

How Do Formal Mentors Assist Their Protégés? A Study of Mentors Assigned to Cooperative Education Students and Interns

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Most researchers studying mentoring have assessed the assistance protégés receive from their mentors using measures derived from the analysis of informal mentoring relationships. However, it is questionable whether formal, or assigned, mentoring relationships are the same as informal ones. Multiple methods were used in this study to investigate formal mentors' perceptions of how they assist their protégés. The results suggest formal mentors serve some, but not all, of the same functions as informal mentors.

Keywords: Mentoring, Social Support, Assessment

Problem Statement

In a mentoring relationship, a more experienced person (the mentor) contributes to the professional and personal development of a less experienced individual (the protégé or mentee). A growing body of research has found being in a mentoring relationship is associated with positive outcomes. For mentees, receiving support from a mentor has been linked to favorable career-related outcomes, including increased job satisfaction, higher career satisfaction, and greater career success (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, E., & Lima, 2004.). Benefits for mentors appear to include developing a personal support network, receiving information and feedback from protégés, gaining satisfaction and pride from helping others, attaining recognition for developing others, and increasing one's career satisfaction (Allen, Poteet & Burroughs, 1997; Busch, 1985; Johnson, Yust & Fritchie, 2001; Mullen & Noe, 1999).

As evidence of the advantages of mentoring has accumulated, organizations increasingly have begun to create programs to facilitate them. However, most studies of mentoring have either focused on informal mentoring relationships that have evolved naturally between people or have not identified the type of mentoring relationships that have been scrutinized. Relatively little research has focused explicitly on mentoring relationships that are formal, or initiated by an organization, and, therefore, much remains unknown about them (Wanberg, Hezlett, & Welsh, 2003). Further research is needed to improve our understanding of formal mentoring relationships in order to enable human resource development professionals to maximize the effectiveness of mentoring programs.

Theoretical Framework

A substantial proportion of research on mentoring has been based on the groundbreaking research of Kram (1985). Through interviews with mentees and their mentors, Kram identified the major kinds of assistance mentors provide to their mentees. These mentoring functions differentiate mentoring from other workplace relationships. Career mentoring functions are those that directly aid the career of protégés. They include challenging assignments, coaching, exposure, protection, and sponsorship. Psychosocial mentoring functions, which include counseling, friendship, role modeling, and confirmation and affirmation, enhance mentees' sense of competence and identity.

Kram's (1985) work has served as a foundation for subsequent research on mentoring. All three of the established measures of mentoring functions are based on Kram's (1985) work. Although Noe (1988) first used his measure in a study of formal mentoring relationships, the items comprising his instrument were based on Kram's research with informal mentoring pairs. Similarly, instruments developed by Ragins and McFarlin (1990) and Scandura (Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Ragins, 1993) are grounded in Kram's work and have been widely used. Although the majority of researchers have either not identified the type of mentoring relationships they are examining or have studied informal mentoring relationships, formal mentoring relationships are beginning to receive more scrutiny (Wanberg et al., 2003). Measures of career and psychosocial mentoring are often utilized in this research. However, it is unclear if the mentoring functions initially identified by Kram accurately characterize the kinds of support mentors provide in formal mentoring relationships.

The equivalence of formal and informal mentoring relationships has been challenged. In addition to being initiated through different means, formal and informal mentoring relationships may differ in terms of the structure surrounding them (e.g., having guidelines for how often to meet and topics to discuss), the motivation and skills of

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the mentors, and the willingness of the mentor to visibly support the mentee (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). When mentees who are highly satisfied with their formal mentoring relationship are compared with equally satisfied counterparts in informal mentoring relationships, they do not differ in terms of important career-related outcomes they experience, including career commitment, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational self-esteem, promotion satisfaction, intentions to quit, and procedural justice (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). However, several studies comparing informal and formal mentoring relationships have found mentees in informal relationships receive more support and accrue more favorable career-related outcomes (Allen, Day & Lentz, 2002; Chao, Walz and Gardner, 1992; Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997, Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Taken together, these findings suggest that although formal mentoring relationships have the potential to be as beneficial as informal relationships, they do not always deliver.

In their dynamic model of formal mentoring relationships, Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett (2003) proposed that certain mentoring functions (i.e., protection, exposure, sponsorship) would rarely occur in formal mentoring relationships. Further research is needed to test this hypothesis. In addition, the broader assumption that common conceptualizations of mentoring functions apply to formal mentoring relationships merits investigation.

Research Questions

Two research questions are addressed in this study. The first question is: how do mentors in formal mentoring relationships in the workplace assist their mentees? It is hoped that taking a fresh look at the nature of support provided in formal mentoring will yield new insights into this potentially influential human resource development tool. Rather than continuing to use previously derived mentoring functions, this research steps back to identify mentoring functions that specifically characterize formal mentoring relationships. Greater knowledge of the type of assistance provided in formal mentoring relationships also should improve future research about formal mentoring relationships and help practitioners build realistic expectations for formal mentoring programs.

Second, this study investigates how the kinds of assistance provided by mentors in formal mentoring relationships compare to the types of support identified in previous studies of informal or unspecified mentoring relationships. That is, how do the kinds of assistance given by mentors to mentees in formal mentoring relationships compare to career and psychosocial mentoring functions that have been widely used in previous studies of mentoring? Comparing mentoring functions explicitly elicited from formal mentoring relationships with those that traditionally have been used to study and understand mentoring relationships will help elucidate the similarities and differences between formal and informal mentoring relationships.

Method

Research Design

This study is a descriptive case study utilizing multiple methodologies, including the critical incidents technique, a focus group, and surveys. All three methodologies were used to address the first research question. The phenomenological philosophy guided their selection. The second research question was addressed using a variation in the analysis of the critical incidents and the second of the two surveys. These methodologies were chosen to facilitate comparisons with prior research, consistent with modified analytic induction (Bodan & Biklin, 2003).

In the first phase of the critical incident technique, individuals are asked to write down actual examples of target behaviors in a structured format, yielding a thorough description of each incident provided. The structured format includes an explanation of the situation that preceded the action or behavior, a description of the action, and a discussion of the outcome of the action (Anderson & Wilson, 1997; Flanagan, 1954). Individuals are typically asked to provide examples of both effective and ineffective target behaviors they have observed or experienced. In the second phase of this technique, the incidents are analyzed by sorting them on the basis of their similarity. Sorters may use as many or as few categories as they wish to group the incidents such that similar incidents are in the same categories and distinct or different incidents are in separate categories.

The critical incidents technique is consistent with the phenomenological approach in that it attempts to understand the meaning of events from the viewpoint of ordinary people (Bodan & Biklin, 2003). The researcher does not offer definitions of the construct being investigated or begin with a priori views of what constitutes effective or ineffective behaviors. Instead, an understanding of the construct being studied is based on the perspective of the research participants, emerging from the incidents they select and the words they use to voice their views. It should be noted, however, that the critical incidents technique does constrain individuals to focus on behaviors and present their observations in a structured format. Thus, although the critical incidents technique

largely reflects the phenomenological school of thought, it cannot be considered a pure exemplar of this philosophy. The critical incidents technique was selected because it enables the researcher to understand the perspective of the research participants in the fairly limited amount of time made available by the organization “hosting” the research.

A focus group was used to share the results of the critical incidents procedures with the mentors. This enabled the researcher to verify that the mentors’ views had been captured accurately and completely. The decision to use this approach was also grounded in the phenomenological tradition and is consistent with the descriptive purpose of the case study. Similarly, a survey based on the themes emerging from the analysis of the critical incidents and the focus group results was used to refine the researchers’ understanding of the research participants’ views. Specifically, the survey enabled the researcher to efficiently capture and describe the participants’ views of the importance of the categories or themes reflected in the critical incidents.

Addressing the second research question required methodologies that permitted comparing the kinds of support offered in formal mentoring relationships with the mentoring functions that have been a mainstay of previous research. This type of comparison can be viewed as the fourth step in the modified version of analytic induction in which cases thought not to fit the definition or explanation of a phenomenon are actively sought and studied (Robinson, 1951 cite in Bodgan & Biklin, 2003). In this study, existing definitions of career and psychosocial mentoring functions reflect conceptualizations of mentoring derived from informal mentoring relationships or unspecified cases of mentoring relationships. The purposeful sample of mentors involved in formal mentoring relationships that was selected for this study represents the new, distinct case. To see if the existing theory of mentoring functions applies in this new case, mentors were asked to complete an established instrument assessing mentoring functions. The results of this survey were interpreted and contrasted with the importance ratings and the themes emerging from the critical incidents technique which reflect the mentors’ own views of the kinds of support they provide. In addition, a variation of the second phase of the critical incidents technique was used to directly compare the mentors’ views with previous models of mentoring support. Three doctoral students familiar with the literature on mentoring functions were asked to sort the critical incidents into pre-specific categories reflecting the mentoring functions identified in and used in previous research on mentoring.

Sample, Procedure, and Instrumentation

Data were collected from mentors in formal mentoring relationships who were employed by a large, federal agency. Each mentor was assigned to support a cooperative education student or intern also working at the same agency. All of the mentors had managerial responsibilities. The formal mentoring program has been in operation several years and is facilitated by a full-time coordinator.

The researcher met with mentors as a group on two occasions. At the first session, mentors were introduced to the critical incident technique and asked to provide examples of times they, or other mentors, had been particularly effective or particularly ineffective at helping their protégés. Detailed instructions, along with examples illustrating well- and poorly-written critical incidents from a different behavioral domain (i.e., job performance), were provided. Ten mentors provided critical incidents

After completing the task of providing critical incidents, mentors completed a modified version the Mentor Role Inventory (MRI) developed by Ragins and McFarlane (1990). The MRI assesses eleven mentoring functions. Coaching, protecting, challenging assignments, exposure, and sponsorship are aspects of career mentoring. Social, friendship, parent, role modeling, counseling, and acceptance/confirmation are components of psychosocial mentoring. The original wording of the survey was suitable for protégés. The author adapted the items so that they worded appropriately for mentors. Items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. Nine mentors completed the MRI.

Between the two sessions, the investigator sorted the critical incidents into common themes reflecting the kinds of assistance they provided to their mentees. These themes were shared with the mentors at the focus group conducted during the second session. At the end of this session, the mentors evaluated the importance of the themes, including one new theme identified during the session. Importance was rated on a five-point, Likert-type scales where 5 = Extremely important, 4 = Very Important, 3 = Important, 2 = Less important, 1 = Not important. Seven mentors participated in the focus group, although a couple could not stay until they end of the session. Five mentors completed the importance ratings.

The primary limitation with this study is that data were collected from mentors within a single organization. The extent to which the results obtained here will generalize to formal mentoring relationships at other employers is unknown. In addition, further research will be needed to determine whether similar findings are observed in formal mentoring relationships directed at other groups, such as new managers.

Results

Sixty-five critical incidents were generated by ten mentors during the first data collection session. Eight major themes representing distinct ways mentors assist mentees were reflected in the incidents. Three of the themes had noteworthy sub-themes. The thirteen major and minor themes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Major and Minor Themes Reflected in the Critical Incidents

Theme	Examples	%
Coach/Advise		33.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage mentee to ask for assignments. Provide advice on preparing for performance review. Suggest mentee request a particular work schedule. 	21.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skill development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share strategies for handling conflicts. Offer suggestions on building visibility. 	6.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss options about permanent assignments. 	6.2
Provide Information		23.1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a new perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share own interpretation of others' behavior. Help mentee see consequences of actions. Explain the nature of programs or roles. 	12.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give information for a specific project. Explain office protocol. 	9.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disclose own experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe own decisions. 	1.5
Intervene		16.9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solve problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk with supervisor about a concern raised by mentee. Work to find mentee a good coach. 	10.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommend mentee for projects. 	6.2
Provide Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make suggestions for improving performance. Review and provide input on a specific piece of work. 	9.2
Manage the mentoring relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule and hold meetings. Identify strengths and interests of mentee. Find common ground. 	6.2
Facilitate self-exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask what work experiences were most enjoyable. 	4.6
Offer encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide re-assurance about mentee's skills. 	3.1
Protect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confront office gossip. Address complaints from mentee's co-workers. 	3.1

Note: The values in the % column indicate the proportion of incidents sorted into this theme.

One third of the critical incidents described examples of mentors advising or coaching their mentees. Most of these—just over twenty percent of the total number of incidents—were instances of mentors providing guidance on how their mentees could address specific problems they encountered in their current assignments. In the remaining incidents within this theme, mentors offered advice or coaching about longer-term issues. About half of these incidents described mentors giving suggestions for how mentees could generally enhance their success by improving specific skills. The other incidents provided examples of mentors giving advice about career choices and decisions.

Almost one quarter of the incidents described instances of mentors providing information to protégés. A majority of these incidents dealt with mentors attempting to provide a new perspective on a situation in which their mentee was involved. Mentors also appear to share information with their mentees on specific issues, such as data

related to projects their mentees are working on. One incident involved a mentor disclosing their own experiences.

The major theme reflected third most often in the incidents was mentors taking action or intervening on their mentees behalf. Most of these incidents described mentors talking to others to address concerns raised by their mentees. Mentors also sometimes attempted to create opportunities for their mentees. Interestingly, during the focus group discussion held during the second meeting with the mentors, the mentors generally expressed reluctance to directly intervene in situations involving their mentees. Several felt that taking action was a last resort and indicated that either they or their mentees were not doing an effective job.

In just under ten percent of the incidents, mentors provided examples of mentors giving feedback to mentees. In some cases, mentors provided comments on a particular piece of work. In other cases, mentors more broadly provided feedback on how mentors could improve their performance.

A small proportion of the incidents were related to mentors managing the mentoring relationship. About half of these incidents were negative, describing cases in which mentors had not given sufficient priority to meeting with their mentees.

The last three themes were each represented by fewer than five percent of the incidents. Several incidents described instances in which mentors tried to facilitate mentees self-exploration by asking them questions about what they enjoyed or liked. Mentors also occasionally offered encouragement to their mentees, providing reassurance and support, and attempted to protect their mentees, confronting office gossip and complaints.

At the second session, the major and minor themes were fed back to mentors and discussed. The mentors identified a fourteenth area that was not represented in the incidents. The mentors felt that an important part of their role was to help assess their mentees fit with their organization and provide feedback as to whether or not the mentee should be offered a permanent job with the agency.

Table 2. *Importance Ratings: Means and Standard Deviations (N = 5)*

Theme	Mean	SD
Coach/Advise		
• Specific problems	3.2	.84
• Skill development	3.0	.71
• Career decisions	4.0	.71
Provide Information		
• Provide a new perspective	4.4	.89
• Share information	4.0	1.22
• Disclose own experiences	4.0	1.00
Intervene		
• Solve problems	2.6	1.52
• Create opportunities	2.4	1.40
Provide Feedback	3.8	.45
Manage the mentoring relationship	3.6	1.14
Facilitate self-exploration	3.6	1.14
Offer encouragement	4.6	.55
Protect	2.4	1.34
Evaluate mentee's fit	3.8	.84

The average ratings of importance five mentors gave to this aspect of formal mentoring, along with the original thirteen major and minor themes are shown in Table 2. When the themes are considered at the most specific level (i.e., the minor themes are considered separately) the theme rated most important was offering encouragement, followed by providing a new perspective. Coaching/advising on career decisions, providing information and sharing one's own experiences were tied for third in terms of ratings of importance. Areas perceived as least important were protecting mentees from office gossip and creating opportunities for them.

It is interesting to note that the ratings of importance do not closely correspond to the frequency with which the themes were represented in the critical incidents. This underscores that what is easy to recall examples of may not necessarily be what is most essential or important. However, the small number of individuals providing ratings of importance must be kept in mind when interpreting these results.

To address the second research question, 9 mentors completed the Mentor Role Inventory (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990) during the first meeting with the researcher. The results are summarized in Table 3. Mentors were most likely to agree that they performed behaviors related to Role modeling, Acceptance/confirmation, Friendship,

Coaching, and Counseling. All but one of these (Coaching) are typically viewed as facets of psychosocial mentoring. Means for three mentoring functions—Social, Challenging assignments, and Parent—were less than the midpoint of the scale, indicating that mentors, on average, disagreed they engaged in these activities. Thus, mentors did not perceive themselves as socializing with their mentees outside of work, giving their mentees challenging assignments, or viewing their relationship with their mentees as like a parent-child relationship.

Table 3. Mentoring Functions Provided (Means and SD's from the MRI) and Reflected in the Critical Incidents

		Mean	SD	Frequency
Role modeling	Psychosocial	5.94	.98	0
Acceptance/confirmation	Psychosocial	5.85	1.23	3
Friendship	Psychosocial	5.74	.92	0
Coaching	Career	5.33	.91	28
Counseling	Psychosocial	5.30	.65	9
Protection	Career	4.67	1.79	6
Sponsorship	Career	4.41	1.33	4
Exposure	Career	4.19	1.19	1
Social	Psychosocial	3.52	1.98	3
Challenging assignments	Career	3.26	1.65	0
Parent	Psychosocial	3.22	1.48	0

Comparing the results of mentors' ratings of an established measure of mentoring functions with the importance ratings of themes generated by the mentors uncovers some striking similarities and differences. The relatively high ratings given, on average, to the Acceptance/Confirmation function on the MRI are congruent with Offer Encouragement being viewed as the most important of the themes generated by the mentors. Challenging Assignments was one of the mentoring functions on the MRI that received particularly low ratings and Create Opportunities was one of the minor themes generated by the mentors that was rated least important. On the other hand, several aspects of mentoring assessed by the MRI were not represented in the themes generated by the mentors. These include Role Modeling, Social, and Parent. In addition, several of the themes generated by the mentors are not assessed by the MRI. These are Manage the Mentoring Relationship and Evaluate the Mentee's fit with the organization. Finally, there are a few small discrepancies between the rating of the themes' importance and the mean ratings of the functions on the MRI. Although Protection was viewed as one of the least important themes, it was not one of the lowest rated mentoring functions. Similarly, although Coaching received relatively high ratings on the MRI, two of the three Advising/Coaching themes did not receive high importance ratings.

A variation in the second phase of the critical incidents technique also was used to compare the kinds of assistance offered by formal mentors in this case study with the mentoring functions identified in previous research. Three doctoral students who were familiar with prior research on mentoring sorted the critical incidents into pre-specified categories representing the mentoring functions assessed by the MRI. All three of the sorters volunteered that they found this task challenging, finding it difficult to fit a number of incidents into the categories and to use all of the categories. Given these spontaneous observations, it is not surprising that the agreement among the raters was modest. Of the 65 incidents, the raters were in complete agreement on how they sorted about one-third of the incidents (33.8%). Two of the raters agreed on the classification of 55.4% of the ratings. There was complete disagreement on 10.8% of the incidents.

The frequency with which incidents on which there was partial or complete agreement were classified into existing conceptualizations of career and psychosocial mentoring are shown in the right hand column of Table 3. Note that four of the instances on which there was partial or complete agreement are not shown. These were placed in new categories that do not reflect existing views of mentoring functions. These results again underscore the prominence of coaching in formal mentoring relationships. The absence of incidents in some categories also suggests that the kinds of assistance provided by mentors in formal mentoring relationships differ somewhat those that have been previously studied in the literature.

Conclusions

The first objective of this study was to identify the kinds of assistance mentors in formal mentoring relationships provide to their mentees. Using the critical incidents technique, eight major ways in which formal mentors help their protégés were uncovered. These include (1) coaching and advising in three areas (specific problems related to mentees' current roles, longer-term skill development, and career decisions), (2) providing information in three ways

(providing a new perspective on situations, sharing information, and mentors' disclosure of their own experiences), and (3) intervening on the mentee's behalf, either to solve problems or create opportunities. Other major ways mentors' help their mentees are by (4) providing feedback, (5) managing the mentoring relationship, (6) facilitating the mentees' self-exploration, (7) offering encouragement, and (8) protecting mentees from office gossip.

The second objective of this study was to compare how the kinds of assistance provided by mentors in formal mentoring relationships compared to extant conceptualizations of mentoring support. Examination of the themes generated by mentors, mentors' ratings of their importance, the results of the sort of the incidents into categories representing mentoring functions, and mentors' responses to the MRI (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990) suggest that aspects of mentoring traditionally categorized as psychosocial functions are a component of formal mentoring relationships. Two of the thirteen major and minor themes, (Facilitating Self-exploration and Offering Encouragement), are closely aligned with Kram's (1985) definition of psychosocial mentoring as involving assistance that builds mentees' sense of identity and competence. Two additional themes (Providing a New Perspective and Disclosing One's Own Experiences) are similar to the psychosocial mentoring function of counseling. Three of these themes are among those rated as most important by mentors. Of the traditional mentoring functions assessed by the MRI, four of the five provided most frequently by mentors were aspects of psychosocial mentoring (role modeling, acceptance/confirmation, friendship, and counseling). On the other hand, only 15% of the incidents generated by mentors that were consistently classified by experts familiar with the mentoring literature were sorted into mentoring functions traditionally considered facets of psychosocial support.

Looking across the data collected from mentors, the one career function that stands out is Coaching. More than one third of the critical incidents provided dealt with Coaching/advising or Providing Feedback. Although the specific major and minor themes representing aspects of coaching varied considerably in terms of their rated importance, Coaching was one of the five top rated MRI functions. Almost half of the critical incidents (48%) on which there was partial or complete agreement among the expert sorters were placed in the Coaching category. It is interesting to note that researchers have differed in how they have classified Coaching. Kram (1985) originally described Coaching as part of career mentoring and this categorization is reflected in some measures of mentoring functions, such as the MRI (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). On the other hand, on Noe's (1988) measure of mentoring functions, which was based on data collected from a study of formal mentoring relationships, items pertaining to Coaching are part of the psychosocial mentoring scale. Overall, coaching or advising appears to be a salient component of formal mentoring.

In contrast, consistent with the dynamic model of formal mentoring (Wanberg et al., 2003), Sponsorship, Protection, and Exposure are less central to formal mentoring. Two of the thirteen major and minor themes, Create Opportunities and Protect, appear to tap into what has traditionally been viewed as core aspects of career mentoring. However, less than ten percent of the critical incidents pertained to Creating Opportunities and Protection and these themes were the two rated lowest in importance. The mentors participating in the focus group also emphasized that they tried to avoid intervening on behalf of their protégés. Although six incidents were consistently categorized as instances of Protection by the expert sorters, Protection, Sponsorship, and Exposure received only moderate ratings on the MRI. Challenging Assignments, also traditionally viewed as a component of career mentoring, also does not appear to be a major form of assistance provided in formal mentoring relationships. It was one of the aspects of mentoring that received low ratings on the MRI, and was not represented in the critical incidents.

The results of this study diverged in several additional ways from those based on informal or unspecified types of mentoring relationships, hinting at other differences between formal and informal mentoring relationships. Managing the Mentoring Relationship and Evaluating Mentees' Fit with the organization were unusual types of assistance provided by mentors that were identified in this study. In contrast, although results from the MRI indicate that Role modeling is often provided by mentors in this study, neither the incidents nor the focus group generated Role modeling as a key theme. This discrepancy across the data collection methods suggest further research is needed to clarify how substantial a part role modeling plays in formal mentoring relationships.

Other suggestions for future research include studying formal mentoring relationships in different contexts and with different methods. This descriptive case study was based on mentors working with co-operative education students and interns employed by a public agency. To ascertain the generalizability of the findings reported here, research should be conducted on formal mentoring relationships involving mentees in different roles, types of organizations, and career stages. Using quantitative approaches or other qualitative approaches also would be informative.

Contributions to HRD

The results of this study advance our knowledge of the types of assistance mentors who are in formal mentoring

relationships are likely to provide, contributing to human resource development (HRD) in several ways. First, practitioners may use this knowledge to help individuals prepare for their roles in formal mentoring relationships. Both mentors and mentees will benefit from having realistic expectations about the types of support and assistance mentors are likely to offer in mentoring relationships that are assigned by organizations. Second, scholars and practitioners can use the major and minor themes identified in this study as a starting point for improving the measurement of mentoring functions in research studies and program evaluations. Third, efforts to build theories about mentoring are aided by this study. For example, the results are consistent with one of the propositions of the dynamic model of formal mentoring recently proposed by Wanberg et al. (2003). Overall, a better understanding of how mentors in formal mentoring relationships help their mentees improves our understanding of the similarities and differences between formal and informal mentoring. Ultimately, this will help HRD professionals make better decisions about when formal and informal mentoring will improve learning and performance in organizations.

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