

### *Setting:*

During the annual LNVH Fall Symposium on December 11<sup>th</sup> 2013 at NIAS (Wassenaar), a panel of experts commented on the following topic: *mentoring & coaching*. Goal: a list of recommendation for quality improvement of mentoring programs. Following recommendations and outcomes are based on a lively discussion and on input from both the audience and the panel.

### *Panel:*

- Wouter Brok (Policy Advisor Human Resources, Radboud University Nijmegen)
- Monique Leyenaar (Professor of comparative politics at Radboud University Nijmegen)
- Makiko Sadakata (assistant professor at Musicology department, University of Amsterdam / Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behaviour, Radboud University Nijmegen / Cognitive Artificial Intelligence department, Radboud University Nijmegen.
- Lucette Teurlings (Policy Advisor Human Resources, Utrecht University)

### *Moderator:*

- Juditha Melssen (Coach and Consultant)

### *Short description of the mentoring program at:*

#### Utrecht University

With 18 percent of female professors, Utrecht University scores above the national average but this percentage is still too low, according to the Executive Board. This is why six years ago the University launched a pilot programme 'Mentoring and Coaching' to support early-career women on their way up to the top. The programme assigns male professors to mentor young female academics and provides the women with the opportunity to receive coaching. It is a two-sided learning process: female academic staff get targeted advice early on in their careers; male professors get a better understanding of the issues that female academics face, making them more aware of a culture that often favours men over women. In other words, the programme is a knife that cuts both ways. The pilot was evaluated as a success and as a result the programme has been rolled out to all faculties, in 2013 for the fifth time. More on mentoring and coaching within the UU: [A knife that cuts both ways. Utrecht University fosters the careers of women in academia.](#)

#### Radboud University Nijmegen

The Radboud University has been organizing a mentoring program for three years now. It's part of the charter 'talent to the top' which aims to increase the number of female scientists in the top and sub top of the university. Besides other activities (such as a quota for appointing female professors, supporting female networks, funds for replacing educational tasks for talented females) the mentoring program is aimed at young female scientists in their crucial phase of their career. The principle target is to support these women in strengthening or improving their position in the university by offering them knowledge and practices that help them in their career. It's a complete program which takes a year and has several individual and group components. Each mentee is individually matched to a mentor based on her personal themes, questions and goals. Mentors can thus be male or female. Also individual coaching is available. Group activities are intervision with other mentees and several workshops around strategic themes and competences such as visibility and networking. The strength of the program is in this combination of activities. All of the mentees see an substantial change in their knowledge and awareness of their career activities. Most of the mentees are able to improve

their position or in general can work more effective with their career. Mentors are also very positive about the program. They are very glad that they can share their knowledge but also gain knowledge about the young and new generation of female talents. Some of the mentors have also declared that this information has led to changes in their attitude towards leadership and guidance of young female talents. Mentors are offered thematic sessions to share this knowledge with each other and to evaluate the role of a mentor in this program.

### *Though-provoking questions raised by panel:*

1. Should mentoring be an obligation for all young scientist – men and women?
2. How can we use mentoring to change the organisational culture. To not just learn the rules of the game but to change the game.
3. Should mentoring only be for women who want to progress in their career? Or should we also involve men?
4. What is the optimal distance between a mentee and mentor? Should they for example have different scientific backgrounds or not?

### *Remarks made by the audience and panel:*

- Just knowing the rules of the (academic) game is maybe enough to succeed in your career as a (women) scientist, but it keeps the system in place. In order to change the old academic habits and existing culture, one should change the institution and the system. More diversity will lead to this system change.
- Involvement of the university board is key to achieve change in the whole organisation. Only then a cultural change can be reached.
- There is need for more (female) role models. Organisations/universities/media should pay more attention to the presence of women as keynote speakers at seminars etc.
- Science in general should be more open and welcoming to women. Women should not have to change or learn other (more manly) skills through mentoring. Women should not have to be the ones to change. The system and science should.
- Women should learn to be more visible. Learn to speak up and not be afraid to show their importance.
- Teaching is not recognized by the higher management and in science in general. Women often find teaching an important part of their job as a scientist. They put a lot of time and effort in it but do not get the same credit for it as article-publishing colleagues.
- A mentor is not the same as a role model. But could be one. Mentoring is: linking a unexperienced person to a more experienced person. A match between mentor and mentee is a good one, once the mentor is an expert on the topics the mentee wants to talk about. This means that there could be more mentors per person needed in order to get an answer to all questions.
- There are strong benefits of having a mentor early on in your scientific career: it help you immensely in your career development. It helps to set goals and to get grip on your career. For a mentor having a mentee contributes to staying in touch with the next generation of scientist. And it is of course an exchange of knowledge and experience that works both ways.
- Having a good mentoring program also helps in attracting talent and enhances cultural change.
- Mentoring programs should not be isolated programs.
- Mentees should get more help in better formulating the questions they have because it appears that they often do not know HOW to ask.

- Mentoring programs do not always consist of group meeting and individual coaching. Mentees feel that this should be the case. That the benefit the most from mixed (ages, scientific disciplines, men/women) group sessions and individual coaching.
- Matching mentor and mentee is sometimes difficult. Not all professors dispose naturally of all the skills needed to be a good mentor. This is also a learning process for them. One thing is key in being a mentor: awareness (of implicit bias for example). Experience is the second ingredient.

*Recommendations:*

- Make sure the mentoring groups are mixed. They are key to a successful mentoring program.
- Mentoring should be available during the whole academic career.
- Writing articles and tips and tricks for applying for (EU) grants should be part of the program.
- In mentoring a focus on where it goes well in the career of (young) scientist is sometimes missed. A focus on the strong points/skills of the mentees misses also. Why only try to develop the weaker qualities?
- Make sure that mentoring does not become a safety net for where it goes wrong in your institution.
- A strong plea for female and male mentors and female and men mentees. To enhance cultural change, one should include all parties in the process of change.
- Everyone should take action themselves. Do not wait for the mentoring program to help you, but look for your own way and make the mentoring programs as flexible as possible for scientists to go their own way.
- Group meetings are the perfect place for problems to be discussed. Make more time available in mentoring programs for '*intervisie*'.
- Also include mentors in the mentoring program from outside the university.
- Make it possible for mentees to have several mentors and not just one.
- Train people to ask the right questions during their mentoring sessions.
- Design mentoring programs in a way that the focus not only lies on 'filling the gaps' and improving underdeveloped skills, but focus more on the strong points of a mentee, address their qualities. Sometimes make it even more playful.