

Career Success of a Woman Mentor: Role of Gender Composition of Mentoring Dyad

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This study examines the role of gender composition in the relationship between mentoring support functions provided by a mentor and career outcomes achieved. The study focuses on the benefits received by women mentors. It is hypothesized that if a homogeneous dyad (women mentor-women mentee) as well as in cross-gendered (women mentor-male mentee) of career support function can increase the objective outcomes received by a woman mentor. Whereas the psychosocial support provided in a homogeneous dyad can enhance the subjective career outcome of a woman mentor, but such support when provided in a cross-gendered dyad can have a negative impact on the subjective career success of women mentors.

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Introduction

The value of mentoring as a career advancement strategy has been a subject of discussion since its popularization (Singh et al., 2009). In organizations, mentoring relationship involves a junior employee and a senior employee, where the senior employee facilitates the career and personal development of a junior employee and provides insights, information, and exposure to other sources.

The career benefits that an individual gets from mentoring relationships like early career socialization, job performance, career advancement (Chao et al., 1992), improved career mobility, increased job satisfaction, faster promotion rate, enhanced self-esteem, higher pay (Koberg et al., 1994) and overall sense of well-being (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002), is well documented. But, the focus of mentoring literature has been on the value and benefits derived from the perspective of those who are being mentored. The extant literature on the benefits of mentoring relationships has

paid much less attention to the benefits a mentor can achieve in comparison to those of mentees. The empirical investigation of the mentor's benefits and the mentor's experience, in general, is scarce (Bozionelos, 2004; Lane, 2004). This was also confirmed by Banerjee-Batist et al (2019), who conducted an elaborate integrative literature review of sociocultural factors and individual differences affecting mentoring functions and outcomes.

Accordingly, the primary purpose of this study is to compare mentoring functions provided by women mentors (career support function versus psychosocial function) and career outcomes of women mentors associated with mentoring relationships (objective career outcome versus subjective career outcomes). The second objective is to understand whether the gender composition of mentoring (homogeneous: between woman mentor and woman mentee, and cross-gendered: between a woman mentor and male mentee) affects the relationship between mentoring function and career outcomes of the mentor. The paper discusses the types of mentoring functions a mentor provides to a mentee, followed by the benefits a mentor derives from such a relationship, after which the role of gender composition in a mentoring relationship has been discussed.

Literature Review

According to Kram (1985: 2) mentoring describes a "relationship between a younger adult and an older, [where] more experienced adult helps

the younger individual learn to navigate the adult world and the world of work." Mentors are more senior individuals who assist less senior or the person in the role of mentee. Kram (1985), in her seminal qualitative study, explained that the assistance provided to a mentee can be broadly categorized into two mentoring functions: career support function and psychosocial support function.

The career support functions related to developmental behaviors can have an impact on the mentee's career and professional advancement. It requires a mentor to discuss dilemmas and options related to the mentee's career and provides mentee career options by coaching, exposure, sponsorship, challenging work assignments, and protection (Kram, 1983). As a coach, the mentor provides information that is available to senior-level members, suggests strategies to achieve career goals, helps improve job-related skills, and shares career histories (Shen & Kram, 2011). To enhance the visibility and exposure of mentees, mentors create opportunities and introduce them to the 'right person' (Scandura & Viator, 1994). As sponsors, mentors nominate mentees for promotions and projects and advocate their abilities (Thomas, 1990). To provide challenging assignments, mentors assign tasks that help mentees learn and develop new skills and push the mentees out of their comfort zone (Shen & Kram, 2011). Finally, as a protector, the mentor shields mentees from controversies and reduces the unnecessary risk that could damage the mentee's reputation (Levesque et al., 2005).

According to Kram (1985: 32), psychosocial support functions are “those aspects of a relationship that enhance an individual’s sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role.” This function relates more to the interpersonal aspect of relationships. It enhances the self-worth of the mentee and helps an individual form a sense of ability. According to Kram (1983), there are four psychosocial support functions that a mentor can provide to a mentee which are counselling, friendship, role modelling & acceptance, and confirmation. As a counsellor, mentors encourage mentees to talk about their anxiety, act as a board to make mentees understand themselves, and show empathy towards mentees’ concerns (Shen & Kram, 2011). As friends, mentors provide opportunities for mentees to spend leisure by discussing non-work interests (Fowler & O’Gorman, 2005; Shen & Kram, 2011). Mentors also double up as role models (Kram, 1983). And to show acceptance and confirmation, mentors convey unconditional positive regard, feelings of respect, and approval even in times of failure (Fowler & O’Gorman, 2005).

Benefits of Mentoring: Mentor’s Perspective

As a mentor one can achieve both personal and professional benefits like increased self-confidence, personal fulfillment, intellectual challenge, financial rewards, assistance on projects, revitalized interest in work, recognition from others, increased reputation and prestige, and valuable insights regarding own or other organizations (Bonzionelos, 2004;

Lane, 2004) and career success and benefits (Allen et al., 2006 b).

The various perspectives of career success have always maintained duality. Nature-wise career success can be both objective (rank, income) can be subjective (personal feeling of achievement and values). On similar lines, the studies done by mentoring scholars exploring various outcomes associated with mentoring from a mentor’s perspective have classified two broad categories of outcome: objective career outcome and subjective career outcome. The objective career outcomes achieved by a mentor include promotion and compensation (Allen et al., 2006 a). On the other hand, subjective career outcomes are effective indicators of career success and less tangible aspects like organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and career satisfaction (Chun et al., 2012).

The gender role of the mentor and mentee has largely been not considered.

Very few studies have examined the association between the provision of different mentoring functions (career support vs. psychosocial support) and the career outcomes of the mentor (objective vs. subjective career outcomes). With a few exceptions, like Allen et al. (2006 a), Bozionelos et al. (2011) who studied the relationship between mentoring provision and objective career outcomes from a mentor’s perspective; and Ghosh and Reio Jr. (2013) who studied the relationship between mentoring

provision and subjective career outcomes from a mentor's perspective, this association has largely been underexplored. Further, the gender role of the mentor and mentee has largely been not considered.

Mentor: The Gender Effect

Ragins (1997) provided a model regarding a diversified mentoring relationship, according to which gender makes a difference in a mentoring relationship. The composition of the mentoring relationship influences the mentoring functions provided which in turn can influence the career development of mentees.

For women at the junior level, women at the senior level act as visible role models and women mentors can share gender-based experiences, which women at the junior level can relate to, to which a male mentee may not relate. The career benefits which women derive from this homogeneous mentoring relationship could be different from cross-gendered mentoring relationships.

There are studies and theoretical perspectives which can be implied to explain diversified mentorship. Drawing from social psychology literature, many scholars argued that women are more supposed to provide informal counseling and emotional support to mentees (e.g., Eisenberg & Fabes, 1991). Drawing from social role theory (Bem, 1974), one can argue that since the feminine gender role encourages the caring and nurturing aspect of women, they are expected to provide psychosocial mentoring more as compared to men. On the other hand, men

are associated with instrumental focus and are expected to provide career-related mentoring (Ibarra, 1993). Males are generally characterized as being result-driven, competitive, task-oriented, and unemotional, whereas women are generally characterized as being empathetic, nurturing, cooperative, and emotionally expressive (Powell, 1990). Whatever the differences in the type of mentoring functions provided by women mentors, it is important to note that the intention to provide the mentoring function to a mentee is not different in women and men. Ragins and Cotton (1993) reported that women mentors expressed similar positive intentions to serve as a mentor compared to male mentors. Similarly, Allen et al., (1997) reported that there were no differences in perceived barriers to becoming a mentor between men and women mentors and women had similar intentions to mentor others.

But the empirical studies have reported inconsistent results. Burke et al. (1994) reported that women mentor provides both psychosocial and career mentoring to mentees more than male mentors. Sosik & Godshalk (2000) reported that male mentors provide more career mentoring to mentees than women mentors. Contrary to these findings, the majority of existing research suggest that the type of mentoring provided has no significant mentor gender differences (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Burke and McKeen, 1990). While some of the studies found a positive relationship between mentors (primarily male) with the advancement of the female mentee (Maniero, 1994), whilst other studies

have failed to establish an association between gender and mentoring relationship (Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

Homogeneous Mentoring Dyads

Despite concerns that the number of women in a senior position is substantially less than men, the fact cannot be denied that women at the top, even though few, provide mentoring to juniors. An informal mentoring relationship develops due to mutual identification. A woman mentor can view a junior woman employee as a younger version of themselves. On the other hand, with only a few women mentors available, junior woman employees can view a senior woman employee as her role model.

The dynamics of homogeneous mentoring relationships can be understood by various theories. According to the similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), individuals tend to attract those who are similar to them. Further, Clutterbuck (2002) suggests that in line with social comparison theory, a relationship is more successful when people share a common perspective and understanding of the issue. In homogeneous mentoring relationships, mentors reported gaining both objective career success and subjective career success (Bozionelos, 2004; Allen et al., 2006 b). Given that a homogeneous relationship provides favorable outcomes for a woman mentor's career, the question to be pondered next is whether both kinds of mentoring support functions lead to positive outcomes. Or is it that a specific kind of mentoring support function leads to specific career outcomes?

Career Support Mentoring Function. Junior and aspiring women employees may prefer to be mentored by other successful women in the organization. Burke et al. (1994) reported that female mentors provided promotional opportunities, exposure, and protection in the same-gendered dyad, and Ragins & McFarlin, (1990) found that in the female mentor-female mentee dyad the provision for providing sponsorship was most likely than in any other gender composition.

The accomplishment of their mentee results in an increased reputation of mentors (Dreher & Ash, 1990). Further, when a mentor provides job-related support to the mentee, it also enhances the technical expertise, leadership capacity, and managerial skills of the mentor (Eby and Lockwood, 2005; Bozionelos, 2004) which can directly and positively impact their chances of getting promotion or pay hikes. Mentors often rely on mentees for support (Mullen, 1994), and for mentors, this can form a basis for advancement (Dreher & Ash, 1990). It is documented that women mentors provide career support functions to female mentees. And in return, the women mentors may achieve objective career success because of increased reputation, support, and enhances skills.

Hypothesis 1: Career mentoring provided to a female mentee in a female mentor-female mentee mentoring relationship will have a positive impact on the objective career success of the female mentor.

Psychosocial Mentoring. When a woman mentor develops a mentoring relationship, the most important character they play is of role model for a woman mentee and denotes visible proof that they can also aspire to be in such a position. The visibility is higher because of fewer women mentors, and such relationship is likely to impact the mentor's professional advancement (Woolnough & Davidson, 2007). Further, as a counselor, a woman mentor may share gender-based experiences, barriers, and opportunities with a woman mentee.

There are empirical studies, even though scarce, which argue that women mentors provide psychosocial benefits to women mentees (e.g., Koberg et al., 1994). Ragins and McFarlin (1990) also reported that in same-gendered mentoring relationships, female mentees stated engaging in social activities with female mentors more than any other gender composition. A similar finding was reported by Burke et al. (1990) who found that women mentors in same-gendered dyad provided more counselling and personal support. Applying interpersonal similarity theory to mentee selection, it can be drawn that mentors are attracted to those to whom they can relate (Allen et al., 1997) and whom they often view as a younger version of themselves (Burke et al., 1993).

Positive interpersonal work relationships like supportive supervision and social networks have been linked to the subjective career success of mentors (Bozionelos, 2004). By provid-

ing psychosocial support to someone to whom a mentor can relate, a mentor can gain pride and a sense of accomplishment (Kram, 1983; Allen, et al., 1997). A female mentor by passing experiences and knowledge that a female mentee is also likely to experience will enhance the sense of meaning in women mentors. According to Eby et al. (2006 : 431), "passing of [their] wisdom to [their] mentee'" is often personally a rewarding experience. Finding someone to whom a female mentor can relate and see a younger version of self in, and to whom she can pass on accumulated wisdom and knowledge can enhance the sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and meaning in the mentors' lives. Other benefits reported include exhilaration from fresh perspectives provided by the mentee, deeper sense of purpose, personal satisfaction, and a deeper sense of belonging to their organization (Eby et al., 2006).

In providing psychosocial support to a woman mentee, a woman mentor may develop an emotional bond with the mentee and derive a sense of meaning and purpose. It is therefore reasonable to expect that subjective career outcomes are more likely to occur when a women mentor provides psychosocial mentoring to a women mentee.

Hypothesis 2: Psychosocial mentoring provided to a female mentee in a female mentor-female mentee mentoring relationship will have a positive impact on the subjective career success of the female mentor.

Cross-gendered Dyad

In organizations, the cross-gendered mentoring relationships witness more male mentor-female mentee combinations as compared to female mentor-male mentee combinations. Thus, research in cross-gendered mentoring has focused more on male mentor-female mentee mentoring relationships (O'Neil & Blake-Beard, 2002).

Mentors rely on mentees for information and mentees are expected to pay back by supplying critical information to them.

Career Mentoring. The career mentoring provided by a female mentor to a male mentee is expected to be no different from the one provided to the female mentee. Many empirical studies have found no differences in career mentoring provided to the male mentee and female mentee by a woman mentor (Burke et al., 1993; Scandura & Williams, 2004). So, the career mentoring functions provided to a male mentee will be similar to those provided to a female mentee. But the outcomes a female mentor receives could be because of different reasons. Mentors rely on mentees for information (Mullen, 1994) and mentees are expected to pay back by supplying critical information to them (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Providing career-based mentoring to male mentees can enlarge the basis or the source of information and assistance she can achieve (Mullen, 1994), which she otherwise may not get. Women are not part of many informal

groups which a male mentee could be like certain clubs or recreational groups or sports groups (Davidson & Burke, 2004). As social network theory suggests (Brass, 1992), social relationships provide access to various social contacts in pursuit of their goals. To build skills, create knowledge to succeed in organizational culture, connect the disconnected parts, and gain new information within the social system, women will tend to develop networks dominated by males. Access to the information, which otherwise a female mentor may not have, and the assistance received by someone who has the required information, can enhance the performance of the female mentor. The enhanced performance may help a female mentor gain reputation and visibility. strong performance, contribution to the development of the organization, and a positive image must contribute to mentors' objective career success (Bozionelos et al., 2011). Hence providing a career-based mentoring function to a male mentee can enhance the benefits and outcomes achieved by a women mentor from this mentoring relationship.

Hypothesis 3: Career mentoring provided to a male mentee in a female mentor-male mentee mentoring relationship will have a positive impact on the objective career success of the female mentor.

Psychosocial Mentoring. Cross-gendered relationships in the office often result in psychologically intimate relationships with the opposite gender (Lobel et al., 1994). The fear of perceived or real intimacy can inhibit women men-

tor from providing personal counseling or friendly relationship with the male mentee. Even if they do, it can often create suspicion and jealousy among colleagues (Fitt & Newton, 1981), and increase the risk of rumors. The mere perception of others can negatively impact the objective career success of a woman mentor. Powell and Graves (2003) also argued that the reflections of the negative event will be higher for women mentors as compared to male mentors because with fewer women at a higher level they consequently become more visible. Further, Ragins & Cotton (1999) also suggested that female mentor-male mentee mentoring composition will be most limited in providing psychosocial function. Also, mentees in cross-gendered mentoring relationships reported a low level of trust as compared to same-gendered (Thomas, 1990). Ragins (1997)

also predicted that minority mentors will report less fulfillment and generativity in a cross-gendered mentoring relationship. Thus, it is argued that psychosocial mentoring given to male mentees will reduce the level of satisfaction of women mentors. However, rumors and suspicion may also impact promotional opportunities subsequently affecting the objective career success of a women mentor. This is also in line with the dark side of mentoring in various mentor-mentee combinations as discussed by Ivey and Dupre (2022).

Hypothesis 4: Psychosocial mentoring provided to a male mentee in a female mentor-male mentee mentoring relationship will have a negative (negative) impact on the subjective (objective) career success of the female mentor.

Table 1 Representation of Proposed Hypothesis

Mentoring Relationship	Homogeneous (W-W)		Cross Gendered (W-M)	
	<i>Objective career success</i>	<i>Subjective career success</i>	<i>Objective career success</i>	<i>Subjective career success</i>
Career mentoring	+		+	
Psychosocial mentoring		+	-	-

Discussion

With the growing use of mentoring in an organizational setting and its importance ascribed to the development of an individual’s career, it is important to understand and quantitatively associate mentoring functions provided with the career outcome a mentor achieves. The purpose of the study was to develop and understand the relationship between a mentoring function provided by a woman

mentor and the outcomes she achieves (both objective and subjective) in a homogeneous and dyadic mentoring relationship.

In the career support mentoring function, a mentor provides instrumental and informational support to both female and male mentees. A woman mentor when providing career mentoring functions to both female and male mentees may achieve objective career success. But

woman mentors while providing psychosocial support should be careful and cautious. Psychosocial support when provided to female mentees may result in subjective career outcomes like job satisfaction. But, when provided to the male mentee, may be perceived negatively by others and can have serious implications for both subjective as well as objective career success.

Managerial Implications

Beyond addressing the research gap, the present study offers few practical insights for understanding the dynamism of mentoring relationships. As argued, if there is a negative impact of psychosocial mentoring given to male mentees on the subjective as well as objective career success of a woman mentor, then it implies that a woman mentor needs to be cautious while handling male mentees and the kind of mentoring she provides to him. Also, mid-career stages involve a reassessment of life accomplishments (Kram, 1985). Hence, by providing mentoring functions to mentees based on the analysis of benefits and costs associated with it, a woman mentor can avoid stagnation which can further sanction their progress in their career. The conclusions of this article can also inform human resource administrators while assigning mentees to women mentors.

By providing mentoring functions to mentees based on the analysis of benefits and costs associated with it, a woman mentor can avoid stagnation.

Future Research

The present study was contextualized in the event of informal mentoring. A formal mentoring program that is facilitated by the organization and formal assignment of mentees to mentors may impact the careers of mentors differently. Further, this study focused on homogeneous and cross-gendered mentoring relationships with respect to women mentors at the individual level (dyadic relationships). There are other types of mentoring which can have varying impacts on the kind of benefits a mentor derives out of mentoring relationships. A mentor can have a network of mentees who can help them achieve professional development in different ways. Peer mentoring, group mentoring, and e-mentoring can have different implications for mentoring relationships.

The literature on outcomes achieved by a mentor has painted only one side of the picture and reported only positive outcomes stemming from mentoring relationships. There are potential serious costs associated with mentoring relationships for mentors (Feldman, 1999), yet this side of mentorship has received less attention. For example, the current paper argued how psychosocial career mentoring provided to a male mentee in a female mentor-male mentee relationship can have a negative impact on the subjective career success of the mentor.

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