

Cross Gender Mentoring in the Era of Globalization: Implications for Mentoring the Organizational Women of India

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This paper addresses gender specific issues in mentoring through a focused review of mentoring literature. It highlights the relevance of cross gender mentoring in the context of women's career growth in Indian business organizations. The paper concludes by recommending relationship constellations as an innovative solution to the problems associated with cross gender mentoring dyads. Implications for mentoring in Indian organizations are discussed in light of the proposed recommendations.

Keywords: Developmental Networks, Cross Gender Mentoring, Women's Career in Indian Organizations

Historically, mentoring has played a significant role in the continuity and evolution of art, craft, and commerce (Murray & Owen, 1991). Early mentoring research (Kram, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978) and relatively recent scholarly literature have identified mentoring as essential to fostering career development of employees (Burke, McKeen, & McKenna, 1993; Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant – Vallone, 2000). As a construct, mentoring is defined as a complex developmental and interpersonal relationship where personal support and career guidance are provided by a senior, more-experienced organizational member to a junior, less-experienced organizational member (Carmin, 1988; Kram, 1985). According to Levinson & McKee (1978), a mentor is several years older; he is a person of greater experience and seniority, a teacher, an advisor or a sponsor. Pursuant to the mentoring literature, mentoring provides career related benefits to protégés such as promotion, increased compensation, career development, increased job satisfaction and psychosocial benefits such as increased self-esteem, strength of interpersonal bond, confidence, identity and socialization (Mullen, 1998; Ragins et al., 2000; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994; Verdejo, 2002). Though mentoring is traditionally viewed as a dyadic relationship, the traditional perception of mentoring has recently undergone a radical change due to globalization. The workforce in business organizations has become more diverse as more women have entered the workforce. These changes have been more pronounced in emerging economies such as India. The economic reforms initiated in the early 1990s have liberalized the Indian economy and the Indian economy has created a large number of employment opportunities for educated women (Das, 2003). In order to survive in the current competitive business scenario Indian organizations are realizing that they will need a talented workforce (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004) and educated women can now contribute their talents to the Indian workforce. In response to these changes in organizations, the practice of mentoring has evolved from the traditional one-on one relationship to constellation of mentoring relationships comprised of mentoring networks and/or developmental networks. Thus, it is no longer sufficient to study mentoring dyads as organizations are increasingly advocating mentoring networks over one-on one mentoring relationships. Mentoring research should now focus on determining how mentoring constellations (having numerous mentors) can benefit Indian women in business and industry. Moreover, mentoring research should help determine whether such developmental networks are effective in helping women overcome the barriers that they face in traditional one-to one cross-gender mentoring relationships.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this paper is to identify the issues that organizational women face in traditional one-on-one cross gender mentoring relationships and to examine the evolving concept of mentoring networks as a possible solution to the problems women face in organizational settings. Additionally, this paper highlights the necessity of developmental mentoring networks for women's career advancement in contemporary Indian organizations. Though it has been suggested that women need mentoring more than men for their upward career progress, it is also true that

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women face more problems and are less likely to benefit from traditional one-on-one mentoring relationships. Given that there are so few women in the top level management positions; women have to be paired up with successful senior male mentors. Consequently, factors such as sexual stereotypes, innuendos of sexual involvement can hinder the growth of such mentor protégé relationships. The issue of lack of women in management who could also serve as mentors is even more pronounced in India. Globally women comprise around 10 percent of senior management positions in Fortune 500 companies whereas in India, the presence of women in managerial positions ranges between a high of 5.8 percent (Kulkarni, 2002) to a low of 3 percent (Singh, 2003). Indian organizational women generally occupy positions in Human Resources, Information Technology and other staff and service-related functions. Very few women occupy positions in marketing or production or take up jobs that entail strategic policy-influencing (Budhwar, Saini, & Bhatnagar, 2005). Thus, due to this shortage, there are very few Indian women who can serve as mentors to their junior counterparts. This condition results in junior Indian women being assigned to male mentors. Based on the empirical studies done in this area till now, it can be inferred that women's career growth is hampered by the dysfunctional potential of such traditional dyadic cross gender mentoring relationships. Hunt & Michael (1983) has pointed out that female protégés are found to be more likely to experience greater social distance and general discomfort in a traditional one-on-one male mentored relationship than male protégés (Kram, 1983). This issue warrants immediate attention in countries with emerging economies such as India. India may be able to learn from established first world economies, where women have made significant progress in integrating the ranks of management and have made significant contributions to the productivity of such nations.

For purposes of this paper, the authors conducted a focused review of the mentoring literature produced within an approximate twenty-five year time span (1978-2006). Scholarly and research articles on mentoring were obtained by using electronic databases which included EBESCO, Proquest, PsychINFO, Emerald and JESTOR. In addition, the bibliographies of books and scholarly articles related to mentoring were reviewed. Key words and phrases used to search the mentoring literature included but were not limited to “mentoring”, “formal mentoring”, “informal mentoring”, “mentoring in organizations”, “cross gender mentoring”, “mentoring and women”, “mentoring outcomes”, “mentoring and human resource development”, “mentoring and Indian organizations” “developmental network mentoring”. The articles generated from these key word searches were perused and only peer reviewed articles that were germane to five specific areas were selected. The five specific areas that guided the selection of peer reviewed articles were: (a) mentoring in an international context, (b) mentoring's conceptualizations, definitions, and distinctions, (c) the nature of cross-gender mentoring, (d) the extant empirical research and scholarly literature on the mentoring phenomenon as it relates to the experiences of women, (e) the conceptualization of developmental network mentoring as a solution for career advancement of organizational women in India.

Theoretical Framework

Although the mentoring literature has proliferated within the past three decades, very little work has been done on the theoretical foundations of mentoring (Zagumny, 1993). This paper uses Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory as the broad explanatory base to address the mentoring phenomenon and the difficulties that are unique to women in mentoring relationships. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory serve as the theoretical foundation for mentoring because it is based on the tenet that humans can learn by observing others. According to Bandura (1977), a large proportion of human behavior is learned through observation. By observing others, an individual can develop an approximate sense of appropriate behaviors and how to perform them. In many respects, senior managers who are mentors model desired corporate behaviors so that their young developing protégés can directly observe and learn those behaviors in a mentoring environment without making grave or career ending mistakes. Additionally, social cognitive theory provides a solid foundation for explicating mentoring's role as a socializing process aimed at the personal and professional development of protégés. Louis (1980) defines socialization as a process wherein an individual or employee learns to value the norms, expertise, expected behaviors, and social knowledge essential to assuming an organizational role and functioning as an organizational member. The work of Kram (1985) and Levinson et al. (1978) have illustrated the effective use of modeling, a component of social cognitive theory in teaching work-related interpersonal skills to developing managers. These behaviors of modeling and vicarious reinforcement form the basis of Bandura's (1977) Social Learning and Social Cognitive Theory and are encouraged as important modes of learning in mentoring relationships.

Gender Issues in Mentoring

Mentoring relationships can be developmental because mentors engage in behaviors that involve the provision of role modeling, observation and feedback to protégés. In male-male mentoring dyads this process is virtually automatic. However, the mentoring process in cross-gender dyads where the protégé is female may be less than automatic and may be subject to communication and female gender specific problems. These problems in effect lessen the mentoring experience and may not be very productive for women protégés due to existence of sexual stereotypes that challenge career advancement of women employees. As management ranks are predominantly occupied by men, and organizational culture and norms are mostly set by men, (Lewis & Fagenson, 1995; Marrujo & Kleiner, 1992; Reciniello, 1999) stereotypes about women's role in workplace is entrenched in everyone's way of thinking. Women are perceived much differently and less favorably than men in terms of competence, emotional stability, independence, and rationality (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995). Thus, though women are more in need of career advancement tools such as mentoring, they are faced with more obstacles that stem from negative stereotypes. Such gender stereotyping and attributions in the workplace have been found to be potentially detrimental to long term career development and to development of successful mentoring relationships for female employees (Young, Cady, & Fox, 2006).

Additionally, women have fewer formal and informal opportunities of developing mentoring relationships with men because they lack access to many of the informal settings potential male mentors frequent such as men's clubs, sports activities and women are also less involved in the key visible projects in the organizations (Ragins & Cotton, 1991). However, this does not imply that women do not develop informal networks in the workplace. Women are in fact, more adept in building informal networks, but with other women, not with men (Brass, 1985). Since women are seldom found in the top management positions, the interaction network of the dominant coalitions in organizations comprises of mainly men who hold positions of power. As women are not central to such dominant coalition networks they loose out on opportunities of looking out for mentors, whereas these opportunities are quite easily available to their male counterparts. This leads to women having less experience in mentoring relationships and since it has been established that experience has a positive impact on perceived opportunities for developing mentoring relationships for both men and women, women are trapped in a Catch 22 cycle (Ragins & Cotton, 1991) and the task of dissolving this cycle seems quite baffling.

Cultural Barriers for Women

The crux of the problem is the traditional upbringing of women in a male dominated society. Women are taught to think of their career aspirations to be secondary and to give family, priority over work. Though many women have successfully overcome such domestic constraints by developing personal relationships that include sharing responsibilities, by remaining single or by having fewer children (Vertz, 1985), domestic constraints or societal upbringing of women still continue to be one of the daunting problems challenging career development of women. The effect of societal stereotypes is also evident in the very few female mentor, male protégé mentoring relationships. Men are seen to take female mentors for granted (Lean, 1983). They have witnessed the nurturing role in their mothers and other women in their families and thus do not give any special credit to their female mentors for such psychosocial support. Such cultural barriers are even more common in India. Indian women have always experienced a paradoxical status; in spite of high respect in Indian society (Budhwar, 2001), women working outside home have been looked down upon by majority in the society (Budhwar, Saini, & Bhatnagar, 2005). According to the constitution of India, women should have equal rights including the right to own property, matrimony and divorce, inheritance, education, employment and equality before the law. However, social legislation envisaging female empowerment has been poorly enforced (Saini, 1999). A combination of social, organizational, and personal biases have contributed towards keeping the employment of women in managerial positions at a lower level (Budhwar, Saini, & Bhatnagar, 2005).

Different Needs of Male and Female Protégés

Contrary to popular belief, both psychosocial and task oriented needs are equally desired by men and women in the mentoring program (Walsh & Borkowski, 1999). However, other researchers such as Hunt & Michael (1983) have contradicted these findings showing that women have a greater urge of emotional support from their mentors. In his research, Vertz, (1985) had shown that women in higher levels do not differ from men on important personality dimensions, such as self-esteem, aggressiveness and management personality that are related to the ability to work effectively with people and excel within a work environment. However, there are significant differences in these

traits between women in higher levels and women who are in lower levels of an organization. (Vertz, 1985). Such strong personality differences are not visible in case of men. The only difference between men in upper and lower level positions are in job satisfaction and self esteem (Vertz, 1985). These findings have significant implications for mentoring. The findings imply that for mentoring women in lower levels one should be especially attentive to the development of their personality traits such as self-esteem, aggressiveness and management personality, whereas mentoring men in lower levels can be comparatively easier as they already equal men in upper level positions in important personality traits like aggressiveness and management personality.

Disadvantages of Woman-Woman Mentoring Dyads

Though junior female employees look forward to emulating senior women in management, female role models may sometimes inhibit woman protégé's career advancement. A basic dynamic of role model relationship is passivity (Shapiro, Haseltine, Florence & Mary, 1978). Role models are of limited effectiveness in assisting women to gain positions of leadership, authority or power. The role model expectation from female protégés makes the senior women tense about being perfect and subsequently hampers a healthy mentoring relationship. Moreover, when younger women look to the women ahead of them as models for their lives, they are often disappointed and perplexed because in many instances, their own desires of balancing family with career might clash with the ambitious senior woman's views about being single and sacrificing family for career. Such dysfunctional outcomes can have serious implications for the younger female's future career. Moreover, woman-woman mentoring alliances in organizations are still novel and may need a great deal of organizational attention (Kram, 1983). In case of a failure they are more likely to be criticized than male-male mentoring relationships. There are chances of accusations of preferential treatment and negative reactions concerning perceived female power coalitions (Ragins, 1994). Thus, given the fact that a woman-woman mentor protégé relationship is susceptible to such problematic outcomes and rarely possible due to lack of women in higher level management positions, it is apparently advisable for a woman to look for a male mentor and thus to opt for a cross gender mentorship.

Cross Gender Mentoring

Cross gender mentorship otherwise known as diversified mentoring relationships can be of two types namely, one with a male mentor and a female protégé and the other with a female mentor and a male protégé, the latter being a relatively rare occurrence due to the paucity of women in senior mentoring positions. This paper mainly concentrates on the issues related to the one-on-one traditional cross-gender mentoring relationships of the male mentor – female protégé variety. A primary reason for cross gender mentoring is believed to be shortage of women at upper levels of organizations. Kanter (1977) observed that men are more likely than women to hold advantageous positions, those involving power, prestige and control over resources. These advantageous positions parallel the situations of likely mentors (Kram, 1985) or in other words make men potential mentors unlike women. Also as rightly pointed out by Ragins (1994) the few available female mentors in the upper levels are overburdened with mentoring requests from large number of women from the lower levels (Hunt & Michael, 1983). Another reason that the researchers have cited for shortage of female mentors is that women at higher ranks are unwilling to mentor because they do not want to share the limelight with others, and also because competitive feelings toward other women prevent them from filling this role (Ragins, 1994). Queen Bee Syndrome (Staines, Travis & Jayeraute, 1973 as cited by Raggins, 1994) can only explain this kind of behavior. However an empirical study by Ragins (1994) found no support for this phenomenon. Thus, the shortage of female mentors can be only explained by analyzing and studying the problems that they reportedly face in the organizations.

Pitfalls of One-on-One Cross Gender Mentoring

Though cross gender mentoring can give valuable insights into experiences of each sex and can help in breaking the glass ceiling effect that keeps women from advancing upward in organizations, traditional one-on-one cross gender mentoring has its problems. According to Clawson and Kram (1984), cross gender mentoring relationships are vulnerable to three specific sources of anxiety and confusion. They are: (1) assuming stereotypical roles that reduce the female manager's competence, freedom, and effectiveness, (2) concerns about increasing levels of intimacy leading to avoidance of frequent interaction and decreased effectiveness, and (3) concerns about the public image of the relationship leading to avoidance of private one-on-one contact. Hunt & Michael (1983) noted that women protégés are found to be particularly prone to making emotional ties with their male mentors. Such desires of strong emotional ties might be misconstrued by colleagues to be sexually motivated. Potential male mentors may be

concerned about the innuendos associated with mentoring a younger female protégé while female protégés may have fears that rumors or office gossip may potentially jeopardize their careers. Concerns about intimacy can limit social interactions in one-on-one cross gender mentorship and even mentors may attempt to alter their role behaviors in order to circumvent any potential intimacy issues (Walsh & Borkowski, 1999). In traditional dyadic cross gender mentorships, fears of perceived impropriety and sexual tension can result in limiting interaction to work hours, avoiding meeting behind closed doors or not lunching together (Young, Cady, & Foxon, 2006). These self-imposed restrictions can hinder the development of a natural friendship (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990).

Developmental Networks as an Alternative to Traditional Cross Gender Mentoring

In spite of the problems associated with cross gender mentoring, Noe (1988) found that female protégés use cross gender mentoring relationships more effectively than males in terms of time spent with mentors. A possible reason for this finding might be the inclination of women to emphasize appropriate work-related behavior in order to protect against rumors of romantic involvement that are associated with cross gender mentoring relationships (Young, Cady, & Foxon, 2006). Diverse developmental networks might help women to fight such rumors more effectively. Developmental network is essentially comprised of a group of individuals who offer different or varying levels of career and psychosocial support to an individual within an organizational setting (Higgins & Thomas 2001). As developmental networks have a combination of same gender and cross gender mentoring relationships, women will get a better gamut of developmental opportunities in such relationship constellations. Moreover, multiple cross gender relationships in developmental networks will ease the tension of mentors and protégés as the attention of colleagues or public scrutiny in such cases will be divided amongst those multiple relationships and a single cross gender mentor protégé relationship will not be accused of sexual interests. Thus developmental networks can be proposed as a solution to certain problems that are unique to traditional one-on-one cross gender mentoring relationships such as concerns about increasing levels of intimacy leading to avoidance of frequent interaction and concerns about the public image of the relationship leading to avoidance of private one-on-one contact.

Developmental Networks as an Evolution in Mentoring

In today's workplace, the concept of career mentoring recommends the developmental network mentoring model with multiple mentors as opposed to the single dyadic traditional mentoring relationship. Formation of diverse developmental networks (Higgins & Kram, 2001) is quite natural when organizations are massively going in for mergers, acquisitions and other forms of restructuring. However, the requirement of secondary or multiple mentors had been recognized long before. Kram (1985) had proposed that not a single or primary mentor but multiple individuals or relationship constellations are needed for developmental support in careers and recommended that individuals seek assistance from more than a primary individual or 'mentor' for developmental guidance in their careers. Her research showed that individuals receive mentoring from a 'constellation' of developmental relationships, from multiple sources such as peers, subordinates, friends, family, and bosses (Kram, 1985). While people frequently have one or two special mentors or significant sponsors early in their career, most actually depend on a broader network of individuals for an important part of the career and psychosocial support they receive (Kram & Hall, 1996; Thomas and Higgins, 1996; Burke et al., 1995). According to Higgins and Thomas (2001), though the quality of an individual's primary developmental relationship affects short-term career outcomes like job satisfaction and intentions to remain, it is the composition of an individual's entire constellation of developers or guides that is responsible for long term career outcomes such as organizational retention and career advancement.

Developmental Networks as Tools for Facilitating Career Advancement of Indian Women

Indian organizations consider mentoring as a tool of knowledge transfer and many organizations have successfully implemented mentoring programs to facilitate such transfer of tacit knowledge. Indian culture encourages the concept of mentoring as it builds strong social relationship between superiors and subordinates (Dayasindhu, 2002). Mentoring is also regarded as a popular career management practice in Indian organizations (Budhwar & Baruch, 2003). In contemporary times, the career management of women employees has become a critical necessity as more women are getting employment in Indian organizations. Since women are more likely to face hindrances arising from India's stereotypical patriarchic society, it is imperative to facilitate their career progression through some mechanism and mentoring seems to be the solution. Mentoring relationships have reportedly helped to overcome prejudices regarding women's work (Ragins & Cotton, 1991). The positive relationship between mentoring and

favorable attitudes toward women as managers is supported by the considerable body of literature. Ragins and Cotton (1991) indicate that "for women, mentors are essential" in helping to overcome gender-related barriers to advancement and in buffering women from discrimination in general. Stuart (1992) in her discussion of gender bias, and its impact on candidates for top management positions, indicates that intentional discrimination does continue to exist; however, that "women who have been recipients of successful mentoring relationships report an increase of nearly 94% in their professional effectiveness". Thus, mentoring can be an effective tool for achieving gender equity in Indian organizations. However, women in Indian organizations face the similar problem of not being able to integrate themselves in the informal networks which are predominantly formed by men. As cited in literature, exclusion of women from informal networks cause barrier to career progression for women (Gupta et al., 1998). These networks are male domains and women's virtual exclusion from their membership prevents them from developing the ability to handle the dynamics of organizational politics (Budhwar, Saini, & Bhatnagar, 2005). Additionally, due to paucity of women in higher level management positions, women have to opt for male mentors and issues related to traditional one-on-one cross gender mentoring such as increased public scrutiny and rumors of romantic involvement affect their career advancement.

Developmental networks or mentoring constellations can help to facilitate career advancement of Indian women by helping them overcome certain problems that are common to traditional one-on-one mentoring relationships. For instance, if a woman has multiple mentors then it is less likely that the relationships will be misconstrued as sexually motivated. Additionally multiple mentoring relationships will be under less public scrutiny as compared to a single dyadic mentoring relationship. However, a formal effort of assigning multiple male mentors to women might run into the problem of women employees not being able to identify with their male mentors. Instead, organizations should advocate a combination of formal and informal setting where a formal meeting can be arranged between senior managers who are willing to mentor and junior employees seeking mentoring relationships. Such meetings will then give women freedom to choose the mentors that they feel they will be compatible with.

Implications for Future Research

There is much scope for future research to empirically investigate whether developmental networks are a better career management option for women compared to traditional dyadic mentoring relationships. Statistical analysis of data collected from a sample of Indian corporate organizations will help to validate the claim. Additionally, the cross gender mentor protégé pairs where the mentor is a woman and the protégé is a man should be studied in further detail to understand the issues specific to such relationships. Since such cases are highly rare, problems specific to such pairs need to be identified through extensive empirical research. The phenomenon of cross gender mentoring needs to be looked into in the context of India; specifically as India is traditionally believed to have a male dominated society which might give rise to a lot of stereotypes in the context of cross gender mentorship.

More importantly, there is no female mentoring model that can explain and support women's absence from career due to family pressures, and their late start of careers due to responsibilities towards children. Levinson's mentoring model follows the linear career development path and is more suitable for men who start early in life and can pursue careers that are not disrupted by domestic constraints. As noted by Hunt and Michael (1983), the male model mentorship of the life/career cycle may be plausible only for those women who enter careers directly without pursuing the traditional family and motherhood roles (Kram, 1983). Given the fact that very few women forego their traditional motherhood and family roles, and such decisions are even rarer in countries like India, it is imperative to design a model that will be more applicable to women's career paths. A mentoring model which is more representative of career paths pursued by women in reality will have great implications for human resource development in organizations all over the world.

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