Multiple mentoring in academe: Developing the professorial network

Suzanne C. de Janasz[a,*] and Sherry E. Sullivan[b,1]

[a] *James Madison University, College of Business, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, USA*
[b] *Bowling Green State University, College of Business Administration, Bowling Green, OH 43403, USA*

Abstract

Previous studies in business organizations have shown that mentoring provides numerous benefits for both individuals and organizations. Most of this mentoring research has been based on traditional, hierarchical mentor–protégé relationships in non-academic settings. We discuss why there is little empirical research on faculty mentoring and review changes in professors' careers that necessitate a fresh look at this issue. We suggest that because of environmental changes, the traditional model of professors being guided throughout their careers by one primary mentor, usually the dissertation advisor, may no longer be realistic or desirable. Instead, professors may be better served by a portfolio of mentors (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Higgins & Kram, 2001) who facilitate the protégé's development of career competencies. Building on the work of intelligent careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996), we examine how the career competencies of knowing why, how, and whom interact with learning demands to produce the need for faculty to develop multiple mentoring relationships across their academic career. We build on this conceptualization by considering the role of signaling of career competencies (Jones, 2002) in developing the professorial network, offering managerial implications in developing mentoring programs, and discussing avenues for future research.
© 2003 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Mentor; Protégé; Professor; Career; Networks

---

* Corresponding author. Fax: 1-540-568-2754.

E-mail addresses: dejanasc@jmu.edu (S.C. de Janasz), ssulliv@cba.bgsu.edu (S.E. Sullivan).
[1] Tel.: 1-419-372-2366; fax: 1-419-372-6057.

1. Introduction

Mentoring is a powerful process for enhancing the development of individuals and organizations (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997; Arnold & Johnson, 1997; Dreher & Cox, 1996; Higgins & Kram, 2001; see Ragins, 1997 for a recent review). Individuals who have a mentor report higher job satisfaction, compensation, promotions, as well as lower turnover intentions and less work–non-work conflict (Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1989; Higgins, 2000; Nielson, Carlson, & Lankau, 2001; Scandura & Viator, 1994; Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001; Viator & Scandura, 1991; Wallace, 2001). Organizations benefit from mentoring as well, as mentors facilitate the socialization process, help acculturate junior members of the organization, and foster more positive attitudes toward their work settings and higher organizational commitment (Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1994; Baugh, Lankau, & Scandura, 1996; Fagenson, 1989; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Whiting & de Janasz, in press; Wilson & Elman, 1990).

Traditional definitions of mentoring suggest a dyadic relationship in which the more experienced mentor helped guide the career of a younger organizational member as this protégé learned to "navigate the world of work" (Kram, 1985, p. 2) and moved up the firm's hierarchy (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Ragins, 1997). Much of the mentoring research has been conducted within traditional organizational settings with traditional, dyadic mentor–protégé relationships (Allen et al., 1997; Chao, 1997; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 1997). However, changes in the workplace in general and in our conceptualization of careers in particular (see Sullivan, 1999 for a recent review), have necessitated a shift in our thinking about the process of mentoring (Higgins, 2000; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram & Hall, 1996). Complexities and challenges in the contemporary environment render the single master–apprentice mentor model insufficient. Individuals need to consider relying not just on one but on multiple, diverse individuals to provide needed development to succeed in their chosen career (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Higgins, 2000; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram, 1985; Thomas & Higgins, 1996). Having a network of mentors can provide a protégé with a variety of developers with different perspectives, knowledge, and skills and who can serve different mentoring functions such as being a role model or providing career-related or emotional support (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Burt, 1992; Eby, 1997; Higgins, 2000; Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Despite the growth of mentoring research in the management literature and the research on the mentoring of graduate students (Tenenbaum et al., 2001), there are relatively few empirical studies on the mentoring of professors. Three key reasons may explain this. First, it is presumed that faculty are well prepared for their careers and therefore do not require a mentor. Most entrants in academe are expected to have studied extensively to acquire their degrees and have had extensive one-on-one apprenticeship-like training with their dissertation advisor (Betz, 1997). Duderstadt (2001, p. 35) notes that: "Our current paradigm of graduate education is based on an important, yet fragile, relationship between the graduate student and the faculty that evolves from mentorship into collegiality. Graduate students are expected