

Mentoring Revisited: An Organizational Behaviour Construct

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What is the “hot issue” in mentoring? What is so new about mentoring? Is mentoring a subject worth studying? However, the first question to be answered is: What is mentoring? Tom Brown describes the popular concept of mentoring as “the process in which an experienced veteran helps to shape or guide a newcomer”[1]. Brown further states that “true mentoring is an extended, confidential relationship between two people who have mutual personal growth – and corporate success – as common goals”. Other descriptions of this term include: “A mentor is someone who helps another person become what that person aspires to be”[2, p. 1]. *Webster’s Dictionary* classically defines a mentor as a “trusted counsellor or guide”[3]. Wright and Werther simply state “Mentors guide their protégés”[4]. The literature often differs on the specific nature of mentoring, but there is agreement on some aspects of the relationship. Mentoring is an evolving dynamic relationship between two individuals: a mentor and a protégé or mentoree. Mentoring can be mutually beneficial to both mentor and protégé, as well as to an organization.

Historically, mentoring can be traced back to Greek mythology[5] – with increasingly more interest arising in the twentieth century – and a resurgence of interest and research in the last 15 years[2, p. 1]. In 1950, Kathy E. Kram first wrote *Mentoring at Work*, a comprehensive analysis of the mentoring process in organizations[6]. In 1985 *Mentoring at Work* was republished as part of the Organizational Behaviour and Psychology Series. In this new edition, Kram cites numerous

research studies that “focus on understanding the nature of mentoring in organizational settings” [6, p. 3]. Most of these studies were conducted during the late 1970s which seems to substantiate the increased interest in the topic during the last 15 years. However, the nature of recent research on mentoring is directed more towards the practical application and implementation of mentoring programmes than to the theoretical and conceptual understanding of the mentoring phenomenon. Academically, mentoring has to be examined in the domain of human resource management but on investigation it appears to have a new congruent fit within the domain of organizational behaviour.

Often, this new research is more a function of human resource planning or training and development than of organizational behaviour. In fact, the literature has now identified two types of mentoring: formal (programmes) and informal (natural or traditional)[7]. At present there are very few large corporations that have not adopted some kind of formal mentoring programme.

Most recently though, there has been a re-examination and evaluation of mentoring programmes. “Few mentoring programmes have actually succeeded”[8]. Brown further states, “some observers suspect that ‘forced pairing’ violates the true spirit of mentoring”[1], and Chao *et al.*, summarize their comparison:

The groups were compared on three outcome measures: organizational socialization, job satisfaction, and salary. Results indicated protégés in informal mentorships reported more career-related support from their mentors and higher salaries than protégés in formal mentorships[7].

The point here is not to debate the merits of formal and informal mentoring, but to portray

mentoring holistically as a dynamic field of study, within the parameters of organizational behaviour which has developed continuously from past to present. In light of this, the purpose of this article is to examine the contemporary relationship between mentoring and specific aspects of organizational behaviour.

“Organizational behaviour is the systematic study of the behaviour and attitudes of both individuals and groups within organizations” [9, p. 6]. For the purpose of this review, mentoring will be the observable phenomenon of a relationship exchange between two people. As such, mentoring often benefits specific aspects of organizational behaviour[8]. A review of relevant literature relates the concept of mentoring to many aspects of the organizational behaviour 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.

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There appear to be four key strategies

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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 furthers the study of 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 insurgence 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].

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Examining this issue for 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 Cottons’ 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:

- ...help reach career goals[23].
- ...boost up the ladder of success[23].
- ...groom for a future management position[5].
- ...upward mobility to career[6, p. 22].
- ...personal career development[2, p. 10].

The concept of having a mentor assist in career development so that the protégé can reach top management is inherently understandable. However, traditional mentoring also supports more fundamental personal needs. Within the framework of job satisfaction, mentoring seems to provide a valuable function other than promotion.

The challenge of managing an already plateaued employer encourages the development of mentoring relationships, as one of the replacements for promotion opportunities. "The plateaued worker who has hit a career plateau suffers from losses in productivity and/or self-esteem"[24]. The suggestion then, is that mentoring will increase productivity and personal self-esteem.

Research examining relationships between protégés and mentors in large public accounting firms was conducted via open-ended interviews suggesting a greater inclination for protégés to stay with their accounting firm[25]. Mentoring reduced turnover in these firms, and there was also a link between mentoring and social support. Using a survey questionnaire, additional research was conducted to compare mentored with non-mentored individuals on levels of job satisfaction. "The results revealed that mentored individuals reported having greater satisfaction"[26]. "Having a mentor appeared to be the most robust correlate of career commitment"[27].

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Mentoring can cause an increase in job satisfaction

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This is one of the summarizing statements from a study examining different personal and situational variables affecting organizational and career commitment: age, internal locus of control, education level, mentoring, role conflict, role ambiguity, and inter-role conflict. Mentoring appears to be the strongest variable. As an indication of job satisfaction, career commitment can be positively correlated since it is simply a reduction of many of the symptoms of job

dissatisfaction (turnover, early retirement, low productivity).

No matter how you evaluate job satisfaction (or dissatisfaction), the phenomenon of mentoring has an effect. The literature demonstrates that mentoring can cause an increase in job satisfaction.

Expectancy theory also helps to suggest that "behaviour is a function of a person's expectancies about the future and the value of future outcomes"[9, p. 214]. An obvious manifestation of expectancy theory is the process of self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP). In an organization, leaders may hold prophecy or expectation about a subordinate, and that subordinate may behave in such a way as to realize the expectation. Obviously, there can be SFPs that are detrimental or beneficial to an individual or for the organization. The constructive management of SFPs is one way to enhance job satisfaction and employee motivation; and mentoring is one way to manage SFPs constructively.

Another term for SFP is the Pygmalion effect derived from Greek mythology. "Mentoring is a typical example of the Pygmalion effect in business"[23]. In this particular case "the mentor must act as a possible Pygmalion to rate the process effective". A positive Pygmalion is a mentor. Specifically, positive Pygmalions must provide the climate, feedback, input and output so that all subordinates are given opportunities to experience satisfaction and realize their potential.

If leaders want to encourage productivity, and satisfaction through self-fulfilling prophecy, they must accept mentoring as a viable leadership technique. Obviously, the Pygmalion effect is one of the missing links in the mentoring/leadership relationship.

Mentoring and Performance

"Mentoring activities are intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated"[2, p. 7]. Performance is the link between mentoring and satisfaction. The extrinsic results of mentoring activities are enhancement at a personal and a corporate level. The personal results are often motivation, leadership, satisfaction, self-confidence, etc. The corporate results are usually referable to performance and productivity. Odiorne stresses the importance of focusing on competence and specifically, nurturing competence. Performance and productivity will follow. Odiorne contrasts competence and passion with

the conclusion that passion is not enough. Like performance and productivity, passion is not enough, and is a result, not a cause. Passion is a symptom that reflects a more thorough process, from empowering and nurturing competence. Odiorne advocates mentoring relationships for “teaching exemplary behaviour to trainees”. “It is important that exemplary performers mentor others in their quest for success”[28].

The organizational benefits of mentoring can be construed as measures of performance. Mendleson *et al.* suggest one of the organizational benefits specifically as job performance[17]. Many other organizational benefits preclude performance as their result.

Protégé performance is enhanced through mentoring, but what about the mentor? Possibly, mentors perform simply by delegating to their protégés, or their performance is measured more indirectly – such as through the maintenance or development of corporate culture. Mentoring from the mentor’s perspective, is a long-term affair, an investment in the firm’s future. This performance is not readily measurable, and is usually only intrinsically rewarding, but it is a performance variable and outcome, nonetheless.

Probably the most controversial mentoring topic sharing the stage with performance is that of cultural differences, discussed earlier in this article. Gender differences and related research is saturating the literature. Racial differences and related research is lacking. However, the overriding query for apparent cultural differences is: Why are not females and minorities fulfilling more male-dominated mentoring roles?

The literature offers continuous assurance as to how the mentoring process can help the protégé. But, how is the mentor’s performance affected? Is the mentor’s performance enhanced in a similar way to that of the protégés? These questions suggest a direction for future research on mentoring and performance.

Mentoring Revisited: What It Is – What It Is Not

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[2, p. 10].

Mentoring is not necessarily the forced pairing found in formally structured mentoring programmes. It is not the integration of women into top management positions. It is not misused Greek mythology. It is not a subtle indoctrination process. It is not a promotional tool. In fact, it is not self-directed at all.

Mentoring is an unselfish process. It is altruistic; interpersonal; a voluntary pairing of two individuals for mutual personal and corporate gain. Mentoring affects many aspects of organizational behaviour including: leadership, organizational culture, job satisfaction and performance. Mentoring is a phenomenon that appears in almost every large corporation.

For too many years mentoring has been misunderstood. It has developed from ancient Greek myth, through a more definitive characterizing phase to the latest implementation stage. The purpose of this article was not to analyse the history of mentoring or to review the latest developments on implementation strategy and programming, but to relate mentoring to specific areas of organizational behaviour, and present the subject as a viable component of organizational behaviour literature. Kathy Kram suggests one of the fundamental components of mentoring: “It occurs in an organizational context that greatly influences when and how it unfolds”[6, p. 2]. It is evident that mentoring is related to organizational behaviour, but the exact place mentoring holds in the organizational behaviour paradigm is as yet unclear.

A Future Perspective

Mentoring is a multi-faceted and extremely diverse process. Therefore, the limitations of these challenges for the future are two fold. First, this article does not reflect the infinite volume of data that has accumulated over the past years on this subject. For the most part, only the most current literature is examined within the past five years. On a final note, mentoring itself is an evolving field of study and future research may render these suggestions obsolete.

What then are the implications for mentoring research? Perhaps a more definitive role of mentoring in organizational behaviour can be explored. There is also a need for further research on mentoring in the areas of leadership, diversity, cultural/gender differences, and job satisfaction.

Leadership and mentoring offer a multitude of varying definitions for their respective processes. Leadership has often been described as one of the most studied and least understood behavioural

processes. Likewise, mentoring is not readily understood in the organizational behaviour paradigm. Suggested research would be to examine directly the correlates of leadership and mentoring with respect to characteristics or attributes. Another area of comparison could be with the cycles of leaders and mentors as they develop and manifest themselves.

In terms of differences, within diversified organizations more specific ethnic combinations need to be examined and compared. For example, the following question could be asked: How do Slavic and Mexican mentoring processes compare; or Which ethnic group is more easily integrated into a mentoring relationship? These are some of the areas in need of exploration utilizing some of the concepts and ideas presented in this article as a foundation on which newer models could be designed and tested.

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