Developing Effective Mentoring Relationships: Strategies From the Mentor's Viewpoint

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Mentoring is being increasingly used by companies as a means of fostering employee learning and development. Limited research exists from the perspective of the mentor on these relationships. This article presents the results of a qualitative study that investigated the characteristics that the ideal mentor should possess and ways that both mentors and protégés can make mentoring relationships most effective. Findings from the study are used to frame suggestions for future research and practice.

The topic of mentoring has received much research attention in the career development literature in recent years. Mentoring reflects a relationship between two individuals, usually a senior and junior employee, whereby the senior employee takes the junior employee "under his or her wing" to teach the junior employee about his or her job, introduce the junior employee to contacts, orient the employee to the industry and organization, and address social and personal issues that may arise on the job (Kram, 1985). The mentoring relationship is distinguished from other organizational relationships (e.g., supervisor–subordinate) in that the involved individuals may or may not formally work together, the relationship is typically not sanctioned by the organization, the relationship usually lasts longer than most organizational relationships, the issues addressed during the course of the relationship may and often include nonwork issues, and the bond between the mentor and protégé is usually closer and stronger than those of other organizational relationships (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Phillips-Jones, 1982).

It is well established that mentoring relationships offer a number of important career benefits to the protégé. For example, individuals who are mentored report higher levels of overall compensation, career advancement, and career satisfaction (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1988, 1989; Scandura, 1992; Turban & Dougherty, 1994; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991). In today's turbulent business environment, the development of mentoring relationships can be a key strategy for enhancing individual growth and learning. Furthermore, as the ability to grow, adapt, and develop becomes more essential to organizational competitiveness, organizations are being called upon to facilitate life-long employee learning. To take advantage of the benefits of mentoring and build a competitive advantage through human and intellectual capital, many organizations are implementing formal mentoring programs as a method of fostering career development. Indeed, it has been estimated that a third of the nation's major companies have implemented a formal mentoring program (Bragg, 1989). Moreover, a recent study by Douglas and McCauley (1997) found that many organizations that did not currently have a program in place were planning on developing one within 3 years.

As more organizations implement formal mentoring programs, the effective management of these programs becomes an increasingly important challenge for organizations and career development practitioners. As noted by Ragins and Cotton (in press), these formal programs are being implemented without the benefit or direction of empirical research. Indeed, the current rapid implementation of mentoring programs may represent a situation where practice has outpaced empirical research. Organizations often do not anticipate or understand the challenges associated with formal mentoring programs (Klauss, 1981; Kram, 1985; Murray, 1991; Phillips-Jones, 1982).

The limited research that has compared formal versus informal mentoring relationships indicates that the outcomes differ. For example, Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) found that protégés in formal mentoring relationships report receiving less career-related support from their mentors than do protégés in informal mentoring relationships. Fagenson-Eland, Marks, and Amendola (1997) found results inconsistent to that of Chao et al. Specifically, they found that protégés perceived greater psychosocial mentoring in informal mentorships than did protégés in formal mentorships but no differences in career-related mentoring. In addition, Ragins and Cotton (in press) found that protégés of informal mentors perceived their mentors as more effective and received greater compensation than protégés of formal mentors.

Ragins and Cotton (in press) offered several explanations as to why the outcomes associated with formal and informal mentorships may vary. One is that it is not unusual for mentors to be self-nominated into formal programs and thus they may lack the necessary communication and coaching skills needed to provide effective mentoring (Kram, 1985, 1986). Indeed, it would seem that an important component to the success of a formal mentoring program would be the mentors themselves. That is, the effectiveness of any formal mentoring

program may hinge on the characteristics of the individual mentors who participate in the program. Another reason why formal mentoring programs may not reach their full potential is that the parties who enter the program do not know how to best take advantage of the opportunities that a mentoring relationship can afford. Protégés in particular may be new to the organization or relatively early in their career and, thus, less knowledgeable regarding how to make the most out of a developmental relationship. Indeed, in their study of formal mentorships, Fagenson-Eland et al. (1997) found that more experienced protégés reported receiving more mentoring than did less experienced protégés. The authors suggested this might be because experienced protégés are better skilled regarding how to distill the benefits that mentors can provide.

The purpose of this study was to extend our understanding of mentoring relationships in two ways. First, we examined the perceived characteristics of an ideal mentor, and second, we investigated what both mentors and protégés can do to facilitate the most effective mentoring relationship. These two broad areas of inquiry were deemed important to promote the effective functioning of both formal and informal mentoring programs within organizations. Because there has been relatively little research looking at these questions, this study should serve as a catalyst for future research examining the factors that enhance the effective functioning of the mentoring relationship as well as what characteristics represent a good mentor. This type of research is needed so that guidance can be provided to organizations regarding the selection of mentors, training both mentors and protégés, and the development of guidelines and interventions for facilitating a prolonged and useful relationship. Furthermore, the study may offer some direction to potential protégés as to what factors they should look for when selecting a mentor. Because these issues have received relatively limited research attention, qualitative interviews with mentors seemed to be an ideal research method. By using experienced mentors as study participants, we were able to obtain a unique and in-depth perspective on these issues. In summary, the following two research questions were posed in the current study:

1. What are the ideal characteristics that a mentor should possess?
2. What can mentors and protégés do to make the most out of the mentoring relationship?

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 27 mentors from 5 different organizations. Of the 27 participants, 14 were women (52%) and 13 were men (48%). Twenty-three participants were Caucasian (85%), two were African-American (7%), one was Hispanic (4%) and one was of mixed race (4%). Participants ranged in age from 26 to 62, with an average age of 41.93 years ($SD = 9.06$ years); ranged in job tenure from

4 months to 12 years, with an average job tenure of 4.24 years (*SD* = 2.86 years); and ranged in organizational tenure from 1 year to 35 years, with an average organizational tenure of 11.48 years (*SD* = 8.23 years). (Although one participant had only worked in her current job for 4 months, she had been employed in the same organization for 22 years.) Twenty-three participants (85%) had obtained at least a 4-year college degree (i.e., bachelor's), with the remaining 4 having received some college education.

The five organizations represented a diverse range of industries, including municipal government, health-care, financial, communications, and manufacturing. Across the organizations, employees represented a relatively broad range of managerial job categories, such as clinical manager, personnel/human resources manager, chief engineer, senior applications system analyst, compensation director, communications supervisor, vice-president, and coordinator of marketing.

Procedure

To select the initial set of companies from which to draw a sample of mentors, local companies were identified that had greater than $50 million in annual sales/revenue and 250 or more employees. Establishing criteria at these levels had the dual benefit of greatly narrowing down the final list of companies to be invited for participation and increasing the odds that the company would have employees who had served as mentors (because of the relatively large numbers of employees employed at these organizations).

After developing our list of companies, we mailed a letter to a representative from each company's human resource (HR) department outlining the purposes of the study and inviting their participation. In return for their participation, each organization was told that it would receive a summary of the study's findings. Once the company agreed to participate, the HR professional then located individuals within the organization who had served as an informal mentor (i.e., not as part of a formal mentoring program) to others. We focused on informal mentors to ensure that the individuals we interviewed had voluntarily served as a mentor to others rather than as a function of being asked to serve by the organization. The following definition of a mentor was used to help the HR professional identify mentors for the study:

> Mentors are individuals who have guided, sponsored, or otherwise had a positive and significant influence on the professional career development of another employee.

Once mentors were identified, their names were provided to the researchers, who then contacted each mentor and scheduled a time to conduct the interview. All of the mentors contacted agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted either at the worksite of the mentor, or by telephone. Where permission was granted, to aid the authors in transcribing the interview notes, interviews were audiotaped. At the outset of the interview, mentors were assured

that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Each of the interviewers possessed extensive training and experience in creating and conducting structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Semistructured Interview

Because the issues under investigation in this study have received relatively limited research attention, a data collection method was used that allowed us to fully explore the issues of interest and any additional themes or issues that may have emerged while conducting the series of interviews. Because a quantitative, survey-driven approach limits the information gathering to only those items or issues that are included on the questionnaire, we determined that a semistructured interviewing approach (King, 1994) would provide the best vehicle for fully investigating the issues outlined in this study and for generating data that could be used to help guide further research efforts.

Data Analysis Procedure

A three-step content-analytic procedure was used to analyze the qualitative data. First, for each content area of interest (e.g., ideal mentor characteristics), a researcher reviewed all the applicable comments and categorized and grouped comments that were similar in meaning. The unit of analysis for classification purposes was phrases. Phrases were used rather than sentences because some sentences contained two or more divergent ideas. The emphasis at this point was in generating as many groups or "dimensions" as possible to categorize each substantive comment made by the participants. For example, the comments "Let people make mistakes . . ." and "Don't be afraid to make mistakes because that's going to happen as well" would be grouped together because they dealt with making mistakes. As recommended by Weber (1990), we used a single versus multiple classification system in that each phrase was assigned to a single category. Once all comments were categorized, the resulting "dimensions" were then provided a name to capture the meaning reflected in the group of comments (e.g., "allow mistakes". Thus, we used an inductive process in which the categories emerged from the data rather than fitting comments into predefined categories.

Next, a second researcher was provided with the names of the dimensions identified by the first researcher and recategorized each of the comments into the appropriate dimension. After all comments were recategorized, Cohen's kappa was calculated so that agreement between the two researchers could be statistically assessed (Cohen, 1960). In cases in which the two researchers disagreed about how a participant's comment should be classified, the researchers discussed their reasons for classification and reached an agreement regarding whether to move the comment to another dimension, create a new dimension with a comment, or delete the comment if its substantive content had already been covered in another dimension.

Finally, in the interest of parsimony and to avoid "splitting hairs" with the dimensions, the two researchers attempted to narrow down the total number of dimensions by collapsing together those dimensions with similar underlying themes. In instances in which a dimension was represented by a single, stand-alone comment made by one participant, and could not be collapsed with another dimension, the single-comment dimension was deleted from further analyses. (However, these comments are presented in the Appendix.) Our rationale for this decision was that we were more interested in comments/dimensions in which multiple participants shared common experiences; hence, instances in which only one subject reported a particular theme or issue were deemed as less substantially meaningful. This stage of the process was completed through discussion and consensus agreement by the two researchers. After this stage of the process, the content analysis was concluded.

RESULTS

Background Information

Mentors were asked several background questions regarding their experiences as a mentor and as a protégé. With regard to their own experiences as a protégé, 25 participants indicated that they had been mentored by another individual during their career, with 18 of those 25 (72%) having been mentored by more than one individual. In terms of gender, 4 men reported having one mentor and 7 men reported having more than one mentor, whereas 3 women reported having one mentor and 11 women reported having more than one mentor. Regarding participants' experiences as a mentor, the average number of protégés mentored was 4.86 (SD = 2.80, ranging from 2 to 13). Male participants mentored a slightly higher number of protégés than did female participants (M = 5.70 and M = 4.17, respectively). In sum, the results establish the high degree of mentoring experience possessed by the study's participants. Importantly, the extensive experience held by the mentors provided a rich base of knowledge to tap in providing informed and thoughtful responses to the research questions.

Ideal Mentor Characteristics

Regarding the characteristics that participants felt "ideal" mentors should possess, participants made a total of 115 comments that were initially grouped into 37 dimensions. Agreement between the researchers on the original classification of comments was very high (99%, kappa = .99, t = 43.8, p < .01). After revisions that included deleting 9 dimensions represented by one comment and collapsing 13 dimensions into 5 separate dimensions, a total of 20 dimensions was represented by 102 comments. Table 1 shows these dimensions and sample comments.

As can be seen in Table 1, participants felt that the ideal mentor should possess a wide range of skills and knowledge areas. Ten or more participants outlined listening and communication skills, pa-

TABLE 1

Results of Content Analysis for Ideal Mentor Characteristics

Dimension	No. of Comments	Sample Comments
Listening and communication skills	13	"Ability to communicate clearly and concisely" "Listens first before they communicate" "It's important to be an excellent listener" "Be able to communicate verbally and in written form..."
Patience	12	"Patience is the number one thing" "You have to have patience" "Of course you need patience..."
Knowledge of organization and industry	12	"Good knowledge of company" "Knowledge of product systems" "Have a good understanding of the company" "They have to have a grasp of their industry..." "Understand the value system of the company and the people in company"
Ability to read and understand others	10	"Read other peoples' needs to identify where you can help" "Understanding that all individuals are going to be different—everyone's going to work at a different pace" "Have...to figure out what people need"
Honest/trustworthy	7	"...one who can build trust..." "There has to be a very intimate amount of trust between a mentor and a [protégé]" "Integrity and honesty" "You have to be trustworthy"
Genuine interest/ self-motivation	6	"Need to be genuinely interested in doing it" "Need to enjoy that type of work" "You do something because you want to do it, because it makes you feel good"
People oriented	6	"Definitely a people-oriented person" "Someone who can relate well to others" "Need to work well one-on-one with individuals"
Structure/vision	5	"A good mentor will structure things better" "Have a vision" "They need to give guidance and direction"
Common sense	4	"A good dose of common sense" "Common sense—you don't have to be highly intelligent...you have to be able to explain things in a way people understand"
Self-confidence	3	"Need to feel good about self" "Confidence in themselves"
Open to suggestions	3	"Be open to suggestions" "Someone who's open to discussion regardless of the topic, even to the point where it might be offensive"
Willing to share information	3	"Should be willing to share information both good and bad" "Willingness to share knowledge and information and experience that you have..."
Leadership qualities	3	"They have to have a grasp of understanding what is required of a leader . . . and they have to have positive leadership characteristics themselves"

TABLE 1 (continued)

Results of Content Analysis for Ideal Mentor Characteristics

Dimension	No. of Comments	Sample Comments
Allows protégé to learn on own	3	"Someone who will allow the protégé to make a mistake" "Have a sense of when to let someone fly on their own by the seat of their pants and when to intervene"
Versatility/flexibility	2	"Versatility is the name of the game on the mentor side"
Has respect of others	2	"Has respect of rest of organization so that protégé feels that he is worthwhile listening to"
Provides reasonable goals	2	"Able to give them reasonable challenges and goals"
Ability to teach	2	"Knows how to build skills"
Willingness to give feedback	2	"Willingness to do the critiquing . . . give feedback, continue when they are falling down or feeling doubtful"
Fairness/objectivity	2	"Definitely objectivity is important"

tience, knowledge of one's company and industry, and the ability to understand others. Between 5 and 9 participants felt that possessing honesty, possessing a genuine interest in mentoring, being people-oriented, and having structure and vision were important. Fewer than 5 participants listed common sense, self-confidence, openness to suggestions, willingness to share information, leadership qualities, allowing protégé to learn on his or her own, versatility, having the respect of others, providing reasonable goals, ability to teach, willingness to give feedback, and fairness/objectivity as important characteristics of the ideal mentor.

Effective Mentoring

When asked what both mentors and protégés could do to make the most out of mentoring relationships, participants made a total of 64 comments. These comments were grouped into 21 dimensions. Agreement between the researchers on the original classification of comments was high (95%, kappa = .95, $t = 25.9, p < .01$). After revisions that included deleting 4 dimensions represented by one comment and collapsing 10 dimension into 5 separate dimensions, a final total of 12 dimensions were represented by 54 comments. Table 2 shows these dimensions and sample comments.

Over half of the participants listed establishing an open communication system as one technique. Other techniques outlined by participants were setting standards and goals, establishing trust, caring for and enjoying each other, allowing mistakes, taking training programs, participating willingly, and demonstrating flexibility. In addition, participants felt that the mentor and protégé should be open and comfortable, consider constraints, learn from others, and work on common tasks to make the most of the mentoring relationship.

TABLE 2

Results of Content Analysis for Making Most Out of Relationship

Dimension	No. of Comments	Sample Comments
Establish an open communication system with reciprocal feedback	15	"Definitely, communication up first and foremost" "Keep open communication channels" "There should be open and honest dialogue" "Don't be afraid to say what you are really thinking even though that can be painful and difficult" "Be willing to take and give criticism" ". . . give feedback to the mentor" "Give feedback—take feedback . . . both ways"
Set standards, goals, and expectations	8	"Set your expectations up front" "Important that the protégé communicates goals and expectations" "Share their objectives with each other"
Trust	7	"Trust is central" "There must be trust and sincerity" "There has to be a lot of trust . . . that is such an important issue. You can never have the open communication unless there is the trust"
Care for and enjoy each other	4	"Care for each other" "Enjoy each other and the relationship"
Allow mistakes	3	"Let people make mistakes" "Don't be afraid to make mistakes because that's going to happen as well"
Take training programs	3	"They can attend any types of seminars or workshops . . ." "Take the courses being offered"
Willing participation	3	"I don't think formal programs are as effective" "You can't force an individual into the relationship. I worked for one company where they tried to assign mentors to people coming in . . . that does not work"
Be flexible	3	"Keep the relationship flexible" "Can't be overly judgmental . . . be flexible"
Be open and comfortable	2	"The atmosphere must be relaxing and conducive to work" ". . . set them at ease so they can relax"
Consider constraints to mentoring	2	"Mentors need to very carefully think through the commitment. . . it's another thing in a crowded schedule for a mentor, but for protégé it is a huge thing that can make a critical impact at the start of their career" ". . . you only have so much time and energy. . ."
Learn from others	2	"Watch other mentors and protégé for other ideas. . . " "I would have some way for those mentors to get together as a support group to figure out what works, what doesn't work"
Work on common tasks	2	"Work on something in common . . . have a stake in what you are doing"

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to extend the mentoring literature by investigating the perceived characteristics of an ideal mentor and identifying ways that mentors and protégés could make the most of their mentoring relationships. The results suggest directions for future research that have the potential to inform human resource and career development practice on the development of mentoring relationships. In the following paragraphs we provide suggestions for future study and some tentative implications for practice that we hope will inspire additional investigations.

The present research revealed a number of mentor characteristics thought to be important. Quantitative studies using larger samples are needed to substantiate that the mentor attributes identified are related to the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship. Additional research examining the perspective of the protégé on this issue would also be informative. A study in which mentor characteristics are assessed and then correlated with protégé reports regarding outcomes of the mentoring relationships would be especially useful. This type of data would provide more conclusive information regarding what mentor characteristics are associated with important mentoring outcomes.

Research of this nature has implications regarding the identification, recruitment, selection, and training of potential mentors. Specifically, it may be possible for organizations to use a two-step process whereby mentors who are selected for mentoring programs are those individuals that display the requisite personal characteristics and then training could be used to address any skill, experience, ability, or knowledge deficiencies. With regard to recruitment and selection of potential mentors, valid assessment devices (e.g., personality tests, assessment center exercises) could be used to objectively gauge the degree that potential mentors possess many of the desired characteristics. The benefits of taking a standardized approach to assessing the characteristics and abilities of potential mentors are multifaceted. First, by focusing their recruitment and selection efforts on only those individuals who have requisite abilities, skills, and interests, organizations may be able to avoid the potential negative consequences of ineffective mentoring relationships. Even well-intentioned individuals who are genuinely interested in mentoring others may not possess the skills to effectively do so. For example, a mentor who does not possess patience may not be willing to let the protégé make mistakes and grow from those experiences. Well-developed procedures for the recruitment and selection of mentors ensure that protégés will have access to a mentor with at least a minimum standard of ability, skill, and so on.

Once potential mentors have been recruited and selected, then deficient characteristics that are more malleable could be addressed through formal training programs. For example, a lack of listening and communication skills can be addressed through a formal workshop that focuses on these skills. Using training programs to complement the selection of potential mentors ensures that a steady pool of mentors is available for protégés and that mentors have the required

levels of proficiency to teach others. It may also be possible for organizations to design processes within formal mentoring systems to address factors that some potential mentors may be lacking. For example, "mentoring support groups" that meet on a regular basis can be used to help mentors deal with unique issues in which they lack the necessary experience, training, or skills. Furthermore, these groups could be used to increase mentors' awareness and knowledge of other functional areas. To deal with circumstances in which certain mentors may lack experience or knowledge about particular functional areas or industries and cannot gain this knowledge from others, organizations may create a process whereby protégés are "rotated" between different mentors so that they gain cross-functional experience.

Of the things that participants felt mentors and protégés could do to make the most out of the mentoring relationship, three stood out among the rest. These were trust, open communication, and setting standards and expectations. Research is needed to further examine how these variables influence the effectiveness of the relationship. For example, to determine the importance of these factors, mentor and protégé reports regarding the extent that these factors were present in the relationship could be assessed along with measures of the overall quality and outcomes associated with the relationship.

Open communication is a relatively standard requirement for many types of organizational relationships. Furthermore, given that mentorships often fulfill nonwork, social needs in addition to career-related needs (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Phillips-Jones, 1982), the greater the degree of open communication between a mentor and protégé, the better their ability to share private, personal information that may be needed to address a protégé's work- and nonwork-related issues. Related to open communication, participants felt that having a high degree of trust is essential for mentorships to succeed. It may be that having trust in one another is a prerequisite to establishing open communication between a mentor and protégé. Longitudinal research that tracks the development of the mentoring relationship at the time of inception may better inform us how communication and trust evolves between the two parties. This seems important because for the protégé, entering into a mentoring relationship can be a very critical event in his or her career. In addition, if there is any doubt as to the protégé's ability to trust the mentor's motivation, interest, ability, and so on, then the protégé should not enter into the relationship. In this circumstance, the protégé may frequently "second-guess" the mentor, may feel he or she is being used for the mentor's benefit, or may circumvent the mentor when taking action. Understandably, this type of conduct may threaten or alienate the mentor, thus leading to a less than successful mentorship. Likewise, it is also important that the mentor be able to trust the protégé, so that there is no fear of reprisal or political "back-stabbing." In either of these circumstances, the degree that there is open communication between the mentor and protégé will both influence and be dependent on the trust between them.

Again, contingent on support from additional research, the results may have implications for how organizations can help manage

mentoring relationships. For example, team-building programs, such as the various crisis scenario exercises, off-site workshops, and team-work seminars are all designed, to varying degrees, to increase the knowledge of and ability to trust others in work situations. These types of exercises could be used to improve the level of trust between a protégé and mentor once a relationship is formed. They can also be used to teach the importance of trust to potential mentors and protégés before the actual mentorship is formed. Role-playing methods can be used to train mentors and protégés on how to provide constructive feedback and for protégés on how to receive feedback (Forret, Turban, & Dougherty, 1996).

In addition, creating a set of policies and procedures on proper and improper mentoring activities and enforcing those in a formal mentoring program may help alleviate individuals' concerns about such issues as backlash, "back-stabbing," reprisal, cross-sexual innuendoes, and so on. For example, Hurley and Fagenson-Eland (1996) suggested that organizations develop guidelines designed to manage sexuality and intimacy in cross-gender mentorships. Ultimately, this may enhance trust within the mentoring relationship.

Also related to communication, participants felt that it was important for mentors and protégés to establish expectations, goals, and objectives before entering into the relationship. This is consistent with Murray (1991), who suggested that at the outset of the relationship, the mentor and the protégé should discuss issues such as the expected role of the mentor, the goals of the protégé, the duration of the relationship, and the frequency of meetings.

The fact that some participants felt the mentoring function should remain informal presents a difficult situation for organizations. Indeed, given the many benefits associated with mentoring, the research and practitioner literature repeatedly emphasize that organizations should make use of mentoring relationships to improve individual and organizational effectiveness. However, some participants in the current study felt that organizational attempts to formalize the mentoring relationship, such as when mentors are assigned to new employees, can result in failure. Poorly designed programs may damper the enthusiasm of all parties involved toward future mentorships. However, research indicates that both formal and informal mentoring are more advantageous than no mentoring and that formal mentors can provide many of the functions associated with psychosocial and career-related mentoring (Chao et al., 1992; Fagan, 1988; Noe, 1988).

Limitations and Other Suggestions for Future Research

The findings and suggestions made in the present study must be couched within the boundary conditions of the methodology used. Although an appealing aspect of qualitative research is the richness of the data that can be captured, there are a number of criticisms associated with the method, such as the discretion researchers have in interpreting their findings. There is the possibility that the researchers' value systems, beliefs, and academic interests may unduly influence conclusions drawn from the data (Van Maanen, 1979).

In addition, data overload may result in researchers missing important information and overweighing some findings (Huberman & Miles, 1993; Krippendorf, 1980).

The present study is also limited by the small sample of interviewees and the fact that only the viewpoint of the mentor was incorporated. Although the present research provides some insight into ideal mentor characteristics, the results should be considered as preliminary. As noted earlier, a more comprehensive evaluation of the essential skills and characteristics mentors should possess is needed to support these findings. We chose to examine these issues from the focal point of the mentor because the mentor's viewpoint has been neglected in the mentoring literature (e.g., Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997). However, it would also be extremely informative for future research to incorporate protégé responses to the questions raised in the present study.

Another area for future research concerns the nature of formal mentoring programs. It seems likely that there is a great deal of variability across formal mentoring programs within organizations. The few studies that have compared formal and informal mentoring programs have not included an assessment of the quality or specific features of the formal mentoring program (e.g., how mentors and protégés are matched, who is eligible to participate in the program). Research is desperately needed to assess the specific design features of formal programs that result in effective mentorships. For example, research is needed that examines how mentoring outcomes vary as a function of how mentors and protégés were matched, if mentors and protégés received any training, and so on.

In conclusion, many valuable ideas were gathered through this research study, illuminating additional avenues for investigation that may have important implications for organizations interested in facilitating mentoring relationships. The results suggest that when organizations attempt to foster mentoring relationships, many issues need to be considered. We hope the present findings will inspire broad-based quantitative investigations designed to further our understanding of the development of effective mentoring relationships.

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APPENDIX

Stand Alone Comments

Ideal Mentor Characteristics

"Willing to learn new skills that you need to do mentoring right"

- "Should know how to motivate people"
- "Good memory"
- "Intelligence"
- "They would have to be a high performer"
- "Availability"
- "I think they have to follow through"
- "Dependability—knowing that they'll be there"
- "Being stern"

Making Most Out of Mentoring Relationships

- "I really honestly believe that a mentor has to be at least one level above the person who they're going to mentor"
- "Have patience with each other"
- "Always treat relationship as a partnership"
- "Seek out someone who has what you want if you're looking for . . . both in skills, ability, style"