Mentoring Dilemmas: Developmental Relationships within Multicultural Organizations

Audrey J. Murrell, Ph.D.
University of Pittsburgh
Katz School of Business
amurrell@katz.pitt.edu
The character, Mentor, in Homer’s epic poem, *The Odyssey*, is widely accepted as the namesake of the term *mentor*.

Before leaving for the Trojan War, Odysseus entrusted guardianship of his household and his son, Telemachus, to his faithful friend, Mentor.

In Homer’s original text, Mentor did not naturally exhibit the wise and nurturing behavior historically attributed to him; in fact, he was inept.

Rather, it was the goddess Athena, known in Greek mythology for her wisdom and compassion who took Mentor’s form to guide and protect both Telemachus and Odysseus on their journeys.
Mentoring Defined

• The process of forming, cultivating and maintaining mutually beneficial developmental relationships between one or more mentors and one or more mentees/protégés.

• Developmental networks as a group of people who take interest in and action to advance a focal individual’s career outcomes (also called egocentric network or development constellations).
Unpacking Mentoring

Mentoring Functions

Mentoring Phases

Mentoring Effectiveness

Mentoring Outcomes
Mentoring Functions

- **Career Functions**: Those aspects of mentoring relationships that enhance learning the ropes and preparing the individual for advancement within the organization. A heavy emphasis is placed on helping the protégé understand the company’s culture.
  - Sponsorship
  - Exposure & Visibility
  - Coaching
  - Protection
  - Challenging Assignments
Psychosocial Functions: Those aspects of mentoring relationships that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, perceptions of organization support and overall effectiveness in one’s professional role.

- Role Modeling
- Acceptance & Confirmation
- Counseling
- Friendship
Phases of Mentoring

Initiation
- Relationship becomes important to each individual

Cultivation
- Maximum range of career & psychosocial functions offered

Separation
- Significant change in the relationship takes place

Redefinition
- Relationship ends or significantly changes
Mentoring Effectiveness

- Characteristics of the protégé/mentee impact willingness of an individual to mentor
- Individuals perceived as “high potential” are most likely to be selected as a protégé/mentee
- Motivational bases for mentoring is driven by self-interest as well as concern for others
- Structural aspects of relationships (type, frequency, duration) are weak and inconsistent predictors of mentoring behavior
- No evidence for universal set of “mentoring styles” that significantly impact effectiveness
Individuals who have mentors are more likely to be promoted, earn more money, are more likely to have a career plan, are happier with their work, and are more likely to become mentors themselves than those without mentoring experiences (see reviews by Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lime; Noe, Greenberger and Wang; Wanberg, Welsh & Hezlett).

Professionals who had mentors earn between $5,600 and $22,450 more annually than those who did not have mentors (see work by Allen & colleagues).
Mentoring – Why Diversity Matters

- Challenging Access
- Complex Interactions
- Different Pathways, Different Outcomes
Cox & Nkomo study of MBAs found significantly less access to mentoring by race.

Dreher & Cox study tracked careers of African American and Hispanic business graduates who were less likely to form mentoring relationships with white mentors than their counterparts.

Thomas reports that limited number of people of color in leadership positions means either cross-race mentoring, outside of unit or inter-organizational mentoring must take place for people of color.

Lancaster described complexity of access to mentoring and race because white males occupy the “predominate mentoring class”.

Murrell, Blake-Beard, Porter & Williamson describe the “mentoring tax” for people of color in organizations.
Women of Color Study – Catalyst, Inc.

% of Respondents Rating the Barrier as Important
(To some/ great/ very great extent)

- Lack of Networking Opportunities: 68%
- Lack of Mentor/sponsor: 67%
- Lack of Same-Race Role Models: 54%
- Lack of High visibility Assignments: 52%

Source: Giscombe – Catalyst Data
Cross-mentoring creates complex inter-racial dynamics that are embedding within organizational cultures

Kram & Thomas studied cross-race mentoring pairs and found that psychosocial support was higher in same-race relationships especially in “skip-level” pairings among peers

James studies African American and white managers and found differences in psychosocial support but no differences in career support in those with same versus cross-race mentoring
Blanchero’s Study of Mentoring

Potential mentors are unwilling to develop a relationship with me because of my ethnicity.

Disagree 40%
Agree 60%

Disagree  Agree
At work, many people have stereotypes about my culture or ethnic group and treat me as if they were true:
Ibarra study showed that networks of high potential minorities contained balance of same and cross-race relationships.

Blake-Beard found significant impact of protégé race on subjective outcomes (compensation satisfaction, career/job satisfaction).

Thomas found different pathways and timelines for African Americans; those who “broke through” to senior levels had access to powerful mentors through cross-race and same race relationships; successful African Americans built a foundation of competence, credibility, and confidence – especially in early career stages.
Dreher & Cox studied graduates from top MBA schools.

Graduates who had established mentoring relationships displayed annual compensation advantages over those without mentoring relationships amounting to an average of $22,454.

Mentoring relationships helped to account for about 11% of the race and gender gap in salaries.
Catalyst Women of Color Study

![Bar Chart]

Race/Ethnicity of Respondent:
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- African American
- Hispanic/Latina

Mean total annual income (salary+bonus)

Access to a Mentor:
- Yes
- No
Catalyst Women of Color Study
Impact of negative mentoring

Power and social capital

Diversity, mentoring and social exchange

Intelligent Mentoring

Unfinished Business
Impact of Negative Mentoring

Eby & McManus typology of negative mentoring experiences include:

- Exploitation
- Egocentricity
- Malevolent deceptions
- Sabotage
- Harassment
- Interpersonal difficulty
- Benign deception
Power and social capital

Burt’s argued that women are unable to duplicate the networks of men because they lack legitimacy in the organization.

In order to be successful, women need to effectively “borrow” the social network of a male sponsor who is influential in the organization.

Borrowing of social power leads others to perceive that they are actually dealing indirectly with the male manager (power by proxy).

Burt found that women who borrowed social networks were promoted more quickly than women who attempted to develop their own networks; however, did not take race into account.
Social Exchange produces the risk of being taken advantage of by a self-seeking partner; High-wary individuals reciprocate less generously than low-wary individuals.

Social exchange relationships have significant impact on key outcomes variables (satisfaction, commitment, trust).

Perceptions of hostile environment or past experience with discrimination may impact exchange relationships and create “reciprocation wariness” as function of race.

Reciprocation wariness may serve as a mediator of the overall effectiveness of mentoring relationships.
Understanding race and mentoring in organizations may be a useful lens for broader diversity issues (e.g., miner’s canary).

Need to look beyond demographic similarity and toward notions of identity and complementary versus non-complementary relationships.

More work is needed on mentoring and diversity as a catalyst for learning and innovation.

Potential benefit of mentoring as tool for solving racial disparity in work outcomes as a “wicked problem.”
“...the underlying struggle- between worlds of plenty and worlds of want; between the modern and the ancient; between those who embrace our teeming, colliding, irksome diversity, while still insisting on a set of values that bind us together, and those who seek, under whatever flag or slogan or sacred text, a certainty and simplification that justifies cruelty toward those not like us – is the struggle set forth...”

Barack Obama

From: “Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance”