

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring — A Theoretical Perspective

October 1999

- *What is the nature of a mentoring relationship and its effect on the participants?*
- *What function do mentoring programmes serve in organisations?*
- *How can organisations structure mentoring programmes to best pursue their objectives?*

This project was researched and written to fulfill the specific research request of a single member of the Corporate Leadership Council and as a result may not satisfy the information needs of other members. In its short answer research, the Corporate Leadership Council refrains from endorsing or recommending a particular product, service or program in any respect. Sources are contacted at random within the parameters set by the requesting member, and the resulting sample is rarely of statistically significant size. That said, it is the goal of the Corporate Leadership Council to provide a balanced review of the study topic within the parameters of this project. The Corporate Leadership Council encourages members who have additional questions about this topic to assign custom research projects of their own design.



Catalog No.: **070-238-104**

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LITERATURE REVIEW

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THE MEANING OF MENTORING

Mentoring as a means of passing on learning and development has an ancient history, and a significant history in the workplace — a Harvard Business Review piece first drew organisational attention to the role mentoring plays in career success in 1978.¹ However, mentoring has received renewed and explicit attention in recent years since its positive impact on the organisational socialisation and career development² of participants has been widely recognised.

Literature differs concerning the specific nature of mentoring, since it takes many different forms in different situations. According to one author:

*"It has been difficult to define mentoring because it is as informal as pairing,
as variable as the organizations in which mentors and protégés find themselves,
and as idiosyncratic as the people involved."*

However, there is general agreement among thinkers and practitioners in this field regarding some aspects of the features of mentoring relationships:³

1. Mentoring is an evolving dynamic relationship between two individuals: a mentor and a protégé.
2. Mentoring can be mutually beneficial to both mentor and protégé, as well as to an organisation.

Two complementary definitions of mentoring and mentors are presented below to provide a comprehensive description of mentoring relationships in a corporate environment:

"...Mentoring is a communication relationship between a senior organizational member (the mentor) and a more junior organizational member (the protégé or mentee). The mentor takes a paternalistic interest in the protégé's career and offers advising, coaching and counseling to enhance career development and success for the protégé."⁴

"The mentor is usually a senior experienced employee who serves as a role model, provides support, direction, and feedback to the younger employee regarding career plans and interpersonal development, and increases the visibility of the protégé to decisionmakers in the organization who may influence career opportunities."⁵

¹ Collins & Scott. "Everyone Who Makes It Has a Mentor." *Harvard Business Review* (1978).

² M. Bahniuk and S. Kogler Hill. "Promoting Career Success Through Mentoring." *Review of Business* (March 1998): pages unknown

³ S. Appelbaum. "Mentoring Revisited: An Organizational Behavior Construct." *Journal of Management Development* Vol. 13 (1994): 62-72.

⁴ Noe (1988, p. 458) as cited in S. Aryee *et al.* "The Motivation to Mentor..." *Group & Organization Management* (September 1996): 261.

⁵ M. Bahniuk and S. Kogler Hill, *ibid.*

THE FUNCTIONS OF MENTORING

In an age where work has become increasingly de-personalised and where internal systems within organisations frequently inhibit interchange, many organisations have established formal mentoring schemes to provide support to employees.⁶ In particular, the positive influence of mentoring relationships is evidenced by organisations' use of formal programmes to further the advancement of particular groups, such as women or ethnic minorities, who would typically have limited access to informal opportunities for building mentoring relationships.

The most frequently stated aims of mentoring are as follows:⁷

- To effectively induct and socialise new hires into the organisation
- To complement formal learning processes
- To improve performance
- To realise potential

Mentoring is generally regarded as being bi-functional: it provides two forms of support or development to the protégé. Its two functions are career-oriented and psychosocial.

FUNCTIONS OF MENTORING

<p><i>Career-Oriented</i> <i>Facilitating the career development of the protégé</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increases protégé's visibility to decisionmakers• Provides challenging development assignments• Suggests strategies for accomplishing work objectives	<p><i>Psychosocial</i> <i>Supporting the protégé to encourage a sense of competence and effectiveness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing counselling, friendship, acceptance and confirmation
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Both the career-oriented and psychosocial functions of mentoring are important to the relationship, and both can positively influence the protégé's advancement. This is evidenced by a 1992 study by Terri Scandura⁸ (former Associate Professor of Management at the University of Miami School of Business Administration), which demonstrates that career-oriented mentoring was positively related to the rate of promotion and that psychosocial mentoring was positively related to salary level.

However, a particular emphasis on either of these two functions, or on specific mentoring roles within each function (such as knowledge sharing, or counselling), may develop naturally within mentor relationships. Such a focus emerges in response to the needs or preferences of the participants: there is no single simple model of mentoring, whether formal or informal.

In some cases, the distinction between mentoring and other forms of support, such as coaching or counselling, is not clear. However, in general mentoring tends to be 'person-focused' (centred on the rounded development of the individual) rather than role- or skill-focused, as is the case with coaching, for example.

⁶ Author Unknown. "Practical Guide: Personal Development — Coaching, Counselling and Mentoring" <http://www.hr-expert.com> (October 1999).

⁷ S. Gibb. "The Usefulness of Theory: A Case Study in Evaluating Formal Mentoring Schemes" *Human Relations* Vol. 52 (August 1999).

⁸ T. Scandura. "Mentoring and Career Mobility: An Empirical Investigation." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* Vol. 13 (1992).

FORMS AND STRUCTURES OF MENTORING

Mentoring in some form is practised in almost every large organisation. Although it increasingly occurs as a product of a formal pairing programme, it should not be defined exclusively in these terms ("mentoring is not necessarily the forced pairing found in formally structured programmes").

Individual versus Group Mentoring

Author Stephen Appelbaum argues that while mentoring is a "voluntary pairing of two individuals for mutual personal and corporate gain" and "affects many aspects of organizational behaviour including leadership, organizational culture, job satisfaction and performance", it is also "a multi-faceted and extremely diverse process".¹⁰ Mentoring in a corporate environment tends to be either informal (spontaneous) or formal (structured, 'managed'), group (collective) or individual (one-to-one). Features of group and one-to-one mentoring are contrasted below:

ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING VERSUS GROUP MENTORING ¹¹		
	Mentor Roles	Benefits
Traditional (one-to-one) Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisor Recommends career direction for protégé, identifies possible career obstacles and assists protégé in overcoming them • Ally Provides candid, forthright opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers one on one interaction • Provides strong opportunity for mentor to explore and develop protégé's weaknesses and hone strengths • Acts as explicit and exclusive point of reference for protégé in the company
Group Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broker Assists protégé in establishing and increasing networking contacts • Catalyst Motivates protégés • Coach Teaches necessary job skills, promotes understanding of the corporate culture and clarifies employer expectations • Communicator Facilitates discussion, interaction and the exchange of information • Counsellor Assists protégés in understanding and pursuing career options • Savvy Insider Facilitates networking by protégés 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for diffusion of personality conflicts between mentor and protégé • Correlates with the trend toward flatter, less hierarchical, team-based organisational structures; especially advantageous for companies that do not have sufficient qualified, tenured employees to act as one-to-one mentors • Facilitates networking by providing protégés with the opportunity to network among themselves • Reduces risk of protégé dependency on mentor • Reduces cost associated with mentoring (lost mentor productivity) • Provides same levels of mentoring and experience to all protégés • Provides diversity of perspectives and opportunity for protégés to learn from each others.

⁹ S. Appelbaum. "Mentoring Revisited: An Organizational Behavior Construct" *Journal of Management Development* Vol. 13 (1994).

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ A. Geiger, "Measures for Mentors." *Training & Development* (February 1992) and B. Kaye & B. Jacobson. "Mentoring: A Group Guide." *Training & Development* (April 1995).

FORMS AND STRUCTURES OF MENTORING (CONTINUED)

Informal versus Formal Mentoring

Spontaneous or informal mentoring exists to some degree in all spheres of interaction between individuals. Two similar individuals form a mutually supportive relationship, which is often based on a pre-existing relationship of trust and respect. The mentor-protégé aspect of the relationship originates and evolves in an unstructured way and is inherently characterised by compatibility and flexibility.¹²

In some commercial organisations, where circumstances may not encourage the spontaneous formation of mentoring relationships, structured mentoring programmes have been established in order to bring benefits to the organisation that will equal or exceed those of any informal mentoring which occurs naturally.¹³ Most formal mentoring programmes exhibit the following common features:¹³

<p>Assigned pairings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of senior managers are asked to act as mentors for particular subordinates (typically newcomers to the organisation) rather than being given free choice. 	<p>High-potential protégés</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protégés who are assigned mentors are carefully selected, on the basis of their likelihood of benefitting from the process, and their potential to contribute to the organisation.
<p>Regulated relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most often, mentors decide how often mentor and protégé will meet. In some cases, mentors are required to meet with their mentees on a specified minimum number of occasions. 	<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since mentoring is an activity designed to achieve particular aims, the organisation will typically make an effort to assess the effectiveness of the programme and compare its costs and benefits.

Drawbacks of formal mentoring programmes

Some criticism is directed at formal mentoring programmes. Since they have the regulated features outlined above, there is no guarantee that their outcomes will necessarily be as positive as those resulting from 'natural' mentoring relationships.¹³

- ♦ Managers may not think highly of the subordinates assigned to them and thus not offer the same degree of support or assistance as they would to a self-selected protégé.¹⁴
- ♦ Mentees are less likely to react positively to assigned (rather than chosen) mentors and may exhibit few good behaviours that mentors can relate to their superiors, reducing the likelihood of success.

Because they are orchestrated, meetings that occur between mentors and mentees in a formal programme are often strained and predictable, with less of the spontaneity and mutual regard that characterises informal interactions.¹⁵ Mentees are unlikely to benefit from meeting of this nature as they do from informal mentoring interactions.¹⁶

¹² L. Burgess. "Mentoring Without the Blindfold." *Employment Relations Today* Vol. 21 (December 1994).

¹³ C. Orpen. "The Effects of Formal Mentoring..." *The Learning Organization* Vol. 4 (1997)

¹⁴ E. Fagenson. "The Power of a Mentor." *Group & Organization Studies* Vol. 13 (1998).

¹⁵ K. Kram. "Mentoring at Work." (1985) Boston. Scott, Foresman & Co.

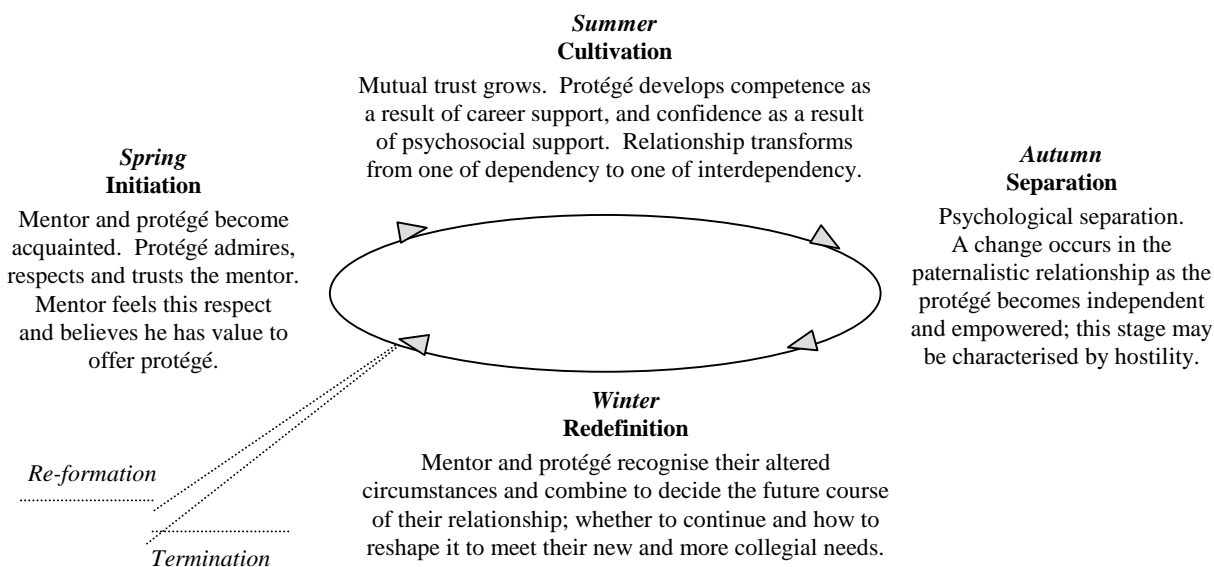
¹⁶ R. Burke *et al.* "How Do Mentorships Differ From Typical Supervisory Relationships?" *Psychological Reports* Vol. 67 (1991).

PHASES OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

The dynamics and duration of mentoring relationships have been subject to some theoretical reflection. Process models can assist in delineating the progressive stages of the mentor/protégé relationship, specifically with regard to traditional, one-to-one mentoring.

One of the most prominent writers on mentoring relationships and their effects is Kathy Kram, Professor of Organisational Behaviour at Boston University. In 1983, Kram presented a paper,¹⁷ based on qualitative interviews with both mentors and protégés, which documented four phases in mentoring relationships: Initiation, Cultivation, Separation and Redefinition.

Kram's four-stage model has been adapted by Leonard Burgess and presented as a 'seasonal' model, as depicted below.¹⁸ The model conceptualises the mentoring relationship as progressing through various stages of mutual utility.



In contrast to Kram, who did not comment on the duration of the mentoring relationship, Burgess expects the average length of mentoring relationships to be no more than three years. However, traditional perceptions of mentoring envisage that a senior employee would mentor new entrants until such time as the new entrants became mentors themselves.

¹⁷ K. Kram. "Phases of the Mentoring Relationship" *Academy of Management Journal* 26 (1983).

¹⁸ L. Burgess. "Mentoring without the Blindfold." *Employment Relations Today* (22 December 1994).

THE IMPACT OF MENTORING

The Motivation to Mentor

Not all experienced managers serve as mentors: individuals must make an active decision to do so. The factors that motivate this decision may be many and varied, based on the perceived costs and benefits associated with the activity.

Samuel Aryee finds that the decision to mentor is motivated by individual and situational factors, although individual characteristics, such as altruism, typically have more influence on the decision.¹⁹ Aryee finds that the following factors are positively related to the decision to mentor:

- Altruism
- Positive affectivity (the tendency to be happy, or experience positive effect across situations)
- An organisational reward system that emphasises employee development
- Opportunities to interact on the job

Potential Benefits of Mentoring

There are a host of potential benefits stemming from mentoring activity, both for the individuals and for the organisation within which they work. Several of these benefits are presented below:

Protégé

Increased power and influence for the protégé within the organisation²⁰

Faster and more effective 'learning the ropes' by the protégé²¹

Enhanced salary, promotion and career satisfaction for the protégé²²

Mentor

Sense of satisfaction and fulfilment felt by the mentor²³

Rejuvenation of mentor's career by creative and energised input from protégé²³

Organisational recognition of mentor for the support provided to and reported by the protégé²³

Increased job satisfaction and organisation attachment for the mentor²⁴

Organisation

Lesser likelihood that protégés will quit: reduced turnover²⁵

Ensured continuity of organisational culture²⁶

Ensured supply of managerial talent²⁷

There are also a number of potential costs associated with mentoring relationships:

- ☒ Time and energy spent nurturing the relationship, in addition to normal job requirements²⁸
- ☒ Poorly performing protégé reflects negatively on mentor's judgement and competency³⁰
- ☒ Risk of mentor being displaced or 'backstabbed' by ambitious or disloyal protégé³⁰
- ☒ Risk of negative organisational reputation of mentor if viewed as favouring protégé²⁹

¹⁹ S. Aryee *et al.* "The Motivation to Mentor Among Managerial Employees." *Group & Organization Management* (September 1996).

²⁰ E. Fagenson. "The Power of a Mentor: Protégés and Non-Protégés Perceptions of Their Own Power..." *Group & Organizational Studies* 13 (1998).

²¹ Wilson & Elman. "Organizational Benefits of Mentoring" *Academy of Management Executive* 4 (1990).

²² T. Scandura. "Dysfunctional Mentoring Relationships and Outcomes" *Journal of Management* (May 1998).

²³ B.R. Ragins & T. Scandura. "Gender Differences in Expected Outcomes of Mentoring..." *Academy of Management Journal* (August 1994).

²⁴ C. Orpen. "The Effects of Formal Mentoring..." *The Learning Organization* Vol. 4 (1997)

citing R. Noe. "An Investigation Into the Determinants of Successful Assigned Mentoring Relationships" *Personnel Psychology* 41 (1998).

²⁵ T. Scandura and R. Viator. "Mentoring in Public Accounting Firms..." *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 19 (1994).

²⁶ Wilson & Elman, *ibid* and M.G. Zey. "The Mentor Connection." 1984, Homewood, Illinois. Dow-Jones-Irwin.

²⁷ B. Bernstein & B. Kaye. "Teacher, Tutor, Colleague, and Coach." *Personnel Journal* 65 (1986).

²⁸ T. Halatin & R. Knotts. "Becoming a Mentor: Are the Risks Worth the Rewards?" *Supervisory Management* 27 (1982).

²⁹ D. Myers & N. Humphreys. "The Caveats in Mentorship." *Business Horizons* 28 (1985).

THE IMPACT OF MENTORING (CONTINUED)

Dysfunctional Mentoring Relationships

Within the substantial volume of published literature regarding mentoring processes and the positive effects of mentoring, there exists little analysis of the potential relational dysfunction within mentoring relationships and what the impact of such dysfunction might be.³⁰

However, Kram's work identifies 'destructive' mentoring relationships. She highlights their potential to become "dissatisfying and destructive as individual needs and/or organizational circumstances change."³¹

In modelling the process and outcomes of dysfunctional mentoring relationships, Scandura identifies personal (*e.g.* dominance or submissiveness), demographic (*e.g.* sex or age) and skill (*e.g.* interpersonal) characteristics that can lead to dysfunction. In a study of terminated dysfunctional mentoring relationships, Ragins and Scandura identify the following dysfunctional reasons for the termination of mentoring relationships:³²

1. Destructive relationship characterised by jealousy, with mentor stifling protégé's progress
2. Dependency and suffocation within the relationship
3. Mentor's unrealistic expectations and subsequent lack of support

Further literature identifies the following destructive relational problems that contribute to the reasons to terminate outlined above:

- ☒ Differences in judgement exist between mentor and protégé³³
- ☒ Interests of the mentor and protégé change³⁵
- ☒ Mentors and protégé have undue involvement in each other's personal issues³⁵
- ☒ Mentors are tyrannical or selfish within the relationship³⁴
- ☒ Protégé's envy of the mentor leads to protégé 'cloning' self into image of mentor³⁵
- ☒ Mentor envy of the protégé leads to mentor blocking progress of 'rising star' protégé³⁷

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³⁰ T. Scandura. "Dysfunctional Mentoring Relationships and Outcomes." *Journal of Management* (May 1998).

³¹ K. Kram. "Mentoring at Work." (1985) Boston. Scott, Foresman & Co.

³² B. Ragins & T. Scandura. "The Way We Were..." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 82 (1997).

³³ W. Hennefrund. "Taking the Measure of Mentoring." *Association Management* 38 (1986).

³⁴ D. Myers & N. Humphreys. "The Caveats In Mentorship." *Business Horizons* 28 (1985).

³⁵ Natale *et al.* "How Envy Affects Management." *Journal of Technology Management* 3 (1988).

THE IMPACT OF MENTORING (CONTINUED)

Scandura maps the range of relational behaviours that may lead to mentoring dysfunction, based on Duck's 1994 typology of personal relationship behaviour.³⁶ These identified behaviours are presented below:

RELATIONAL BEHAVIOURS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DYSFUNCTION OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Negative Relations</i></p> <p>The power differential between mentor and protégé is reinforced by tyrannical or exploitative behaviour on the part of the mentor. Depending upon the protégé's response, such relationships can become abusive or can result in the parties becoming organisational enemies if the protégé 'fights back'. These situations are emotionally unpleasant and damaging for the protégé.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sabotage</i></p> <p>The relationship is characterised by one party taking revenge on the other, or ignoring the other in order to provoke a response (the 'silent treatment'). For example, mentor does not recommend promotion for the protégé. When resentment builds to the point where one seeks revenge on the other, the relationship has transcended organisational issues and may require external mediation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Difficulty</i></p> <p>Psychosocial relational problems interfere with each party's good intentions towards the other. Relationship is characterised by conflict, disagreement on judgements, or the making of ultimatums to manipulate the other party's behaviour. For example, the mentor imposing his own model of a 'successful' career on the protégé may result in a high level of stress and anxiety for the protégé.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Spoiling</i></p> <p>Problems in the relationship tend to be related to career issues, despite the parties having good intentions toward each other. The potentially positive relationship is spoiled by some actual or perceived act of 'betrayal' that evokes emotions of disappointment or regret. Miscommunication about the parties' expectations or capabilities can lead to perceived (though not malicious) 'betrayals'.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Submissiveness</i></p> <p>Protégé offers submissive behaviour in exchange for relational and organisational rewards mediated by more powerful mentors. Since mature and successful work relationships tend to be characterised by balanced exchanges of support and resources, while this relationship is characterised by over-dependence, which may produce tyrannical behaviour in the mentor.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Deception</i></p> <p>Mentor or protégé manipulates information in order to obtain compliance from the other. Ingratious behaviours such as flattery and falsely agreeing with opinions involve (albeit benevolent) deception. This behaviour is dysfunctional and indicates relational difficulties inherent in the mentoring relationship. Deception may lead to the dissolution of the relationship.</p>

Informal relationships are more often successful than dysfunctional. Their spontaneous nature implies strong foundations that in most cases preclude relational difficulties. However, mentoring relationships established under formal schemes are more liable to suffer difficulties such as those outlined above, since they result from an external matching process. This process should be carefully designed and executed in order to minimise the risk of dysfunction.

³⁶ S. Duck. "Stratagems, Spoils and the Serpent's Tooth..." in *The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication* W. Cupach and B. Spitzberg (Eds), (1994) Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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