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Business Mentoring: help or hindrance?

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ABSTRACT   *In recent decades, mentoring has been identified as an important learning activity in a variety of contexts such as business corporations, schools, universities and hospitals. In this review of 151 articles relating to business mentoring, an endeavour has been made to clarify the positive and negative outcomes of mentoring programs for mentors, mentees and business organisations. Although there was found to be a higher incidence of positive outcomes associated with mentoring programs, sufficient evidence suggested that the 'dark side' of mentoring does exist. In many cases where mentoring programs were reported to have negative outcomes, success appeared to have been jeopardised by lack of time, lack of training, negative attitudes of others, or poor matching of mentors and mentees.*

Introduction

As researchers interested in the field of mentoring, we were aware that many studies investigating the effects of mentoring had reported positive outcomes. For decades now, mentoring has been linked to a range of consequences ranging from career advancement and heightened self-confidence, to an increased sense of belonging. Indeed, literature exists which suggests that mentoring is a panacea for a variety of personal and societal ills. Torrance (1984) for instance, suggested that individuals who remained mentorless were more vulnerable than mentored individuals to a range of problems such as educational failure, lack of career goals or focus, lack of enthusiasm, frustrated creativity, unfulfilling jobs, emotional problems, alcoholism and drug abuse.

   A precursory investigation of research into mentoring has linked mentoring to a wide range of benefits for both mentees and mentors. For instance, mentees in Reich's (1986) United States study of female executives attributed benefits such as skill development and career promotion to being mentored, while networking with senior colleagues was a positive outcome of mentoring for mentees in a Hong Kong study by Aryee *et al.* (1999). Concerning benefits for mentors, those in Allen and Poteet's (1997) United States study highlighted personal and role satisfaction, insight and visibility among the positive outcomes from being a mentor, and in an Australian study by Burke *et al.* (1994), mentors cited new ideas from mentees as being beneficial. Perhaps lesser known is a body of literature that has reported

negative outcomes associated with mentoring programs. Some studies, such as that by Ragins and Scandura (1997) have painted a less than auspicious picture of mentoring programs. In their study of executives and managers in the United States, Ragins and Scandura (1997) identified a range of factors that ultimately led to the breakdown of relations between mentors and mentees. According to mentees, instrumental in the demise of these relationships were mentor jealousy and attempts by mentors to block the career advancement of their mentees. It seems that problems are not confined to mentees, however. Several mentors in Cunningham and Eberle's (1993) Canadian study felt exploited by their mentees, while some female mentors in White's (1990) United States study commented that they had 'been burned by proteges turning on them'. Negative outcomes such as these underlie what Long (1997) has referred to as the 'darker side' of mentoring.

It was apparent from our preliminary investigation that the variability of findings from studies into mentoring hindered the making of valid inferences about mentoring programs. The aim of the current study was, therefore, an attempt to develop a comprehensive database from which more reliable inferences regarding the nature and outcomes of mentoring programs could be made. For the purposes of our review, mentoring was considered to be a personal, helping relationship between a mentor and a mentee/protégé that includes professional development and growth and varying degrees of support. While mentoring relationships are reciprocal, mentors tend to be those with greater experience. The current review of business mentoring was guided by the following questions:

- What does the literature say in relation to the beneficial and/or negative outcomes that result from the implementation of mentoring programs in a business context?
- What is the impact of such mentoring programs on the mentor and mentee?
- What is the impact of such mentoring programs on the organisation?

While the reporting of outcomes associated with mentoring programs is significant in its own right, the current investigation went beyond this to examine particular methodological characteristics of the studies. For instance, also examined were the types of businesses that utilised mentoring, the nature of the mentoring program, the sample sizes, data collection techniques, publication sources, and the countries in which the studies were conducted. It was felt that these and other variables considered in the investigation would enable a more comprehensive understanding of business mentoring.

Procedure

The initial source of mentoring studies came from a collection of articles held by a member of the research team. However, in order to identify a more complete population of studies the databases EBSCO, Business Periodicals Index, Business Australia on Disc, Science Direct, Emerald, ERIC, AUSTROM (AEI), PsycLIT and ProQuest were searched using the terms *MENTOR, MENTORING, MENTOR + BUSINESS, MENTORING + BUSINESS, MENTOR + ORGANIZATION/ ORGANISATION, MENTORING + ORGANIZATION/ORGANISATION.* A

total of 151 studies were retrieved. This number, we believed, would provide a reasonably representative sample of the total population of studies available. As Lather (1999, p. 3) explained, a review 'is not exhaustive; it is situated, partial and perspectival', it is 'a critically useful interpretation and unpacking of a problematic that situates the work historically and methodologically'. This construct of a review underpinned our extensive inquiry into the literature devoted to the outcomes associated with business mentoring.

For inclusion in the current investigation, studies had to meet two criteria. Firstly, they had to report original research findings, that is, findings specifically generated by the particular study. Secondly, they had to focus on the use of mentoring in a business context.

Measure

Starting with the most current databases (around June 2000) and searching back to 1986, we retrieved 151 studies that met the requirements of the investigation. Each was reviewed according to a series of codes developed specifically for the analyses. The development of the coding sheet that was used stemmed from a preliminary reading of 14 articles in the area of mentoring. These articles provided the authors with an indication of the nature of information that could be accessed and coded.

Accordingly, two types of data were identified and coded—factual and descriptive data. Factual data comprised year of publication, source (for example journal article, research report), country of study, type of mentoring studied (such as mentoring in accounting practices), sample size, the data collection techniques employed by the researchers, and who the data were collected from. We also attempted to identify the nature of each mentoring program (i.e. formal or informal), and the theoretical underpinnings of mentoring that were used throughout the studies. However, in many cases, the nature of the mentoring program was not made explicit and theoretical insight was lacking.

Descriptive data comprised the reporting of any problems and positive outcomes associated with business mentoring activities. Problems and positive outcomes were further differentiated according to three criteria—those impacting on the mentor, the mentee and the organisation.

Data Analysis

Once coded, data was analysed using SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistics were used to identify patterns or trends related to factual data. Descriptive data underwent thematic analysis to identify emerging themes or categories. In order to provide as valid a coding of descriptive data as possible, consensus had to be reached between two coders. This was confirmed at a later stage by a third coder.

Results

Sample Demographics

From the review, it was evident that research into mentoring has grown since 1986 with a marked increase in activity occurring from 1994 onwards. The period 1986–93 accounted for 25.8% of reviewed studies, while 1994–June 2000 accounted for nearly three-quarters (73.6%) of all reviewed studies.

Almost all (98%) of the studies reviewed were derived from journals. Studies were spread across 86 journals and only four of these accounted for five or more studies. These journals were the *Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Association Quarterly*, the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, and the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. The journal responsible for the most studies (10) was the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. The remaining 2% of studies were derived from research reports or monographs while only three (1.9%) were derived from book chapters.

More than 70% of studies had been conducted in the United States. The United Kingdom accounted for a further 13.9% of studies, Canada 3.3%, Australia and Asia both 2.6%, and South Africa 1.3%. Saudi Arabia and India each accounted for another 0.7% of studies. An additional 2% of studies were conducted in multiple countries. Although these figures suggest that little research into business mentoring had been published outside of the United States and United Kingdom, this is unlikely to be so. What is more likely is that the databases used in the literature search draw predominantly on specific countries.

Type of Business and Focus of Studies

The studies investigated mentoring in a wide variety of business settings. As can be seen in Table I, 61 (40.4%) studies examined mentoring as it occurred in more than one type of business setting. These multiple settings often resulted from researchers accessing respondents via university alumni records, rather than through an individual organisation. Business settings included finance, banking or insurance (11.3%), accounting (7.9%), and technology (4.7%). Retail or other sales settings contributed to another 6% of studies, while manufacturing and hospitality each accounted for an additional 4% of studies. A further 22 studies (14.6%) did not describe the type of business beyond 'general management'.

In many instances, studies also focused on personal characteristics of employees. Of these, 46 (30.5%) examined gender, nine (6%) examined race, nine (6%) examined both race and gender, while one each (0.7%) examined age, class, and both class and gender. In 80 (53%) studies the nature of mentoring was not made explicit. However, in 25 (16.6%) studies the mentoring arrangement was formal (arranged by the organisation), in 24 (15.9%) studies it was informal (arranged by individuals), and in a further 22 (14.6%) studies, a combination of formal and informal mentoring arrangements was examined.

TABLE I. Categories and frequencies for type of business mentoring

Mentoring type	N	%
Mixed (more than one business type)	61	40.4
General management	22	14.6
Finance/banking/insurance	17	11.3
Accounting	12	7.9
Retail/sales	9	6.0
Technology	7	4.7
Manufacturing	6	4.0
Hospitality	6	4.0
Law	4	2.6
Research and development	2	1.3
Self-employment	2	1.3
Media	1	0.7
Unknown	2	1.3

Theoretical Underpinnings

A number of authors including Gibb (1999) and Jacobi (1991) have claimed that very few studies have located mentoring within a wider theoretical framework. Gibb (1999, p. 1) commented that 'a substantive theoretical analysis of mentoring has been absent, implicit, limited or underdeveloped'. Similarly, in her extensive review of the literature on mentoring, Jacobi (1991, p. 522) concluded that a weakness of research into mentoring was 'the lack of theoretical and conceptual base'.

More than a third (34.4%) of the studies reviewed espoused at least one theoretical perspective. There was immense variability in the types of theories linked to mentoring. For example, theories were grounded in disciplines as diverse as economics (human capital theory, exchange theory), philosophy (Foucault's 1983 analysis of discipline and control, post-confucian theory), organisational behaviour (contingency theory, competing values framework), sociology (structuration theory), and psychology (social learning theory, developmental theory). Given that business draws on numerous schools of thought, this theoretical diversity was not surprising. Variability was also evident in the extent to which individual studies explored theoretical perspectives. While some studies made fleeting reference to a theory or theories, others provided considerable detail.

Rather than align themselves with a particular theoretical view of mentoring, many researchers referred to the seminal work of Kram (1985). According to Kram (1985), mentoring has two important dimensions, career and psychosocial mentoring. Career mentoring tends to focus on 'external' career progress-oriented functions such as sponsorship, coaching, protection, visibility and exposure. These functions act to strengthen an individual's ability to develop their career and prepare them for career advancement. Psychosocial development functions, on the other hand, are 'inner oriented' and include role modelling, counselling, and friendship. These functions help individuals to develop their personal feelings of competence,

confidence and acceptance. Kram's (1985) career and psychosocial mentoring functions were cited in 64 (42.4%) of the reviewed studies.

Methodological Stance of Studies

Studies were coded according to whether they were qualitative, quantitative or mixed method in their approach. This was largely determined by the types of techniques utilised by researchers in the collection of data; however, consideration was also given to how that data were analysed. Studies classified as qualitative were those that derived data, not from measurements, but from techniques such as interviews, observations and journals. Quantitative studies, in contrast, used measures that were structured and produced numerical data resulting from measurements or counting. Mixed method studies were those that used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques or a single technique that conformed to both methodologies (for example survey questionnaires that included both closed-response questions resulting in numerical data, as well as open questions).

More than half (51%) of the studies were classified as quantitative in their approach. Almost one-third (32.5%) were qualitative, while 23 (15.2%) were mixed method. Quantitative studies all employed survey questionnaires featuring mostly select response or closed items as a sole means of gathering information. Qualitative studies tended to employ interviews or questionnaires comprising open questions. Mixed method studies relied on a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, for example questionnaires comprising open and closed questions. Several mixed method studies also used questionnaires that comprised closed-response questions to survey a large population, followed by interviews with a subset of the original population. Regarding the breakdown of data collection techniques employed in the reviewed studies, 97 (64.2%) studies gathered information through surveys (featuring open or closed questions or a combination of open and closed questions), 38 (25.1%) relied on interviews (individual or focus group), and 13 (8.6%) utilised a combination of techniques. Only one study (0.7%) used journal writing as a source of data collection.

As noted, the majority of studies examined adopted a quantitative approach to their investigation. Given the large sample sizes that featured in many of the studies this was not unexpected. Samples in excess of 100 respondents comprised over half (56.9%) of all studies reviewed. In five of these studies, samples exceeded 1000. In contrast, fewer than one in ten of the studies reviewed featured samples of 20 or less. In a further 15.9% of studies the sample size was unknown.

Studies were also coded according to their data source. In 80 (53%) studies, information was collected exclusively from mentees. Substantially fewer (7.9%) studies sought information from mentors only; however, a further 36 (23.8%) studies gathered information from both mentors and mentees. The remaining studies sought opinions from a variety of respondents including human resources staff, training consultants or executives, often in conjunction with opinions from mentees and or mentors.

TABLE II. Categories and frequencies for positive mentee outcomes

Outcome	N	%
Career satisfaction/motivation/plans/promotion	76	50.3
Coaching/ideas/feedback/strategies	46	30.5
Challenging assignments/improved skills/performance	35	23.2
Counselling/listening/support/understanding/encouragement	33	21.9
Access to resources/information/people	25	16.6
Self-confidence/respect/personal/interpersonal growth	23	15.2
Company socialisation/involvement in policies/issues	22	14.6
Sponsorship/protection/advocacy	21	13.9
Exposure/visibility	20	13.2
Role modelling	16	10.6
Friendship/social interaction	14	9.3
Psychosocial functions	13	8.6
Career functions	10	6.6
Acceptance and confirmation	6	4.0
Stimulated	3	2.0

Outcomes Associated with Mentoring

The studies were coded according to whether they reported positive, negative or both positive and negative outcomes. Reported outcomes then underwent thematic analyses in order to identify themes or categories.

Positive outcomes. Of the studies reviewed, 102 (67.5%) reported only positive outcomes as a result of mentoring, while a further 37 (24.5%) reported a mix of both positive and negative outcomes. Taken together, more than 90% of studies reviewed attributed some positive effect associated with mentoring activities. In contrast, only ten studies (6.6%) exclusively reported negative outcomes. In order to shed light on the types of positive outcomes, it was necessary to differentiate outcomes according to those parties affected by mentoring—the mentee, the mentor and the organisation.

Mentee. Of the studies that reported positive outcomes, 130 (86.1%) noted positive outcomes for mentees. Thematic analysis revealed 15 categories of positive outcome responses for mentees. These categories are presented in Table II.

The reliance on Kram's (1985) construct of mentoring was evident throughout the studies. As Table II illustrates, Kram's (1985) *career functions* of coaching, exposure and visibility, sponsorship, protection, and challenging assignments, and *psychosocial functions* of role modelling, counselling, acceptance and confirmation, and friendship dominated responses. This was not surprising, however, as these functions often comprised items in the questionnaires that gathered data for the studies. In several studies researchers simply used the labels *career functions* and *psychosocial functions* to describe outcomes associated with mentoring. In these

instances, individual functions such as counselling and coaching were not delineated.

The most frequently noted positive outcome for mentees was that related to career satisfaction, motivation, advice, and promotion. More than half (50.3%) of the studies reporting benefits for mentees claimed that as a result of mentoring, mentees were satisfied with, or motivated about, their chosen careers, or received career planning advice or promotions. A further ten (6.6%) studies merely cited *career functions* as a positive outcome for mentees. However, it was unclear whether these ten studies were referring to one, a combination of, or all of the activities that constituted career functions.

The second most frequently cited benefit for mentees was coaching, ideas, feedback or strategies. Comprising 46 (30.5%) responses, this category encompassed specific task-related ideas and suggestions from the mentor. A further 35 (23.2%) responses noted challenging assignments, improved skills or performance. According to many respondents, involvement in challenging tasks had helped to improve their skills or performance.

The fourth most frequently cited benefit reported in 33 (21.9%) studies focused on counselling, listening, support, understanding, or encouragement. These responses referred to a personal, rather than professional, interest in the mentee's well-being. Access to resources, information and people also figured highly. Twenty-five (16.6%) studies indicated that mentoring facilitated such access, while in another 23 (15.2%) studies mentees experienced increased self-confidence or inter-personal or personal growth.

Other benefits reported for mentees included three of the psychosocial functions identified by Kram (1985). These functions are role modelling, acceptance and confirmation, and friendship. In addition to these, a further 13 (8.6) studies simply noted *psychosocial functions* as benefits. As with the aforementioned *career functions*, it was unclear whether these studies were referring to one, a combination of, or all of the activities that constituted psychosocial functions.

Mentor.   Compared with the 130 (86.1%) studies that reported benefits for mentees, substantially fewer identified benefits for the mentor. Only 40 (26.5%) of the studies reported one or more positive outcome for mentors but this can be attributed to the comparatively small percentage of studies that sought opinions from mentors.

Benefits noted for mentors are presented in Table III. As the table illustrates, the most commonly cited positive outcome for mentors focused on networking, collegiality and reciprocity between colleagues. Twelve (7.9%) of the studies noting positive outcomes for mentors highlighted benefits associated with collaborating, networking or sharing ideas with colleagues.

Noted in 11 (7.3%) studies, the second most frequently cited positive outcome for mentors was career satisfaction, motivation or promotion. It would appear then that career enhancement from mentoring is not restricted to mentees. Improved skills or job performance was cited in ten (6.6%) studies, while a further ten reported pride or personal satisfaction, reward or growth as an outcome of mentoring. Interestingly,

TABLE III. Categories and frequencies for positive mentor outcomes

Outcomes	N	%
Networking/collegiality/reciprocity	12	7.9
Career satisfaction/motivation/promotion	11	7.3
Improved skills/job performance	10	6.6
Pride/personal satisfaction	10	6.6
Assistance/ideas/support/feedback	9	6.0
Respect/empowerment	9	6.0
Insight into other's roles/divisions	9	6.0
Personal/interpersonal development/confidence	9	6.0
Role satisfaction/reward	8	5.3
Challenging/stimulating/enjoyable	5	3.3
Transmission of knowledge/skills/values	3	2.0
Visibility /exposure	2	1.3
Friendship	2	1.3

fewer studies (5.3%) noted role satisfaction as a positive outcome. Other positive outcomes for mentors included insight into other's roles or divisions (6%), personal, interpersonal development or confidence (6%), and stimulating, challenging or enjoyable (3.3%).

Comparison of mentor and mentee response categories revealed several commonalities across the groups. Both groups were reported to have experienced positive outcomes in terms of their careers, their self-confidence and their interpersonal skill development. Both groups also reported benefits associated with visibility and exposure, and friendship, although the reporting of these was considerably higher among the mentees.

Organisation. The outcomes discussed thus far impacted on mentors or mentees. However, the review of literature revealed additional outcomes that were organisational in nature. In all, 46 (30.5%) studies cited one or more positive outcome that impacted directly on the organisation. More often that not, these outcomes were highlighted by researchers or research participants other than the mentor or mentee.

Seven categories of positive organisational outcomes emerged from the reviewed studies (see Table IV). The most frequently cited of these centred on tangible benefits for the organisation. These benefits—improved productivity, or increased contribution or profit by employees, were cited in 21 (13.9%) of the studies.

Attraction or retention of talented employees was the second most frequently cited positive outcome noted for the organisation. Eighteen (11.9%) studies reported that mentoring programs were successful in either attracting desirable employees to an organisation or retaining their services. The promotion of loyalty, empathy or team spirit among employees was cited in another ten (6.6%) studies as being a positive outcome associated with mentoring, while a further six (4%) studies noted that mentoring brought about improvements in workplace communications and relations.

TABLE IV. Categories and frequencies for positive organisational outcomes

Outcome	N	%
Improved productivity/contribution/profit by employees	21	13.9
Retention/attracted talented employees	18	11.9
Promotes loyalty/empathy/team spirit	10	6.6
Improved workplace/communications/relations	6	4.0
Facilitates change/learning	3	2.0
More control over employees	2	1.3
Bridges gap between training and workplace	2	1.3

According to respondents in three (2%) studies, mentoring engendered enthusiasm for learning or accepting change within the organisation. This seemed to be particularly important in organisations undergoing some kind of restructuring. Finally, respondents in two studies (1.3%) each felt that mentoring benefited their organisation because it increased control that organisations had over their employees, and it helped to bridge the gap between training and the workplace.

Problems Associated with Mentoring

Compared with the positive outcomes, substantially fewer problems were reported to have resulted from mentoring. Less than a third of the 151 articles reviewed identified one or more problems. As with positive outcomes, problems associated with mentoring are discussed according to mentee, mentor and organisation.

Mentees.   Thirty-eight (25.2%) of the studies reporting problems associated with mentoring identified problems for mentees. Thematic analysis revealed 11 categories of responses. These categories are shown in Table V.

The most frequently identified problem for mentees surrounded issues related to gender or race. Twelve (7.9%) studies reported that misunderstandings or incom-

TABLE V. Categories and frequencies for mentee problems

Problem	N	%
Gender/race related problems	12	7.9
Cloning/conformity/limited autonomy/over-protection	11	7.3
Mentor untrained/ineffective	10	6.6
Negative attitude of others	9	6.0
Mentor competes/takes credit/exploits	8	5.3
Career blocked by mentor	6	4.0
Lack mentor interest/support/communication	6	4.0
Mentor lacks time/availability	6	4.0
Mismatch/incompatibility	5	3.3
Mentor critical/defensive	2	1.3
Lack proximity to mentor	2	1.3

TABLE VI. Categories and frequencies for mentor problems

Problem	N	%
Lack time	9	6.0
Negative mentee attitude/lack trust/cooperation	8	5.3
Lack training/knowledge/understanding	7	4.6
Jealousy/negative attitudes others	6	4.0
Pressure/conflicting demands/roles	5	3.3
Mentee expectations unrealistic	4	2.6
Negative exposure/failure if mentee unsuccessful	4	2.6
Difficulty ending relationship	4	2.6
Ingratitude/lack recognition/reward	3	2.0
Resistance/lack support by management	3	2.0
Mismatch professional/personality	2	1.3

patibility associated with gender or race hampered the success of the mentoring relationship. Concerning gender problems, difficulties were more likely to arise from the pairing of female mentees with male mentors, while racial problems tended to be encountered by black mentee and white mentor pairs.

As can be seen in Table V, many problems experienced by mentees related to particular mentor characteristics or behaviours. Mentees in 11 (7.3%) studies claimed that the practice of cloning by mentors and the lack of autonomy or the pressure from mentors to conform was problematic. Rather than developing their potential, these mentees believed that mentors had stifled their growth. In a further ten (6.6%) studies, mentees commented that their mentors were untrained, and thus, were ineffective in their role, while mentees in eight (5.3%) studies felt that their mentor was competitive, took credit for the mentee's work or exploited the mentee. Mentors in six (4.0%) studies were also accused of blocking the mentee's career; of being disinterested, unsupportive or uncommunicative; and of not having time or being available for the mentee. In another two (1.3%) studies, mentees noted that their mentors were critical or defensive. Other problems reported by mentees in the studies were negative attitudes of others (6.0%), personal or professional mismatch or incompatibility (3.3%), and lack of proximity to mentor (1.3%).

Mentor. Twenty-six (17.2%) of the studies that reported problems associated with mentoring identified problems for mentors. Eleven categories emerged from the responses and these are shown in Table VI.

As Table VI indicates, the most frequently cited problem to emerge from the responses was lack of time. In nine (6%) studies mentors reported that they had insufficient time to carry out their mentoring role. Similarly, mentors in five (3.3%) studies believed that mentoring created additional pressure or conflict between work demands and functions. Mentors in seven (4.6%) studies also reported problems associated with lack of training or understanding of program goals or expectations. As a result, these mentors felt limited in their effectiveness.

Two of the most frequently cited problems expressed by mentors related to mentee characteristics or attitudes. Eight (5.3%) studies identified negative mentee attitudes, lack of mentee trust or cooperation as causing difficulties for the mentor, while in another four (2.6%) studies, mentors commented that the expectations of their mentees were unrealistic.

Several studies revealed that for some mentors, mentoring could be a contentious or thankless task that went unnoticed by others. Mentors in six (4.0%) studies cited jealousy or negative attitudes of others as being problematic, while lack of gratitude, recognition or reward, and resistance by or lack of support from management were each cited in a further three (2.0%) studies. Only two (1.3%) studies reported that professional expertise or personality mismatch was a problem for mentors.

Organisation.   In contrast to the numerous positive outcomes that organisations appeared to experience as a result of mentoring, fewer problems were reported. Only 14 (8.8%) of the studies pinpointed problems that directly impacted on the organisation and for the most part these problems were disparate. The two problems that were cited in more than a single study were high staff turnover and gender or cultural bias in organisation. According to respondents in two (1.3%) studies, the high staff turnover within the organisation hampered the development of long-term relationships between mentors and mentees, while two studies also noted that the gender or cultural biases of mentors meant that good staff were overlooked in the mentoring process.

Other problems reported for organisations included the decline in sales if mentors were overburdened, difficulty controlling the program, the need to constantly evaluate the program, and financial outlay.

Discussion

From the review, a demographic profile of the studies into business mentoring since 1986 emerged. Most of the reviewed studies were published in journals and nearly two-thirds utilised survey questionnaires to collect data. Mentee responses only were sought in more than half of the studies. A wide variety of business settings were examined in the studies and almost one-third focused on gender issues in the workplace.

Most research activity has occurred in the United States where more than 70% of the reviewed studies were conducted. This predominance of studies from the United States is not surprising. Here, mentoring has a long-standing role in the nurturing of staff in industry and business and, for both the mentor and mentee, can be integral to career advancement. Few of the studies reviewed aligned themselves with a particular definition of mentoring. This 'definitional vagueness' according to Jacobi (1991), however, adds little to the field of research into mentoring. Conversely, Jacobi (1991) contends that it results in a 'continued lack of clarity about the antecedents, outcomes, characteristics, and mediators of mentoring relationships' (p. 505).

In terms of theoretical underpinnings, an eclectic range of theories or frameworks

was described. More often, however, researchers referred to Kram's (1985) psychosocial and career mentoring functions to deconstruct or measure the effects of mentoring.

As expected, numerous positive and negative outcomes were attributed to mentoring programs in the studies reviewed. For some mentors, lack of time and training, and conflicting demands were issues. For others, poor attitudes of mentees and other colleagues were problematic. Mentees, too, commented on lack of mentor training and poor attitudes of colleagues but were more concerned by gender and race-related issues along with the stifling effects of mentoring. Several mentees also accused mentors of taking credit for work carried out by mentees and claimed that mentors had deliberately stood in the way of their careers. Both groups infrequently pinpointed personal or professional incompatibility as impediments to the success of their relationship.

Despite its problems or shortcomings, the findings confirmed that mentoring appears to offer numerous, far-reaching benefits. More than half of the studies noted that mentoring facilitated some kind of career enhancement among mentees. Many studies also noted that mentees benefited from specific strategies that mentors used in their interactions with mentees such as coaching, role modelling, as well as opportunities for involvement in challenging assignments. Other benefits for mentees in business included company socialisation, sponsorship and friendship. For mentors, rewards associated with mentoring typically stemmed from the establishment of networks, increased career satisfaction, improved workplace skills, and personal pride and satisfaction. In contrast with mentees, however, mentors rarely reported friendship as a beneficial outcome of the mentoring relationship.

Organisations were also seen to benefit from the implementation of mentoring programs. In many studies improved productivity, contribution or profit by employees was attributed to mentoring programs, as was the increased retention or attraction of talented employees. Several problems were also expressed; however, these were confined to a small number of studies and tended to be one-off, rather than commonly cited problems.

At first glance, findings from the review suggest that mentoring provided considerably more benefits than drawbacks for both the mentee and mentor. Indeed, compared with the 102 (67.5%) studies that reported only positive outcomes, only ten (6.6%) studies exclusively reported negative outcomes associated with mentoring. While we acknowledge that mentoring may well have a 'dark side' (Long, 1997), the review supports the conclusion reached elsewhere that 'the negative outcomes associated with mentoring can be minimised by time and effort being directed toward the design and implementation of theoretically sound programs' (Ehrich & Hansford, 1999, p. 105).

The review did elucidate factors that can impede the success of any mentoring program. Firstly, concerning relationships, incompatibility between the mentor and mentee can clearly undermine the mentoring process. It seems evident that successful mentoring relationships are more likely when mentors and mentees are matched in terms of professional expertise and personality as well gender and racial tolerance. Secondly, it is crucial that mentors have sufficient time, training, and support from

others in order to effectively carry out their role. It is also recommended that in order to maximise the potential benefits for all involved, mentoring programs should be subjected to continued appraisal and refinement

It should be noted that the review was constrained by a number of limitations. Firstly, the review did not incorporate a true cross-section of studies from around the world. The most commonly used databases primarily reported research conducted in a limited number of English-speaking countries. From personal contact with other researchers, we are aware that literature that describes studies about business mentoring exists in many countries. We wondered, for instance, if different outcomes would be reported by mentees and mentors in countries such as Japan or China. However, the costs of locating, obtaining, and in many cases, translating, such literature is prohibitive. Secondly, while it was not our aim to judge the quality of individual studies, it was our perception that some lacked methodological rigour. This had implications for our ability to interpret research findings and draw conclusions from some of the studies. Thirdly, regardless of inter-coder checking the discreteness of the categories developed for descriptive material remains open to interrogation. It was felt necessary to retain the authenticity and richness of the descriptive data provided in the studies. In doing so, some blurring of the categories may have resulted.

In conclusion, despite the limitations associated with the current study, we believe that it contributes substantially to the growing knowledge base on mentoring. In particular, this synthesis of research should help to consolidate our understanding of the potential benefits and pitfalls of mentoring programs.

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