Mentoring and career development

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GUEST EDITORIAL
Mentoring and career development

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Abstract

Purpose – This special issue seeks to examine mentoring relationships and offer new perspectives and frameworks, suggesting exciting avenues for future research on mentoring and career development.

Design/methodology/approach – In the last two decades, the workplace has been dramatically transformed. Individuals traditionally had careers entrenched in organizations, relying on the paternalistic firm for career development. Increasingly now, individuals are enacting careers outside organizational boundaries, defining career success on their own terms rather than by the organizational measures of salary and rank. Rapid technological change and globalization have intensified the decoupling of individual careers from organizations, putting more emphasis on individuals for their own career development and creating an even greater need for mentoring.

Findings – Although much research has been done on the impact of mentoring on subjective and objective career success, there are still many unexamined and under-explored aspects of mentoring. This collection of ten articles tackles some of these areas, providing new insights and offering new avenues for research and practice.

Originality/value – These articles are authored by individuals from a variety of disciplines (e.g. organizational behavior, psychology, health care), and countries (e.g. USA, UK, Nigeria), with each article bringing a unique lens to the study of mentoring and careers. Individually, each article makes a contribution to the better understanding of how mentoring has evolved and is enacted today. Together, this collection of articles provides important insights that it is hoped encourage even further research into the complexities of developmental relationships and their impact on career development.

Keywords Mentoring, Career development

Paper type General review

Mentoring has generated a great deal of interest in both the academic and practitioner communities. A keyword search using the term "mentor" results in over 1,800 articles from the PsyInfo Database and over 81,700 book titles on Amazon.com. It is clearly an area that piques our interest from both a professional and personal perspective. From a professional perspective, we try to establish the functions and outcomes of mentoring and to devise guidelines or programs that will help develop relationships that will result in positive individual career and organizational outcomes. From a personal perspective, we reflect upon the relationships that we have experienced, both as a mentor and a protégé, and wonder if we managed those relationships as effectively as we could or should have.

What is it about mentoring that catches and holds our attention? We think it captures our attention because mentoring holds both the great potential for enhancing career success as well as the possibility of contributing to career blunders. When mentoring

relationships are good, they can produce beneficial career outcomes to mentors and protégés as well as to the organization(s) in which they take place. When mentoring is dysfunctional, it can be disastrous for the individuals and organizations involved. The articles in this special issue take the more optimistic view of mentoring, looking primarily at the potential career benefits of these developmental relationships. The topic of mentoring has certainly captured and held our interest for many years. We developed the idea of this special issue of *Career Development International* as the result of extended conversations with regard to continuing research in which we are both engaged on mentoring and careers. Given the number of unresolved issues with respect to the process of mentoring and mentoring research, we suspected there might be enough interest among researchers and practitioners to support a special issue on the topic. We were right but were surprised at the overwhelming interest in the topic. Over 50 manuscripts were submitted for this special issue, with articles of such high quality that editor Yehuda Baruch graciously agreed to a double special issue. Reading each manuscript submitted has certainly been a wonderful education, making us more current in our knowledge about this phenomenon and enabling us to identify several key unresolved issues about mentoring and career development.

The first issue is a fundamental one – what is "mentoring"? The definition, which originally incorporated a long-term time horizon, an emphasis on development of the protégé, a hierarchical component, and a focus on a dyad, and was believed to occur relatively infrequently, has expanded to include many other possibilities. Mentoring is no longer viewed as necessarily long-term, as the changing nature of careers and organizations has caused many relationships to be of a more temporary nature. Benefits, both instrumental and psychosocial, are seen as accruing to both parties to the relationship, rather than primarily or only to the protégé. Mentoring can be accomplished by immediate superiors, peers within one's own organization, individuals outside of one's organization, subordinates, and any number of other individuals. Mentoring relationships need not necessarily be dyadic, as different forms of group mentoring have been proposed. Mentoring relationships are no longer considered to be relatively rare, and may occur sequentially or simultaneously.

The expansion of the definition of mentoring, however, does not come without cost. It is no longer clear what we, as academics, researchers, or practitioners, mean by "mentoring." As a result, it is not at all obvious to the participants in our research or our mentoring programs just what we are asking them about or asking them to do. When we look at the proportion of participants in research studies who claim to have a mentor (or even multiple mentors), we must begin to question whether the definition of the term lacks precision. The time is ripe to develop a taxonomy of developmental relationships so as to differentiate among the types and levels of involvement that individuals may experience.

In addition to examining how mentoring is defined, it is also important to look more closely at the initiation and maintenance of mentoring relationships. What brings mentors and protégés together, causes them to be willing to explore the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship, and binds them together over some period of time? These questions are especially important with regard to dysfunctional or marginally effective mentoring relationships. It is critical to determine why individuals will develop and maintain less productive relationships rather than withdraw in order to identify a different partner or partners with whom a more successful relationship is

possible. Although the articles in this special issue begin to study these and other issues, there is clearly much more work to be done.

We start this special issue by exploring the functions that mentors perform for their protégés in an article by Laurie Levesque, Regina O'Neill, Teresa Nelson, and Colette Dumas. These researchers tested for gender differences in perceived importance of mentoring functions, but surprisingly found very few. They suggest, however, that perhaps we need to take another look at what mentors actually do with and for their protégés to be certain that we have identified the full range of mentoring behaviors. The second article, by Jenny Headlam-Wells, Julian Gosland, and Jane Craig, continues the focus on gender issues by looking at the effect of technology on mentoring for women. In addition to suggesting that e-mentoring allows more women to benefit from mentoring relationships, this article also highlights the importance of matching mentors and protégés in a formal mentoring program. The following article by Ellen Fagenson-Eland, S. Gayle Baugh, and Melenie Lankau is one of the first to focus directly on the extent of congruence in perceptions of the relationship between mentors and protégés. The findings suggest that some types of demographic differences may result in a mismatch in perceptions of mentoring activities. This article, too, offers fresh directions for future research on the identification of good candidates for mentoring dyads.

The next two papers offer a more contextual perspective on mentoring. Monica Forret and Suzanne de Janasz explore the effect of mentoring on the protégé's perception of the work-family climate in a public accounting setting. Their article takes an integrative approach and is among the first to examine the possible linkages among mentoring, work/non-work issues, and careers. Ann McAlearney follows up by looking at the influence of mentoring on leadership development specifically in the context of health care organizations. Both articles focus on mentoring in a professional organization and both suggest some benefits that flow to the organization, as well as to the partners in the mentoring dyad. These findings may provide incentive for more organizations to begin to think about nurturing mentoring relationships internally.

The next two articles call our attention to an international focus, a theme that is also picked up by Dawn Chandler and Kathy Kram. David Okurame and S.K. Balogun extend our borders physically, by examining whether results found in western countries are generalizable to a Nigerian context. They report that mentoring has some appeal in Nigeria and offer findings similar to the results of western studies. Madeline Crocitto, Sherry Sullivan, and Shawn Carraher also extend our boundaries, as they discuss mentoring constellations for expatriates and repatriates.

We conclude this special issue by turning our attention to mentoring and developmental networks. Janice Molloy summarizes what we have learned about developmental networks and issues a call for further theorizing and research in this area. That call is answered by Dawn Chandler and Kathy Kram, who offer an adult development perspective on mentoring and network relationships. They look at empirical work on the effect of a developmental network on professional identity in the early years of the career.

It is indeed an exciting time all of us who are working in this field. There is much that we have learned and much to be still explored. We are fortunate that so many individuals across the globe are studying the topic and were willing to submit their work to this special issue on mentoring and career development. We are likewise

grateful to the many reviewers who provided detailed feedback to all those who submitted papers. We owe a special thanks to *CDI* editor, Yehuda Baruch, for his strong support of scholarship and his dedication to and advocacy of the developmental review process. In addition to his encouragement to authors, he truly was a mentor to us throughout the process of developing this special issue. We also appreciate the tireless work of *CDI*'s managing editor Paula Fernandez. Finally, projects like developing a special issue require support from the participants' academic institution, so we would like to thank Arup Mukherjee, the Chair of the Department of Management at the University of West Florida.

In closing, we hope that the articles in this special issue will inspire you to continue to learn more about mentoring and developmental relationships. But we also hope that you think about the people who have provided positive support to you in your career, and encourage you to offer the same sort of support to a friend or colleague. It may, after all, be time to practice what we write!

(S. Gayle Baugh is an Associate Professor at the University of West Florida. She has published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, among others, in the areas of mentoring, gender and diversity, and leadership. She is a past Division Chair of the Gender and Diversity in Organizations Division of the Academy of Management and currently serves as the President Elect for the Southwest Academy of Management. She works with volunteer and arts organizations in the Pensacola, Florida community.

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