships developed amongst the conservators at the City of Cape Town.*

These different forms of mentoring provide a range of options to help overcome the resource constraints in organisations.
Mentors work with individuals at many different levels in the organisation. For example, mentoring students on a work shadow programme, working with new graduates fresh off the pre-service production line, or working with experienced professionals for career development and/or promotion in or outside the organisation. In this section, we look at mentoring at different levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MENTEE</th>
<th>MENTORING PURPOSE</th>
<th>SUGGESTED FOCUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRE-SERVICE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Learners</td>
<td>To promote an interest in the environment and conservation sector by exposing learners to career streams in this field.</td>
<td>Details of a range of career streams in the sector and requirements for entry into these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interns (undergraduates)</td>
<td>To support experiential learning as part of undergraduate curriculum requirements while providing exposure to career options in the sector.</td>
<td>Opportunities for learning and support for curriculum requirements and provide details of key work areas in specific careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Professionals (graduates)</td>
<td>To give the young professional a general orientation to the sector as a whole and details of potential career paths and related career interests.</td>
<td>Induction and orientation to the sector and the organisation as well as the details of specific or range of related career interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Professionals</td>
<td>To prepare individuals for career development.</td>
<td>Competence requirements to develop towards and in a specific career path.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN-SERVICE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-career professionals</td>
<td>To strengthen the individual’s all-round capacity for entry into senior management, related mid-management or specialised positions.</td>
<td>Competence requirements at senior, related middle management level or position of specialisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management</td>
<td>To strengthen management at senior and strategic levels.</td>
<td>Competence for strategic management of an organisation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mentoring the school learner

As they move through high school, learners become increasingly interested in finding out about work and career opportunities. Mentoring the school learner involves providing career related exposure and information.

During high school, learners participate in job shadow programmes to explore career options in the sector and requirements for entry into these careers. Job shadow programmes provide important career guidance opportunities. Learners from Grade 10 to Grade 12 have the option of participating in a job shadow programme as part of their Life Orientation curriculum. At this stage, learners are quite focused on the requirements for accessing a broad sweep of career paths. Mentoring the school learner could be most valuable if focused on information that learners require in taking the next step out of school, towards their chosen career.

Questions worth exploring with school learners include:

- **What are the various career streams available in the sector?** Most learners are unlikely, at this stage, to have made a specific decision about the exact career path into which they plan to enter.

- **What subjects are required, and at what level of performance?** This might include prerequisites for entry into a learning pathway or simply a subject that will make practical sense in the field of work. For example, Economic and Management Sciences might be a valuable contribution to a career in eco-tourism.

- **What learning pathway to follow?** Various professionals might have entered into the same careers through different learning pathways. One might have got into reserve management through a National Diploma in Game Ranch Management or Nature Conservation. Another might have entered through a Bachelor of Science degree in Botany, Zoology or Environmental Management. These options might be worth exploring when hosting learners on a job shadow programme.

- **What are the key work areas in various career streams?** It might be useful to expose school learners to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of various careers to inform decisions made.

- **Additional questions that learners might have include those around career paths, career development opportunities, salary scales at different levels, organisations of work, and availability and conditions of bursaries, amongst others.**

Hosting learners through a job shadow programme has considerable potential for attracting new entrants into careers in the field.

*As a result of interactions during a job shadow programme, two school leavers in the C.A.P.E. Capacity Development Programme decided to pursue a learning pathway in Environmental and Water Sciences.*

Mentoring the undergraduate intern

Undergraduates from organisations of higher learning are required to do work-integrated learning – some including a work-related or research project. Mentoring these students should primarily be guided by the specified curriculum requirements for work-integrated learning. This level of mentoring also provides an opportunity for giving students an orientation to the world
of work in conservation and exploring various career options in the sector. Some of the more specific elements of mentoring the undergraduate intern could include:

◆ **What are the various career options that could be pursued in the area of qualification?** Having been exposed (albeit at a theoretical level) to the field, students might have some ideas of potential careers they could pursue in the sector. This could be an opportunity to explore the field and its career possibilities in more depth.

◆ **What are the key work areas in each career field?** The work-integrated learning requirement allows opportunities for students to explore various career fields in depth and the practicalities of the job.

◆ **What are the key competences required in each of these work areas?** Mentoring also provides an opportunity to start development in these key areas of competence.

◆ **What are the best career paths and development opportunities in each career field?** A mentor who knows the field well might be able to guide and support an undergraduate intern in researching career paths and development options in a particular organisation as well as in the sector.

At the time of her internship with Flower Valley Conservation Trust, Neo was an undergraduate student doing the work-integrated learning component of her course. She comments positively on her exposure to the sector through her internship and found it significant in shaping her career.

Mentoring undergraduate interns also provides a key opportunity for attracting students into particular careers in the field, and nurturing their development towards and in particular career fields.

**Mentoring the young graduate**

One of the biggest constraints in higher learning is its limited link to the real world of work. Introducing the young graduate into the field through structured and effective mentoring can go a long way to support him/her in making the transition from learning into work. In the C.A.P.E. Capacity Development Programme, a young professionals’ programme was developed to attract and retain new entrants into careers in conservation. Suggesting an 18-month to two-year internship, this programme proposes three phases of orientation:

◆ **A period of induction into the sector, organisation and job function, recommended for three months.** Many young professionals, as they leave higher learning, do not have an adequate or grounded perspective of the sector that could shape their practice in conservation. A thorough induction programme has the potential to address this. This could include, for example, an exploration of the legislative framework shaping conservation, both globally and nationally. It might also include an analysis of the various organisations working together in the sector, and their respective mandates. The latter could possibly be explored in relation to the host organisation’s mandate and/or the area of work in which the young professional is placed. An induction into the organisation could focus on the organisation’s mandate, organisational structure, and functioning and interactions...
across units, directorates and departments. This induction could also focus on the job function into which the young professional has been placed, preferably in relation to the sector and the organisation’s mandate. Complementary processes of induction could be participation in sector and/or organisational meetings and events, through which to develop a grounded understanding of the field.

♦ Young graduates rarely have a complete sense of the scope of career fields and options within them. A six-month rotational programme could allow the young professional to explore and gain in-depth insight into the various career fields and options in the sector. A young professional placed in CapeNature might, for example, work on a month-to-month rotational basis with a field ranger, a reserve manager, a community conservator, a conservation services officer and a scientist to experience each career field and options within them. A young professional joining the WWF Living Waters Unit might work in the same way in a fisheries programme, a marine protected areas programme, a water neutral programme, an integrated catchment management programme, a wetlands programme, etc. A task-based approach, discussed in Section 8, is also a useful approach to mentoring in this rotational programme, allowing a mentee to engage in depth with the details of each career field.

♦ The balance of the internship can be focused on an orientation to key performance areas in a chosen career field. During this period, a clear development plan should be negotiated between the mentor and the young professional, with regular assessments. This period could also be complemented by participation in specific professional development programmes that enhance development and growth.

Mentoring the young graduate provides a good opportunity for supporting the new entrant in developing a sound and grounded view of the work in conservation. Some entrants have struggled to find their way into the sector in the absence of effective mentoring. Some new entrants have even been lost to the sector as a result of less positive first engagements in the sector. A mentor at this level has the potential to support a new entrant in finding his/her career niche in the broad scope of the sector.

Mentoring the junior professional

The junior professional has, in all likelihood, been in the sector, possibly in the organisation, or even in the job function for some time. The focus in mentoring the junior professional is to support him/her to find his/her longer term career niche. An added and important focus at this level is also to strengthen specific competences for career development and growth.

Traditionally, career development is approached by supporting upward mobility, commonly referred to as career progression. Career development could, however, also be horizontal, into a related career stream on the same job level.

Arnelle developed extensive experience as a nature conservator in the reserve management career stream. She then moved into conservation services, a parallel career stream of off-reserve conservation. Dian feels that her experience in these two parallel career streams has provided the grounding for her work in conservation stewardship, where she is considered to be one of the strongest professionals in the field. Career development could also be in-depth specialisation in a particular career stream which is very common in scientific services.
Some key considerations in mentoring the junior professional include:

- **The interests and strengths of the professional, and the career path that would best suit these interests and strengths.**

  Zishaam showed a particular interest and skill in information management and was supported to develop in this career field. This also responded to the organisation’s needs at the Cape Research Centre. Biodiversity information management is also a critically scarce skill in the sector as a whole.

  Roy recognised Sabelo’s interest in working with communities and supported his development in this area of work.

  Deon recognised Patricia’s interest in community conservation and supported her career development in this direction. Patricia has subsequently left CapeNature for a position as a Community Conservation Officer with the Paarl Mountain Nature Reserve.

- **The career aspirations of the individual.** It could be useful to expose the junior professional to a range of development opportunities that support development to attain these aspirations.

- **The competences that would stand the individual in good stead in a more senior position in this career path.** Development opportunities to develop these particular competences would be a useful focus.

- **Career development opportunities and the organisations in which these are available.** At this point, the mentor might need to face the reality that the junior professional might not stay at the current organisation, and be preparing to spread his/her wings into different work contexts. This mentoring effort would be a contribution to the sector as a whole rather than only to the individual organisation.

Junior professionals are at a critical point of decision-making for their future career. Mentoring at this point critically shapes the further career development of junior professionals to realise their potential and interests.

**Mentoring the mid-career professional**

Mid-career professionals have mostly found their career niche. Mentoring is generally not considered or offered at this level. There are, however, certain contexts at this level where mentoring could be helpful to strengthen required competence of individuals, their practices and, ultimately, the organisational performance. These include:

- **Moving into new key performance areas:** Mid-career professionals have significant experience in key work areas. Moving into an evolving practice might, however, require support to grow into these new key work areas. For example, Arnelle had extensive experience as a nature conservator when she joined the stewardship team at CapeNature. As a new and evolving practice in CapeNature, all stewardship professionals required support to strengthen certain areas of work, such as negotiating with landowners in the agriculture landscape. Ben was brought in specifically to respond to this need.
Moving into new work contexts: When a mid-career professional moves into a new work context, this might require some mentoring to orientate the incumbent into a new organisational and/or functional context.

Preparation for succession into senior management: A mid-career professional might be identified as having the potential for progression into senior management of an organisation. This could be coupled to the imminent opening up of a senior management position due, for example, to retirement. An individual could then be mentored in preparation for the take-up of this senior management position.

Strengthening particular areas of competence: Mid-career professionals might be challenged in a particular area of work and require mentoring to support the strengthening of this capacity. This is evident in the case of the CapeNature stewardship professionals as well as in the case of the City of Cape Town’s conservators, all of who had a significant amount of experience in conservation but required some support to strengthen their practices of engaging communities.

Mentoring at this level is more likely to focus on strengthening existing practice than on developing new areas of competence. In many ways, mentoring might be considered less complex at this level, since it draws on an existing level of experience for development into new directions.

Mentoring the senior manager

Mentoring at the senior management level is often referred to as executive coaching and takes the form of one-on-one mentoring around specific areas of competence. Senior managers may require support in specific performance areas and an executive coach could support improvement and strengthening in this area.

Approaches other than one-on-one coaching might also be valuable in working with senior managers.

The C.A.P.E. Capacity Development Programme’s mentors support programme is an example of peer and group mentoring amongst senior managers. A group of senior managers from both the City of Cape Town and CapeNature participated in this programme. Drawing on extensive experience, they collectively explored ways to improve mentoring practices in their respective organisations. Through take-home assignments, senior managers in both organisations developed mentorship programmes.

In summary

As noted, mentoring individuals at various levels of career development and growth requires a different focus. It then becomes imperative for the mentor to get to know the interests, strengths, areas of development and career aspirations of the individuals with who he/she works, to respond appropriately to development needs.
Many mentors are overwhelmed at the prospect of starting the mentoring journey and supporting the development of an assigned mentee. Most mentors came into the C.A.P.E. mentors support programme with a vast amount of experience in working with mentees and junior staff in their organisations. Sharing these experiences was invaluable to all who participated. Many commented on the value of the programme that provided them with a structure to strengthen the work they do as mentors. In Lesley and Ben’s words, respectively:

‘… I found the programme to be a real eye-opener actually! ... I’ve always been interested in capacity building, but realise now [that] I use a ‘one size fits all approach’ ... this programme has given me a way to organise myself better to plan and deliver a more appropriate approach, depending on whether training, coaching, etc. is needed ...’;

‘... It surely builds competence of the mentor himself and provides excellent, real tools to do the job ... aspects that I found to be significant include: role of the mentor, setting up of mentorship relationship, designing mentoring tasks ... yes, I was able to apply my learning ... going through all the steps with 15 conservation extension officers I am contracted in to mentor ... currently setting up/executing mentoring tasks ...’.

In this next section we offer a practical guide to structure mentoring that includes:

◆ establishing a working relationship to identify the mentoring needs of both the mentor and mentee;
◆ agreeing on the most appropriate approach to mentoring;
◆ adopting a task-based approach to mentoring through developing tasks appropriate to the development needs of the mentee as well as being of value to the organisation;
◆ supporting the development of the mentee as he/she works through the task; and
◆ assessing the development of the mentee, both formatively and summatively.

In drawing on these suggestions to support your work as a mentor, we urge you also to draw on your own experiences and to contextualise approaches to suit your own professional context and the personalities with who you work.
8.1 Clarifying the mentoring needs

From an assessment of mentoring we found that many mentors focus primarily on what is required for the job at hand and the needs of the organisation. Whereas there is much merit in this approach (given that experienced professionals generally know what is needed in the work context), there is also a flip side to the coin. Mentees enter into the workspace with their own experiences, visions, ideas and career aspirations, which also need to be accommodated in the mentoring interaction.

All mentors note the value of getting to know the mentee, both professionally and personally, as this shapes the nature of the interaction and supports the development of the mentee.

Rhett’s approach to working with Natalie and Deon was to expose them to ‘… specific tasks … as well as other things which I considered part of their holistic development as nature conservators … they develop professional and life skills …’.

Roy says that Sabelo ‘… came into the job with wide-ranging experience and quite a bit of skill … what he does lack is confidence to run with his ideas … one gets a feel with people … Sabelo came in with a particular interest in extension and community training … in line with his job function of managing the reserve … we had initial discussions about his ideas and he would go off and do what he needed … my job was to enable what he needed to do at an organisational level …’.

As Zisham settled into the Cape Research Centre of SANParks, Melodie says that ‘… I recognised that his expertise is in IT … critical for the organisation …’ at which point the initial focus of his internship shifted from scientific field work to supporting this function through IT.

Neo moved from Pretoria to Bredasdorp. It was ‘… difficult for her to find direction …’. Recognising the constraints in the small town of Bredasdorp for her development as a journalist, Lesley felt she needed greater exposure to public relations and communications. Lesley then set up a rotational programme through which Neo would be exposed to this broader field in which she was interested in pursuing a career.

These examples all reflect a response to the interests and strengths of the intern as well as the needs and mandates of the organisation. This all hinges on getting to know the mentee, his/her background, experiences and strengths, career interest and aspirations, and professional development needs.

Some suggested approaches to getting to know the mentee include:

Developing a personal mission statement

In writing a personal mission statement, mentees could make explicit their career vision and aspirations, the competence required and the means to acquiring these. This provides a valuable guide to enabling development towards this career vision and the competence required at various levels of development. It could also provide a useful framework for assessing the development of the mentee. Some guiding questions to developing this personal mission statement might include:

◆ Where would I like to be in 20 years’ time in my career? It might be useful to break this up into three- to five-year periods that indicate a career development path, with very specific
details, like what position they envisage for themselves, in what organisation and with what professional attributes. For example, in 20 years I would like to be the Executive Director for Conservation in South African National Parks, with a vision for consolidating and expanding the national parks of South Africa and involving adjacent and other communities in conservation actions.

◆ What current background, experience, strengths and interests would support this journey through my career?
◆ What competences – knowledge, skills, attitudes and values – would support me in my growth?
◆ How could I acquire these?
◆ What further help do I need to develop my career?

Mentors might need to guide the mentee in developing this personal mission statement. This could be a useful induction task for the mentee and could be coupled to exploring the sector as a whole. You might support them in undertaking a small-scale research project of all the role players in a sector, for example – who they are, their mandates and the various functions and programmes that support those mandates. This could easily be undertaken as a desktop study, to inform the development of the intern’s personal mission statement. It also then supports the development of an understanding of the field and the various career paths and options in the sector.

The following example might help in discussions and development of this personal mission statement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In 20 years’ time, I would like to be ...</th>
<th>Pacing my career development path</th>
<th>Strengths, experience, attributes and interests to support these stages</th>
<th>What more do I need?</th>
<th>How could I acquire what I need?</th>
<th>When can I undertake this development initiative?</th>
<th>What else do I need at this stage?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am starting my career path with a two-year internship at CapeNature in reserve management.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would like to then find a position as a nature conservator in another organisation to expand my experience, and stay in this position for three years to gain grounded experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would then like to move to another organisation to focus on community conservation in a junior management position for five years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would like to spend the next five years in a middle management position guiding the work and development of community conservation professionals.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In keeping with the idea of a personal mission statement, the mentee could write this detail in essay form for further discussion. Submission of this mission statement could be used as the culmination of induction and the task that defines and structures this process. The above table can be developed over time – for example, during three months of induction – and form the framework for ongoing discussions between mentor and mentee during this period. The completed form could be submitted as a task outcome that concludes this period.

A needs or ‘NICE’ analysis

A needs analysis is useful to identify the development needs of the mentee. It is useful to frame these needs in relation to the strengths, interests and attributes of the mentee. In the C.A.P.E. mentors support programme, participants experimented with a workplace-based learning task that helped them to get to know the mentee(s) with who they worked. Through this task, they made use of a tool we came to refer to as a NICE analysis to better understand the needs, interests, competences and expectations of the mentees they worked with.

◆ What are my development needs? It is useful to focus on current, medium and long-term career development needs; and to not only focus on deficiencies, but also on areas of current competence that could be strengthened through mentoring support.

◆ What are my interests and attributes? These could similarly expand beyond only the professional, to include the mentee’s personal interests and attributes. For example, a highly sociable individual might struggle in a career path that inhibits or does not allow extensive social interaction.

◆ What are my competences and strengths? Establishing current strengths and competences provides a good framework for further development. These, too, might include strengths and competences in both the professional and personal realms.

◆ What are my expectations? It is useful, very early in mentoring, to clarify the expectations of the mentor and the mentee, the levels and roles of responsibility and the interactions between the individuals involved. These discussions could focus on expectations in career development, the organisation and the job.

Deidre says that the NICE analysis worked well in her first meeting with two mentees, even though she had known both for a while. It ‘… provided the opportunity to get a more in-depth view of what their personal views, needs and concerns are …’.

The following example provides a useful template for a NICE analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Focus</th>
<th>Immediate Term</th>
<th>Medium Term</th>
<th>Long Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are my career development needs in the ...?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are my interests and personal attributes that could support my career development in the ...?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What competences and strengths do I bring into the workspace immediately and which will best serve my career in the medium and long term?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are my career development expectations in the ...?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are my expectations of mentoring in the ...?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As suggested with the personal mission statement, these discussions could similarly form part of the induction discussions between the mentor and mentee over a period of approximately two to three months.

**Conduct a ‘first’ meeting**

In the C.A.P.E. mentors’ support programme, participants were encouraged to conduct a ‘first’ meeting with the mentees assigned to them. Though many of them had already started work with mentees, the intention of this meeting was to identify areas of development and explore ways to best respond to these needs. It also served to clarify the mentoring interaction.

> The objectives of this first meeting, as shared by Deidre, were to: ‘... establish and discuss expectations; establish what the needs are; set clear boundaries; define roles and responsibilities of both parties; set clear, realistic and achievable goals – these goals were defined for a period of three months, for review as they went along ...’.

As part of ‘... a process of orientation and introduction ...’ Gabbi included ‘... an orientation workshop ... to give participants ...’ in the mentoring programme ‘... a broad overview of where the mentorship’s position in the project is ...’. In further planning to respond to mentees’ needs, Gabbi and another mentor undertook site visits, to assess ‘... what each teacher and site required from the mentorship programme ...’. At this time, they also discussed the expectations of mentees and the capacity of the mentors and organisation to meet these. Regular meetings were then convened at the start of each school term to reflect on progress, emerging needs and approaches to addressing them.

Ben’s first interaction with his 15 mentees in CapeNature was a one-on-one meeting, which he used to collect ‘... background information ...’ from all mentees. These meetings were held in the office space of the mentees, which also provided him with an ‘... opportunity to observe the office arrangements ... in order to get a sense of [the] organisation and functional planning ...’. Following his own introduction to the mentees, which included both personal and professional aspects, he explored various aspects with the mentees, including academic qualifications, career history, involvement in stewardship, challenges encountered, their future in stewardship, mentoring needs and expectations, interests and general concerns.

These introductory processes need not be one or the other. A combination of appropriate methods could be a useful framework for induction and orientation of a mentee into the workspace.
8.2 Developing an appropriate mentoring approach

One is unlikely to find a tried-and-tested mentoring approach that works in one context as well as in another. Organisations differ in their make-up, culture and consequent interactions; job functions vary and require different ways of engagement and different approaches to addressing developmental needs; and, possibly the most challenging, is the difference in personalities that engage in mentoring interactions. To accommodate this level of diversity in mentoring, it is useful to define the mentoring approach in relation to the organisation, the job function and the personalities involved. Section 6 provides some useful forms of mentoring – from one-on-one mentoring to group, peer and network mentoring – that might be useful to define the approach used.

It is useful to consider the following aspects in defining the approach to mentoring:

- The mandate of the organisation;
- The policy and practice, either formal or informal, of mentoring in the organisation;
- The work practices in the organisation, as well as more broadly in the field – it is also useful to consider future developments in considering work practices;
- The placement of the mentee – for example, where in the organisation he/she is placed, in which programme, unit and job function, and the diverse group of staff with who they are likely to interact;
- The availability of mentors inside and outside the programme, unit and/or organisation, considering that all required expertise might not necessarily be available in the actual programme, unit and/or organisation, such as in the Flower Valley and CapeNature case;
- The background and experience of both the mentor and mentee and others in the programme, unit and/or organisation; and
- The needs, interests and attributes, competence, strengths and expectations of the mentee and, in some cases, the mentor as well.

Amongst others, these might be useful considerations to guide mentoring that best suits the organisation, the programme/unit, the job function and the various personalities in the workspace.

In defining the mentoring approach, we encourage you to think beyond traditional approaches of one-on-one mentoring. You might consider a programme that brings mentees across the organisation into a network to share their learning, challenges and opportunities. You might also offer support to the mentors through a network forum to explore more effective ways of mentoring. In this way, we can create the space to explore new and innovative ways of supporting the development of individuals through mentoring.

8.3 Developing a task and agreeing on outputs and time frames

Some mentoring interactions could be abstract, if the mentoring focuses purely on the individual development of the mentee and not on the broader organisational objectives. Mentees could then very well develop theoretically, rather than through grounded experience. Informal research also reflects that many mentees are left to their own devices and to find their own way, or are given menial tasks that bear little or no relevance to their career aspirations. A task commonly cited is photocopying and making the early morning coffee. This does little to grow professionals for our organisations and the sector.
All mentees in the C.A.P.E. Capacity Development Programme reflect the significance of real work and making a contribution to the organisation’s work. In this programme, a task-based approach was encouraged to enable the development of the mentee. The task-based approach provides the mentee with small, manageable, measurable and time-bound growth opportunities through specific tasks. This supports them in making a real contribution to the work of the organisation without being completely swamped by the enormity of the job.

Mentors are encouraged to design tasks that specifically respond to the development needs of the mentees. This task then also provides a streamlined framework for assessing the development of the mentee at interim periods during the full mentoring period.

At Flower Valley, one of Neo’s first tasks was to support the organisation of an Open Day. She was tasked with developing an invitation to key stakeholders. This might be considered a small task but was in fact a sizeable challenge to get her into the swing of contributing to the overall organisation of the event. It also helped her to get to know the various stakeholders that are aligned to and support the work of the organisation.

Lesley developed the rotational programme for Neo fearing her limited exposure, particularly to the media in Bredasdorp. During her one-month rotation stint at the C.A.P.E. Co-ordinating Unit, her task was to support hosting a media event. Neo’s specific task in this bigger assignment was to identify, liaise with and secure participation of key media individuals in the event. Her month with the Unit culminated in the hosting of the event, which she attended with other staff. This provided her with a discrete and measurable task that could be assessed with the culmination of the event.

Gaynor had a keen interest in teaching environmental education when school learners visited the centre. She developed a lesson plan for visiting learners to the garden. This was facilitated through her participation in the learnership. She taught this lesson in the garden and was able to assess its usefulness in the field.

Sabelo developed a training programme for community leaders through the environmental education course in which he participated. Roy and Sabelo both agreed that it would be a useful focus for the Harmony Flats Conservation Site. As part of the course requirements, Sabelo implemented the training programme with a small group of community leaders, and was therefore able to assess its usefulness and value in the work context.

Zishaam would accompany field researchers into the field. On return, he would debrief with Melodie and develop IT processes to support data collection, processing and management, and making the findings accessible to others. So he responded to specific tasks as they were required.

Gabbi recognised her mentee’s need for support in planning learning interventions. Gabbi worked with her to do planning for the term. The mentee was then tasked with translating this term plan into weekly plans.
Ben’s broader task for Hermien was to design a strategy for approaching, negotiating and convincing the owner of a farm to set aside a portion of his farm for conservation. This broader task was broken up into sizeable chunks. The first task, for example, focused on planning for an initial meeting with the landowner.

Some questions to guide the development of appropriate tasks include:

- What are the developmental needs of the mentee?
- What are the interests, existing competences and strengths of the mentee?
- What are the job requirements of the mentee?
- What measurable task can best respond to the mentee’s development needs and also respond to the job and organisational requirements?
- How would this task respond to the development needs as well as the organisational and job requirements?
- What competences does the mentee already have to support him/her in this task?
- What can be added to comfortably stretch the mentee beyond his/her comfort zone?
- What knowledge and skills could be developed through the task? This can include knowledge and skills related to the field, the organisation as a whole, the unit/programme/directorate, the job function and the individual’s career.

Tasks assigned to mentees should have specific outcomes that provide the basis for assessing their development. Outcomes of the tasks need to be clearly defined and communicated to the mentees, as this provides them with a roadmap to complete the tasks. It might be useful to define, with the mentee, clear actions to complete the tasks. Clear documentation of the tasks might also be useful for mentees, as a reference as they go along.

Outcomes of the tasks should be clearly articulated and should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound.

8.4 Supporting the development of tasks

Ideally, the task assigned to the mentee is one that provides him/her with the opportunity to grow. Most mentees say they valued this space to explore new and innovative ways of doing things, but also valued the ‘safety net’ provided by their mentor. This ‘safety net’ was provided by mentors in various ways, such as:

- Regular planning meetings and follow-up reflective meetings at interim periods to assess progress, advise and guide;

  Most mentors and mentees reflect the value of meetings between mentors and mentees at regular intervals.

  For some, these meetings were ad hoc and when required, such as in the case of Roy and Sabelo, who see each other each day and had no structured interactions. Sabelo says he ‘... would drop by when I needed to ...’. Gaynor’s interactions with colleagues were also in part unstructured, where she ‘... was able to go to anyone for help ...’.
For others, meetings were more structured, as in the case of Jeff and Charl’s weekly meetings. This was then restructured as Charl provided Jeff with more space to grow individually. Melodie and Zishaam also held regular meeting related to Zishaam’s tasks at hand. Neo had monthly meetings with her network of mentors.

- Supporting participation in training and short courses that address development needs;

In the case of Gaynor, Sabelo and the stewardship staff of CapeNature, their development was supported through participation in professional development programmes. You might also identify a developmental need of a more specific nature – such as presentation skills or report writing, amongst others – and support mentees in their participation in a related skills development programme.

Ben provided training in Extension Theory for the mentors with who he worked, to support the work they do in stewardship extension.

- Meeting with others in professional networks to inform the task at hand;

Many mentees were encouraged to participate in conferences related to the work and tasks they were doing. For example, Neo participated in various meetings together with Lesley. Other examples include participation in the stewardship peer learning forums, the monthly meetings convened in the boland area of CapeNature and the regular interactions amongst urban conservators in the City of Cape Town.

- Guidance towards useful information resources that might inform the work being done.

An example is the reading list regarding land use planning that Charl gave Jeff. Another example is reflected in Roy and Sabelo’s case, where Roy would refer Sabelo to key people who could help him in exploring the field of community conservation.

These are just some of the ways in which mentees can be supported through work-related tasks.

8.5 Assessing development towards the outputs

It is critical to assess the development of mentees through specific tasks and to provide them with regular, clear, constructive and timely feedback. The specific outcomes defined for a task could provide a framework for assessing the mentees’ progress and appropriate completion of an assigned task.

Assessment need not necessarily be done only at the end of a task (summative), but could also inform the development of the task (formative). The latter has the potential to significantly improve the quality of the end product and also instil greater confidence in the mentee in his/her ability.

Assessment can be done in various ways, such as verbal report-back in regular meetings, written reports, presentations, assessment of events, such as workshops, training, etc., and/or through observation.
Gabbi’s mentee developed weekly plans that she could review and assess relative to the quarterly plans in which Gabbi herself participated.

Ben assessed Hermien through a written report of her engagement with the landowner and through observation when accompanying her on the site visit to the landowner.

Sabelo was assessed in the course and based on the educational principles reflected in the programme, the practical aspects of running the programme, and his own reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

Feedback following the assessment is critical and should ideally be approached in a developmental way. Most psychologists suggest that individuals are more receptive to constructive critique if their efforts are acknowledged upfront. Most mentees with a commitment to learning are likely to put much effort into the task they are assigned. Since these individuals are on a journey of learning, they do have the luxury of doing things less effectively, and constructive critique can strengthen the individual both personally and professionally. As noted before, feedback should be regular and timely so as to aid the development of the mentee as well as make constructive inputs into the job being done.

**In summary**

Lesley says that the most significant thing for her, in participating in the mentors’ support programme, was the realisation that a one-size-fits-all approach is less effective when working with mentees. Given the difference in professional contexts, needs, personalities, etc., one must conclude that mentoring needs to be customised to the contexts and personalities involved.

This section provides only some strategies to help you in the work you do with mentees. You are encouraged to customise these to suit your own organisational needs, your individual needs and circumstances as a mentor, and the needs and personalities of the mentee with who you work.
Concluding remarks on mentoring

Mentoring is a tried-and-tested approach to supporting the development of individuals, practices and organisations. As time passes and our work practices evolve, it might be necessary to revisit our traditional practices and reorient these towards approaches more applicable to our present-day context. Nothing in this source book suggests throwing the baby out with the bathwater, but rather is meant to encourage you to draw on what you have, in terms of professional and mentoring experience, and to use these suggestions as lenses for reflection on and improvement of your mentoring practices.

As we conclude the discussion on mentoring, two aspects are worth reflecting on:

Institutionalising mentoring

Most mentors strongly support the institutionalisation of mentoring to recognise their effort in supporting the development of individuals, practices and, ultimately, the organisation. For many, this would mean an inclusion of mentoring as a key performance area in performance assessments. This issue has been debated at length in the mentors’ support programme, but remains unresolved.

The following key points might support you in taking this debate further:

- Most managers in organisations, whether in a junior, middle or senior management position, have at least one key performance area that focuses on the development of people. Mentoring individuals forms part of this and, as such, does not become an additional task to existing key performance areas.

- Supporting the growth and development of individuals ultimately strengthens practices that form a part of your own key performance areas as a supervisor, manager and/or mentor. It therefore makes good sense to support the development of individuals who contribute to your own management goals.

- Informal research across a sample of associated organisations has shown that mentoring is highly prominent and effective, whether these processes are formal or not. In fact, research shows that informal mentoring is more effective than formal processes, since both mentors and mentees reacted negatively when faced with the ‘requirement’ of mentoring or being mentored.
Participation in the mentoring support programme provided the impetus in three organisations for developing and setting up formal and structured mentoring programmes. Responses to these formal processes were not as positive in one of the organisations, and this seems to validate the point that mentoring is best left as an elective rather than prescriptive activity.

Developing a culture of learning

Mentoring has the potential to contribute to cultivating and developing a culture of learning in organisations. In the C.A.P.E. programme, as more and more mentors participated in the support programme (particularly in bigger groups from individual organisations), the scope of mentoring increased. Similarly, conversations about mentoring intensified. This is evident in the following examples:

- Nelson Mandela Bay Metro’s Environmental Management Branch developed a focus on mentoring for inclusion in their most recent operational plan.

- In the City of Cape Town, mentoring between senior management (as mentors) and middle managers (as mentees) led to middle managers replicating these interactions with junior staff.

- In CapeNature, as more and more managers participated in the mentoring support programme, a resolution was passed at an executive management level to develop and implement a structured mentoring programme with a dedicated co-ordinator.

- In many organisations and programmes, there is evidence of a steady flow of mentees on a year-to-year basis, and there is evidence of a groundswell of mentoring both in organisations and in the sector as a whole.

Mentoring continues to be a significant way of attracting, retaining, enabling and sustaining the growth of new entrants to the field of environment and conservation.