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# Structured Mentoring Programs in Organizations

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## Introduction

I'm curious as to what the current "hot issue" in mentoring is. So what's the big deal about guiding others? Is mentoring something that needs further research? But first, we must address the fundamental question, "What is mentoring?" Mentoring, as defined by Tom Brown, is "the process by which an experienced veteran helps to shape or guide a newcomer"[1]. According to Brown, "true mentoring is an extended, confidential relationship between two people who have mutual personal growth — and corporate success — in common goals." The word "mentor" has been defined in a variety of ways, including this one: "A mentor is someone who helps another person become what that person aspires to be"[2, p. 1]. In its traditional sense, a mentor is described as a "trusted counsellor or guide"[3] by Webster's Dictionary. Wright and Werther put it simply, "Mentors guide their protégés"[4]. Although scholars don't always agree on what makes a good mentorship, they do agree on a few key points. Mentoring involves two people, a mentor and a mentee, in a reciprocal relationship that develops and changes over time. The mentor, the mentee, and the company as a whole may all benefit from a mentoring relationship. Mentoring has been studied and discussed extensively in the past 15 years[2, p. 1], although its roots may be traced all the way back to Greek mythology[5]. *mentorship at Work*, by Kathy E. Kram, is a classic examination of mentorship in the workplace, originally published in 1950[6]. As part of the Organizational Behavior and Psychology Series, *Mentoring at Work* was reissued in 1985. In this updated edition, Kram mentions various research papers that "focus on understanding the nature of mentoring in organizational settings" [6, p. 3]. The majority of these research date back to the late 1970s, lending credence to the topic's renewed popularity during the last 15 years. Recent studies on mentoring, however, have focused less on defining the mentoring phenomenon and more on figuring out how to put mentoring programs into practice. While research on mentoring has traditionally taken place within the field of human resource management, a new, complementary field of study has emerged: the study of organizational behavior. Rather of focusing on organizational behavior, this new study is often a product of HRD or L&D. Both formal (via structured programs) and informal (through more natural or customary means) mentoring have been recognized in the literature[7]. There are now just a handful of major companies that have not implemented a structured mentorship program.

However, mentorship schemes have lately been re-examined and evaluated. Unfortunately, "very few mentoring programs have been successful." [8]. Forcing people together in a mentoring relationship is counter to the essence of mentoring, according to Brown. In [1], Chao et al. synthesize their evaluation:

The goal here is not to settle a disagreement over whether formal or informal mentoring is superior, but rather to depict mentoring as a multifaceted and evolving area of study within the context of organizations' evolving behavioral norms. In light of this, the aim of this essay is to take a closer look at how mentoring is related to many facets of modern organizational behavior. Individual and collective actions within companies are the focus of organizational behavior research [9, p. 6]. The term "mentoring" shall be used here to refer to the phenomena of an interpersonal contact between two persons. As such, mentoring often benefits specific aspects of organizational behavior[8]. A review of relevant literature relates the concept of mentoring to many aspects of the organizational behavior paradigm: individual processes, interpersonal and work-group processes, and organizational structure and processes. More specifically, mentoring will be examined as it relates to: leadership, corporate culture, gender differences, job satisfaction and performance.

### Mentoring and Leadership

Mentors must behave in certain ways as leaders: when they shape values; act as an example; and define meanings[2, p. 14].

The relationship between mentoring and leadership is closely aligned, but the defining characteristics are elusive. Intuitively, the similarities seem obvious; the differences become confusing. Perhaps it is a simple ratio difference. Leadership involves one leader and generally more than one follower, whereas mentorship involves one mentor and one protégé. On the other hand the differences could be very complex. Possibly leadership is more formal and overt, and mentorship is more subtle; or mentors are self-actualized and leaders are just developing mentors; or mentors are leadership trainers?

Maybe mentors are simply leaders in disguise.

Past adviser to four presidents, management academic, leadership authority and author – Warren Bennis coined the phrase "managers do things right, leaders do the right thing"[10]. This famous axiom, among others, is at the foundation of Bennis's leadership philosophy; a perspective developed from years of leading. It appears that the foundation of Bennis's interest in leadership began with the influence of Douglas McGregor and his work on "The

Human Side of Enterprise". Bennis states: "McGregor was my key mentor". The rhetorical question is – where did Bennis learn how to "do the right thing?" The proverbial answer is – from his mentor[10].

Bennis's concepts can enhance a different concept of leadership as a personnel development tactic rather than the defensive posture of avoiding wrong[11]. He solicits leadership as care for the spirit:

Leaders prepare their people, develop them, challenge them, encourage them, and touch them with their vision and the passion for that vision[11].

In much the same way, mentors prepare their protégés:

Mentors are trusted counsellors or guides who provide direction toward a line of thought or inclination – developing personal concern and responsibility in assisting others[2, p. 9].

The similarity between these statements clearly exemplifies the similarity between leaders and mentors. The two definitions are almost interchangeable. The only intuitive difference being the more direct approach adopted by leaders compared with a more indirect guiding/assisting approach used by mentors.

### ***There appear to be four key strategies***

Another example of a unique leadership approach that closely parallels mentoring is the concept of "Total Quality Management"[12]. There appear to be four key leadership strategies: "attention through vision, meaning through communication, trust through positioning, and confidence through respect". The underpinning of quality management is the development of good people[12] and good people appear to be developed through mentoring.

It may be important to examine what integrates mentoring with the development of chief executive officers (CEO) and presidents. "The traditional take-charge president will have to become the innovator, a team builder, and a mentor"[13]. Droste further studies CEOs by highlighting the utility of networking groups for CEOs: "Networking groups provide a good opportunity to mentor talented individuals"[14]. This research further describes the responsibility of every top executive to "assist and groom the next generation of leaders". In describing the next generation of leaders, McCanus emphasizes their need to strengthen interpersonal skills, and focus on developing people:

"Presidents will need a leadership style that allows them to create a vision of where the organization is trying to go and to present this in a way that is meaningful and can be supported by the staff. The leadership style needed in the 1990s, as seen from the comments of the officer group in this study, will require the presidents to share their professional knowledge and skills with their officers as *mentors*[13].

The next generation of leaders will characterize mentors, and mentors will characterize leaders.

The literature seems to indicate the duality of mentoring and leadership: Mentors are leaders, and leaders are mentors. Asking which comes first is like asking the proverbial chicken/egg question.

Fundamentally though; in what ways are mentoring and leadership related? Good leaders act as mentors on a one-to-one basis. Mentoring can then produce good leaders, and the leaders will act as mentors for the next generation. Perhaps the mentoring/leadership process is cyclical from generation to generation. Mentors produce leaders, leaders become mentors, and the cycle repeats itself.

### **Mentoring and Organizational Culture**

"The SELF Method of Mentoring"[15] provides a framework that incorporates leadership, mentoring and principles of self-fulfilling prophecy into a paradigm that

"embodies core values that best promote desired organizational behaviour"[15]. More specifically, the SELF method promotes socialization, education, leadership and time for fruition.

White directly links the four principles of SELF to the process of mentoring, and then to the cultivation of norms and values in an organization. "The informal influence that emanates from a mentor relationship has a potential effect on the behaviour practised in the organization"[15]. Apparently, the SELF method has been designed for its positive impact on organizational culture.

Similarly, Jaccaci[16] describes "social architecture" as a contiguous method of planning and designing organizational culture. Like White, Jaccaci describes a synergy of leaders, individuals, groups and the *raison d'être* of the collaboration with evolution, to be free and wise enough to adapt to the dynamics between people and organizations. "The challenge is to become a mentor of purpose and fulfilment for individuals, groups, and whole organizations"[16]. Mentoring in this regard is akin to dynamic leadership: a useful tool for achieving a desired organizational culture. Through mentoring the effect on corporate culture is seen as "benefits to the organization, including improved job performance, early socialization, clearer managerial succession, preparation of leaders, improved motivation, better exposure to ideas, and improved employee loyalty"[17].

Wilson and Elman also describe the process of mentoring as a medium for organizational benefits which includes the transmission of corporate culture. As they state:

The subject of “mentoring” has often been discussed, along with the benefits that they accrue to the mentee and mentor; however, the benefits that accrue to the organization that encourages mentoring within its ranks are referred to less often [18].

The accrued benefits to the organization are more “related to the long-term health of the organization as a social system”. More specifically, “mentoring provides a structured system for strengthening and assuring the continuity of organizational culture ... it can provide members with a common value base, encourage the fostering of healthy expectations, and operate as an agent for organizational modification or redefinition of culture” [18].

Moreover, mentoring can provide more practical but subtle translations of current culture.

Whether it is the more philosophical approach of Jaccaci’s “social architecture”, White’s SELF methodology, or Wilson and Elman’s practical organizational benefits, the relationship of mentoring to organizational culture is evident. Mentoring can be utilized for the differentiation, translation and modification of organizational culture.

**Monitoring and Gender Differences** Gender differences and mentoring is one of the most questionable and controversial contemporary organizational behaviour subjects. Traditionally, mentoring was a male-dominated phenomenon, but more recently women have initiated relationships. It is interesting to note that considering the relatively recent resurgence of mentoring for women, very few current studies show a difference in frequency of mentoring relationships. Drehr and Ash describe “no gender differences with regard to the frequency of

mentoring activities, and gender did not moderate mentoring-outcome relationships” [19]. The differences in salary and status that this research did illuminate was not found to be related to the outcome of gender-specific mentoring relationships. In fact, Drehr and Ash [19] found that women were well integrated in mentoring systems (contrary to their predictions). It seems that women have adapted quickly and efficiently in recent years.

Other similar research discovered that although women perceived more barriers to gaining a mentor than men, there was no difference with intention to take an assertive role in initiating mentoring relationships [20]. The barriers appear to be interpersonal and organizational in nature. Because of these barriers, many organizations are targeting women for their mentoring programmes. The result has been a proliferation of mentoring programmes for women without empirical evidence that it is necessary. Ragins and Cotton suggest that these programmes may be unnecessary because their results give evidence that women seem to be assertive in order to overcome the perceived barriers to gaining a mentor. They appear to be rising to the occasion. It must be noted though, that despite the pervasive tenacity of spirit evident in female protégés, the gender of the mentors has remained predominately male [20].

## Sex roles and gender are aligned

Examining this issue from a more theoretical standpoint has presented the following:

The mentor-protégé relationship can be conceptualized within the context of biological dimorphism with sex roles reflecting different reproductive strategies that evolved by natural selection [21].

This theory simply matches mentors with predominantly masculine sex-role behaviour, and protégés with predominantly feminine sex-role behaviour. In other words, this would seem to support Ragins and Cotton’s view that males dominate the role of mentor. This biological perspective may further define cross-gender mentoring as portrayed as a heterosexual theme whereas matched-gender mentoring could even portray a “latent” homosexual theme. These sex themes emerge because “sex roles and gender are aligned” [21]. Another parallel between this sociobiological theory and Ragins and Cotton’s study, is the obvious “barrier defying” attraction between female protégés and their male mentors. Is there a sex theme evident? It can be concluded that: “sociobiology could play an important role in the development of a theoretical framework for understanding mentor-protégé relationships and the impact of gender” [21]. It follows from this biological perspective, that there may be certain implications for women when considering mentoring in organizations. In a study examining these implications, it was found that “mentoring plays a crucial role in career development” [22]. There are two issues specific to mentoring: access to information networks, and the norms regarding cross-gender relationships. “Problems in managing cross-gender mentoring include sexual attraction, marital disruption, and damaging gossip.” The solution to these potential problems can be stated in one word: communication. Burke and McKeen advocate “open discussions in the workplace”, and making discussion of cross-gender mentoring “an explicit part of the process” [22].

In summary, there is an abundance of literature and research on varied aspects of gender differences and mentoring. In this brief review, two current studies, a sociobiological theory, and female specific implications were examined. Female protégés appear to be adapting well to the traditionally male-dominated mentoring world. However, despite this influx of female protégés, females have not been playing the role of mentor. Further research needs to focus on the reasons why not.



### Mentoring and Job Satisfaction

A relationship appears to exist between mentoring and job satisfaction in two distinct ways. First, a positive correlation exists between mentoring and career commitment. Second, a negative correlation exists between mentoring and dissatisfaction manifested in absenteeism, turnover and plateauing. In other words, mentoring fosters *less* absenteeism, turnover and plateauing.

It is impossible to mention mentoring without mentioning the word promotion. In fact, many of the traditional definitions of mentoring include the idea of promotion:

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