FEMINIST MENTORING *for feminist futures* THE PRACTICE

crea

2

crea

www.creaworld.org

EMAIL crea@creaworld.org
FACEBOOK creaworld.org
INSTAGRAM @think.crea
TWITTER @ThinkCREA

FEMINIST MENTORING *for feminist futures*

PART 2
THE PRACTICE

by Tejinder Singh Bhogal
and Srilatha Batliwala

Contents

5

KEY STEPS
in feminist
mentoring

As with any complex capacity-building process, starting the feminist mentoring journey with a road map is very useful, and that is what this chapter attempts to lay out. This chapter addresses some of the key steps that need to be taken at,

a. the preparatory stage and in the first mentoring sessions, and

b. as the process gets underway, to build an environment that ensures rapport is developed and power is equalized between Mentor and Mentee.

The chapter also explains how the Mentor segues from asking "pure enquiry"[1] questions to a stage where she can ask tough confrontative questions, as well as use a range of hypotheses and frameworks to help the Mentee think more deeply as she deals with both the challenges and opportunities in her journey of growth and change.

Setting Up the Process

In order to initiate a process of feminist mentoring, there are certain first steps that need to be taken to establish a strong foundation. The guidelines below assume that a group of Mentees have already been selected/self-selected to be mentored, and a small group of feminist Mentors, confirmed.[2] Some key steps to launch the mentoring process are outlined below.

---

1   One of the early phases in the mentoring process. This concept is further explained later in this chapter.

2   Consult Chapter 8 to understand how the mentoring system can be set up.

1. Start with a Basic Workshop:[3]

Both the Mentee and the Mentor must undergo some orientation and stage-setting for the mentoring process to work effectively. For the Mentee, this could mean attending a workshop where she meets her Mentors and better understands the process; what mentoring can and cannot do, what the process will feel like and the boundaries it will operate in (ethical, physical, time).

The goals of the workshop are:

- For Mentors and Mentees to meet and get acquainted: the workshop becomes a place for getting to know each other, however briefly, and creating a degree of comfort for both, for the ensuing process;

- To allow both to focus on their emotional state (see exercise suggested below);

- Explore their current understanding (including misconceptions) about mentoring;

- For both to acquire a better understanding of the reality of mentoring, especially feminist mentoring and what to expect;

- Indicate how the process of feminist mentoring has the potential to first transform individuals, and through them, transform families, organizations and the larger society;

- Recognize what each — Mentor and Mentee — must bring to the process to make it work; and

- Develop a set of guidelines around meeting schedules, logistics, etc.

This workshop could be a half or full day, with the Mentors playing the role of facilitators. The following is a suggested structure for such a workshop, assuming a group of trained Mentors are in place and a group of Mentees have been selected/joined in to embark on the mentoring journey:

- **Welcome and introductions:** brief one-minute introductions including name, location (where she is from), occupation and one sentence about what she hopes for from the mentoring process. *(30 minutes)*

---

3   This workshop assumes that the Mentors have already been trained in feminist mentoring through a workshop (see Chapter 6).

- **An ice-breaker exercise:** with participants talking in small groups about their experiences with different emotions. For instance, participants could talk about a recent experience when they felt joyful, angry, sad, jealous or proud. The exercise could be completed by asking them to talk about their "favourite" emotion. This way the participants (Mentees) are prompted to think about their emotional state, something very critical from the mentoring perspective. *(30 minutes – one hour)*

- **Exploring ideas about mentoring:** ask participants what they think mentoring is. This can be followed by the facilitator (one of the Mentors) talking about what she thinks mentoring is and what participants can expect from the process. *(one – two hours)*

- **Introducing the basic principles, values and methodology of feminist mentoring:** explain in simple, accessible language, what Mentors can and cannot do and what investment is required from the Mentees. *(one – two hours)*

- **Structuring the mentoring process:** conclude by planning the location and schedule of the mentoring sessions and any other logistical details. *(as much time as required)*

If an introductory workshop is not held, it might make sense for the one-on-one process to start with a discussion of the above parameters. Here, the Mentor can ask the Mentee to express her hopes and expectations from the process, clear misconceptions and explain the objectives, methodology, tentative time-frame and schedule of the process. This helps ensure that the Mentee is reasonably clear about what she is committing to before starting the actual mentoring process.

2. The First Mentoring Session:

In the first session, the Mentor could ask the Mentee to introduce herself and talk a bit more about her background, leaving it to the Mentee to decide what she would like to talk about. Once the Mentee has introduced herself, the Mentor could ask the Mentee what she would like to know about the Mentor, and share a little bit about herself. She could then ask the Mentee what she would like to talk about in this session. While most of the time, Mentees would start talking about one or another issue, there can also be situations where the Mentee is not yet ready to open up — she does not feel comfortable about the mentoring process as yet. In this scenario,

the Mentor needs to accept the Mentee's hesitation or discomfort, and not press her to talk about issues that she is not comfortable with. Instead, she could encourage the Mentee to ask any further questions or concerns she has about the process and respond to these. It is quite possible in this case that the Mentee may choose to talk about her issues in subsequent sessions. What needs to be remembered is that the choice to talk about issues lies with the Mentee, and she should not feel pressured by the Mentor to open up before she is ready. Mentors also need to be assured that the Mentee will open up when she is ready; the time spent making her feel comfortable is not "wasted" mentoring time.

Overall, the first session, or sessions, may proceed at a slow pace, since the Mentee is likely to take time to open up to the Mentor. What is more, rapport building between the Mentor and Mentee is not always a linear process: in some cases rapport builds up almost immediately, in others, given the complexity of the psycho-social dynamics between the two, it might take two to three (or even more) sessions before rapport begins to develop.

The often unconscious pressure to "perform" on both Mentor and Mentee adds to the psycho-social dynamics. The Mentee may feel, for instance, that she has to say something that seems important enough for the Mentor to engage with, while the Mentor may feel the need to give a wise or useful response to the Mentee. It is pressures such as these that can result in awkwardness in the first session and a delay in developing rapport. This highlights the importance of letting the sessions develop slowly, so that the Mentor gets to know the Mentee, and the Mentee gets a feel for both the Mentor and the mentoring process.

3. Create a Container for Personal Reflective Space (PRS) and DRS (Dyadic Reflective Space):

The chapter on the theoretical bases of feminist mentoring introduced the concepts of Personal Reflective Space (PRS) and Dyadic Reflective Space (DRS). We saw that the transition to a Personal Reflective Space takes place after some kind of trigger or preparatory exercise. PRS is created by three things: (a) by setting a mood for reflection, (b) by listening quietly and attentively, and (c) by conveying genuine interest in what the person is saying.

When the mentoring process starts, it might be helpful for the Mentor and Mentee to engage in a five-minute meditation exercise: i.e., they both close their eyes, sit in a comfortable pose and focus on their own breathing and/or what is happening to different parts of their body. When the alarm rings [at the end of five minutes], the two can open their eyes and start the process. This can be done even if the session is online or on the phone.

Thereafter, the Mentor invites the Mentee to share her thoughts, feelings or concerns, and listens attentively to what the Mentee has to say. There are times the Mentor has to speak, ask questions and clarify, but there is an important rule of thumb to keep in mind here: apart from some exceptional circumstances, **the Mentor should not take more than ten percent of the session's talk time**.

Sometimes, the Mentor poses a question and the Mentee does not respond right away — she needs time to think about the Mentor's question. It is essential that the Mentor keeps quiet during this reflective process and avoids expressing impatience either overtly or subtly. For, when the Mentee goes quiet, it is often because she has entered into the Personal Reflective Space.

4. Build Rapport and Equalize Power

Building rapport implies creating a situation where the Mentee is comfortable sharing her thoughts, feelings and concerns with the Mentor. The process of building rapport starts from the workshop itself and remains an on-going project during the mentoring. In case there is no introductory workshop, the process needs to begin at the mentoring session itself. With or without an introductory workshop, the process is essentially the same.

This rapport can come about in different ways. One way, especially when there has been no introductory workshop, is to ask the person to introduce herself and pay great interest to what she has to say. At other times, the rapport may come about when the Mentor talks about her life and reveals more of herself to the Mentee. Rapport does not build through a single session or workshop, but is gradual and incremental. It is possible that rapport is contingent on the confidence the Mentee acquires both in the competency of the Mentor, and the growing conviction that what she shares with the Mentor is kept confidential, as well as the growing realization

that the Mentor is actually there for her and wants to help her. Once these milestones are passed, rapport will generally increase with each mentoring session. **The critical thing is for the Mentor to be aware that the degree of rapport and the quality of the relationship built between Mentor and Mentee is what determines the success of the mentoring.**

Again, in the context of feminist mentoring, a critical part of the rapport-building process is equalizing power, gradually but consistently. This means that the Mentee has to learn and grow into seeing the Mentor as her equal. While recognizing that the Mentor has a different role, the Mentee has to avoid equating it to that of a teacher, guru, matriarch or supervisor.

Since equalizing power depends on a shift in the Mentee's attitude, it does mean that this may not happen overnight or without a very intentional process initiated by the Mentor. If the Mentor makes no effort to help the Mentee shift her attitude towards achieving power equality, it will not come about. Here are some simple ways that Mentors can equalize power:

• Suggest that the Mentee address you by your first name rather than madam, aunty, sister or "didi" *(honorific for elder sister in many South Asian languages),* and analyze how the Mentor and Mentee feel when this happens;

• Encourage the Mentee to ask questions about yourself and then answer honestly and transparently;

• Be authentic about your emotions (while retaining the sensitivity of not dumping your emotions or reactions on to the Mentee or making her feel responsible for these — e.g. "What you said now has made me feel very sad");

• At every session, spend time asking how the Mentee has been since you last met or spoke and spend a couple of minutes sharing your own emotional location: "How are each of us feeling today," "What is happening to us at present that is important in our lives," etc.; and

• Engage in self-reflection work (outside the mentoring space) about your own situation in relation to the Mentee's: for example, your own experiences of the situations, dilemmas or anxieties the Mentee has shared.

A quicker way to achieve at least partial power equalization is to encourage the group

of Mentees to ask difficult questions during a group mentoring session. Thus, in one of the group mentoring sessions in SAYWLM (South Asia Young Women's Leadership and Mentoring), the Mentees asked questions such as the following:

- What is the biggest challenge you have faced till now (in this mentoring project) and how did you tackle it?

- What difference do you find between young and senior feminists?

- What, in your opinion, are the opportunities and challenges for young feminists?

- Were there moments when you felt very good about being involved in this project?

The Mentors found these questions interesting as they needed to reflect on these quite a bit. They felt their roles had been flipped and there was a clear sense of power being equalized.

A step towards power equalization could be seen in the example where a Mentor reported that the Mentees had started asking questions such as: "How are you doing?" "How are you feeling?" "How's your work life?" The Mentor pointed out that these questions showcased a sense of empathy for the Mentor which she felt was impressive and indicated a significant shift as Mentees no longer saw them in a position of authority.

5. Close the Session

One positive innovation can profitably be incorporated into all mentoring sessions, viz., ending the session by asking the Mentee to summarize her key take-aways. These could be in the form of insights, questions that the Mentee needs to answer for herself or actions she plans to take before the next session. Care needs to be taken that the summarizing activity is not perceived as an order, test, or monitoring tool, but more as a way of taking stock of where the Mentee is.

Phases and Stages of the Mentor-Mentee Relationship

To begin mentoring, the Mentor needs to navigate a process of building a relationship in which power is not vested with the Mentor. The development of this relationship can be divided into three distinct phases: a phase of **pure inquiry**, a phase of **exploratory diagnostic inquiry** and a phase of **confrontative inquiry**. It is sometime during the first two stages that the relationship may reach a critical point: that of power equalization. From here onwards, the Mentee does not in any way feel inferior to the Mentor.

In the **pure inquiry phase,** the Mentee controls both the process and the content of the conversation. In this, the Mentee speaks unfettered, at her own pace and about anything she wants to talk about. The Mentor interrupts only to ask clarificatory questions: what happened, describe the situation, tell me more, etc.; or to summarize her understanding of what the Mentee has said, for example, "Is this what happened/ what you're saying, if I've understood you correctly."

In the **exploratory diagnostic inquiry phase**, the Mentor begins to nudge the Mentee to move from mere sharing towards analyzing her experiences and emotions. She starts asking questions that causes the Mentee to become more reflective. This phase usually happens after the Mentee has already spoken (to her satisfaction) about the situation and problem she is facing. In this phase, though, the Mentor only asks questions about what she has already talked about. The Mentor may,

- Explore emotional responses ("How did you and/or others feel or react to the situation?" "Why do you think you/they reacted that way?");

- Offer hypotheses for actions and events that took place ("Is it possible you reacted to your supervisor that way because you are resentful/jealous of her?");

- Summarize the past, present and future result of actions taken or contemplated by the Mentee. For example, the Mentor may ask: "What do you think will happen as a result of your actions?" (e.g., what do you think is likely to happen after you shouted at your colleague yesterday?); or "What will happen if you decide to actually implement what you are thinking?" (e.g., what will happen if you decide to send in your resignation tomorrow?).

Finally, in the **confrontative inquiry phase**, the Mentor shares her own ideas and reactions about the process and content of the Mentee's narrative that has emerged over the various sessions. She deliberately chooses to focus on issues that have not been brought up by the Mentee! This forces the Mentee to think from an alternative perspective. Here the Mentor can share reactions related to the process ("Could you have done the following in the encounter or discussion with your supervisor?") or the content ("Have you considered the possibility that your reaction was due to envy towards your supervisor?"). Alternatively, the Mentor can bring up contradictions noted in what the Mentee has discussed, (e.g., "Since you are expecting your supervisor to be sensitive to you, are you yourself showing sensitivity towards your supervisor?").

Needless to say, this is the toughest phase, as the Mentee can get upset with the Mentor for not being empathetic and for challenging her. However, if the Mentor is able to frame the questions in a spirit of exploration, they have the potential to help the Mentee generate deeper insights about herself and her context — and thus, deepen and accelerate her growth.

As the SAYWLM experience showed, asking sharp questions was counterproductive as the Mentees perceived the Mentors to be angry with them.

Nonetheless, the Mentor has to be very careful before starting confrontative inquiry: the Mentor needs to be sure that her relationship with the Mentee is truly equal and that the Mentee considers the Mentor a trusted partner in this exploration. Thus, the Mentor should only enter this phase after the two of them have reached a stage of power equalization and acceptance of the other, in which the Mentee is sure that the questions are not being raised with the intent of putting her down or to show the Mentor's superiority or power.

Using Hypotheses and "if-then" Statements

A key aspect of the mentoring process is the use of **hypotheses**. The hypotheses are generated using theories of organizational, social and personal change. It is up to the Mentee to accept these hypotheses and then use them to reflect on what she needs to change in herself: her perspectives, attitudes, assumptions, actions or world view. Of course, she may also choose not to accept the hypotheses. If this happens, it is important that the Mentor does not become argumentative or angry about the

rejection. Rather, the Mentor should clarify that this is how it appears to her and that she could be wrong; but also reiterate that the Mentee could, whenever she has the time and space, revisit a particular hypothesis and reflect on whether it perhaps does apply to her.

"If-then" statements can often enable Mentors and Mentees to generate hypotheses. Examples of such statements include: "**If** you were to ask your parents to explain why they are angry with you, what do you think will happen **then**?" "**If** you were to challenge men to behave more sensitively with their partners, what do you think will happen **then**?" "**If** you were to stop blaming yourself for your sister's problems, what do you think will happen **then**?" Answering each of these questions can help generate multiple hypotheses, which can then be explored further.

The ability of the Mentor-Mentee relationship to be helpful to the Mentee stems from the quality of hypotheses generated about the Mentee, the organization or movement the Mentee is involved in and the society or community in which the Mentee is based. The hypotheses refer to a set of connected reasons that can explain how a situation came about, and in feminist mentoring, these need to be framed using a feminist lens — for instance, the hypotheses would recognize the role of patriarchy in the challenges the Mentee is facing. This hypothesis generation can be done by either the Mentor or the Mentee, and it helps if there is more than one hypothesis to explain a situation.

The hypothesis is a possibility that is presented in the form of a question — "Do you think this could be the cause?" It is for the Mentee to consider, reflect about and then accept or reject. It is **never** presented as a definitive statement: "I think this happened because..." There are two related risks with presenting hypotheses as definitive statements: it reduces the agency of the Mentee; and locates the Mentor in the role of the expert or teacher, which goes completely against the grain of feminist mentoring and disrupts the power equalization that has been achieved.

There would be times when the Mentor is convinced that a hypothesis is the right answer, but the Mentee is either not convinced or does not want to consider it deeply enough. The Mentor may get a sense that this is because it is too close to the truth and therefore very uncomfortable. If so, the Mentor can make one of two choices: to let it be (to not push the matter any further as the Mentee wants to avoid it) or to point out that the Mentee is possibly avoiding considering the hypothesis because it

is close to the truth. There is a risk with the latter that the Mentee may get put off by the Mentor's pushiness, but at times the Mentor's pushiness may help the Mentee go deeper in analyzing her responses.

On the other hand, if the Mentor does not push, it does not necessarily mean that the point is lost. Once the hypothesis has been stated it usually enters the Mentee's mind, even if the Mentee is ostensibly not doing anything about it. There are many occasions when the Mentor's hypothesis "clicks" for the Mentee much later — sometimes after many months.

In short, making a decision as to whether to reiterate hypotheses with a particular Mentee is something of an art; this is something that a Mentor will become a better judge of over time.

Using Multiple Frameworks

Even as we emphasize the importance of power equality, it is important that the Mentor try to be as useful as she can for the Mentee. Being useful has many connotations: being able to listen well; being able to create conditions that allow the Mentee to reflect; creating conditions which give the Mentee the opportunity and space to be vulnerable, and talk about what she is truly bothered about; and finally, helping the Mentee resolve real life problems. While the first three aspects of being useful are mostly a matter of attitude, the last is more a result of the Mentor's knowledge of various frameworks that relate to feminist social change work.

This kind of knowledge is essential in feminist mentoring because it allows the Mentor to understand the challenges Mentees are facing and posit hypotheses that enable the Mentee to think more systemically. For instance, the framework of patriarchy can help the Mentor understand why the Mentee is not leaving her husband despite being subjected to violence daily. Frameworks of organizational dynamics and behavior may help her understand the reason why the Mentee's supervisor does not listen to the Mentee. The framework of power may help to understand what is stopping the individual from accessing her inner power, or causing her to use the power in a dysfunctional fashion. Socio-cultural frameworks might help her understand the Mentee's difficulty in getting communities to accept that child marriage should not take place. The motivational framework of Abraham Maslow might help the Mentee understand why she does not like to study written texts.

There are multiple other frameworks on community organizing, movements and movement building, the psychology of individuals and the dynamics of groups. The more frameworks the Mentor is familiar with, the greater the possibility of being able to find out the possible reason for a particular problem and the ways of solving it.

Of course, no Mentor can possibly know every possible framework that might help the Mentee, but a willingness to read and acquire more knowledge is an essential responsibility of a feminist Mentor. Another way that the Mentor may increase her mentoring capacities is to undergo training in counseling or specific coaching approaches, or by learning some form of therapy. Learning any of these techniques will simultaneously deepen an understanding of herself, as well as provide her with other tools that she could usefully apply in one or the other mentoring session.

The case below provides an example of how a SAYWLM Mentor used a framework:

CASE EXAMPLE: Using a framework of Organizational Culture to understand a Mentee's challenge

O sounded alert and energized as she picked up my call. She had specifically asked if we could have the call over the weekend. "I am home today. I wanted to have a frank conversation with you," she said. I figured this was because O has been having a hard time fitting into her workplace and this position as a young woman leader (YWL). She has been struggling to find direction and support from the organization, and this has been a difficult path for her to navigate.

It also frustrated me, watching her trying to figure this out. O is new in this area, fresh out of university, passionate and wanting to change the world! I find her open to new ideas, full of zeal to learn more, vocal about her feminist values — all the intentions which would benefit the movement; and yet this feminist organization was letting her down, day in and day out.

"I got offered a new job. I have decided to take it. I don't know if I will be able to explain to the organization why I want to leave, but I wanted to explain to you how it has all been," O said. I could tell that she has been waiting to have

this conversation so I let her continue. There wasn't a lot for me to say, this wasn't even a surprise really. I have been able to tell for the last few months that O was feeling stuck and unable to do much in her workplace. Every time we had spoken, she had sounded lost, wondering where and how to look for the way forward from her supervisors.

We have had quite a few sessions discussing these issues. We had even tried to come up with different ways to navigate the situations. It seemed like a large part of the hurdle was her not being able to figure out how and when activities could be scheduled. She was also struggling with knowing when to negotiate time to focus specifically on the different projects she was part of. Sometimes I shared tips on project planning, organizing schedules, time management and how to propose plans that would help her supervisors understand the vision she had and the way she wanted to go ahead with her Community Young Women Leaders (CYWLs).[4] But nothing really seemed to get things moving: decisions kept on being reverted back or new directions were proposed by her supervisors. It also seemed that a concrete way forward was missing, and no one was providing her the guidance on how to take things forward. She also felt side-lined over and over again and sensed that her project was not made a priority.

We spent almost 1.5 hours this day, with her mostly talking, and sometimes me asking her for some additional clarifications. She had felt lost in this organization, everyone knew the process already, and she felt like she could not get it right. Since the organization was structured horizontally, the decision making process involved multiple people. This meant that for every decision or plan that the YWL (Young Women Leader) wanted to make, she had to present it to a number of people, and different opinions/suggestions came in all the time. Given that she was new to this process, she kept on trying to change her plans to fit into this, and everything just got delayed over and over again. Since this was supposed to be her project, no one else played a role in guiding her, which only left her more lost. It eventually made sense:

---

4   The young activists in the community that the SAYWLM Young Women Leaders trained and mentored.

this horizontal structure that this organization had designed, aligned with its feminist values, was actually the reason that a new, young recruit could not find her footing and take the lead on a project in this workspace.

All these months, we had been trying to understand the YWL's experience, and I had been focusing on her skills and abilities in trying to plan and negotiate her space in the organization. What I had failed to recognize was that there was a gap in the way the organization itself was functioning. What I needed to do earlier was probably analyze the issues she was facing from a wider, organizational level point of view.

Having said this, however, it is important to assert that while knowledge of frameworks can enhance the quality of mentoring interventions, it is not a prerequisite for effective mentoring. The Mentor needs to be aware that irrespective of her overall knowledge base, she will be helpful to the Mentee provided she ensures the following basics:

- The Mentor has created a "container"[5] in which the Mentee can be herself and talk openly, candidly about the issues and dilemmas she is facing. This space is an open space for the Mentee to both articulate her thoughts and vent her emotions.[6]

- The Mentor has helped create a space where the Mentee can reflect on what is happening to her, what her responses have been, what are the options open to her and what she could do.

- This is a space for the Mentee to understand her context in depth. Many times the reason that Mentees find themselves in a dilemma is because they have stopped thinking deeply about the context they are situated in — they are thinking about things from a limited perspective without understanding where others are located.

5   There are two meanings of the term container. One is that it "contains": i.e., prevents spillage outside. In the case of feminist mentoring, the fact that things are not going to spill outside and impact other relationships so the Mentee can fully vent whatever emotions she is feeling. The other sense of containment is that whatever is troubling the Mentee will get "contained": i.e. not expand so much that the Mentee is unable to handle it in her life elsewhere. This implies efforts to understand and resolve the issue within the mentoring space.

6   The space is important even when there is no such dilemma, for this is where the Mentor and Mentee create a bond and learn to be with each other. Not all sessions are about problem solving — some can just be about talking, listening, reinterpreting, or about what is exciting the Mentee about the new challenge she is facing.

CASE EXAMPLE: Mentoring without a recognized framework

T is in her late twenties and has a six year old daughter. She is divorced because she had decided not to stay in an abusive relationship. She wasn't ready to get married again but at the same time did want the sense of being loved, appreciated and taken care of by a partner. However, the social expectation is that a woman, especially a village woman, should not want these things if she is not married.

After a few months of sessions where I would ask, "What else is up? Are you okay?" she began opening up to me about her struggles. When she first started talking to me about this relationship which was "illicit" according to society, she was in the first stage of her relationship. They had just started getting to know each other. T said it always broke her heart when her young daughter B constantly came home from school or the playfield crying. B would tell her mother, "they say, you are a bad, bad woman. Be good. Otherwise I don't want to be your daughter."

In every call I had with T I could see how this was breaking her spirit. Still she fought back and tried to figure out how not to hurt her daughter but at the same time be happy. She started hiding her relationship from her daughter and lying. We talked about her struggle. I don't think I was consciously following any theoretical framework when I was listening to her. I was just there for her, so that she could vent, calm down and feel heard and not judged. But I was also asking the questions that she was trying to answer by herself.

And then one day it happened. She said her daughter finally met her boyfriend and they broke the ice. Her daughter now talks a lot to her boyfriend and T is happy.

The above is an example of how a Mentor was able to support a Mentee without access to any larger frameworks. The case indicates how a Mentor can actually help a Mentee resolve a problem just by being empathetic, available and non-judgmental. The actual solution was identified by the Mentee — in this case by finally introducing her boyfriend to her daughter.

Setting and Keeping Boundaries:

Feminist mentoring, like any other process has certain boundaries that need to be set up and respected. Some of the boundaries are obvious enough.

- A private, secure space: The one-on-one mentoring session must take place in a reasonably private space (online or offline) where the two can talk without being disturbed or overheard. The Mentee needs the security of this boundary if she is to open up.

- The second boundary is of time. It is always preferable to define the beginning and end of the mentoring period. This is helpful to both the Mentor and the Mentee. Of course, it is always possible to extend the time period, but this needs to be negotiated by both either before or during the session and not taken for granted.

- The third boundary is the questions that the Mentor will ask. The Mentors should not ask questions about what the Mentee is not talking about or does not want to talk about. For instance, the Mentor cannot ask questions about the Mentee's past experience of trauma, if the Mentee has not already introduced the topic and clearly indicated she wants to talk about it. Mentors cannot ask questions to satisfy their curiosity; questions are asked only to help the Mentee achieve clarity on the topic the Mentee wants to talk about. If at any point of time the Mentor is confused about whether it is okay or not to ask a question, it always helps to check with the Mentee whether she is okay with the particular question.

CASE EXAMPLE: Mentor's guilt or Mentee's need?

At the first SAYWLM training in July 2017, one of the YWLs got drunk, lost control of herself and had to be managed by her peers. It was the first time she had drunk alcohol. The next day she wanted to talk to one of the Mentors about it. But the Mentor was distracted by some other events that had occurred at the training and wasn't really present during the conversation. Returning from the training program, the Mentor felt guilty that she had let the young woman down, even though the mentoring had not even officially started then. The Mentor wanted to call her and apologize and let her know that she would now like to talk about it. The program coordinator had to tell the Mentor to reconsider, to separate what

she was feeling about that interaction and not assume that the YWL was stuck in that moment and needed help. As it happened the Mentor was supposed to schedule a call with that particular young woman in the following month, and so she did talk to the YWL about it — but only after checking to see if the young woman still wanted to talk about it.

- The fourth boundary is about self-disclosure by the Mentor. Self-disclosure by Mentors should primarily be to help the Mentee understand options, and not because the Mentor wants to unload her experiences/life lessons on the Mentee. The mentoring session is for the Mentee, not the Mentor, and this point should always be kept in mind. Whether it be giving advice or sharing one's experience, it is appropriate for the Mentor to use self-disclosure in the spirit of putting forth a hypothesis or alternative — something for the Mentee to consider, but not otherwise. In no case should the Mentor feel affronted if the Mentee ignores the advice and does not respond to the Mentor's experience sharing. In both cases, the advice and experience sharing has to be put forth as an option, something that the Mentee might consider or also reject. The cases below show how sharing one's experiences can be very beneficial, if done in the right spirit.

CASE EXAMPLE: Appropriate sharing of Mentor's experience

S is an indigenous girl. Her mother married a non-indigenous person, but ended up coming back to her indigenous community as she couldn't bear her husband's beatings anymore. These kinds of marriages are a big taboo in the indigenous society as the non -indigenous people are always seen as the oppressors. S is the product of this so called "mixed" marriage, and is in her twenties. All her life she has been taunted, bullied and left out. She started working with a women's rights organization where the organization's Executive Director and S share a similar kind of history.

S started working on [the issue of] marriage registration. Given that indigenous people follow oral traditions, it is not easy to build a movement in the community demanding something [like marriage be recorded]

on paper. Also, given that indigenous people are subjected to extremist nationalism, militarization, eviction from their lands, rape and, communal attacks — marriage registration is not a subject they are particularly interested in. They do not think that marriage registration is something that could help the community. And most importantly, since S is a product of a mixed marriage, they do not trust her.

I shared my personal story and the struggle I had in my life, and it seemed to help. She started talking to her community's YWLs, traditional leaders and others. She started knocking on every single door, and the work is ongoing. Some of the community members have now come on board. Although some still doubt her, they now attend every meeting S calls for.

- The fifth boundary is knowing when the Mentor cannot help, and when the person may require professional help, therapy or psychiatric support. This is usually when there are issues such as a mental illness — severe depression, suicidal thoughts, uncontrolled rages, hallucinations, etc. In this case it is important for the Mentor to play the role of a "Doctor" (i.e., in the mentoring sense) and convince the individual to start seeing a mental health professional. Here is an example of such a situation:

CASE EXAMPLE: Recognizing the limits of a Mentor's capacity to help

One Mentee said that she feels worthless, and despite all her achievements, has found no meaning to life and existence. She has even visited a mental health facility and is seeking psychiatric help, but has occasional suicidal thoughts. I never realized the trauma that each of these young women are facing. Although they do share some part of this during the mentoring sessions, I felt it was just the tip of the iceberg. What do we do as Mentors in such situations, since we are not (professional) counselors or therapists? All we can do is talk of our lived experience, try to give them strength and make sure they are getting the required professional help.

The kind of situations that the Mentor is advised *not* to attempt to handle is where the Mentee clearly has serious problems that require the expertise of trained therapists and psychiatrists. These include the following: addiction and substance use disorder, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, anxiety disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), serious eating disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and postpartum depression.

Similarly, there may be situations where the Mentee is clearly facing serious violence or harassment that require legal or other interventions. She is being beaten, or threatened, forced into a marriage against her wishes, or her property rights are being infringed. In such scenarios, too, the Mentor needs to help the Mentee access the professional assistance or services that she needs.
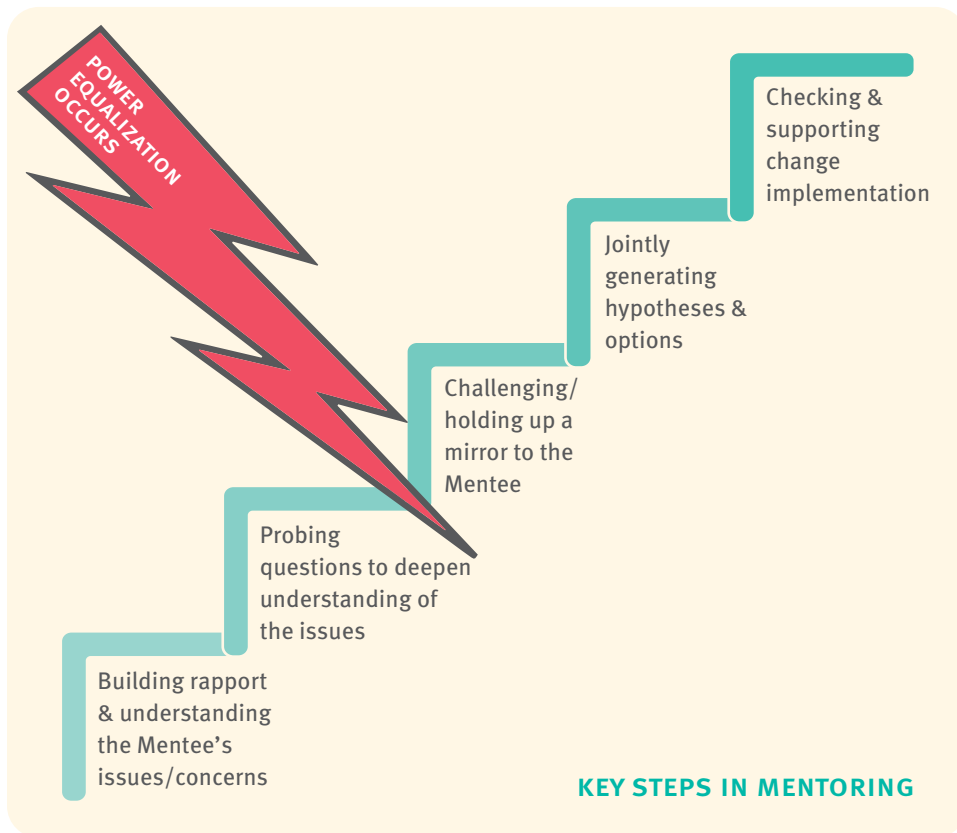
Key Stages of the Mentoring Process:

It may be useful to conclude this chapter by summarizing the six key stages, or steps, of the mentoring process, and highlight the one important turning point that has to occur in order to move to the next stage:

- Step 1: Building rapport and understanding possible issues affecting the Mentee

- Step 2: Once trust has been built, going deeper into these issues by asking probing questions

Critical Stage: Power Equalization has taken place

- Step 3: Confronting the individual with inconsistencies

- Step 4: Jointly generating hypotheses to understand the issue more deeply and self-critically

- Step 5: Helping the Mentee generate options to deal with the issue in real life

- Step 6: Checking in with the Mentee on how the implementation of such options is advancing and moving on to explore a fresh area of growth and change

This graphic represents the steps like an ascending stairway:

POWER EQUALIZATION OCCURS

Checking &
supporting
change
implementation

Jointly
generating
hypotheses &
options

Challenging/
holding up a
mirror to the
Mentee

Probing
questions to deepen
understanding of
the issues

Building rapport
& understanding
the Mentee's
issues/concerns

KEY STEPS IN MENTORING

In the next chapter, we will examine some of the important "dos" and "donts" of feminist mentoring — for both Mentors and Mentees — during the different stages of the mentoring process and interactions shown in the above diagram. These will help avoid some of the most common mistakes or omissions that affect the quality and impact of the process for both Mentors and Mentees.

6

DO'S AND DON'TS
in feminist mentoring

Feminist mentoring, like any other practice, has some essentials which need to be performed, as well as some boundaries that should not be crossed. These essentials and boundaries apply to both Mentors and Mentees in order for the feminist mentoring process to be successful.

As we go through the steps and stages mentioned in the previous chapter (Chapter 5), there are several important **do's and don'ts** that are essential to bear in mind; which can either enable or hamper the building of the Mentor-Mentee relationship, the achievement of power equalization and the impact of the mentoring process overall. The do's and don'ts need to be looked at from the perspective of both the Mentor and the Mentee. They are as follows:

The Mentor's Do's

- Begin every mentoring session by recapping in your mind, however briefly, the purpose of feminist mentoring: to empower the Mentee with greater clarity, strength and resources to tackle whatever issues she is dealing with.

- Explore ways of equalizing the relationship. You can begin by encouraging the Mentee to call you by name to reduce hierarchy.

- Possibly start a session with a five-minute meditation exercise; after which, start by asking how the Mentee has generally been since the last session.

- Till you reach the first stage of mentoring, ask questions to understand or clarify whatever issue the Mentee has brought to the conversation.

- Help create a Personal Reflective Space (PRS) by setting a mood for reflection, listening quietly and attentively, and conveying genuine interest in what the person is saying. Help maintain such a space by not becoming impatient when the Mentee is quiet and thinking about the issue.

- Help the Mentee explore her situation, feelings and thinking by asking some basic questions. For example:
  - What happened? Who else was involved in the situation? What do you think was happening to them? Why were they there? What was the impact of the process on them?
  - What are the reasons why such-and-such happened?
  - Could there be another reason for what happened?
  - What were your feelings around what occurred? What was your thinking around it?
  - How are you thinking of dealing with the situation?
  - What would happen in the short and long term, if you were to apply one of these options?

- Listen empathetically and understand not only what the Mentee is saying, but also what she is *feeling* and what her underlying beliefs are.

- Articulate and reflect back, periodically, what you have understood about the Mentee's thoughts and feelings.

- Once you are confident that power equalization has taken place and rapport has been strongly built, challenge the Mentee when she is either contradicting herself or externalizing the issue (i.e., blaming others without considering her role in it, or blaming others without understanding what could lie behind their actions/responses). This has to be done carefully and sensitively, without making the Mentee feel foolish. Point out how all of us, including yourself, can become very limited in our thinking when faced with a difficult problem or situation.

- When a Mentee is externalizing (blaming others), remember to distinguish between emotions and perspective. Her perspective may be limited or even wrong, but the emotions are real. It is vital to fully empathize with the emotions even as you challenge the perspective.

- Wherever appropriate, situate the issues the Mentee is dealing with, within a broader social transformation perspective; the patriarchal structures which the transformation process needs to recognize, the conflict that arises when we try to make a change, the forms of power available for this transformation, and so forth.

- Possibly end the session by asking the Mentee to summarize key takeaways: insights, questions to think about or tasks the Mentee has decided to perform.

- Recognize what you are thinking and feeling about the person you are mentoring (this allows you to put these aside, with full awareness, and still give the person the best while mentoring). Be aware of what the Mentee's actions, perspectives or feelings are doing to you emotionally and intellectually. Check if you are internally making a judgment, recognize it and let it flow inside you till it disappears. (If necessary, ask for a pause during the session to help you do this).

- Answer questions about yourself honestly and transparently. Be authentic

about your emotions and in your responses, while retaining the sensitivity not to dump your emotions on the Mentee or make her feel guilty for the emotions she may have triggered in you.

- Be present, in the real sense of the term; if you feel that you are distracted (e.g., you have guests coming over or feel ill) reschedule your session.

- Over time, try to create a balance in the mentoring process between a focus on personal issues and the Mentee's role as a feminist activist, and the larger feminist transformation process that you both are a part of.

- Always record what has happened in each session: issues identified, insights generated, confusions persisting, the nature of your interactions with the Mentee, the questions asked and follow-up steps planned. If you recorded the interaction, go through it after and identify what you may have missed, what you may have done differently, reflect on opportunities missed or missteps you may have taken. Reflect on the patterns you tend to adopt as a Mentor. If you have someone supporting you during this process, do share your dilemmas and insights and ask for feedback. All this will help you conduct the next session more effectively.

- Distinguish general problems from dilemmas. Dilemmas can be seen as a specific kind of problem in which the feminist activist/leader struggles to decide between different options. What is important in many of these cases is to understand the various value layers of the dilemma and the political implications of the choices that lie before her — this kind of unpacking and deeper level analysis will help the Mentee make a considered choice. But perhaps most important of all, the Mentor needs to help the Mentee deal and live with ambiguity, with the possibility that her chosen path may lead to fresh challenges, because in a feminist social change context, there are no foolproof strategies or perfect solutions!

- Expand your understanding of different concepts, frameworks and tools in the time available between sessions, as explained in Chapter 5. But for a feminist Mentor, the most important cross-cutting framework that has to be at the core of her repertoire is about POWER: the forms of power

and the uses and abuses of different forms of power. As Chapter 4 on mentoring concepts showed, a Mentee can effectively recognize and use Power To, Power Within and Power With. She must also recognize the uses and abuses of Power Over in building a feminist organization and society, as well as in recognizing the dangers of Power Under, especially within herself.

- The other frameworks that the Mentor needs to be aware of is the role of conflict in social change. According to Social Conflict Theory,[1] more powerful groups in society tend to use their power in order to retain it and exploit groups with less power. Consequently, conflict is an engine of change, since it produces contradictions which are sometimes resolved, creating new conflicts and contradictions in an ongoing dialectic. While the original Marxist theory had class conflict in mind, it is also highly applicable to feminist change processes, where a whole range of intersecting power structures — patriarchy, class, caste, racism, heteronormativity, ableism and ecological destruction — are challenged. This understanding is very critical for Mentors to be able to ask the right questions, and guide and support activist Mentees dealing with resistance, backlash and even violence that their activism unleashes. It is not that the feminist Mentor will have answers or solutions, but that she can accompany the Mentee more effectively in locating strategies for her own safety as well as protecting the community or movement where she is located when such conflict arises.

- The Mentor may also invest in understanding Foucault's explanation of the importance of resistance to deal with the strategies of power.[2] The points of resistance are the subjective knowledge of the poor, the dispossessed and all those who are disqualified by specialist knowledge regimes. Building, strengthening and amplifying the counter discourses of feminism are thus some of the critical ways in which power is resisted.

---

1   Lewis A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, Free Press, (1964); and Randall Collins, Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science, New York: Academic Press, (1975).

2   Michel Foucault's thinking explained in: Bert Adams and R. A. Sydie, Sociological Theory, Vistaar Publications, (2002), 588.

The Mentor's Don'ts

- Avoid problem-focused mentoring. Mentoring, as we emphasized earlier, is not just about solving problems. It is a space for the Mentee to talk about herself and be with herself and thoughts; her problems, successes and rhythms of daily life. The Mentor plays a critical role in developing this space by being available for the Mentee in whatever way the Mentee would like to use the space. This means that Mentors should not become problem-focused (constantly asking, "So what's the problem that you would like to discuss today?"), so that the Mentee does not feel that she has to bring up some or other problem for the Mentor to solve in every session.

  Mentors would better succeed by asking the Mentee, "What is it that you would like to talk about today?" And if the Mentee says, "I don't know, you tell me," then the Mentor could respond with something like, "Well we could talk about anything you like: a problem you're facing, the successes you have achieved, a relationship you are really happy about, any thoughts or reflections you have about your daily work or daily life, how you are feeling today — actually anything that you might want to share." If the Mentee does not talk about a problem or a success, but about something entirely different (an interpersonal dynamic between two colleagues, some news she has heard that day or an outing she is planning), the Mentor should not think her time is being wasted. Rather, she should view this as another way of getting to know the Mentee better and building a closer relationship.

- The Mentor should draw a clear boundary around the relationship. Apart from the mentoring sessions — one-to-one, group, in person, on-line or at times a formal visit to the Mentee's organization — it is strongly advised that Mentors should avoid meeting the Mentee in other spaces, in other informal contexts.

- Never expect or ask that the Mentee provide some service to you, even as simple as making a purchase on your behalf from the market, fetching your bag or making you a cup of tea. Such requests will disrupt power

equalization and set up an unequal relationship, regardless of your intentions.

- Through your body language or tone of voice never convey the feeling, directly or indirectly, that you are doing the Mentee a favor by giving your time. For instance, avoid mentioning how busy you are or how much you have to do after the session!

- Do not speak too much! Remember this is the Mentee's space, not yours. Ideally, you should not speak for more than ten percent of the total session time.

- Never rush the Mentee. Some Mentees need time to open up. If you are feeling impatient, work through your emotion by yourself. Learn to accept periods of silence as part of the process, especially after you have offered a hypothesis that requires critical self-reflection on the Mentee's part.

- Do not judge the person. Be conscious of your own biases and ensure you are not allowing these to color your view of the Mentee.

- Avoid forming a "union" with the person or become their partner/mother/sister in whatever struggle they are in. A feminist Mentor may struggle with this many times. She may strongly identify with and support the cause or the struggle of the Mentee, whether personal or political, and feel that as a feminist she must engage with it beyond the mentoring role. At this point, it may be necessary for the Mentor to decide what would be of greater value to the Mentee and to the larger feminist change process: becoming directly involved in the personal struggle/change actions of the Mentee, or continuing as her Mentor and strengthening the Mentee's capacity to deal with those challenges. Even a feminist Mentor cannot play both roles at the same time.

- Do not allow the Mentee to become dependent on you. Even a feminist Mentor must avoid the temptation of becoming a mother or big sister to the Mentee because that causes dependency, and weakens rather than empowers the person. Remember that if dependency is created, even with

the best of intentions, there can be no power equalization!

- Do not present your insights as certainties. Rather, present them as possibilities or hypotheses to be considered.

- Avoid scheduling more than three mentoring sessions on a given day, unless extraordinary/emergency circumstances demand a fourth unplanned session. Too many sessions might lead to and reveal emotional fatigue and impact both you and the mentoring process.

- Do not break boundaries or allow others to do so. There are at least five boundaries that the Mentor must ensure and maintain:
  - A safe undisturbed space for mentoring;
  - Time: how much time is allotted to the session and a start and end time. This can of course be re-negotiated through mutual agreement;
  - Questions that cannot be asked (e.g. probing or curiosity questions around issues that the Mentee has not introduced herself, but the Mentor would like to know about);
  - Self-disclosure by the Mentor: restrict self-disclosure to contexts in which it will help the Mentee, and not because the Mentor wants to impress or push the Mentee in a particular direction; and
  - Support in serious situations/crises for which the Mentor is not trained (e.g. psychiatric support, post-traumatic stress, etc.). Help the Mentee find the right resources and expertise in such situations.

The Mentee's Do's

- Clarify in your mind the purpose of the sessions that you are attending.

- Reflect on how you are perceiving the Mentor. If you are placing the Mentor on a pedestal, reflect on the reasons behind this. Think about what needs to be done in order for you to begin perceiving the person as an equal.

- If you feel afraid of the Mentor, or angry with her, reflect on why this is so. If it seems to you that some of your boundaries are being transgressed confront the Mentor with your observations and/or fears. (Boundaries could be that of confidentiality, expectations of being respected or of demands made by the Mentor from you that are unacceptable to you).

- End each session noting (to yourself) the insights you had about the issues you are grappling with, what decisions or plans you have made, how you will implement them and the questions you need to explore further.

- If during the session you sense that the Mentor seems upset or distracted, check if she is in a position to handle the session. In such situations, you can take on the role of a Mentor and ask questions such as: "How are you? You seem worried/upset/distracted. Would you like to talk about what's happening with you?"

- If she responds and tells you something about herself, listen non-judgmentally, and briefly summarize what you have understood of what she is saying and what she seems to be feeling.

- Before beginning each session, recall what happened during the previous session and what has happened with you (personally or in your work) since the last session.

- Before every mentoring session, spend some time centering yourself, if possible, so that you are in a calmer, more reflective state of mind.

The Mentee's Don'ts

- Never ask or expect a Mentor to help you financially or in some practical issue (helping to find a job or writing a reference letter) while part of the mentoring process.

- Don't have expectations of building a personal relationship with the Mentor outside of the mentoring sessions.

- Avoid inviting the Mentor to your personal spaces or accepting invitations to enter the Mentor's personal space, outside of the mentoring session. While this may seem harmless, it can alter the equation in subtle ways that can negatively affect the mentoring process. The Mentor may, for instance, unconsciously start judging your personal behavior because she now thinks she is your friend/mother/sister and has the right to cross that boundary!

- Do not "multitask" during the mentoring session, such as sending messages, checking email, etc. If you are not focused during the mentoring process, you are not going to get much out of it.

- Don't assume that the Mentor is there to solve your problems or give you answers. Her role is exactly the opposite: to develop *your* capacities to solve *your* problems, build your insights and ideas and develop your clarity as a feminist and as an activist.

- If on some occasion, the Mentor expresses inability to handle a session, do not insist on having it. The Mentor needs to be centered and available in order to be effective and useful for you. If there is something happening in her life that is affecting her availability, be understanding and accommodating. In situations where the Mentor insists she is fine, but your intuition tells you otherwise, trust your instincts and postpone the sessions.

- Do not allow others to interrupt or disturb the mentoring session when it is in progress. This is particularly relevant when you are connecting with

your Mentor by phone or through the internet from home or office, when other family members/children/colleagues may create distractions.

- In a situation where you feel the Mentor is transgressing/crossing your boundaries in a way that makes you uncomfortable, confront them about what you are feeling. If the Mentor does not change her behavior despite this, you should not continue with the mentoring relationship, and it is your right to terminate it.

★ ★ ★ ★

In a perfect world, feminist mentoring relationships would develop organically, respectfully and mindfully, without the need for any rules and boundaries. In reality, though, this rarely happens because each of us brings our own subjective expectations, habits and mindsets to the process.

Our goal in this guide is not to erase that individuality, but to provide some important guidelines that can help each individual navigate the process in a way that maximizes benefits for both Mentee and Mentor. Therefore, especially in the early stages of practicing feminist mentoring, it may be useful to keep a copy of this chapter close at hand as a touchstone, whenever you are in doubt about what to do or not to do, and to gauge where to go next.

7

APPROACHES FOR DEALING WITH *common barriers*

The mentoring process is one in which both Mentors and Mentees grow. The growth for Mentors comes in the form of learning how to support the growth of others, engaging with different scenarios and challenges and learning to use different techniques and frameworks at different times. Depending on individual interests, the Mentor may pick up and use various coaching or counseling techniques. The growth of Mentees, however, is not always a smooth path. They deal with a range of problems and barriers — some internal, and some generated by the contexts in which they live and work — that trip them up and impede their growth. This chapter suggests a number of techniques that feminist Mentors can use to help their Mentees overcome these barriers:[1]

1. Promoting Self Awareness

Self-awareness is knowing what is happening to oneself — what one is feeling, thinking and doing. A significant part of the capacity for growth and change comes from self-awareness. Recognizing one's feelings is critical for then it is possible to ask the question, "Why is it that you are feeling the way you are?" Exploring this question, in turn, allows the Mentee to understand her underlying beliefs or assumptions that have led to the feeling and how these feelings are holding her back. For instance, if the Mentee recognizes that she is feeling jealous or angry with a colleague of hers, she would be able to articulate what is taking place within the organization that

1   The techniques listed here have been taken from (though adapted for our needs), Percy Zeus and Suzanne Skiffington, The Coaching at Work Toolkit: A Complete Guide to Techniques and Practices, Sydney: McGraw-Hill Companies, (2002).

is leading to her reaction; perhaps the supervisor praised her colleague and said nothing about the Mentee's work. The Mentee's underlying belief in this situation could be that her colleague does not work as hard as she does. Once she realizes this, she may be able to examine, more objectively, whether this is genuinely the case or not. In a feminist mentoring context, self-awareness is critical in order for a Mentee to recognize that despite her professed feminist ideals, she may in practice, be giving more weight to what male colleagues say or do in an organizational or social context, as opposed to women in a similar situation. Let us look at some more examples from different settings on how self-awareness can help, or has helped Mentees grow into more effective leaders of social transformation at different levels.

A young, highly educated person, with no prior work experience joined a feminist organization. Excited to learn new things, she volunteered for multiple tasks. However, even though her boss was happy with her enthusiasm and initiative, she was surprised that many of her colleagues decreased their collaboration with her. Reflecting on what was happening she thought that her colleagues were jealous of her doing things so well, and she felt superior and annoyed with them, because she could not imagine being jealous about anyone or anything. It took a session with a Mentor for her to recall how she too had been intensely jealous in a situation when she was in college and had not got what she desired, while a classmate did. This awareness that she too harbored such feelings allowed her to be more accepting of her colleagues, as well as rethink how she could approach future work in the organization.

A community level organizer working in a feminist organization was worried that some of the rations that her organization was providing during the COVID-19 pandemic were not reaching the appropriate people. Despite her worry she kept postponing addressing this with her supervisor. During a discussion with her Mentor it emerged that she was avoiding this conversation because she didn't want her supervisor to think that she was favoring particular people in the community. The heart of the matter was that she was afraid of anybody in authority thinking poorly about her, and sometimes procrastinated important actions. What she required was to be aware of how her fear of authority was

inhibiting her: only such awareness could lead her to question the cause and consequences of this unreasonable fear and change her behavior.

Another community level organizer working in a feminist organization wanted her Mentor's advice on a financial matter. When the Mentor clarified that that is not her role, the Mentee talked about how her nephew had taken a big loan from her with the promise of returning it within a week, but had not done so even after two months. The Mentee talked about how she had taken care of her nephew ever since he had come to the city for his school education. He had stayed with her all through his education, which she had financed. After he graduated, she had helped him find a place to live in and even helped him get a job. But after this, he had started taking his aunt [the Mentee] for granted. He had casually turned down her request for a small loan from him and then misrepresented the transaction by telling his parents that his aunt was dependent on him. Although this had annoyed the aunt, when he subsequently asked for a loan, she had promptly agreed. Through the mentoring process, the Mentee realized that her nephew wanted to project the masculine fantasy that he was taking care of his aunt and her family, rather than the other way around. And she, even though often proclaimed that for her there is no difference between boys and girls, had given in to the lure of pleasing a son-like figure. She had only daughters and no sons and the nephew staying with her would be seen by everyone in society as a "quasi-son" — something the nephew also used to his benefit. Becoming aware of how her needs had got defined for her in this patriarchal structure, she decided to change her stance in dealing with her nephew.

A young woman activist, reflecting on the way she interacted with her team of community-based young leaders, recognized that she had been focusing on the more articulate and confident ones who helped organize meetings and interacted more openly. In this process, she realized that she was ignoring the less "leader-like" women and not supporting their growth. Having become self-aware of this bias, she decided that in subsequent meetings she would

specifically call upon the quiet ones, and ask them to lead discussions and voice their opinions.

A leader of a feminist organization may use self-awareness to understand the kind of dismissive language or behavior she is using with some of her colleagues and the kind of impact she is having on them. For instance, the leader may be cutting off a particular colleague every time she speaks, because she has made up her mind that this colleague has a "problematic personality" (apparently because this colleague points out the deficiencies in certain organizational approaches or programs). This behavior, in turn, can make the colleague angrier and more critical of what is happening in the organization, re-affirming the leader's original belief that her colleague has a "problematic personality."[2]

There are two parts to developing self-awareness about feelings: the first is recognizing them and second is owning the responsibility of having that feeling. In other words, not placing the entire blame on someone else for your feelings.[3] One way to help the individual develop a capacity to recognize her feelings and underlying beliefs is to ask her to keep a journal. In that journal she could note down, every day, one or two strong feelings (pleasant or unpleasant) she experienced, and then reflect with honesty on the reasons behind them.

Becoming self-aware about one's behavior is relatively more difficult. However, one way to increase greater self-awareness is to seek feedback from key trusted people in one's life, as well as from the Mentor.

---

2   This socio-psychological phenomenon is recognized as the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in which the actions of person A with respect to person B, driven by the beliefs of person A with respect to B, end up by transforming the behavior of B, in line with the beliefs of person A. This process has been recognized in classrooms where teachers who expect some children to be intelligent, actually become intelligent, and those they expect are slow, become slow. For more information, see Michae Biggs, Prophecy, Self-Fulfilling/Self-Defeating, Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences, (2013) and Derek Schaedig, "Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and The Pygmalion Effect," Simply Psychology, August 24, 2020.

3   This seems like a cruel thing to do particularly if the Mentee has truly been treated badly. The point here is that by owning the feeling you begin to recognize that the feeling is not arising from your psyche, but from the belief you have internalized. Obviously, in some cases, the belief could be perfectly legitimate: when the Mentee has been at the receiving end of violence or abuse or otherwise treated badly. However, unless the Mentee recognizes and articulates this belief and tells her oppressor so, she will not be able to make her oppressor recognize their role in causing the Mentee pain.

2. Working with Self Limiting Beliefs

Mentees, like all of us, struggle with a range of beliefs that stop them from taking action even when it is possible to do so. For instance, the Mentee may believe that it is not possible for her to speak up or to stand up for her rights, because she is too weak to be heard, or no one will listen to her. Some other debilitating beliefs could be:

- One of the YWLs in the SAWYLM project drank alcohol for the first time in her life and lost control. As a result, she felt such immense shame ("I can't show my face in the office") that she had thoughts of leaving the project. We can surmise that her shame came from a belief in what kind of behavior makes for "good" women and "bad" women.[4]

- During an organizational visit (as part of the SAYWLM project), the Mentee told the Mentor that the community-based young women she worked with felt that "They are not good enough [to become leaders], because they have not received formal education." As a consequence of this self-belief, the CYWLs tended not to speak or share their views.[5]

- "I am the only one who can take care of my children, and this is a big load on me." In this example, the person may either be ignoring other potential sources of child care support in her environment or not getting help; either because she doesn't want to surrender control or doesn't believe anyone else can provide the same quality of care.

- "I am always unlucky," "I am very untidy," "Nobody will love me because I am not good looking." These are examples of overgeneralization, another form of self-limiting belief.

- "I succeeded in getting this job because I was lucky." This is an example of minimization: in this case, minimizing her own capacities and putting herself down.

---

4   The Mentor worked with her to explore the shame she felt, to help her explore the categories of "good and bad women" — of women who stepped outside the strict boundary of what is defined as good women in society. The Mentee was then able to locate her reaction of shame in the larger social context of how women learn to carry shame.

5   As this seemed to be a problem with an entire group of people, the Mentor chose a workshop approach. She conducted an exercise in which the CYWLs recognized their diverse forms of knowledge and the potential within each of them.

- "If I fail this driving test, I will not be able to learn driving at all," "If I don't get this promotion, I will have to leave this organization," "My attempt will never work out." This is an example of "all or nothing" thinking which is self-limiting.

- "When I go back home there is nothing but drudgery." This is invariably the reality for many women, but in many cases, it is also possible that the speaker is not recognizing her right to claim leisure and pleasure time for herself or the times when she has done so. By only focusing on the negatives, or unquestioningly accepting the circumstances that create them, she pulls herself down more than she needs to.

- An organizational leader may believe that she cannot understand people who are working in the field — as she herself has no work experience in the field. This belief prevents her from spending time in the field and interacting with those who are working there in their own context. Consequently, her understanding of the field situation and its staff remains limited to interacting with them during staff meetings. She has great difficulty in recognizing the real challenges the field-based staff face, and is unable to understand if the reasons for delayed reports are due to genuine reasons or because the field staff are trying to "fool the boss."

If we look through a feminist lens, we can find multiple examples (apart from the above) of self-limiting beliefs women and girls are socialized into. The idea, for instance, that she must manage the housework and the children because men cannot be asked to do so, or cannot be trusted to learn and take care of these responsibilities effectively; that she should not spend even her own hard-earned money on herself; or that she must not argue her point with older or more "senior" people in her organization. When we are trying to build women's leadership capacity, the self-limiting beliefs that get in the way are usually about their limited education, knowledge, experience or skills of various kinds. For those in formal leadership roles, these beliefs are often the unexamined biases or stereotypes they carry about their colleagues.

Mentees can be helped to deal with these self-limiting beliefs by following these steps:

- **Recognize and highlight the self-limiting belief** when it surfaces during the mentoring session.

- **Then ask the Mentee a series of questions** that help her see how that belief is

stopping her from exploring or pushing for other solutions. The starting question in all of the above scenarios could be something like the following:

- **In case of overgeneralization:**
    - "Are you always unlucky? Is there no occasion when you have been lucky? Or can you remember something really positive that you experienced in the last few months?" And use the example to identify some good fortune that came her way. For example, she mentions a movie she really enjoyed and the Mentor says, "So you are lucky enough to be able to go see a good movie once in a while."
    - In a feminist context: "Do you think no man ever learn to cook properly, take care of the children and the house?"
    - In the context of a young activist, who believes she can never be a leader, "What about that action you told me about, that you suggested and that worked so well?" "What about the time you helped those two family members resolve their differences?" The Mentor could also ask the Mentee to verbalize her unspoken assumptions about leadership qualities and critically examine these together.
    - In the context of a community mobilizer who believes she can never question her supervisor on any decision, "Will your supervisor necessarily consider you a troublemaker?" "Do you think your supervisor does not have the wisdom or the maturity to look at the issue from another angle?" "Do you think your supervisor distrusts you so much that whatever you say she will be suspicious of that?" "Do you believe your supervisor will certainly not recognize the quality of your question and its value to the project?"
    - In the context of a leader of a feminist organization, when she bemoans that nobody else, apart from her has the capacity to talk to the donors or to the government successfully: "Can nobody ever can? Is there no situation in which they will be heard successfully by a particular donor or government department?"

- **In the case of not recognizing other resources or support:**
    - "Is there no way that another person in your household can also take care of the child? What about the men in your household? Has no one ever shown

affection or concern for your children or for the load you are carrying?"

- "Can your child not be taken care of even once by persons X or Y? Have they never done it before?"

- If the Mentee says that others have taken care of the child, but it was not up to her standards, the Mentor can ask: "How bad was it? Was the child injured or starving? Had the care-giver done nothing for the child?"

- Or the Mentee could say "What would X or Y say if you asked the question 'how did you take care of the child today?' What do you think would be their answer?" These questions frequently help the Mentee realize that others were actually doing things for the child that she had never thought about!

- **In the example of the all or nothing thinking,** the Mentor could ask "If you fail this driving test, will you fail all future driving tests too?" or "Does not getting this promotion mean you will never get another one? What can you do to improve your chances of getting it?"

- **In case of too much focus on negatives,** the Mentee could ask "Can you not remember a single occasion when you managed to do something fun or relaxing? Watched a movie? Or an exciting serial on TV? Or visited a good friend?"

- **In the case of a young woman activist who is paralyzed by fear of someone who is sexually harassing her in the organization,** "Is there no one else in the organization who will listen to you? Is there nothing she can do in the organization which will not involve dealing with this person? Can she find an alternative technical support in the organization or in the network of Mentees which will obviate the need to work with this person?"

The Mentor can stop at this point and let the individual reflect on the nature of her belief. The Mentor has an option here to take the process one step deeper. This can be done by asking the Mentee to evaluate the advantages of this belief, "How is this belief helping you move to a better place, practically or emotionally?" This can be followed by, "In what way is this belief a disadvantage for others?" For instance, one of the advantages of saying that only "I" can take care of the child might be that it lets her play the victim and martyr role (more than she needs to), but prevents

anyone else from bonding with her child. In this case, the disadvantage for the child is the lack of trusting relationships with anyone but the mother; for others, it denies them the opportunity to participate in the emotionally rewarding process of child care. This kind of probing by the Mentor allows the Mentee to see the situation from other angles and other people's perspectives.

In a similar way, if the Mentee is the leader of an organization and holds the belief that no other staff member can replace her in her ability to convince donors and the government, the Mentor could ask the Mentee to evaluate, "In what way is this belief of yours a disadvantage to others in the organization and to yourself?" This may help the Mentee understand how her belief is discouraging people and convince her to try and learn about other methods of working with donors and the government. She may realize that even as she has her unique strengths (e.g. a postgraduate degree from an elite university and work experience at international organizations), others could be using their field experience and insights to convince donors and the government in a different fashion. She may also realize that her evaluation of others from her own standpoint (e.g. use of English or the use of the latest jargon) is an inappropriate benchmark. What matters is their ability to develop rapport with donors, through whatever method works best for them, which might be very different from what she has used till now. When she evaluates others using her own benchmarks, she invariably conveys her lack of confidence in them, which leads to creating self-doubt in others, and actually prevents them from accessing their own unique resources to develop such rapport.

There is one more technique that can help change self-limiting beliefs: the **"ABCDEF"** model for changing beliefs. This can happen either when the Mentee has voiced a self-limiting belief or is affected by a particular event which has either happened or is likely to happen. The steps to be followed in this case are:

- **A (Activating event or situation):** The first step is to understand the event that is causing anxiety to the Mentee.

  - For instance, the Mentee works as a community mobilizer and has to leave home early the next day to attend a training program. She is worried about who will take care of her child.

  - A young woman leader or activist who is also a single mother [Mentee], is just starting a new relationship. Her daughter is taunted by her classmates

and she tells her mother that she is a bad woman. This is the activating event which creates her anxiety.

- For a Mentee who is an organizational leader, the activating event may be that she is unwell, cannot attend an important meeting with a donor and has to send a subordinate, whom she does not trust to do this job effectively.

- **B (self-limiting Belief):** Ask what the underlying belief is that is leading to anxiety about this event.

  - In the case of the community leader, the belief could be, "There is no one at home who is capable of taking care of my child properly."

  - For the young woman activist, the belief could be that she has forever lost the love of her daughter as she was too absorbed in her own needs.

  - In the case of the organizational leader, it could be, "My colleague does not have my skills or background to effectively handle the meeting with the donor."

- **C (Consequences of this belief):** Here the Mentee is asked to spell out the emotional and behavioral consequences of her belief.

  - For the community mobilizer, the answer could be that emotionally this is causing her anxiety, and behaviorally she is also not willing to explore other possibilities and resources that may exist in her household to handle this challenge.

  - For the young woman activist, the consequence of the belief could be depression, crying and actively considering breaking off her budding relationship — which could further increase her depression and sense of being deprived of love and intimacy. The consequence could also be a resentment towards her daughter for preventing her from fulfilling her own needs.

  - For the leader Mentee, the consequence would be firstly her fear that the meeting would be disastrous and anger at being saddled with such ineffective colleagues. It may also lead to the Mentee subtly conveying to her colleague the lack of trust she has in the colleague's capability or competence. ("I'll see if I can come in at that time to help out. And if I can't just give me a call so that I can talk to the donor on the phone").

- **D (Disputing the belief):** In this step, the Mentee is helped to do one or both of

the following. First, she could challenge the black and white nature of her belief.

- In the case of the community mobilizer, perhaps a friend, relative or neighbor can provide for some aspects of the care (some could help with feeding and getting the child ready for school, while another helps with dropping the child to school). Perhaps she is underestimating either the willingness and capability of others (e.g. her husband, relative or neighbor) or her own capability in explaining to others how to handle her child.

  Second, she has to think through the worst case scenarios, which may help her realize they are not as bad as she imagines.

- Will the care of the child be so bad that the child would be injured or sleep hungry? If the person is late in providing food to the child, will the child collapse; or will the child, through her own agency start crying and demanding food when hungry? What if the child learns a new game or rhyme from the caregivers?

- For the young woman activist, the questions could be as follows. Is it necessary to sacrifice your needs in order to satisfy your daughter? Will your daughter find it impossible to understand your needs after you confide in her? Is it impossible to explain to the daughter that the classmates are parroting the patriarchal norms of society and that no one is a "bad" woman because she seeks love and fulfillment outside the institution of marriage, and that she should feel confident to defend her mother? Is it impossible to assume that when her daughter gets to meet this new lover, the two will like each other and get along?

- For the leader Mentee, her belief could be disputed by asking whether she has seen and truly knows about her colleague's ability to learn new things in other contexts; ability to understand and develop rapport with new people whom she may not have interacted with earlier; or her ability to present issues in a way that, while different from how the leader does, is still clear and accessible to other people.

- **E (creating Effective new beliefs):** Here, after understanding the above, the Mentee might generate new beliefs.

  - For instance, the community mobilizer might think that if she is patient with those who could help, maybe they would do an adequate job. She could also

realize that minor things going wrong or not being done to her liking e.g. not changing the child's clothes after school or letting her play too long outside instead of completing school homework) is not such a disaster for the child, or her!

- The young woman activist might think of how and when to introduce the topic to her daughter. She might consider showing her daughter a film which sensitively explores this issue. She might introduce the daughter to her lover and allow them to spend time and interact with each other. She might even think of inviting some of her daughter's classmates home, showing them that she is as good a person as anyone else and talking to them about her relationship in terms they could understand.

- The leader Mentee might generate ideas on the kind of approach she may take with her colleague to prepare her for the meeting with the donor. The leader might ask her colleague to recognize her unique strengths as well as how she would deal with questions the donors might raise, in her own way. The leader might ask the colleague for her own insights about the donor and the meeting, and discuss how she could develop her own kind of rapport with them. The Mentee would also avoid telling her that she will come to the rescue so that the colleague does not feel she is not being trusted, and to ensure that it doesn't undermine the colleagues's willingness to risk and learn a new skill.

- **F (new Feelings and behavior):** The result of considering the new belief, might be a much less anxious Mentee who is willing to try out new behavior:

  - The community mobilizer might feel more confident to approach other people to help take care of her child and build a wider support system for her child's care.

  - The young woman activist would center herself, create more time to listen to her daughter's struggle with the situation, ask about her interests and concerns and have regular heart-to-heart chats with her.

  - The organizational leader may change her approach with her colleague and empower the colleague in a new and distinct way; she may realize that this investment would help both her colleague and the organization in the long run.

3. Recognizing and Countering the Internal Critic

A particular form of a self-limiting belief is the internal critic — a voice within us which admonishes us when we make a mistake and makes us feel miserable about ourselves. The internal critic plays a powerful role in women's lives since it is often the internal patriarchal "policeman" ensuring that women view themselves as subordinate and inferior or play out their gender roles as society expects. Worst of all, it makes women censure and limit themselves in multiple ways. Feminist mentoring needs to tackle the internal critic as one of the most effective barriers obstructing its potential for leadership and transformation.

Some examples of the internal critic are as follows:

- The Mentee could not complete her work-related assignment on time and felt and thought, "I really am the most disorganized person in the world."

- She made a mistake in calculating the amount to be paid for her groceries and told herself, "I really am the most stupid person in the world."

- She wrongly became angry and scolded her child for some transgression. When she realized that the child had not made the mistake she said to herself, "I am such a terrible mother."

- A young woman activist was unable to assert her right to be heard in an all-male meeting. At the end of the meeting she told herself, "I am just too weak to stand up to these men."

Like in other self-limiting beliefs, here too the internal critic can have a large emotional and behavioral impact on the Mentee. For instance, when she fails to complete her assignment or allotted task on time or fails to stand up for her rights as a woman, and then allows the internal critic to beat her, it could lead to feeling depressed. As a result she fails to analyze why exactly she could not complete the assignment (did something unexpected come up? did she over-commit? did she underestimate the complexity of the task?) or was unable to assert her rights at the meeting (was she ill prepared with the material? was she not prepared for the way men will try to diminish her and therefore not thought of a strategy to deal with it?). Consequently, she does not prepare herself for what she could do the next time

to ensure such a thing will not happen. For, if she could do this, she is less likely to surrender to feelings of hopelessness, despair or worthlessness and will instead continue to engage actively and thoughtfully with the various daily challenges that come her way.

The following exercise can help the Mentee counter the internal critic.

a. First, the Mentee identifies what is being said by the internal critic in particular situations, e.g., "You are so stupid!"

b. Next, the Mentee is asked to note down the frequency, intensity and exact wordings of the internal critic in different situations. The Mentee is likely to have multiple statements from the internal critic in different situations ("Well that was foolish! Why do you always mess up like this? That was a really foolish thing to do!")

c. Thirdly, the Mentee is asked to identify counter statements that will nullify the internal critic. Thus, when the Mentee finds that the internal critic is saying "You are so stupid," she counters that with "No, actually, I'm quite smart!" If the internal critic is telling her "You are such a terrible mother," she shoots back the counter statement, "Nonsense! I am a caring and loving mother." When selecting the counter statement, the Mentee must make sure that the statement is short and realistic so that she can believe in it and it responds to a particular statement of her internal critic.

d. Having constructed various counter-statements, the Mentee is asked to practice this method in her real life. She is specifically asked to keep track of the number of times she uses the counter as well its intensity. The counter has to be strong enough or calm enough to defuse the anxiety provocation effect of the internal critic. The more the Mentee develops the habit of using counter statements, the easier she would find to deal with the negative effects of her internal critic.

4. Recognizing and Dealing with Resistance

There are times when the Mentor may feel that the Mentee is not very interested or invested in using the mentoring space. Some of the signs of this lack of interest could be:

- The Mentee keeps on changing what she identified as troubling her.

- After committing to follow through on some actions the Mentee does nothing about it.

- The Mentee is engaged in some kind of conflict but resists talking about it, lest her role in it is examined more closely;

- The Mentee is frustrated that her efforts to make some kind of change have not worked or are receiving backlash and simply shuts down saying, "There is no point in doing anything. It won't make a difference!"

- The Mentee intellectualizes and philosophize, without getting into the nitty gritty of a particular issue: e.g., "Well you know how people are, you can't believe all that they say" or "There are always problems in life. That's just the reality."

- The Mentee continues to externalize all her problems, blaming others, without being willing to look at her part in an issue. She may also keep on focusing on the past, without ever dealing with issues of the present or future.

- The Mentor herself is not keen to continue the mentoring process. This feeling is, usually, a powerful indicator that there is something not quite right in the process — the Mentee is not collaborating in the process for reasons that are not clear.

After recognizing the resistance, the Mentor should work with the Mentee to explore the reasons for it. Some possible reasons could be:

- The Mentee does not fully trust the Mentor.

- The Mentee believes that mentoring processes cannot really help her situation.

- Perhaps, the Mentee is not satisfied with the specific analysis done of the situation troubling her. She might have felt that the Mentor was forcing her own viewpoint about a situation on her.

- The interventions or changes that the Mentee made resulted in conflict within the organization or social context where she works. The Mentee believes that this came about due to "following the Mentor's advice."

This kind of situation could be dealt with through the following exercise:

- When the Mentor is discussing her observations of what is happening, she must be careful not to use language that comes across as blaming the Mentee for her actions or her personality. She [Mentor] may instead express her own dissatisfaction with what is happening, while assuming responsibility for her own emotion. She can then directly ask the Mentee to give her own reflections on the process. She may also ask the Mentee to give feedback on how she sees the Mentor acting or not acting. In this process, the Mentor and Mentee work closely to look at what in the mentoring process is not working out, without in any sense, "blaming" the other.

- The Mentor could also help the Mentee recognize that when any kind of change is initiated — either within an organization or in the community — especially dealing with gender power, resistance and conflict is inevitable, and these are often signs that the change process is working and making an impact. She could help the Mentee place backlash and conflict in this context, and help her re-strategize to tackle these or devise different tactics, and still move forward.

5. Problem Solving Techniques

There are many situations the Mentee faces where she may find it easier to locate solutions by applying certain techniques developed in the management field. Some of these include: Cost-Benefit Analysis, SWOT Analysis, Six Honest Serving Men, Lateral Thinking, Six Thinking Hats and Role-Playing.

a. Cost-Benefit Analysis

There are various situations in which the Mentee has to choose between two or more alternatives and does not know what to do. It is in this situation that the cost-benefit analysis technique can be very helpful. Let us say that the Mentee says she is confused about going back to her husband, from whom she is separated (but not yet divorced). She left him because of his occasional violence, but she also misses the good times and intimate moments they had together.

This table is an example of how the Mentor can ask the Mentee to do her own cost-benefit analysis. Here, cost and benefit are calculated by multiplying likelihood and importance (e.g., if the likelihood is given a score of 5, and the importance a score of 2, the cost is 10).

Cost of taking the step (going back to the husband)			
ITEM	LIKELIHOOD	IMPORTANCE TO ME	COST (1-100 SCALE)
Beaten up in future too.	Very High. His personality has not changed (10)	High (8)	80
He will restrict my movement	Medium. He will realize that my situation is different (6)	Very high (10)	60
My work will get affected	High. Tensions caused by his behavior will impact the quality of my work (8)	Very High (10)	80
I will stop searching for a more appropriate partner	Low. I am likely to be too busy to search for people (3)	High (8)	24
TOTAL			244

NOTE: How to score Likelihood and Importance?

Both Likelihood and importance may be scored on a 1-10 scale with the following meaning:

1-2: Very low; 3-4: Low; 5-6: Medium; 7-8: High; 9-10: Very high.

Benefit of taking the step (going back to the husband)			
ITEM	LIKELIHOOD	IMPORTANCE TO ME	BENEFIT (1-100 SCALE)
Intimate moments	Medium. Initially he will be warm, but then fall back into his old pattern (6)	Very High (10)	60
Will take care of our daughter	Low. He has never shown too much interest in our child, but he may change (3)	High (8)	24
His parents will be happy	Very High (10)	Low (3)	30
Neighbors will stop blaming me for breaking the marriage	Medium. Many of them already understand me and are supportive (6)	Medium (5)	30
He will bring in some income	Low. He blows up his earnings on drinks and going out with his friends (3)	Medium (6)	18
TOTAL			162

In the above example, the Mentee may decide that after weighing the pros and cons she will not seek to reconcile with her husband and will file for divorce. Depending on the Mentee's level of understanding the Mentor can use a far simpler version of the cost-benefit analysis, in which the Mentee would just need to list the costs and benefits on either side and then decide her action after examining the overall number of costs vs. benefits.

b. SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a more sophisticated version of the cost-benefit analysis. SWOT analysis is undertaken when the Mentee has to decide whether she is ready to make a particular decision (such as whether she should apply for a particular job or not).

In that case she should list the **Strengths (S)** that will enable her to do the job effectively, and the **Weaknesses (W)** that might prevent her from doing the job effectively. For instance, if the job is that of a community development program coordinator, her strengths could be that she is from the community herself, and has a very good understanding of community dynamics. Her weaknesses may be inexperience in managing a team, or not being able to write good reports.

She then lists the **Opportunities (O)** that might emerge if she got the job: e.g., a higher salary that would allow her to send her child to a better school or build up her savings, or a chance to obtain further training and skills. Finally, she lists the **Threats (T)** she might face were she to take up this job, such as the need to move her residence to a different locality or town or having to travel alone to remote rural areas at some risk to her personal security.

Having listed Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, the Mentee gets a clear overview of the implications of the new job. She might be able to see at a glance whether her Strengths might adequately compensate for her Weaknesses and whether the Opportunities that she would get would clearly compensate for the Threats she may face. In which case, the decision to take on the job would be clear to her. If, on the other hand, she learns that her Weaknesses will outweigh her Strengths (because, for instance, the role gives greater importance to reporting to the donor and managing a team than to holding meetings with and motivating the community) or finds the Threats too overwhelming when compared to the Opportunities (e.g., she realizes that the locality she will have to live in has a high level of crime against women and living there as a single mother will jeopardize her daughter's, and her own safety). In this case, she decides not to apply for the position at all.

c. Six Hardworking Horses[6]

This is a technique to help clarify a complex issue. Once an issue is clarified, it

---

6   Tony Proctor, Creative Problem Solving for Managers: Developing skills for decision making and innovation,

becomes relatively easy to solve a problem.

The six "horses" are the questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How?

This is a useful technique to help Mentees when they are struggling to articulate a problem or challenge they are facing. The Mentee is encouraged to clarify the situation by answering the following questions:

- Who is involved in this issue? Who is affected? Who is the decision maker/ Who are all the decision makers? Who will implement the decision/s made?

- What is the problem or issue regarding the decisions to be taken?

- Why is this a matter of concern? Why are the decisions significant? Why are you anxious about them?

- Where are the decisions being made? Where will the decisions impact?

- How are the decisions being made (unilaterally, only by senior people or through consultation and consensus)? How can you influence them?

- When are the decisions being made?

A clear picture of the issue that emerges by answering these questions is often reassuring and reduces anxiety in and of itself. But for many, doing this exercise also helps identify concrete possibilities and steps forward, especially if the Mentor asks useful follow up questions that enable the Mentee to locate herself in the dynamic in an empowering way.

d. Lateral thinking

There are times when the Mentee is struggling to generate new ideas. For instance, she is looking for ideas for a campaign she wants to launch to prevent child marriages in her community or the community she works in. One way to generate new ideas is to use lateral thinking.[7]

Routledge, 3rd edition, (1999). For some reason, this technique is named Six Honest Serving Men. As to why they should be honest serving men, and not women, or better even, people, is not clear. Wanting to avoid this mess, we have chosen to replace the serving men for horses!

7   A better known method for generating new ideas is brainstorming. As a matter of fact, we may consider brainstorming as another exercise within the Lateral Thinking area. However, as brainstorming is meant as a group exercise, we have not included it in the main text. In brainstorming, a group of individuals throw up different ideas to solve a particular problem. There are two principles to follow in this process: defer judgement and go for quantity. The exercise is done with a definite time limit. As an example, a group

But what is lateral thinking? According to Edward de Bono, who popularized this concept, lateral thinking is to be contrasted with traditional vertical thinking. He says, "Rightness is what matters in vertical thinking. Richness is what matters in lateral thinking. Vertical thinking selects a pathway that excludes other pathways. Lateral thinking does not select but seeks to open up other pathways. With vertical thinking one selects the most promising approach to a problem, the best way to look at a situation. With lateral thinking one generates as many alternative approaches as one can."

He further distinguishes the two forms of thinking indicating that vertical thinking is analytical and sequential, where one has to be correct at each stage, concentrate and exclude what is irrelevant. Lateral thinking, in contrast, is provocative, can make jumps, doesn't require one to be correct at each stage and welcomes chance intrusions.

There are many exercises to help us learn and practice lateral thinking. These include the following:

- **Exercise 1 (warm up):** Generate alternative uses of an ordinary item. Let's take a pencil. Please generate five uses. When a person succeeds in that, ask them now to expand the list to ten uses. When they reach ten, ask them to expand that to twenty uses. This is a warm up exercise for becoming creative.

- **Exercise 2:** Open a book at random and look at the first noun or verb on the left page. Now connect that to the topic. For instance, if the first noun is "blackboard," you could talk about how blackboards in schools could be used to convey the message of early child marriage. The next word picked up is "fractionation," which means to divide into small fractions. The campaign could be divided into many parts. One part could focus on what happens to the girl, the second could be about what happens to the family.

  - If the Mentor does not feel very confident about opening up a word at random, she could do some prior preparation for herself with pre-selected words. One such list of random words is as follows: Orangutan, box, type, run, sleeping,

---

is given ten minutes to generate as many ideas about the campaign against child marriages. Members are specifically asked not to pre-judge or censor any ideas. While theoretically it should be possible for a single individual to engage in brainstorming, the absence of being motivated by others may lead to a single person not being able to do effective brainstorming.

welcome, apple, whistle, night, happy. [Equivalents could be found in any language, since lateral thinking is not language-based].

- The task of the Mentee is to link the word directly or indirectly to the topic in as many ways as she can, and then see what kinds of ideas are getting generated. For instance, an orangutan is an ape that lives in trees. Trees mean climbing up. So, perhaps the campaign posters can be hung up in trees. Alternatively, an orangutan is like an ancient human being. Child marriage is almost like we have evolved back into an earlier orangutan stage.

- **Exercise 3:** Provide a set of objects to get the person to connect the object to the topic. For instance, the set of objects could be: toothpaste, toothpick, wheel and spectacles. If you pick toothpaste, the link could be that it is used every day and so we need to do something that makes sure the topic is discussed every day, in different houses, bus stops, schools, in little bits and pieces.

- **Exercise 4:** Reversal. Let's have a campaign to promote child marriage. We could do a parody of the advantages of child marriage.

e. Six Thinking Hats

The Six Thinking Hats[8] exercise can be used if the Mentor and Mentee feel that the Mentee would benefit from expanding her ways of thinking, in order to enhance her ability to understand other viewpoints and perspectives. Edward de Bono, who developed this method, suggests that it is possible to distinguish six forms of thinking. Each form of thinking has its uses. However, overuse of one particular thinking style limits one's ability to respond to real life situations. For a person to be effective, she needs to understand, mix and use the six ways of thinking.

The six thinking hats are: White, Red, Yellow, Black, Green and Blue. Each of these colors represent a particular kind of thinking.

- **White:** corresponds to data, objectivity — there is no place for values or judgements in this. Using this hat, the person can collect all relevant information with respect to an issue. On the anti-child marriage campaign, using the white hat, the Mentee may collect information on what is the area to be covered in

---

8   Edward de Bono, Six Thinking Hats, Penguin, (1985).

the campaign, what are the demographic details of people in this area (age, sex, income, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, etc.), whether there have been previous campaigns on this topic, and so forth.

- **Red:** plays the opposite role of white, and brings in the matter of values, gut feel and instinct. Wearing the red hat the Mentee might say that no matter what happens, she would like to prioritize this topic as it corresponds dearly to her feminist ideals. Using her instinct she might say that most people are going to react very badly to the campaign, particularly those who are of the older generation.

- **Yellow:** is logical thinking which is optimistic in nature. In this, the person identifies how a particular action is likely to succeed. The Mentee might, putting on this hat, argue that if she focuses her campaign on the youth then she is likely to succeed.

- **Black:** represent the opposite of yellow, intent on identifying reasons why or how an action might fail. This kind of thinking forces people to look carefully and ensure that they are not being foolishly optimistic as well as identify possible areas of failure. Thus, wearing the black hat the Mentee might say that the focus on the younger crowd may not be successful as the older generation may actively try to prevent the younger from taking part in the campaign.

- **Green:** corresponds to creativity, the use of lateral thinking. Wearing this hat, the Mentee may come out with a solution of organizing a parody on child marriage; something that will both energize the younger people in the community on the issue and give them the wherewithal to argue their case with the older generation.

- **Blue:** is the overall hat. It decides which of the five hats needs to be worn at a particular point of time. For instance, if a yellow hat is followed by a black hat, shouldn't the green hat be worn again to solve the problems created by the black hat, before going back to the yellow hat?

Mentoring should help the Mentee identify and expand her "thinking hats" to more effectively tackle her issues of concern and grow her leadership capacity.

6. Role Playing

Role playing can be an effective way to challenge and change a Mentee's attitude and perspective (especially when it is holding her back in various ways) and help her understand and better navigate conflict situations. Zeus and Skiffington suggest at least three kinds of role plays that could be used.[9]

a.   Dramatic Role Playing – Adopting a Persona

In this form of role play the Mentee adopts the persona of someone totally different from her, usually the person with whom she is having the greatest difficulty. Acting the role of this person allows the Mentee to experience and better understand the world view and emotions of this person. This also helps the Mentee understand this person better, which in turn allows her to decide on the kind of behavior she would now like to use while engaging with this otherwise "difficult person."

b.   Role Playing for Attitude Change

In this form of role play, the Mentee adopts a perspective which is different from — or even opposite to — the one she holds. As an example, if the Mentee holds a belief that it is not right to argue with people in authority, she might be asked to present an argument during the mentoring session about the advantages of arguing with people in authority; if she believes sex work is immoral and should be banned, she may have to argue for the rights of sex workers and the legalization of sex work. This essentially allows the Mentee to re-examine her attitude to a variety of issues.

c.   The "As If" Technique

The objective of this kind of role play is to focus on change of behavior, rather than exploring deeper emotional issues or underlying beliefs. Taking a feminist example, the Mentee keeps very quiet in an all-male meeting, in which she is the only woman. The Mentor asks her to list down the situation and the behavior she

---

9   Suzanne Skiffington and Percy Zeus, Behavioral Coaching: How to build sustainable personal and organizational strength, Tata McGraw Hill, New Delhi, 2003.

engages in. Subsequently, the Mentor asks the Mentee to role play a new way she could interact in such a setting and what would happen as a result. The Mentee acts, in the mentoring session, "as if" she starts speaking up at the point where she has something very important to contribute.

Having practiced this during the mentoring session, the Mentee now promises to initiate it in her real life. The Mentee informs people close to her about her intention to change her behavior. She also keeps a written record of how exactly she moved forward in this process. At the next mentoring session, the Mentee would reflect on the experience and how her change of behavior has impacted her, her male colleagues and others around her. Following this, she can decide whether to go back to the old pattern or move forward with the new one.

★ ★ ★ ★

In patriarchal societies, women inevitably face multiple barriers in trying to change their internalized beliefs about their conduct, roles and rights, abilities, or when they attempt to assert themselves and take leadership either in their personal or professional spaces. Some-times, these beliefs are not about themselves but their colleagues and their abilities. While overcoming these is a long-term process, the techniques provided in this chapter can help enable individuals to recognize the social roots of these beliefs, transform their self-image and beliefs and make the concrete shifts in practice that create new norms and contribute to larger change.

8

GUIDELINES FOR SETTING UP A *feminist mentoring system*

In order to use feminist mentoring as a conscious intervention in a feminist leadership and social transformation process, we must begin with a clear design or plan. This must include several parameters or dimensions: the scale and structure of the mentoring system; the sequence of steps required to operationalize the process; the preparation and training of Mentors in the feminist mentoring approach and methodology; periodic check-ins to harvest learning and make course corrections; refresher training for the Mentors to deepen their knowledge and practice (if required); and of course, systems for tracking and assessing how the process is impacting both Mentees and Mentors. In this chapter, we offer suggestions that will hopefully assist organizations and movements design their feminist mentoring system more effectively and efficiently.

Develop your Mentoring Plan And Design:

Begin by determining the dimensions or parameters of the mentoring structure. Some key facets and decisions would include:

1. What is the total number of people to be mentored — i.e., how many Mentees will there be?

2. What is the best ratio of Mentors to Mentees — i.e., how many Mentors are required for the number of people to be mentored? (This may be determined by the resources available for the mentoring).

3. How will Mentors be selected? What are the critical criteria for choosing Mentors?

4. How will the training of Mentors be conducted and by whom? What should be the content/curriculum and methodology of the training?

5. Will Mentors be paid or will they undertake the mentoring pro-bono? If paid, what will their remuneration be, and what will be the method of payment (per day, per session, etc.)?

6. Will Mentors be "assigned" specific Mentees or will they rotate? If a rotation system is considered, how many sessions will each Mentor have with a particular Mentee within each rotation? *[More details on this are provided in this chapter]*

7. Will the mentoring system only include both individual mentoring or group/peer-mentoring as well? *[More details on this are provided in this chapter]*

8. Who will oversee/coordinate the mentoring process to ensure it runs smoothly and that the Mentors are recording key developments/progress with each Mentee and with the group (if group mentoring is also used)?

9. How frequently will the Mentors check in with each other and with the coordinating organization to share feedback and progress?

10. How will key qualitative and quantitative information about the mentoring be recorded and gathered in order to enable assessment of its progress and impact?

11. What is the overall time frame for the mentoring initiative (two, three or more years)?

12. What is the timeline for the key steps of the process and setting up the system?

13. [The training of the Mentors, for instance, should take place at least a month before the actual mentoring process begins. A quarterly check-in (at least) with the Mentors should be conducted in the initial year with any kind of troubleshooting done in a timely manner. A refresher training-cum-reflection event with the Mentors should ideally be held once a year.]

Below we share some ideas for each of these parameters based on our learning from the SAYWLM initiative. These can be adapted and modified to suit the specific context in which other feminist mentoring initiatives are located.

1. **Mentor-Mentee ratio:** First of all, there is no "ideal" or perfect ratio of Mentor to Mentees. The ratio should be decided based on the total number of people to be mentored, the number of potential Mentors identified who are willing to undertake this role and undergo the necessary training, and most importantly, the resources available to compensate the Mentors. Nevertheless, we would advise organizations to be aware that Mentoring is quite an intense process and requires an investment of mental, emotional and physical energy and time, in order to be done well. If the potential Mentors are already employed full-time at other organizations, then they may also have limited time to spare for mentoring. It would probably be best not to exceed five Mentees per Mentor (although, as mentioned, the final ratio has to be a decision based on balancing several factors). In the SAYWLM initiative, we created teams of three Mentors to mentor ten young women activists, and since all our Mentors were engaged in other work, this ratio worked very well.

2. **Mentor selection:** This is probably the most important factor in the entire feminist mentoring process! In our experience, these are some of the more critical criteria that must be applied in selecting Mentors:

   a. **Commitment to feminist ideology and vision of social transformation:** it is self-evident that feminist mentoring cannot be conducted by someone who is hesitant about embracing feminism itself! Of course, there are diverse feminist visions and approaches — this does not matter as much, unless there is disharmony with the feminist vision of the organization or movement setting up the mentoring initiative. For example, if the initiating organization is working with LBTQ women, or sex workers, and their Mentees may be from these constituencies, the potential Mentor cannot be uncomfortable with or have strong biases against these groups. Similarly, racial, ethnic, caste, class and other biases must be examined, even if the potential Mentors overtly identify as feminists.

   b. **The experience base of the potential Mentors** is also an important criterion, for similar reasons. In the case of the SAYWLM initiative, we wanted to ensure

that the majority of Mentors had some experience in movement-building work and a strong commitment to movement-building approaches, since a key objective was to strengthen the Mentee's understanding of and capacity to use a movement-building approach. Other organizations may need Mentors with expertise in feminist legal aid, sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's economic empowerment, feminist popular education, advocacy strategies, creative media and communications, etc. In the SAYWLM initiative, we created diversity in the Mentors' team by selecting one "senior" Mentor with strong women's movement experience, one Mentor from a creative background (theatre, film, design or communications) and one "younger" feminist.

c. If the intention, however, is to have a free-standing mentoring program, untied to any particular organization or movement, then a set of **Mentors with diverse experiences and skills base** will be needed and the system of rotating Mentors may have to be explored.

d. If the mentoring initiative is focused on young activists, then we would also encourage **age diversity in the selection of Mentors**. Young Mentors, not too far removed, age-wise, from the Mentees, will have less of the age-hierarchy factors to deal with in the power equalization process that is crucial to feminist mentoring.

e. **Openness, humility and willingness to learn:** these may seem obvious criteria, but it is surprising how often they are overlooked! Sometimes the "best" people in terms of skills and experience may not be the best at mentoring because they believe they know how best to create change. They may tend to lecture the Mentee or adopt the least desirable mentoring methods — viz., "Advice" and "Doctor"! The most effective Mentors in the long-term are those willing to come into the process as learners — no matter how well-known they may already be in other arenas — and embrace this as a journey that leads to their own growth and development, as well as the Mentees'. This requires humility, not over-confidence; openness, not opinionatedness; and a learning, rather than a "know-it-all" attitude.

f. **Practical capacity:** sometimes, individuals are extremely enthusiastic about wanting to be a Mentor, as it is new and exciting, but may not be able to deliver

in the longer-term. This could be because they are already over-committed and are struggling to juggle their different work, under-estimate the time and effort this will involve, have a tendency to get bored with the "nuts-and-bolts" part of the process or any number of other reasons. Therefore, it is imperative that the organizers of the mentoring initiative undertake due diligence and have a frank conversation with potential Mentors about these core truths to ascertain their actual capacity to be part of the process over a sustained period of time. Although turnover among Mentors is inevitable, it is also quite difficult to manage after a significant investment in their training and development! So we need to do our part in terms of basic fact-finding and effective communication to reduce Mentor turnover as far as possible.

3. **Training of Mentors:** Feminist mentoring requires a strong foundation in the principles of feminist mentoring, the basic and specific theories underlying it and clear guidelines for practice. This is exactly what we have tried to provide in this guide. However, reading the guide is not sufficient preparation for the journey. It is essential to begin with a 3–4 day training workshop where all the Mentors develop a shared understanding of the what, why and how of feminist mentoring, and so begin the journey with greater clarity about its goals and methodology. In the SAYWLM initiative, we brought in a mentoring expert (co-author of this guide) to design and conduct the first training for our Mentors, which proved to be a critically important decision. The workshop ran for four days and topics covered included:

   a. The principles and goals of feminist mentoring and why these are distinct from other generic forms of mentoring/coaching;

   b. Summary and exploration of the theoretical foundation (as laid out in several chapters of this guide), during which, Mentors could clear doubts and confusions regarding these;

   c. Several rounds of practice exercises to simulate the mentoring process followed by critical examination to identify the different ways in which Mentors can slip into errors (such as taking up too much talk time, giving a lot of advice, rushing to diagnose the problem, etc.). Fishbowl and role-play methods were extensively used during this; and

d. Explanation of design, structure, coordination and operation of the mentoring system, including:

   i. Schedule of one-on-one and group mentoring sessions and how the rotation system would work;

   ii. Who will undertake the coordination from the organizational side;

   iii. Nature of data to be recorded in the mentoring session Debriefing Forms/notes;

   iv. Frequency of check-ins with and among the mentoring team and organizational coordinator; and

   v. Other practical details (e.g., advised length of individual and group mentoring sessions, visits to the Mentee's organizations, payment schedules, etc.).

An initial training of this kind is critical to give Mentors clarity about the goals of the mentoring process and who they will be mentoring. It can also help develop a shared understanding of the theory and methodology and create a space to raise questions, clarify doubts and connect all those involved in the mentoring initiative. This is especially important if the Mentors in the initiative have not met or do not know each other prior to this shared endeavour. It will also help build confidence before embarking on the mentoring journey, for those who have never done this kind of structured and theoretically-grounded feminist mentoring before. If no external facilitator with the required expertise is available to do the training, the organizers of the initiative can themselves run the workshop, using the resources in this guide as their framework.

However, one initial workshop is not enough. If the length of the initiative is at least a couple of years, then it is highly recommended to hold one refresher workshop at the end of the first six months, and then after each twelve-month period, if resources permit. A refresher fairly soon after the mentoring process begins (preferably after six months) allows the Mentors to assess, early in the process, how things are going and what challenges they are facing. This is a good point at which to also check-in with the Mentees, to gauge how the process is going for them. The six-month refresher workshop and check-ins with Mentees enables early-stage course correction, rather than allowing

problematic processes to continue for a full year. Another workshop, about a year after the first refresher, would provide an opportunity for a more in-depth analysis of the experience — of the progress made by Mentors in mastering feminist mentoring theory and practice, and progress of Mentees in effectively using the mentoring process for their growth. In the SAYWLM project, these annual check-ins have been enormously useful to both the Mentors and CREA, as well as our mentoring advisor, to harvest learning and contribute greatly to the creation of this guide.

4. **Compensating Mentors:** While the capacity to compensate Mentors is obviously tied to the question of resources, it is worth considering a few key points on the pros and cons of voluntary vs. paid Mentors. A spirit of voluntarism is to be lauded and there are many able and committed feminists who would be happy to work as feminist Mentors on a voluntary basis. However, the disadvantages of voluntary work must be recognized and kept in mind — often related to the availability, priorities and time commitments of the volunteer, rather than the structure and needs of the process. When Mentors are retained on a more professional basis, with their time and commitment compensated, the discipline and structure necessary to make the mentoring process function systematically is easier to assert. In the case of SAYWLM, for instance, our Mentors received compensation for their time and signed contracts for a given number of days per year that they committed to the process. They, in turn, felt their time was valued and ensured their participation in all the key aspects of the mentoring system — from attending training workshops, conducting the ongoing individual and group mentoring sessions in a timely manner, and participating in annual reflection and refresher training workshops to monitoring and evaluating the process. The simple truth is that paid assignments are usually taken more seriously than voluntary ones, with of course some rare exceptions!

5. **Rotational vs. fixed mentoring:** In the SAYWLM initiative, we experimented from the outset with a rotational system of mentoring, which has proved to have both pros and cons. Rotating Mentors is beneficial because Mentees get the benefit of many different Mentors' knowledge, experience, and insights; it can also sometimes create breakthroughs if the dynamic between a particular Mentee and Mentor is stuck or just not working because of interpersonal friction. Mentees have reported enjoying having access to different Mentors and their diverse

perspectives and ways of supporting them.

On the other hand, speaking to a different Mentor each month raised several challenges in rapport-building, especially in the initial stage. The rotation system was also complicated by the fact that some Mentors delayed uploading their Debriefing Forms, and the next Mentor often did not have a good sense of what had been explored in the previous session or other critical information that she could build on. In some contexts, our Mentor teams themselves chose to limit the rotation to once in three months — i.e., sustaining a particular Mentor-Mentee dyad for three months — before each rotation, and that seemed to be more effective. Accordingly, some experimentation and analysis is needed to discover what works best in achieving the long-term goals of the mentoring process.

6. **Individual and group mentoring:** As mentioned earlier, the SAYWLM initiative utilized both individual and group mentoring. Mentoring has always been conceived as a one-to-one process, and indeed this is essential to achieve the kinds of impact we aspire for in building feminist leadership and social change. However, complementing this with group mentoring has several advantages; it reflects the feminist value of collective learning and solidarity, sometimes enables individuals who are more reticent in the individual space to speak up and can become a space for a different kind of growth. For example, group calls were often used in SAYWLM to discuss cross-cutting issues affecting several of the young women or broader feminist issues like gender-based violence, harassment faced in workplace or public spaces, burnout and self-care strategies and current affairs. Most importantly, group mentoring is where peer mentoring can be gently and subtly encouraged and built up over time, so that a system of mutual support emerges that can sustain the Mentees when the mentoring initiative concludes.

Group mentoring has its own challenges, however, and can take time to ground itself and acquire the same value, in Mentees' minds, as the individual sessions. In the SAYWLM context our challenges included higher absenteeism in the group sessions, a failure to acknowledge or respond to scheduling messages and a tendency for some Mentees to dominate the discussion while others remained largely silent. The SAYWLM Mentors drove the planning and facilitating of sessions, but it took over a year to get the Mentees to take over responsibility for setting up meetings and agendas, co-facilitating the sessions and participating

more actively. However, group sessions acted as the primary space for peer mentoring and was therefore worth the time and energy invested, as an adjunct to the individual mentoring.

Despite the challenges, the group mentoring approach held many advantages. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, group mentoring calls allowed a space and opportunity for Mentees to ask Mentors difficult questions — questions they may not have asked at one-to-one sessions. This speeded up the process of power equalization. Another advantage of the group mentoring was that when one Mentee found it difficult to deal with a particular Mentor initially, working with other Mentors allowed her to successfully re-look and recast her relationship with the Mentor she was finding difficult to work with earlier.

7. **Coordinating and overseeing the mentoring process:** Even when all the elements of the mentoring process are in place, it is necessary for the whole system to coordinate, monitor and manage ongoing issues that may arise from at least one person or a small team of the coordinating organization. For example, someone needs to take responsibility for ensuring that the mentoring sessions are being documented (in whatever form decided in the initial design) in a consistent manner by the Mentors, so that the progress and impact of mentoring can be assessed periodically, as well as at the end of the process. Similarly, if group sessions are part of the mentoring design, some logistical support for setting up the sessions (whether online or face to face) may be needed. Periodic check-ins with the Mentors, organizing reflection workshops and troubleshooting of various kinds will be needed on an ongoing basis.

8. **Documenting the progress and impact of mentoring:** Since mentoring is a unique journey for each individual — both Mentor and Mentee — recording key qualitative and quantitative information about the process at each step is essential to help us understand how it is progressing and its cumulative impact. This information system is a vital tool especially for Mentors to check how they are progressing, when and if the process is "stuck" or caught in a loop and to take timely action by changing their methods of inquiry or shifting gears in some other way. This is only possible if key aspects of each session (whether individual or group) are recorded in some way, and if this data is actively used by the Mentors to help them plan subsequent sessions appropriately.

Most important of all, is that we have a responsibility to gather concrete, tangible evidence on the value of feminist mentoring as an investment in building feminist leadership and feminist social change, rather than rely on anecdotal information. This is all the more so if we have invested significant resources in feminist mentoring and want to make a case to the donor community that mentoring has to be an integral part of the capacity building strategy for feminist social change work.

In the final chapter of this guide, we have provided detailed ideas on how to assess the progress and impact of mentoring. We would encourage all users to draw on the ideas and methods offered there and create their own tools and assessment methods.

Some key steps to launch the mentoring process are also outlined in the next chapter (Chapter 9). The guidelines in this next chapter assume that a group of Mentees are already selected/self-selected to be mentored and a group of feminist Mentors are in place to mentor them.

<div align="center">★ ★ ★ ★</div>

We hope that this chapter allows our readers, especially organizations interested in setting up feminist mentoring as a vital adjunct to their leadership capacity building, to plan and design their mentoring systems with the benefit of the lessons learnt in the SAYWLM initiative. What we have discussed here are only some of the critical elements in setting up an effective system that will then have to be applied and adapted to the diverse contexts in which others may be situated.

The goal of this chapter is to ensure that each user of this guide can design and plan their feminist mentoring system with the wisdom of our hindsight!

9

ASSESSING
THE IMPACT OF
feminist mentoring

Like any other process of change and growth, it is important to be able to track our progress and the impact on the individuals and groups at the center of the process. In the case of feminist mentoring, we need to assess the change and growth it generates in both Mentors and Mentees along three key dimensions:

- The increasing knowledge, skill and confidence of the Mentor in both individual and group[1] mentoring;

- The Mentee's greater capacity to effectively navigate her personal and professional spaces — i.e., to activate and empower her feminist self; and

- The Mentee's greater clarity and leadership capacity in her feminist transformation work — i.e., her growth and impact as a feminist activist and leader.

In the SAYWLM project, we gathered information along seven axes to assess the quality and impact of the mentoring process:
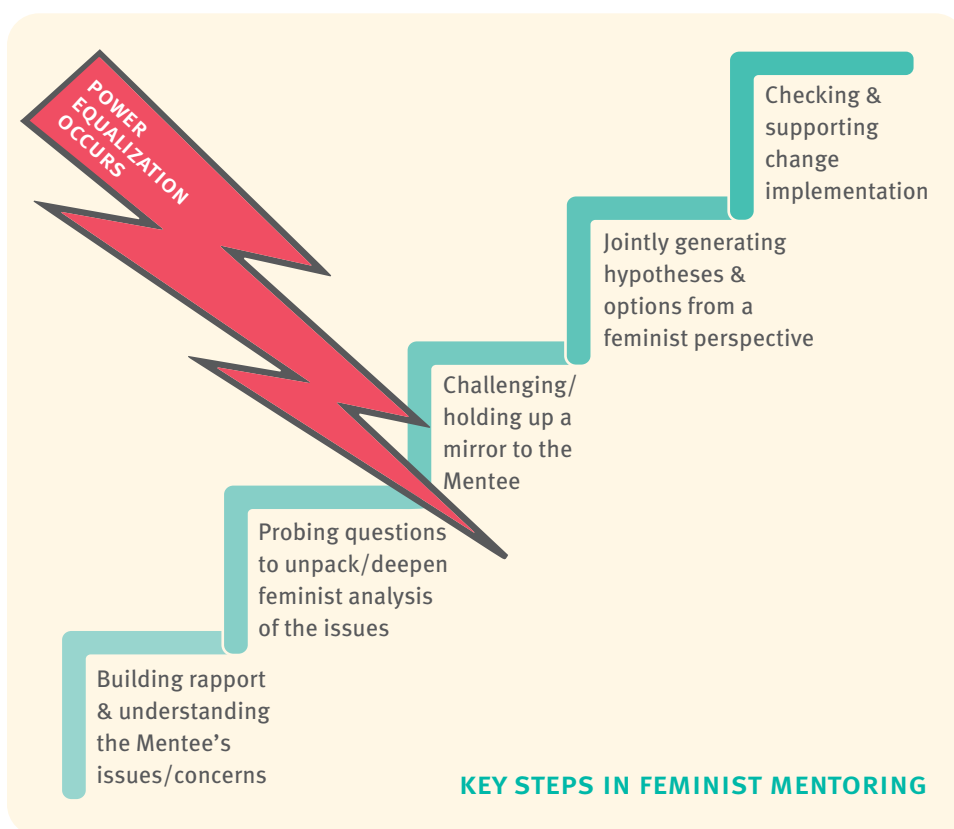
1. Assessing the stage reached in the mentoring process;

2. Documenting and assessing each mentoring session;

3. Mentor's assessment of Mentee's progress;

4. Assessing mentoring skills and capacity;

5. Assessing collective/peer mentoring processes; and

6. Mentee's assessment of the mentoring process.

---

1   If group mentoring is included in the mentoring process.

In this chapter, we unpack each of these and explain why they are helpful in assessing the overall quality and results of the mentoring process. We also share case examples of evidence in each area, in the hope they will be useful to others embarking on the feminist mentoring journey.

1. Assessing the Stage Reached in the Mentoring Process:

Let us begin with some ways of monitoring and assessing our progress through the different stages of the mentoring process. The very first level of assessment could be locating the stage of the mentoring process using the diagram shared below on "Key Steps in Feminist Mentoring."

POWER EQUALIZATION OCCURS

Checking & supporting change implementation

Jointly generating hypotheses & options from a feminist perspective

Challenging/ holding up a mirror to the Mentee

Probing questions to unpack/deepen feminist analysis of the issues

Building rapport & understanding the Mentee's issues/concerns

KEY STEPS IN FEMINIST MENTORING

The key goal here is for Mentors to use these measures to assess:

- Where they are in the process;

- What is the next stage they need to move to; and

- Most importantly, if the Mentor, Mentee or overall process is "stuck" at some level.

For example, if six months after the mentoring process has begun, good rapport is yet to be established, or the Mentor is still unclear about what issues the Mentee would like to work on, then something is not working. The Mentor then needs to step back and try and understand what is going wrong. This could indicate a shortcoming or gap in the mentoring technique being used or in the way it is being used or could mean that the Mentee is unwilling or unable to open up and is holding back due to some kind of fear or anxiety. This recognition will help both Mentor and Mentee step back, try to come to terms with this deeper impediment, and identify how they can overcome it.

Similarly, the mentoring process can sometimes become circular — where the Mentee keeps throwing up a new problem or issue in each session, and the Mentor gets diverted with diagnostic inquiry around each of these, and therefore never reaches the stage of holding up a mirror or challenging the Mentee (confrontive inquiry). Sometimes, this is an unconscious mechanism the Mentee uses to avoid examining any of her issues at a deeper level or looking within herself. The Mentor can unwittingly get drawn into that dynamic if she doesn't step back and assess where the two are in the mentoring journey.

This is why assessing the progress of the overall mentoring process and using the stages of mentoring as a diagnostic and tracking tool is quite critical for a feminist Mentor, especially in the first year of mentoring! The stage of mentoring reached could be assessed periodically, based on the frequency of the mentoring sessions. For example, if the sessions take place on a monthly schedule, it may be useful to check every three months to identify the stage reached. However, if the sessions are more frequent — maybe once every two weeks — then assessing the stage every two months is advisable.

Of course, this tool does not have to be used once the Mentor and Mentee reach Stage 5 — i.e., they have arrived at a point where both can freely share their issues and have

a healthy dynamic of generating hypotheses and exploring and implementing action strategies.

One could use a series of questions or a grading system to locate the stage the relationship is at, during any particular time, in terms of the above five steps. For example, one could give a score between 0 to 5 for how much rapport has been built with the Mentee, or for how far one has been able to unpack/understand the issues concerning her. The overall stage of mentoring could be ranked using the steps or stages themselves: such as stage 2, 4, or 5. Since power equalization is a key turning point in the mentoring relationship process, this could also be used to rate the stage of the process — e.g., the mentoring process could be assessed as "yet to achieve power equalization," or "post power equalization."

2. Documenting and Assessing each Mentoring Session:

However, where will the data to track the progress of mentoring and assess the stage reached, originate from? How do we recognize whether the process is stuck in the doldrums?

Data can only be collected by Mentors recording insights and assessing each individual mentoring session — so this is an essential step. These notes or process records can provide valuable insights and data on how the relationship is growing and what breakthroughs (such as power equalization) have been achieved. It can also generate critical information on the Mentee's growth over time. While there are several ways individual sessions can be recorded and assessed, the "Debriefing Forms" developed and used in the SAYWLM initiative are shared below to provide an initial template that could be adapted and applied in other contexts.

During the first year of mentoring, we designed the SAYWLM Debriefing Form to help Mentors keep an eye on some of the key elements of effective feminist mentoring and be more consciously aware of the mentoring techniques used in each session, in building the relationship and advancing the process. Thus the form included:

A. Debriefing Form for individual mentoring sessions in the first phase of mentoring (12 – 18 MONTHS):

1. **Basic information:**
   a. Mentor's name
   b. Mentee's name
   c. Mentee's organization/location
   d. Mentee's contact information: (email, phone)
   e. Date of the mentoring session
   f. Nature of meeting: virtual (phone, internet call) or face-to-face
   g. Scheduling of meeting: regular, pre-scheduled or an exceptional one at the request of the Mentee
   h. Duration of the session
   i. Objective of the meeting: such as further rapport building, diagnostic inquiry on issue raised at the last meeting or discussion on problem faced by the Mentee at home/in her office/in the area where she lives, etc.

2. **Notes on session content and process:**
   a. What were the key issues raised/discussed?
   b. What progress did you notice in the Mentee (if any)?
   c. What challenges were noted (if any) by either you or the Mentee?
   d. Did you enable the Mentee develop insights from a **feminist perspective** on the challenges she is facing or the issues she raised? (If so, please note in detail):
   e. What inputs/guidance/frameworks/strategic insights did you provide?
   f. Has the Mentee requested for any capacity building or any other support? And what support or capacity building do you think the Mentee will benefit from?

3. **Methodology/techniques used:**
   a. What theoretical framework (self, organizational, social/political or feminist frameworks) did you use to understand the context and challenges (if any) being faced by the Mentee?

b. What mode of mentorship did you use: "Advisor," "Doctor," or process based inquiry/enabling? Explain the reasons for your choice.

c. Approximately what percentage of the session time did you (the Mentor) speak?

d. What method did you rely on: pure inquiry, explorative diagnostic or confrontive method? What were your reasons for using this/these method/s and how effective were they?

e. Were you pushing the Mentee to share a problem or specific issue?

4. Personal reflections/assessment:

(Please rate the points a-f on a scale of 1–5; 1 signifying the lowest and 5 signifying the highest in assessment)

a. How far did you succeed in making the Mentee feel comfortable and providing space for her to share (creating the "Personal Reflective Space")/discuss her issue in depth?

b. How would you rank the level of rapport with this Mentee?

c. How well did you succeed in helping the Mentee open up and discuss her issues?

d. How well did you succeed in understanding the Mentee and/or the issues she is grappling with?

e. How far have you progressed in developing a relationship of equals between the Mentee and yourself?

f. How far has the Mentee progressed in developing a **feminist perspective** on the issues she is dealing with?

g. What progress, if any, have you observed in the Mentee's leadership capacity?

h. What progress or shift, if any, have you observed in the Mentee's activism/ social change work?

i. Any other reflections/insights?

5. Follow up/points for further discussion or development in the next session: (please summarize briefly)

_____

_____

CASE EXAMPLE: The struggles of a Mentor

It was very difficult to be in the same kind of mind space with every Mentee at every session. Also, a specific experience with one Mentee can have a consequential effect on what kind of bias I may hold during the next session. Sometimes, a session is very taxing and draining, especially if it is frustration that is the core takeaway, so it does work nicely that I get a few months' gap before I have another one-to-one with the same Mentee. I have often wondered and felt guilty if I was doing the best I can/should be doing. But that is also a part of being human and efficiency levels will vary; maybe I need to learn to express that to the Mentees also.

The one-on-ones are a very specific space when I got to explore intimate/personal connections with the Mentees. Especially, when/if I get to meet them face to face, because usually it is a more informal setting, we have a chance to explore our conversations without an agenda as such. I tend to find little nuances in those conversations. It also opens both of us up to communicate more genuinely with each other. As someone who is usually used to keeping my communication channels at a distance, it has also been an accomplishment for myself to learn to open up to the Mentees during these conversation spaces.

At a later stage of mentoring, when the Mentor is quite confident in observing the basic norms and boundaries (such as not taking up too much of the talk time, not frequently using the Doctor or Advisor mode and recognizing what technique or framework she is utilizing), the debriefing format can be simplified to have more narrative content. Here is a sample of the Debriefing Forms used in SAYWLM towards the second half of year two, when the process was well established and the Mentor-Mentee relationship reasonably consolidated:

B. Debriefing Form for individual mentoring sessions in the later stages of mentoring (AFTER POWER EQUALIZATION AND CONFRONTIVE INQUIRY):

1. **Basic information:** As in first form

2. **Session content and process:**
   a. What were the key issues raised/discussed?
   b. What inputs/guidance did you provide?
   c. Has the Mentee requested any other support or do you feel some other form of support is needed (e.g. professional counseling, medical care, legal aid, etc.)?

3. **Methodology/techniques used:**
   a. What theoretical framework (self, organizational/social or feminist) did you use to understand the context and challenge/s (if any) being faced by the Mentee?
   b. What method did you rely on: pure inquiry, explorative diagnostic or confrontive method? What were your reasons for using this/these method/s and how effective were they?
   c. Were you pushing the Mentee to share a problem or specific issue?

4. **Action strategies/shifts observed:**
   a. What change actions or decisions have emerged in the session with the Mentee?
   b. What shifts in her perspective/actions have you observed since the previous session or over the past few sessions?

5. **Personal reflections/assessment:**
   a. How far has the Mentee progressed in developing a **feminist approach** to tackling the issues she is dealing with, handling backlash or conflict, resolving strategic dilemmas and managing the organizational space?
   b. How far has the Mentee progressed in implementing the changes she wishes to make in herself/her situation?

c. What progress have you noted in the Mentee's feminist leadership skills/capacity?

d. Any other reflections/insights/observations:

6. **Follow up/points for further discussion/development in the next session:**

3. Mentor's Assessment of Mentee's Progress:

Mentors could also do a periodic assessment of the progress of the Mentee from their own perspective. This is primarily anecdotal qualitative data, but can help the Mentor create a picture of how far the Mentee has traveled in her journey and what she has gained in the process. This assessment is only effective, however, if some kind of baseline exists against which subsequent changes can be compared. Mentoring debriefing notes from the early stage of the process can provide some of this data — though we recommend an actual baseline assessment be designed and conducted at the start of the process.

In the case of the SAYWLM initiative, we did such a baseline assessment before the mentoring process began, using an assessment tool developed for us by the Gender at Work team.[2] We designed our baseline to capture the location and understanding of the young women activists with respect to the key elements of the SAYWLM project (as outlined in Chapter 1). Therefore, it included their knowledge and attitudes towards feminism; shifts in their understanding and practice of feminist leadership in their personal, organizational and larger social change spaces; and progress in their understanding of movements and in their movement building work. However, each mentoring initiative must develop a baseline tool that best captures the context and goals of the process in which it is located.[3]

Once some kind of baseline assessment is in place, these are some of the criteria/

---

2   See www.genderatwork.org.

3   Since this instrument was developed for the South Asian context, with the nature of the participating organizations and young women activists in mind, it was not a universal tool. However, it can be provided on request from crea@creaworld.org.

indicators that we have found useful for Mentors to assess a Mentee's progress:

a. Evidence of growing self-reflexivity/self-awareness of the Mentee.

b. Breakthroughs achieved by the Mentee in shifting negative or disempowering

c. Dynamics in her personal spaces.

d. Breakthroughs achieved by the Mentee in shifting negative or disempowering dynamics in her professional/organizational relationships and spaces.

e. Breakthroughs achieved by the Mentee in contributing to feminist social change in the communities and/or issues on which she works.

f. Concrete evidence of Mentee's greater clarity about feminism, feminist strategies and feminist visions of change in her context.

g. Concrete evidence of growth of Mentee's feminist leadership capacity, with examples of her practice of feminist leadership in her personal, organizational and movement spaces.[4]

CASE EXAMPLE: Evidence of growing self-reflexivity/ self-awareness of the Mentee

As my parents were in the Non Governmental Organization (NGO) sector, I always felt the default setting for my life was the NGO sector. There is one part of me that has always aspired to follow the morality and values that my parents' held. But at the same time I **am now recognizing that I can be an architect of my own life**. I have realized the Gandhian way, the ascetic life is not the only way. I have realized I value/need community more than my parents. I have come to a place where I am now working towards a life which is not a reaction to my parents. **This was me, locating my agency. The mentoring process has helped me understand my own agency. This location of agency has been extremely powerful.**

---

4   The annexure to this guide (Part 2) includes our framework for assessing feminist leadership in all these realms.

4. Assessing Mentoring Skills and Capacity:

Just as Mentors need to assess the progress and growth of their Mentees, they must also track their own skills and capacity as Mentors in managing the mentoring process effectively. There are several possible criteria and sub-criteria that could be applied to gauge this.

1. **Evidence of growing mentoring skills of Mentors,** which could include:
    a. Greater comfort in relating to the Mentee as an equal.
    b. Greater insights into what might be troubling the Mentee.
    c. Increasingly conscious and varied use of different frameworks.
    d. Enhanced ability to frame and offer hypotheses to the Mentee.
    e. Increased avoidance of Doctor and Advisor modes of mentoring.
    f. Increased awareness of and ability to deal with her own biases during the mentoring process.
    g. Enhanced ability to quickly grasp and respond to her Mentee's needs and issues.

2. **Evidence of shifts/growth/deepening of Mentor's understanding and knowledge.** This would include:
    a. A deeper and more nuanced understanding of the various ways patriarchy impacts individuals, organizations, families and societies in real time and in their Mentees' specific realities.
    b. A greater understanding of different strategies developed and used by individuals to effect social transformation at various levels — individual, family, organizations and larger society.
    c. Expanding repertoire of frameworks/concepts relating to power, organizational dynamics, human psychology, feminist intersectionality, dealing with conflict, etc.

3. **Growth of Mentor's self-awareness in the mentoring role and process:**
    a. A greater understanding of the mentoring process — the art and science of it.
    b. Increased capacity to assess where she is in the mentoring process and where

she needs to shift/change/improve.

c.   A greater understanding of her skills, her weaker areas that need development and biases/tendencies that negatively impact her mentoring (e.g., impatience, sharp tongue, tendency to tune out or any other reactions that impede relationship building with the Mentee and the impact of the mentoring).

5. Assessing Collective/Peer Mentoring Processes:

The SAYWLM initiative used a combination of individual and group mentoring, in the hope that over time some degree of co-mentoring among the YWLs would emerge, and that this could become a more sustainable long-term support mechanism for them. In any mentoring initiative that involves a larger cohort of Mentees, group sessions are an effective complement to individual mentoring and builds the capacity and confidence of the Mentees to emerge as peer Mentors over time.

> **CASE STUDY: Advantages of group mentoring**
>
> Without the others in the Mentees group, my work with LGBTQI would have remained an isolated effort. But through this group it became the effort of not one but ten of us together. Similarly, I reciprocated for their initiatives with Dalit women, on sexual violence, and several others. Hence, group mentoring has supported us to integrate at least ten issues of feminist movement in our country.
>
> When I started talking about going to colleges to start conversations and build awareness around the issues and the rights of LGBTQI community, we could not find a single college that would agree to let us do it. But then the other Mentees suggested that they could approach each of their respective colleges. This gave us a very good starting point.

Therefore, as mentioned in the previous chapter, we organized a monthly group meeting/call for all the Mentees in each country, in addition to the one-to-one mentoring sessions. The Mentors participated in the group calls as well, and maintained debriefing notes of these group mentoring sessions to help us track how

the collective/peer mentoring and learning process was evolving. This data helped us track the gradual shift in agenda-setting, facilitation and even responsibility for planning and setting up the calls from Mentors to Mentees. The degree of peer engagement that occurred — or peer mentoring — can also be tracked by the Mentors through these notes. The following is a suggested structure for group mentoring sessions:

A. Group mentoring Debriefing Form: since in the SAYWLM context,

a team of Mentors rather than an individual conducted the group mentoring, the team used a slightly different Debriefing Form to the individual mentoring form (although, as in the previous, the Mentors undertook the filling of this information):

1. Mentor/s' name/s:

2. Date of meeting:

3. Meeting planned/set up by:

4. No. of participants:
   a. Mentors:
   b. Mentees:

5. Agenda created by: (To capture the growing participation and initiative of the Mentees in crafting the agenda for group sessions)

6. Discussion facilitated by: (To capture the growing role of the Mentees in facilitating or co-facilitating group sessions)

7. Issues discussed:

8. Highlights of the discussion:

9. Observations regarding peer mentoring (examples of when the Mentees individually or collectively supported or mentored each other):

10. Level of participation:
    • All present participated in the meeting;
    • Most of those present participated;
    • Only half of those present participated;

- Very few of those present participated

11. Inputs/guidance provided by the Mentor/s:

12. Overall assessment of the meeting:
    Excellent _____   Good _____   Needs Improvement _____   Poor _____

13. Observations of the Mentor for next session:

    _____

    _____

CASE EXAMPLE: The challenges of group mentoring calls

A huge challenge of the group mentoring process has been to create space for all YWLs, and ensure that those who tend to "claim" more space do not end up taking over the space. It is also easier to get into advice mode when issues are discussed in groups, and there is less time to explore it in depth. So, I feel like I have to check myself every now and then and try to participate in group discussions with the intention to just throw in thoughts, and not necessarily with the intention to come to solutions. Also, we always go overtime!

I think the rewarding parts of the group conversations are usually jokes and leg pulls that happen. Even in the midst of a serious chat, someone will make a quirky comment about something, and everyone will start laughing. It lets on, that even though these meetings are much more structured than one-to-ones, and much of the discussion tends to be in a somewhat more reporting style, we are still in a space where everyone has the space to joke/laugh/ tease anyone else. On that note, they tend to refer to me as the one who scolds them.

6. Mentee's Assessment of the Mentoring Process:

The ultimate impact of mentoring obviously manifests in how the mentored have benefited, grown and changed as a result of it. No assessment of the effectiveness of mentoring can therefore be complete without the Mentee's perspective. Ideally, Mentees should also maintain a diary or journal documenting their own experience of each mentoring session, just as Mentors do, but it is often difficult to ensure this, as we found during the SAYWLM initiative. The organization hosting the mentoring should determine whether this is a feasible demand and how they will monitor it. But it is essential that Mentees assess the impact that the mentoring process has had on them – if any – on a six-monthly or annual basis, and reflect on how it has helped them individually and collectively (if group mentoring is also being done).

In the SAYWLM context, these are the assessment questions we shared with the Mentees, though obviously each mentoring process has to tailor the assessment to their own goals and learning needs.

CASE EXAMPLE: How the mentoring process developed my understanding of feminism

At a very basic level in my personal life, it was about who does what at home. I used to think that doing household chores was a woman's duty. For example, that washing clothes was her responsibility. Why will men do this work? I never questioned this. When I interacted with the Mentor and got involved in the program, I understood gender very clearly, understood sex very clearly. (But..) I never understood sexuality and same-sex relationships and never approved of it. Now at this point I feel that this is the right of every person regarding their life. I should not be a judge of this process. I am now clear about the gender socialization process and how socialization must be questioned.[5]

---

5   This case is an example of what has not got covered in the questions indicated in the Assessment form. This case answers a question that needed to be there: Did the mentoring process clarify some key feminist concept for the Mentee? If yes, please indicate that.

Mentee's assessment form:

1. What were your expectations/assumptions about mentoring when you first entered the mentoring process?

2. Has your understanding about mentoring changed today? Can you recall any particular session or event that triggered this change in your understanding?

3. Do you feel equal to your Mentor/s today as compared to earlier on?

4. Have you ever felt that your Mentor/s speak a lot during a session or give a lot of advice?

5. Tell us the story of one mentoring session that really impacted you, that you still remember very well. What happened and why did this session have such an impact on you? What did the Mentor do or say that has stayed with you?

> **CASE EXAMPLE: How a session impacted the Mentee to look at her power relations with her CYWLs**
>
> I particularly remember a session in which I asked my Mentor if she faces trouble because of the extreme changes in my mood, to which she replied that being a feminist Mentor, she sees the person as she is at that moment without rushing to judgements. She told me that she does not reduce my existence or my experience with her to that one call.
>
> When the Mentor said that she does not judge me on the basis of one conversation, I started thinking about how I treat my Mentees in the community...I started introspecting about my own power relations a lot.

6. Do you think the mentoring process has changed how you look at yourself, feel about yourself?

> **CASE EXAMPLE: How a mentoring process changed the way a Mentee looked and felt about herself**
>
> Mentoring has led to personal changes in all aspects of my life. Firstly, the biggest change has been an increase in my confidence. Earlier I used to second guess myself. Now I believe in myself. At home, I am able to voice my thoughts much more than before. My family and close relatives now seek my opinion. *They wait for my opinion. They value my opinion.* My opinion matters and I am able to take decisions.

7. If yes, please share a few examples. If no, why do you think it has not?

8. Do you think the mentoring process has changed how others around you (family, friends, colleagues, supervisors, your community) see you or relate to you?

9. If yes, please share a few examples. If no, why do you think it has not?

> **CASE EXAMPLE: How others around a Mentee changed**
>
> A particularly gratifying example of such a shift was provided by a Mentee who talked about how her husband intervened after an impromptu remark by some neighboring women.
>
> The case, as reported by the Mentor, can be explained as follows: A's husband often helps her with domestic tasks and makes no bones about his willingness to do so. This includes washing clothes and cooking food. Once, more recently, when he was outside working alongside A hanging clothes out to dry, the two women began taunting A, making comments like "You're not much of a woman if your husband has to help you do all your work!" and "What kind of man does housework!"
>
> A said that she had been about to respond to them sharply, when her husband intervened. He pointed out, quite calmly, that the women were just seeking to create trouble. He added, "the fact is, your husbands do not care how much you struggle with things, so you cannot bear it that my

> wife and I have such a good relationship and that I am happy to help her with these tasks. It does not matter what you think or say, because I know why you are so nasty to her."
>
> A told me that while she has always appreciated her husband's willingness to help her with household chores, she was taken aback to hear him directly address these women who were jeering at her. "I never thought that he would just come out and tell those women that they were jealous!" she said, delighted at her husband's willingness to speak out in favour of having a strong woman for his wife.

10. If you wanted to give your Mentor/s feedback, what would you tell them?

> **CASE EXAMPLE: A Mentee's discomfort with a Mentor's actions**
>
> The Mentor was visiting my organization. She had compared me with another YWL, let's call 'T', and said, 'T had shared a lot, now it is your time to share.' My organization started placing a lot of pressure on me after that. Under that pressure I used to do or say things in panic mode, and as a result became the subject of gossip in my office. This made me feel very bad. The next issue arose when the Mentor started treating me as a friend and started asking for personal favors from me. I was not comfortable with this and felt she was crossing a boundary.

11. If you could change something about the mentoring process, what would it be? Please share as many points as you wish:

In the SAYWLM context, the feminist leadership and movement building strategy required each Mentee to mobilize and build the leadership capacity of other young women in the community where the movement building process was taking place. Consequently, they also received training in feminist mentoring and began to mentor these community-based young activists. Therefore, the SAYWLM assessment system

included some questions around the Mentees' own experience as community-based Mentors and the changes they observed in themselves as Mentors and in their community-based Mentees. An example of one such reflection is in the case below:
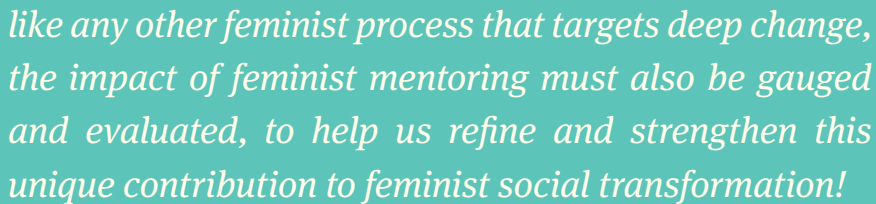
> **CASE EXAMPLE: How the Mentee changed her approach of mentoring**
>
> Most of the girls I mentor have learned to stay in a spiral of silence in the face of discrimination and abuse. I felt they needed a one-to-one space where they could open up and talk. So I created, for my Mentees, the kind of one-to-one process that I experienced with my Mentors. This gave them a very safe space to talk about issues which they otherwise never spoke of.

★ ★ ★ ★

Mentoring is a deeply subjective experience with many different variables that determine its quality and impact. Some factors depend on the Mentee, some on the Mentor, some on how the Mentor-Mentee dyad works (or not) and many factors arise from the context in which the mentoring is taking place. The socio-cultural context generates behavioral norms and expectations of their own, while class, race, ethnic, linguistic and other differences also play a role in shaping the mentoring experience, as we have seen. Assessment of mentoring and its impact is therefore quite challenging, and there can be no "one size fits all" tools or ideal frameworks for all situations. Sharing information or analysis of impacts can also be challenging due to the confidentiality and privacy norms built into mentoring, the sensitivity of the "data" generated, the difficulty of gathering "objective" data, and the need for all concerned to consent to sharing their mentoring experience in an anonymized form (as has been done for the case examples in this guide).

What we have offered in this chapter are intended only as suggestions, and we encourage the users of the guide to exercise all their creativity in developing stronger and more reflective assessment tools and methodologies in their own contexts. What is important, however, is to do it. Because,

like any other feminist process that targets deep change, the impact of feminist mentoring must also be gauged and evaluated, to help us refine and strengthen this unique contribution to feminist social transformation!
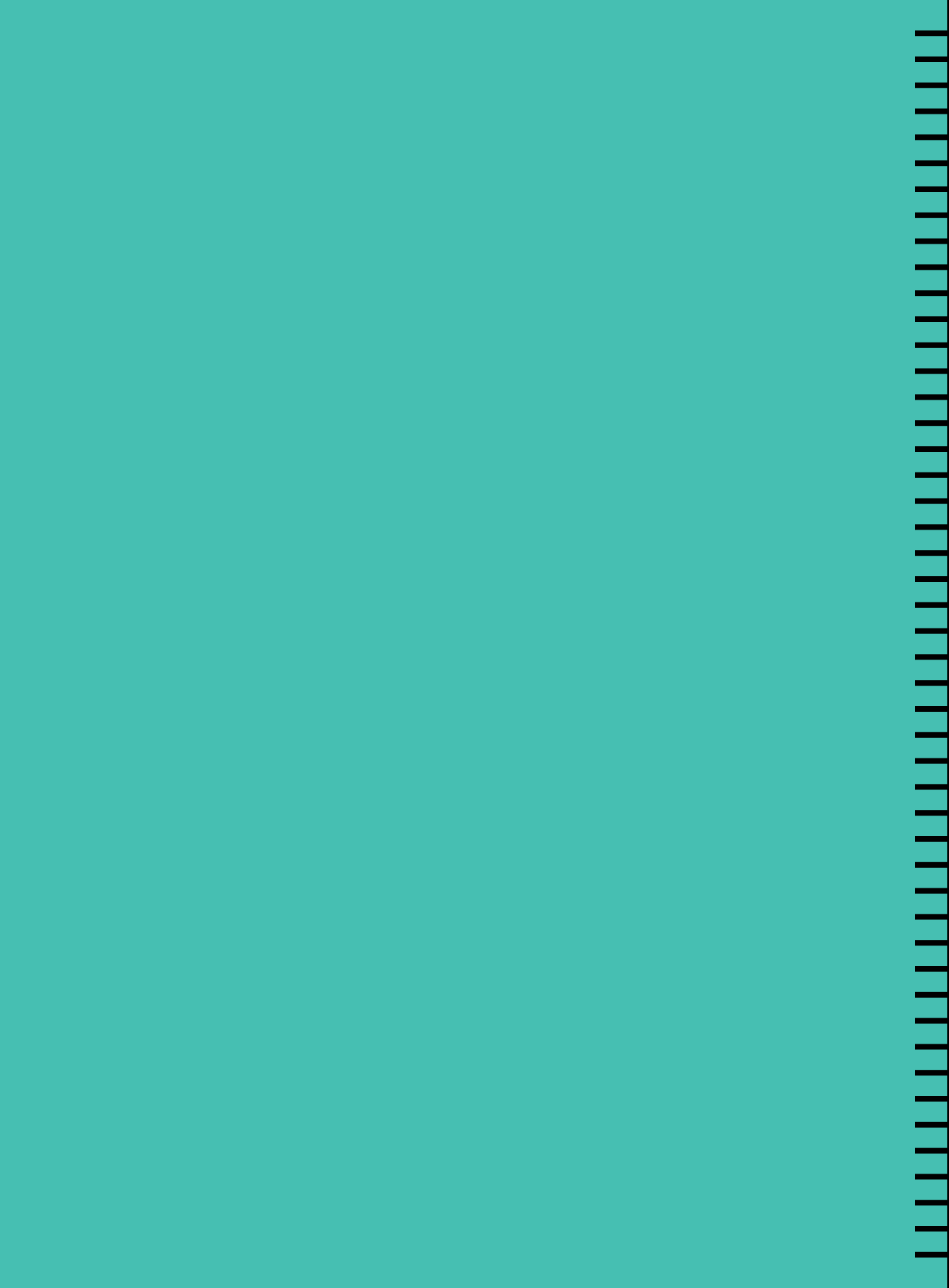
Annexure

HOW DO WE ASSESS FEMINIST LEADERSHIP? SOME IDEAS...

A major challenge of the SAYWLM project was the need to assess growth in the leadership capacity of the YWLs that the project sought to build, and later, of the community-based YWLs that they in turn trained. This can only be done if we are clear about **what constitutes leadership capacity, especially from a feminist perspective**. This note is an attempt to unpack feminist leadership in a more concrete way to help us create an effective assessment framework and tool for measuring it.

What is Feminist Leadership?

At the highest level, feminist leadership is, to quote the inimitable Hope Chigudu, "not about positional power, accomplishments, not even about what we do. It's about creating a domain in which human beings continually deepen their understanding of reality and become more capable of participating in....creating new realities... [Feminist] Leadership exists when people are no longer victims of circumstances but participate in creating new circumstances."

More specifically, CREA defines feminist leadership as:

Women — and men! — with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive ways that unleash the potential in those around them to achieve that larger vision. Feminist leadership is a process that makes visible and transforms the deep structures of discrimination, oppression and exclusion that lurk within ourselves, and in our organizations, movements and societies at large.

What does this mean for the day-to-day, ground level practice of feminist leadership by young women activists? CREA's conceptual framework on feminist leadership (the four Ps and the self)[1] suggests that it is useful to break this down to the individual, organizational and social levels, because feminist leadership is practiced in all these locations; although its practice looks different and has different results in each of these spheres. The following is an attempt to unpack what feminist leadership might look like when we see it operationalized or manifested in how a feminist leader thinks, behaves, works and feels.

1. At the individual level, feminist leadership means:

1. Recognizing the gender-based injustices in their families, organizations and communities (including ones that have been normalized), that "a better world is possible," and that these injustices are NOT okay, and must be challenged and eradicated.

2. Personal commitment to being part of such a process of challenge and change, including changing oneself.

3. Willingness to analyze one's own concept of leadership and relationship

---

1   S. Batliwala, Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud, New Delhi: CREA, (2011), https://creaworld.org/resource/feminist-leadership-for-social-transformation/

to power, how one practices power and a commitment to change negative patterns that reproduce dominant forms of oppressive power associated with mainstream leadership (especially recognizing one's own "powerless rage" and "power under" practices).

4. Capacity to analyze and identify the root causes of gender and social injustices — not just their overt symptoms.

5. Belief/faith in one's own capacity to mobilize others around the need to build more gender-just communities.

6. Basic skills with which to undertake this kind of mobilization, especially the ability to:

    i.   Communicate effectively and creatively with others, and share one's analysis in appropriate and captivating ways;

    ii. Bring together others affected by the injustices by creating safe spaces, careful listening and respect for their voices and experiences;

    iii. Inspire others to analyze the roots of the issues and act for change;

    iv. Direct the change process in strategic ways; and

    v.   In the above process, recognize and cede space for the leadership of others to emerge (ability to share leadership).

7. Ability to recognize gaps in one's own leadership practices/capacities and willingness to acquire them in different ways.

8. Willingness to explore and model new ways of leading/practicing power as a feminist social justice activist.

2. At the organizational level, feminist leadership means:

1. Recognizing and challenging the deep structures of discrimination within the organization, and catalyzing organizational leadership to address these.

2. Ensuring your voice is heard in shaping the priorities and strategies of the organization especially with regard to their gender equality/women and girls empowerment work.

3. Providing effective leadership to that work, including:

    i.   Analyzing the nature of gender injustice in the communities they work in

and its deeper roots (social norms and customs, individual attitudes and belief systems, skewed control over resources and decision-making, etc.);

   ii. Identifying the priorities for organizational intervention;

   iii. Mobilizing the support of peers and supervisors for these priorities; and

   iv. Designing and implementing the intervention, including mobilization of women, girls, men and boys in the community around these issues.

4. Advocating for and implementing a movement-building approach in addressing these priorities in order to achieve longer-term, sustainable impact in terms of gender justice (as opposed to short-term, symptomatic interventions or services that don't address the deeper roots of the problem).

3. At the community/societal level, feminist leadership means:

1. Building a movement for gender justice in the specific context in which you work, including:

   i. Building rapport and credibility with the key constituencies you wish to mobilize around the change agenda (i.e., those most affected by the injustice);

   ii. Creating a safe space where they can meet, analyze their challenges, identify priorities and strategize for change;

   iii. Linking these groups with each other to build a larger movement for change; and

   iv. Building the leadership capacity of movement members at different levels, especially women and girls, who can provide the movement's long-term leadership needs.

2. Inspiring creative strategies to advance change, including strategies conceived by the constituents/movement members.

3. Supporting the movement to reflect and analyze its actions/achievements/ setbacks.

4. Providing critical feedback to the movement and its organizations on deep structure and Power Under dynamics, and helping them model new ways of practicing power, especially in leadership.

About the Authors

Tejinder Singh Bhogal

Tejinder Singh Bhogal is a Director at Innobridge Consulting Pvt. Ltd. He works in two areas: organizational change consulting for the social sector and mentoring/coaching.

In the former, he has worked with a range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, donors, networks and government programs — those working on gender, education, reproductive health, mental health, children, environment, non-traditional livelihoods, etc., — many of these organizations being avowedly feminist. He believes that organization change work cannot be effective unless situated in broader social change processes. In the latter, apart from being formally trained in mentoring/coaching, his understanding of individuals (and contexts) has been aided by being a professional T-group trainer: something that involves working intensively on human processes with small groups of individuals.

Tejinder has helped many NGOs design and implement mentoring programs. He continues to mentor organizational leaders, community level workers and potential mentors. His present approach to mentoring is deeply informed by feminist mentoring precepts, which situates individual change within a rubric of larger social change. Prior to becoming a consultant he spent 13 years working in the villages of Gujarat and Chattisgarh, with a national level NGO, PRADAN. He is a graduate of the 1st batch of the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA) and a professional member of the Indian Society of Applied Behavioral Sciences (ISABS).

In his spare time he writes prose and poetry, and reads extensively in the areas of psychotherapy, science, sociology and literature. He is deeply interested in birds, insects and wildlife in general. He is also a published author in the areas of organizational development and human resource development.

Srilatha Batliwala

Srilatha Batliwala is Senior Advisor, Knowledge Building at CREA, a feminist human rights organization based in New Delhi, India. Her work focuses on capacity building and mentoring of young women activists in the global South, and on building new knowledge from the practice and insights of activists working with the most marginalized people.

Prior to CREA, Srilatha worked as Scholar Associate at AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development), as Civil Society Research Fellow at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations in Harvard University, and as the Civil Society Program Officer at the Ford Foundation. Srilatha has a history of grassroots work in India, where she was involved in building large-scale women's movements that mobilized and empowered thousands of rural and urban women from the poorest communities in Mumbai and in the poorest districts of Karnataka state in South India.

Srilatha has published extensively on a range of women's issues, and is best known for her work on women's empowerment. Her most recent publications, "All About Power" and "All About Movements" discuss power equations in society and the potential for effective movements to challenge such power structures. She has also served on the governing boards of a number of international and Indian human rights, women's rights and development organizations.

Srilatha lives and works from twin bases in Bangalore and Coonoor in the Nilgiri Hills of South India. She prides herself on being an active feminist grandmother to her four grandchildren! She is also trying to model new ways of being an older feminist leader by supporting, mentoring and learning from younger feminist leaders and new movements. When she's not working, she bakes, reads and plays Sudoku.

Founded in 2000, CREA is a feminist human rights organization based in New Delhi, India. It is one of the few international women's rights organizations based in the global South and led by Southern feminists, which works at the grassroots, national, regional, and international levels.

CREA envisions a more just and peaceful world, where everyone lives with dignity, respect and equality. CREA builds feminist leadership, advances women's human rights, and expands sexual and reproductive freedoms for all people.