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CHAPTER

39



## Relational Mentoring

*A Positive Approach to Mentoring at Work*

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### Abstract

Like other relationships, the quality of mentoring relationships falls along a continuum ranging from high quality to dysfunctional. Although most mentoring research has focused on relationships that are average in quality, at its best, mentoring personifies the very essence of positive relationships at work. Using a positive lens, this chapter offers an overview of the construct of relational mentoring. Relational mentoring represents the relational state of high-quality mentoring and is defined as an interdependent and generative developmental relationship that promotes mutual growth, learning, and development within the career context. The construct of relational mentoring is presented and contrasted with traditional approaches to mentoring. The antecedents, functions, processes, and characteristics of relational mentoring are examined. Mentoring schema theory, the self-structures of mentoring framework, and the relational cache cycle are applied to relational mentoring. A preliminary measure of relational functions is presented, along with an agenda for future research on mentoring relationships and mentoring episodes.

**Keywords:** Mentoring relationships, positive relationships at work, relational mentoring, high-quality mentoring, developmental relationship, mentoring schema theory, self-structures of mentoring, relational cache cycle, relational functions, mentoring episodes

22 When asked to reflect on relationships that have  
23 made a difference in their lives, many people think  
24 about their mentoring relationships. However, like  
25 other work relationships, mentoring relationships  
26 fall along a continuum of quality (Ragins & Verbos,  
27 2007). Mentoring researchers have focused on  
28 understanding the qualities, characteristics, and  
29 outcomes of average relationships but have not  
30 examined the high-quality end of the continuum.  
31 At its best, mentoring has the capacity to be a life-  
32 altering relationship that inspires and transforms  
33 individuals, groups, and organizations (Ragins &  
34 Kram, 2007). High-quality mentoring exemplifies  
35 positive relationships at work (Dutton & Ragins,  
36 2007; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). By neglecting  
37 the high end of the quality continuum, we unneces-  
38 sarily restrict our understanding of high-quality

relationships, which in turn curtails our ability to  
cultivate and sustain these critical work relation-  
ships. 40 41

The field of positive organizational scholarship 42  
(POS) offers an important lens for understanding 43  
high-quality mentoring (Cameron, Dutton, & 44  
Quinn, 2003). Using a positive lens, this chapter 45  
offers an overview of the construct of relational 46  
mentoring. Relational mentoring represents the 47  
relational state of high-quality mentoring and is 48  
defined as an interdependent and generative devel- 49  
opmental relationship that promotes mutual 50  
growth, learning, and development within the 51  
career context (Ragins, 2005). The antecedents, 52  
functions, processes, and characteristics of relational 53  
mentoring will be presented, along with an agenda 54  
for future research. 55

1 The chapter proceeds as follows. It first begins  
2 with an overview of mentoring relationships and  
3 the distinction between relational and traditional  
4 mentoring. Following this, the antecedents of rela-  
5 tional mentoring are presented and integrated with  
6 mentoring schema theory and the self-structures of  
7 mentoring. I then examine the functions, processes,  
8 and characteristics of relational mentoring. To pro-  
9 mote research in this area, a preliminary measure of  
10 relational mentoring is presented and an agenda for  
11 future research is provided.

## 12 **Mentoring and the Relational Perspective**

13 In this section, I first offer an overview of mentoring  
14 and define mentoring using a traditional perspec-  
15 tive. I then describe some of the limitations of the  
16 traditional approach and present the construct of  
17 relational mentoring as an alternative frame for  
18 viewing mentoring relationships at work.

### 19 ***What Is a Mentor?***

20 Traditionally, mentoring is defined as a relationship  
21 between an older, more experienced mentor and a  
22 younger less experienced protégé for the purpose of  
23 helping and developing the protégé's career (Kram,  
24 1985; Ragins, 1989). Mentors may or may not  
25 be employed in the same organization as the protégé  
26 or be in the protégé's profession or chain of  
27 command.

28 Mentoring relationships may develop informally  
29 or may be assigned as part of a formal mentoring  
30 program (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007). Formal  
31 mentoring relationships are generally not as effec-  
32 tive as informal relationships (Ragins & Cotton,  
33 1999; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). However,  
34 the quality of the relationship has been found to  
35 matter more than whether the relationship is for-  
36 mally assigned or informally developed (Ragins,  
37 Cotton, & Miller, 2000); high-quality formal rela-  
38 tionships can be more effective than low-quality  
39 informal relationships. Those with mentors, be they  
40 formal or informal, generally have more positive  
41 work and career attitudes than those lacking men-  
42 tors (cf., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima 2004;  
43 Underhill, 2006).

44 A key feature that defines mentoring and distin-  
45 guishes it from other types of work relationships is  
46 that mentoring is a relationship that is embedded  
47 within the career context (Ragins & Kram, 2007).  
48 Another distinction is that mentoring relationships  
49 evolve through stages that eventually result in the  
50 relationship either terminating or becoming rede-  
51 fined as a peer relationship (Kram, 1983, 1985).

Finally, it should be noted that mentoring rela- 52  
tionships are part of a developmental network of 53  
relationships that exist within and outside the work- 54  
place (Higgins & Kram, 2001). At a given point in 55  
time, individuals may have a constellation of devel- 56  
opmental relationships that offer career guidance 57  
and support. As discussed later, these relationships 58  
change individuals, and these changes are carried 59  
with the individual across life thresholds and the 60  
other relationships in their developmental network. 61  
As we will see, a key tenet of relational mentoring 62  
theory is that the outcomes associated with rela- 63  
tional mentoring have the capacity to transform 64  
other relationships in the individual's developmen- 65  
tal network. 66

### ***Mentoring Episodes*** 67

Like other relationships, mentoring relationships 68  
can be viewed at the level of a single interaction, 69  
which are called *mentoring episodes* (Fletcher & 70  
Ragins, 2007). Mentoring episodes involve short- 71  
term developmental interactions that occur at a spe- 72  
cific point in time. 73

Although all mentoring relationships involve 74  
mentoring episodes, individuals can engage in a men- 75  
toring episode without necessarily being in a men- 76  
toring relationship. Individuals may come to define their 77  
relationship as an informal mentoring relationship 78  
after they reach a "tipping point" in the number, 79  
length, and quality of mentoring episodes. For exam- 80  
ple, a junior faculty member may seek advice about a 81  
career-related dilemma from a more senior member 82  
of her department. Both individuals may agree that 83  
the senior faculty member engaged in mentoring 84  
behaviors during the specific episode, but neither 85  
may view it as a mentoring relationship at that point 86  
in time. However, with repeated positive interactions, 87  
they may begin to view their relationship as a men- 88  
toring relationship. 89

Like mentoring relationships, mentoring epi- 90  
sodes fall along a continuum of quality. High- 91  
quality mentoring episodes are similar to 92  
high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) 93  
and growth-fostering interactions (Jordan, Kaplan, 94  
Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1976). High- 95  
quality connections are characterized by high emo- 96  
tional carrying capacity (i.e., the capacity to 97  
withstand both positive and negative emotions), 98  
tensility (i.e., the capacity to withstand strain), and 99  
high connectivity (i.e., the capacity to be open to 100  
new ideas and deflect behaviors that shut down gen- 101  
erative processes) (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). 102  
Growth-fostering interactions are characterized by 103

1 mutual empathy, authenticity, and empowerment,  
 2 and lead to states of zest, empowered action,  
 3 increased sense of self-worth, new knowledge, and  
 4 the desire for more connection (Jordan et al., 1991;  
 5 Miller, 1976). The higher the quality of the mentor-  
 6 ing episode, the more likely individuals are to view  
 7 their relationship as a mentoring relationship. Low-  
 8 quality episodes are unlikely to lead to mentoring  
 9 relationships. Episodes that are mixed in quality  
 10 may lead to mentoring relationships, but as dis-  
 11 cussed next, these relationships are more likely to be  
 12 characterized as average in quality.

13 ***The Continuum of Quality***

14 Relational mentoring theory holds that mentoring  
 15 relationships involve three relational states (dys-  
 16 functional, traditional, and relational) that reflect  
 17 low, medium, and high ends of the quality contin-  
 18 uum (Ragins, 2005). Like other relationships, no  
 19 two mentoring relationships are the same or stay the  
 20 same over time. Mentoring relationships provide  
 21 different functions based on the needs of their mem-  
 22 bers, which are continually evolving. Not only are  
 23 there differences between relationships in terms of  
 24 quality, but relationships also transform over time  
 25 to reflect various states of quality (Ragins & Verbos,  
 26 2007). The continuum of mentoring quality there-  
 27 fore reflects not only differences across relationships  
 28 but also within them. The field of mentoring has  
 29 generally focused on mentoring relationships that  
 30 reflect the midpoint of the quality continuum.  
 31 There has been a significant amount of research  
 32 directed toward understanding dysfunctional men-  
 33 toring (e.g., Eby, 2007; Eby, Butts, Lockwood, &  
 34 Simon, 2004; Eby, Evans, Durley, & Ragins, 2008;  
 35 Scandura, 1998), but less is known about high-  
 36 quality relationships. One reason for this is that,  
 37 like other fields in organizational science, the field  
 38 of mentoring focuses on phenomenon experienced  
 39 by the majority of workers (e.g., average phenome-  
 40 non). Although this captures the experiences of  
 41 more workers, it curtails our understanding of the  
 42 full range of mentoring experiences, and as dis-  
 43 cussed next, creates methodological problems and  
 44 issues in our research.

45 ***The Need for a Positive Organizational  
 46 Scholarship Perspective***

47 The field of POS (Cameron et al., 2003) illuminates  
 48 the problems with focusing on average phenome-  
 49 non: Not only do we lose sight of the extraordinary,  
 50 but the very description of our constructs suffers  
 51 from conceptual and methodological inadequacy.

This problem is aptly illustrated in the field of men- 52  
 toring. Traditional perspectives on mentoring 53  
 describe ordinary relationships of average quality, 54  
 but by focusing on average relationships, our very 55  
 definition and measurement of mentoring becomes 56  
 limited to these types of relationships. For example, 57  
 traditional perspectives on mentoring view it as a 58  
 hierarchical, one-way relationship in which the 59  
 mentor serves as a “godfather” in helping the pro- 60  
 tégé’s career and advancement. However, research 61  
 on high-quality relationships questions this view 62  
 and points to its limitations in understanding the 63  
 processes and outcomes associated with high-quality 64  
 relationships (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton 65  
 & Ragins, 2007; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Miller & 66  
 Stiver, 1997). Because our theory explains aver- 67  
 age relationships, our measurement soon follows, 68  
 and our empirical base of knowledge becomes 69  
 limited to explaining average relationships. High- 70  
 quality relationships fall off our conceptual and 71  
 empirical map. 72

***A Relational Approach to Mentoring*** 73

Relational mentoring puts high-quality mentoring 74  
 back on the map. It does not reject traditional per- 75  
 spectives; these approaches explain average or mar- 76  
 ginally effective relationships, but do not explain 77  
 high-quality relationships (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). 78  
 By widening the conceptual lens of mentoring, rela- 79  
 tional mentoring allows us to assess the processes, 80  
 characteristics, and outcomes of high-quality men- 81  
 toring. Let us now turn to the four key principles 82  
 that define relational mentoring and distinguish it 83  
 from traditional approaches (Ragins, 2005; Ragins 84  
 & Verbos, 2007). 85

**USE OF A DYADIC AND RECIPROCAL 86  
 PERSPECTIVE 87**

First, relational mentoring challenges the view that 88  
 all mentoring is a one-sided relationship, and instead 89  
 points to the mutuality and reciprocity inherent in 90  
 growth-producing relationships (cf., Fletcher & 91  
 Ragins, 2007). Instead of viewing the mentor as a 92  
 prevailing source of power and influence, relational 93  
 mentoring recognizes that high-quality relation- 94  
 ships involve the capacity for mutual influence, 95  
 growth, and learning. Both members enter the rela- 96  
 tionship expecting to grow, learn, and be changed 97  
 by the relationship, and both feel a responsibility 98  
 and a desire to contribute to the growth and devel- 99  
 opment of their partner. 100

Although the overall level of expertise between 101  
 the mentor and protégé may be asymmetrical, 102

1 a relational perspective recognizes that expertise  
 2 shifts within a given mentoring episode, which  
 3 allows for mutual learning for both members  
 4 (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). For example, a faculty  
 5 mentor may help a protégé with publishing an article,  
 6 but the protégé may offer expertise in new statistical  
 7 analyses. Influence is shared, with the mentor  
 8 using “power with” rather than “power over” influence  
 9 strategies that characterize high-quality relationships  
 10 (Follett, 1924; Miller, 1976). An example  
 11 of mutual growth can be found in diverse mentoring  
 12 relationships; diverse mentoring relationships  
 13 involve individuals who differ in group memberships  
 14 associated with power (e.g., race, ethnicity,  
 15 gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability)  
 16 (Ragins, 1997). These relationships offer an ideal  
 17 platform for both mentors and protégés to learn  
 18 about diversity and to grow from the unique experiences  
 19 of those with different backgrounds, cultures,  
 20 nationalities, and experiences.

#### 21 **RELIANCE ON COMMUNAL NORMS AND** 22 **GENERATIVE PROCESSES**

23 Second, relational mentoring calls to question  
 24 *exchange paradigms* and the *instrumental approach* to  
 25 mentoring. An instrumental approach uses a transactional  
 26 frame and values the relationship for what  
 27 it can *do* rather than what it can *be*. Instrumental  
 28 approaches use a social exchange framework (Blau,  
 29 1964, Homans, 1958, 1974) that relies on exchange  
 30 norms in the relationship. With exchange norms,  
 31 partners give to each other with the expectation that  
 32 they will receive a “return on their investment.” For  
 33 example, mentors may expect allegiance in return  
 34 for the favors bestowed on their protégés. In turn,  
 35 protégés may be advised to use their mentors as a  
 36 career resource and to “trade them in” when a better  
 37 mentor comes along. In contrast, relational mentoring  
 38 is a close relationship that is governed by communal  
 39 norms (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993), in which  
 40 individuals give to their partners on the basis  
 41 of need rather than on the basis of expected  
 42 returns.

#### 43 **EXTENDED RANGE OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES**

44 Third, relational mentoring expands the range of  
 45 dependent variables used to capture the effectiveness  
 46 of mentoring relationships. Current approaches  
 47 use traditional criteria of career success, such as  
 48 advancement and compensation, which fail to capture  
 49 the outcomes associated with high-quality  
 50 relationships (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Miller &  
 51 Stiver, 1997). Relational mentoring draws on the

relationship and the POS literatures to identify a  
 52 broad range of dependent variables that reflect personal  
 53 growth and development, as well as the acquisition  
 54 of relational skills and competencies that may  
 55 be transportable across work roles and organizational  
 56 boundaries (Fletcher, 1996; Kram & Ragins,  
 57 2007). A POS perspective offers an array of potential  
 58 outcomes that include positive psychological  
 59 capital (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007), thriving  
 60 (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant,  
 61 2005), flourishing (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008;  
 62 Keyes & Haidt, 2003), resilience (Luthans, 2002;  
 63 Luthans et al., 2007), and a host of other POS  
 64 outcomes identified in this volume. 65

66 Expanding the criteria base allows for a more  
 67 accurate assessment of the effectiveness of mentoring  
 68 relationships. For example, a high-quality relationship  
 69 may help its members develop a professional identity  
 70 or balance work and family, but may not lead to a  
 71 change in compensation or advancement. Researchers  
 72 who use compensation or advancement as evidence of  
 73 effective mentoring may conclude that the relationship  
 74 is ineffective, when in fact the relationship may be  
 75 exceptionally effective in meeting the unique needs  
 76 of its members.

#### 77 **A HOLISTIC APPROACH**

78 Finally, a relational perspective takes a holistic  
 79 approach that incorporates and acknowledges the  
 80 interaction between work and nonwork domains  
 81 (Ragins, 2008). Although traditional perspectives  
 82 view work relationships only in terms of work  
 83 outcomes, a holistic perspective recognizes that  
 84 high-quality relationships can influence the quality of  
 85 life within and outside the workplace (Ragins &  
 86 Dutton, 2007). Relationships change people, and  
 87 these changes are not left at the workplace door. The  
 88 reach of high-quality mentoring may extend beyond  
 89 the workplace and may influence the individual's  
 90 ability to cope with challenges that spill over across  
 91 his or her life domains (Ragins, Lyness, & Winkel,  
 92 2010). For example, high-quality mentoring may  
 93 build an individual's self-efficacy and her capacity  
 94 for compassion (Boyatzis, 2007), as well as her  
 95 emotional intelligence (Cherniss, 2007), her capacity  
 96 to cope with stress (Kram & Hall, 1989), and her  
 97 ability to balance work and family demands  
 98 (Greenhaus & Singh, 2007). Although this chapter  
 99 focuses on work relationships, a developmental  
 100 network perspective holds that people have  
 101 constellations of developmental and mentoring  
 102 relationships that exist within and outside the  
 103 workplace (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Using a  
 104 holistic perspective, high-quality mentoring 103

1 relationships outside the workplace can build an indi-  
2 vidual's relational resources, which can be carried into  
3 the workplace and influence her ability to develop  
4 high-quality relationships at work.

5 In sum, in contrast to traditional, one-sided  
6 approaches to mentoring that use exchange models  
7 to predict a restricted range of instrumental out-  
8 comes, a relational approach widens the lens of  
9 mentoring to include high-quality, interdependent  
10 relationships that use communal norms to facilitate  
11 mutual growth, learning, and development within a  
12 career context. Relational mentoring incorporates a  
13 holistic perspective, and views mentoring as a posi-  
14 tive work relationship that influences the quality of  
15 life within and outside the workplace. Let us now  
16 turn to a more in-depth review of the antecedents,  
17 processes, and outcomes that may be found in high-  
18 quality mentoring relationships.

### 19 **Antecedents of Relational Mentoring**

20 In this section, I review the individual, relational,  
21 and organizational factors that may lead to high-  
22 quality mentoring relationships. A number of indi-  
23 vidual variables may predict people's ability to  
24 develop and sustain high-quality mentoring rela-  
25 tionships (cf., Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Ragins,  
26 2005, 2009; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). These include  
27 their self-structures of mentoring, their relational  
28 skills and knowledge, and other individual differ-  
29 ences variables, such as personality, attachment  
30 styles, and emotional intelligence.

### 31 ***The Self-structures of Mentoring***

32 Self-structures of mentoring involve three compo-  
33 nents: mentoring identities, mentoring schemas,  
34 and mentoring as possible selves (Ragins, 2005,  
35 2009; Ragins & Verbos, 2007).

### 36 **MENTORING IDENTITIES**

37 Individuals vary with respect to the degree to  
38 which they incorporate relationships into their  
39 identity structures (Anderson & Chen, 2002;  
40 Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individuals who define  
41 themselves in terms of others are viewed as having  
42 interdependent self-construals (Cross, Bacon, &  
43 Morris, 2000) or relational identities (Brewer &  
44 Gardner, 1996). Since relationships are central to  
45 their sense of self, these individuals should place  
46 greater importance on relationships than others  
47 (Anderson & Chen, 2002).

48 Mentoring identities are a type of relational  
49 identity that involves individuals defining them-  
50 selves in terms of their mentoring relationships

(Ragins, 2009). Both mentors and protégés have  
51 mentoring identities, and these identities may range  
52 from positive to negative. Positive mentoring iden-  
53 tities involve states of positive self-cognition (e.g.,  
54 "Who am I? I am a good mentor."). The individual  
55 not only defines him- or herself in terms of the  
56 mentoring relationship, but this self-structure also  
57 gives the individual positive cognitive and affective  
58 associations. Individuals who have positive mentor-  
59 ing identities are posited to be more motivated and  
60 better able to develop high-quality mentoring rela-  
61 tionships than are those who do not have a positive  
62 mentoring identity (Ragins, 2009). 63

### 64 **MENTORING SCHEMAS**

65 Mentoring schemas are the second self-structure  
66 that influences relational mentoring. Mentoring  
67 schemas are "fluid cognitive maps derived from past  
68 experiences and relationships that guide mentor's  
69 and protégés' perceptions, expectations, and  
70 behaviors in mentoring relationships." (Ragins &  
71 Verbos, 2007, p. 101) Drawing on relational schema  
72 (Baldwin, 1992; Planalp, 1985, 1987) and social  
73 cognition theory (Fiske, 1992; Markus, 1977;  
74 Markus & Zajonc, 1985), mentoring schema theory  
75 holds that individuals hold mental maps of mentor-  
76 ing that shape their expectations, frame their experi-  
77 ences, and motivate their behaviors in mentoring  
78 relationships (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Essentially,  
79 mentoring schemas are knowledge structures of  
80 what mentoring relationships "look like." Mentoring  
81 schemas involve expectations about what mentors  
82 and protégés do in the relationship, what the rela-  
83 tionship provides, and how it functions. As dis-  
84 cussed later, relational mentoring involves a unique  
85 set of functions that distinguish it from average or  
86 dysfunctional relationships. Individuals who incor-  
87 porate relational functions into their mental maps  
88 of mentoring should be more likely to develop high-  
89 quality mentoring relationships than are those who  
90 do not incorporate relational functions (Ragins,  
91 2005). An example of a mentoring schema that  
92 would predict the development of a high-quality  
93 relationships is "Good mentors learn from their  
94 protégés and are able to grow in the relationship."  
95 An example of a schema that would be less likely to  
96 result in a high-quality relationship is "Protégés  
97 should always listen to their mentors as the mentor  
98 knows best."

### 99 **MENTORING AS POSSIBLE SELVES**

100 Possible selves reflect the selves we wish to become,  
101 as well as the selves we fear becoming (Markus &

1 Nurius, 1986). Mentoring as a possible self is defined  
 2 as “a future oriented representation of oneself in a  
 3 mentoring relationship” (Ragins, 2009, p. 243). The  
 4 possible selves of mentoring range from positive to  
 5 negative, reflecting the best and worst visions of  
 6 oneself in a future mentoring relationship. Examples  
 7 of different possible selves include: “I see myself as  
 8 an effective, wonderful mentor,” “I can’t picture  
 9 myself as a mentor,” and “I would be an awful  
 10 mentor.” Those who hold positive self-visions should  
 11 be more motivated to enter and sustain a high-  
 12 quality mentoring relationship than are those who  
 13 lack visions or hold negative visions of themselves in  
 14 mentoring relationships (Ragins, 2005).

15 These three self-structures influence one another  
 16 and are also affected by past and current experiences  
 17 in mentoring relationships (Ragins, 2005). Those  
 18 who have had high-quality mentoring relationships in  
 19 the past, either as mentors or as protégés, may be more  
 20 likely to have positive self-structures that allow them  
 21 to develop and sustain high-quality relationships in  
 22 the future. In contrast, those who lack these experi-  
 23 ences may be less likely to incorporate mentoring into  
 24 their identity structures; mentoring becomes tangen-  
 25 tial to who they are and who they aspire to be.

26 Even the experience of witnessing high-quality  
 27 relationships can help individuals develop mentor-  
 28 ing self-structures that offer a foundation for high-  
 29 quality mentoring relationships. For example,  
 30 high-quality mentoring relationships can be a source  
 31 of role modeling for others in the organization, par-  
 32 ticularly if such relationships occur in high-ranking,  
 33 visible positions. To the extent that mentoring cul-  
 34 ture is driven from the top, the presence of high-  
 35 ranking relational mentoring may create mentoring  
 36 cultures that both value and model high-quality  
 37 relationships.

38 Although cognitive structures are important for  
 39 guiding and framing expectations, individuals also  
 40 need a certain skill set in order to develop high-  
 41 quality mentoring relationships.

#### 42 *Relational Skills, Caches, and Differences*

##### 43 RELATIONAL SKILLS

44 Mentors and protégés should be more likely  
 45 to develop and sustain high-quality relationships  
 46 when they have the ability to engage in effective  
 47 communication, empathic listening, personal learn-  
 48 ing, and self-reflection (Kram & Ragins, 2007).  
 49 Emotional intelligence, emotional competence, and  
 50 the ability to be compassionate may also help indi-  
 51 viduals develop high-quality mentoring relation-  
 52 ships (Boyatzis, 2007; Cherniss, 2007; Fletcher,

1998; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Boyatzis (2007) 53  
 observes that, by exhibiting compassion, mentors 54  
 and protégés help each other engage in intentional 55  
 change behaviors that allow them to achieve their 56  
 dreams and aspirations. 57

Using Stone Center relational cultural theory 58  
 (RCT) (Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997), 59  
 Fletcher and Ragins (2007) identified a set of indi- 60  
 vidual antecedents to relational mentoring. These 61  
 include the ability to be authentic, adaptive, empa- 62  
 thetic, interdependent, and vulnerable in the rela- 63  
 tionship (see also Fletcher, 1998, 1999). Another 64  
 key antecedent is the ability to engage in fluid exper- 65  
 tise; fluid expertise allows individuals to move from 66  
 an expert to nonexpert role, to acknowledge help, 67  
 and to give credit to others without losing self- 68  
 esteem or needing to engage in “face-saving gam- 69  
 bits” (Fletcher, 1998). Mentors in particular need to 70  
 be able to put aside their hierarchical roles and 71  
 formal position in order to enter the relationship 72  
 from a place of mutual vulnerability, interdepend- 73  
 ence, and fluid role relationships. They must have 74  
 the emotional stability and self-awareness necessary 75  
 to allow for mutual influence in the relationship; 76  
 influence that is based on needs and abilities, rather 77  
 than on hierarchically prescribed roles and tradi- 78  
 tional power relationships. 79

##### 80 THE RELATIONAL CACHE CYCLE

High-quality mentoring relationships are not only 81  
 built on relational skills, they may also generate the 82  
 relational skills needed to build other high-quality 83  
 relationships. We call this *relational caches*, which 84  
 are a transportable set of relational skills and com- 85  
 petencies that transfer across time, relationships, 86  
 and settings (Kram & Ragins, 2007). This reflects 87  
 the idea that individuals carry their skill set with 88  
 them across relationships. 89

Relational caches are likely to be developed in 90  
 high-quality relationships, and because people share 91  
 and build relational skills in growth-producing rela- 92  
 tionships (Miller & Stiver, 1997), they are also likely 93  
 to be passed between members of these relation- 94  
 ships. Moreover, since mentoring relationships exist 95  
 within a broader network of other relationships 96  
 (Higgins & Kram, 2001), members in high-quality 97  
 mentorships may pass their relational caches to 98  
 others in their social network. This becomes an iter- 99  
 ative process in which mentors and protégés help 100  
 each other broaden and build their skill caches, and 101  
 in so doing develop relational caches that are passed 102  
 along to members of their other relationships both 103  
 within and outside the workplace. 104

1 In essence, a holistic perspective recognizes that  
 2 individuals do not leave their relational skills at the  
 3 workplace door, but carry them into other relation-  
 4 ships nested within their homes, communities, and  
 5 professional networks. Similarly, relational skills  
 6 that are developed outside the work domain can be  
 7 carried back into the workplace and can influence  
 8 the quality of workplace mentoring. This suggests  
 9 that the ability to develop high-quality relationships  
 10 outside the workplace should spill over and influ-  
 11 ence relationships within the workplace and vice  
 12 versa. An iterative cycle of positive relation-  
 13 ships could therefore be developed that includes  
 14 relationships nested in the workplace, the home, the  
 15 community, and the profession.

16 **INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

17 A number of individual difference variables may  
 18 influence an individual's ability to develop and sus-  
 19 tain high-quality relationships. Although there has  
 20 been a lack of research on personality characteristics  
 21 that predict high-quality mentoring, a recent review  
 22 of the literature on mentoring and personality  
 23 suggests that individuals who exhibit prosocial per-  
 24 sonalities, altruism, other-oriented empathy, and  
 25 openness to experience may be more likely to engage  
 26 in relational mentoring than are those who lack  
 27 these attributes (cf. Turban & Lee, 2007; Allen,  
 28 2003; Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996; Bozionelos,  
 29 2004).

30 Given the relational skill set identified earlier, it  
 31 would be reasonable to expect that individuals who  
 32 had strong self-esteem, emotional stability, and  
 33 emotional intelligence would be more likely to seek  
 34 and develop high-quality mentoring relationships  
 35 than would those who lack these attributes.  
 36 Individuals with strong learning goal orientations  
 37 (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003) should be attracted to  
 38 the mutual learning processes inherent in high-  
 39 quality mentoring relationships. Finally, attachment  
 40 styles may influence the closeness of the mentoring  
 41 relationship (Noe, Greenberger, & Wang (2002)  
 42 and the motivation to enter a mentoring relation-  
 43 ship (Wang, Noe, Wang, & Greenberger, 2009).  
 44 According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969),  
 45 individuals with secure attachment styles may be  
 46 better able to develop close relationships than would  
 47 those who either avoid close relationships or experi-  
 48 ence anxiety in the presence of intimacy. Those with  
 49 secure attachment styles are also better able to  
 50 adhere to the communal norms that characterize  
 51 close relationships (Bartz & Lydon, 2008). It is  
 52 therefore reasonable to expect that individuals with

secure attachment styles should be better able and  
 more motivated to enter high-quality mentoring  
 relationships than would those with insecure attach-  
 ment styles.

**Relationship Antecedents**

At least four characteristics of the relationship  
 should affect its ability to achieve high-quality  
 states. First, relationships are likely to be of higher  
 quality when the mentor and protégé share similar  
 mentoring schemas (Ragins, 2005; Ragins &  
 Verbos, 2007). As discussed earlier, both mentors  
 and protégés have mentoring schemas that reflect  
 expectations about their respective roles, as well as  
 the behaviors, purpose, and outcomes of the rela-  
 tionship. Schema congruency should not only influ-  
 ence the satisfaction and quality of the relationship,  
 but also its effectiveness; members may be more  
 likely to work at cross-purposes when they do not  
 share a common frame of reference or set of expect-  
 ations about the relationship.

Second, mentoring relationships are likely to be  
 of higher quality when both members hold com-  
 munal norms. Communal norms involve members  
 giving to their partners without the expectation or  
 obligation of repayment (e.g., Clark & Mills, 1979)  
 and represent a key process in relational mentoring  
 (Ragins, 2005). Existing research indicates that  
 commitment is a key predictor of quality of rela-  
 tionship (Allen & Eby, 2008), and communal  
 norms reflect the deepest form of relational com-  
 mitment (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993); so, it is rea-  
 sonable to expect that relationships will be of higher  
 quality when *both* members hold communal rather  
 than exchange norms. However, a state of norm  
 incongruency, in which one member uses exchange  
 norms while the other relies on communal, should  
 lead to restricted levels of relational quality.

Third, the similarity of values, personality, and  
 learning orientations should affect the quality of the  
 mentoring relationship. Mentoring researchers have  
 found that perceived and actual similarity in learn-  
 ing goal orientations and other personality and  
 value attributes predict relationship satisfaction and  
 liking, which are often predictors of high-quality  
 relationships (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003; Lankau,  
 Riordan, & Thomas, 2005; Wanberg, Kammeyer-  
 Mueller, & Marchese, 2006). Demographic dis-  
 similarity creates a challenge for many mentoring  
 relationships as individuals may not be aware of  
 "deep level" types of diversity (e.g., personality,  
 values, interests) that can be the basis for developing  
 a close mentoring relationship (Ragins, 1997).

1 However, related research indicates that, over time,  
 2 individuals find deep-level similarities that form the  
 3 basis of effective work relationships (Harrison, Price,  
 4 & Bell, 1998). This suggests that members of diverse  
 5 mentoring relationships may need to make a more  
 6 concerted effort to discover similarities involving  
 7 personality, values, and interests, and that diverse  
 8 relationships may take more time to develop into  
 9 high-quality mentoring relationships than demo-  
 10 graphically homogeneous relationships (Clutterbuck  
 11 & Ragins, 2002; Ragins, 1997).

12 The fourth characteristic that may influence rela-  
 13 tional quality is the structure of the mentoring rela-  
 14 tionship. For example, whereas informal relationships  
 15 often develop on the basis of shared interests and  
 16 commonalities, formal mentoring relationships are  
 17 usually assigned by a third party and are therefore  
 18 less likely to have this advantage. In recognition of  
 19 this limitation, some formal programs involve men-  
 20 tors and protégés in the matching process, and exist-  
 21 ing research indicates that this procedure may yield  
 22 higher-quality relationships (Allen et al., 2006).  
 23 Even so, formal relationships are usually con-  
 24 tracted to last between 6 months and a year, which  
 25 restricts the time needed to reach a high-quality  
 26 state (Ragins, 2005). In contrast, informal mentor-  
 27 ing relationships usually span between 3 and 5 years,  
 28 which allows more time for members to establish  
 29 trust, reciprocity, and interdependence in the men-  
 30 toring relationship.

31 Electronic or virtual mentoring, which occurs  
 32 over the Internet, also faces unique challenges to  
 33 achieving high-quality states (cf. review by Ensher  
 34 & Murphy, 2007; see also Ensher, Heun, &  
 35 Blanchard, 2003; Hamilton & Scandura, 2003).  
 36 Because of the lack of face-to-face interaction and  
 37 nonverbal cues, electronic relationships are more  
 38 susceptible to miscommunication, and it is more  
 39 difficult and time-consuming to establish trust and  
 40 rapport in these relationships than in face-to-face  
 41 mentoring (Buche, 2008). Given these differences,  
 42 it may not be fair to compare formal and electronic  
 43 mentoring with informal mentoring. Perhaps a  
 44 better approach would be to examine the predictors  
 45 and the range of quality within a particular type of  
 46 mentoring relationship (e.g., what does high-quality  
 47 electronic mentoring look like, and what factors  
 48 predict the ability of individuals to attain these  
 49 relationships).

### 50 **Organization Antecedents**

51 Mentoring relationships do not exist in a vacuum  
 52 but are nested within the organizational context.

Some organizations promote a mentoring culture 53  
 that values shared knowledge, collaboration, and 54  
 learning (Eby, Lockwood, & Butts, 2006). These 55  
 cultures should be more likely to promote relational 56  
 mentoring than organizations that are characterized 57  
 by competitiveness, hierarchical relationships, and 58  
 traditional forms of power that restrict mutual 59  
 learning, reciprocity, and interdependence in work 60  
 relationships (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). 61

In sum, characteristics of the individual, rela- 62  
 tionship, and organization may influence the ability 63  
 of individuals to develop high-quality mentoring 64  
 relationships. Let us now turn to a more in-depth 65  
 examination of the functions and processes of high- 66  
 quality mentoring relationships. 67

### **Functions and Processes in High-quality mentoring Relationships**

#### *The Evolution of Mentoring Functions*

68 Over 25 years ago, Kathy Kram (1985, p. 22) defined 69  
 mentoring functions as “those aspects of a develop- 70  
 mental relationship that enhance *both* individuals’ 71  
 growth and advancement” (italics added). Although 72  
 this definition took a dyadic perspective, the func- 73  
 tions described in her landmark book focused pri- 74  
 marily on what the mentor provides to the protégé. 75  
 Kram described two classifications of mentor func- 76  
 tions, career development and psychosocial, and 77  
 identified discrete functions or behaviors within 78  
 each of these categories. *Career development* func- 79  
 tions help protégés advance in the organization and 80  
 include five subcategories: sponsoring advancement, 81  
 providing job coaching, increasing positive exposure 82  
 and visibility in the organization, offering protec- 83  
 tion, and giving challenging assignments. Mentors 84  
 also provide *psychosocial* functions, and the four sub- 85  
 categories here include role modeling, acceptance 86  
 and confirmation, counseling, and friendship. 87  
 88  
 89

90 Building on Kram’s (1983) groundbreaking work,  
 91 instruments were soon developed that allowed  
 92 researchers to measure these functions from the men-  
 93 tor’s perspective (Noe, 1988; Ragins & McFarlin,  
 94 1990; Scandura & Ragins, 1993). Twenty years later,  
 95 we know that mentors do indeed provide these func-  
 96 tions and that these functions predict protégés’ career  
 97 outcomes and their satisfaction with the mentor and  
 98 the relationship (cf., Allen et al., 2004; Wanberg  
 99 et al., 2003). *However, although high levels of these  
 100 functions represent greater levels of relational quality,  
 101 high-quality relationships may involve more than just  
 102 these functions.*

103 Relational mentoring builds on this existing  
 104 work in two key ways. First, hearkening back to



1 Kram's (1985) initial definition, relational mentor-  
 2 ing examines the functions and processes provided  
 3 by *both* members of the relationship. Second,  
 4 because relational mentoring seeks to explain pro-  
 5 cesses involved in high-quality relationships, the  
 6 range of functions in the relationship are extended  
 7 to include the qualities, behaviors, and characteris-  
 8 tics found in close interpersonal relationships  
 9 (Duck, 1994; Mashek & Aron, 2004), high-quality  
 10 connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), growth-  
 11 fostering interactions (Jordan et al., 1991; Miller,  
 12 1976), and positive relationships at work (Dutton  
 13 & Ragins, 2007).

14 Relational mentoring offers a third category of  
 15 mentoring functions: relational functions. *Relational*  
 16 *functions do not substitute for career development or psy-*  
 17 *chosocial functions, but represent an additional category*  
 18 *that reflects high-quality relationships.* From the nega-  
 19 tive side of the spectrum, research has presented new  
 20 measures that capture the functions, behaviors, and  
 21 characteristics found in dysfunctional mentoring  
 22 relationships (Eby et al., 2004, 2008). Mirroring this  
 23 work from a positive perspective, this section describes  
 24 relational functions, and a preliminary measure of  
 25 relational functions is provided in Table 39.1.

### 26 **Relational Functions**

27 Relational functions represent a third category of  
 28 mentoring functions that reflects the characteristics,  
 29 behaviors, and attributes that may be found in high-  
 30 quality mentoring relationships. The list of such  
 31 characteristics can be extensive, but here I am only  
 32 identifying key functions that may be displayed by  
 33 *both* mentors and protégés in high-quality relation-  
 34 ships and episodes. This list is not meant to be  
 35 exhaustive, but reflects core attributes drawn from  
 36 related research and theory in the relationships,  
 37 social psychology, social cognition, and mentoring  
 38 literatures. Drawing on this work, relational  
 39 functions may include six subcategories: personal  
 40 learning and growth, inspiration, affirmation of  
 41 selves, reliance on communal norms, shared influ-  
 42 ence and mutual respect, and relational trust and  
 43 commitment.

#### 44 **PERSONAL LEARNING AND GROWTH**

45 Learning can be both a process and an outcome of  
 46 mentoring relationships (Kram & Ragins, 2007;  
 47 Lankau & Scandura, 2007). In terms of process,  
 48 high-quality mentorships differ from traditional  
 49 relationships in the mutuality, type, and degree of  
 50 learning. Traditional approaches view the mentor as  
 51 the teacher or guide and the protégé as the learner.

In contrast, a relational approach recognizes that, in  
 high-quality mentoring, both members may learn  
 and grow from the relationship. High-quality rela-  
 tionships involve fluid expertise, in which expertise  
 shifts depending on the mentoring episode or inter-  
 action (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). For example, in a  
 given episode, a protégé may show the mentor how  
 to use the latest technology, or may offer insights  
 into generational differences among new entrants  
 into the workforce. Greater levels of mutual learn-  
 ing should occur in high-quality relationships  
 because learning is based on the individual's task  
 expertise or knowledge, rather than on their hierar-  
 chical position or role in the relationship.

The type of learning should also differ in high-  
 quality mentoring relationships. Although there are  
 many ways to define learning in mentoring relation-  
 ships (cf., review by Lankau & Scandura, 2007),  
 high-quality relationships are more likely to pro-  
 duce personal learning (Carmeli, Brueller, &  
 Dutton, 2009; Kram & Cherniss, 2001), which  
 involves the individual's insights into their values,  
 strengths, and weaknesses, as well as their develop-  
 mental needs, reactions, and patterns of behaviors  
 (Kram, 1996; Higgins & Kram, 2001). Learning  
 therefore can involve not only the sharing of infor-  
 mation and knowledge, but also the potential for  
 personal growth and development. By providing  
 personal learning functions, members help each  
 other learn more about themselves and others. For  
 example, in high-quality relationships both mentors  
 and protégés may provide their partner with feed-  
 back that illuminates the "blind spots" in their re-  
 lationships with others, while giving them insights  
 into their personal strengths and weaknesses.

#### 87 **INSPIRATION**

88 Inspiration is an evoked psychological state derived  
 89 from an episode with an object, event, or person  
 (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004). Inspiration involves  
 seeing different and better possibilities, and can lead  
 to a positive motivational state that involves the  
 energization and direction of behavior (Thrash &  
 Elliot, 2003, 2004). Inspiration scholars distinguish  
 between being "inspired by" and being "inspired to"  
 (e.g., one can admire a person or an object without  
 being moved to action) (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). In  
 a relational context that involves mutuality and  
 reciprocity, there may be an additional process of  
 mutual inspiration (e.g., "inspired with.")

101 Mentors and protégés have the capacity to inspire  
 102 each other in their mentoring episodes and relation-  
 103 ships. Traditional perspectives on mentoring hold

**Table 39.1 The Relational Mentoring Index**

*Instructions:* The following questions ask about your experience in mentoring relationships. Mentoring is a developmental relationship that pairs a more experienced and knowledgeable mentor with a less experienced protégé. The relationship supports the protégé’s career, but also offers important benefits for the mentor. Both members may learn, grow, and develop from the mentoring relationship.

Some mentoring relationships develop spontaneously and informally, whereas others are part of a formal mentoring program. In formal mentoring programs, mentors and protégés are matched and assigned in some way.

*(Introductory Questions)*

- Do you currently have an ongoing mentoring relationship? (options: yes/no/unsure)
- When did the relationship begin?
- If you have more than one mentoring relationship, please answer the following questions in terms of your strongest relationship.
- What is your role in this relationship? (options: mentor, protégé)
- Is this relationship formally assigned as part of a formal mentoring program? (options: yes it is a formally assigned relationship/no it is not a formally assigned relationship/unsure)

*Relational Mentoring Index*

When thinking about this particular mentoring relationship, please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements using the following scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

*(Relational Functions and Items)*

**(Function: Personal Learning and Growth)**

1. My partner is helping me learn and grow as a person.
2. My partner helps me learn about my personal strengths and weaknesses.
3. My partner helps me learn more about myself.

**(Function: Inspiration)**

4. My partner has inspired or been a source of inspiration for me.
5. My partner gives me a fresh perspective that helps me think “outside the box.”
6. I am often inspired by my partner.

**(Function: Self-affirmation<sup>a</sup>)**

*(Sub-function: Affirmation of Ideal Self)*

7. My partner is helping me become the person I aspire to be.
8. My partner sees me not only for who I am now, but also for who I aspire to be.

*(Sub-function: Affirmation of Best Self)*

9. My partner always sees the best in me.
10. My partner seems to bring out the best in me.

*(Sub-function: Affirmation of Authentic Self)*

11. My partner accepts me for who I am.
12. I can be myself with my partner.

**(Function: Reliance on Communal Norms)**

13. In our relationship, we help each other without expecting repayment.
14. We never keep score of who gives and who gets in our relationship.

**Table 39.1 The Relational Mentoring Index** (continued)

15. We give to each other without expecting repayment.
<b>(Function: Shared Influence and Respect)</b>
16. My partner and I respect and influence each other.
17. We respect each other, and we value what each person has to say.
18. There is mutual respect and influence in our relationship.
<b>(Function: Trust and Commitment)</b>
19. Our relationship is founded on mutual trust and commitment.
20. My partner and I trust each other, and we are committed to the relationship.
21. Trust and commitment are central to our relationship.

\* Affirmation items may all load on same factor.

1 that mentors may serve as role models for their  
 2 protégés. Role modeling approaches, but does not  
 3 fully capture the possibilities for inspiration in  
 4 high-quality mentoring relationships; members are  
 5 not only “inspired by” others (e.g., the mentor serv-  
 6 ing as a role model), but can also be “inspired to”  
 7 engage in new and creative behaviors and may also  
 8 engage in a reciprocal and synergistic process of  
 9 mutual inspiration (e.g., “inspired with”). Traditional  
 10 perspectives on role modeling ignore the possibil-  
 11 ity of mutual inspiration in which the mentor  
 12 both inspires and is inspired by his or her protégé.  
 13 Another distinction is that role modeling involves  
 14 emulation and admiration, whereas inspiration  
 15 can involve sparks of creativity that allow both  
 16 members of the relationship to think about things  
 17 in fresh and new ways (Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy,  
 18 Fryer, & Ryan, 2010). Mutual inspiration can  
 19 involve synergistic “thinking outside the box”  
 20 behaviors that can be beneficial for both mentors  
 21 and protégés (Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin, & Cassidy,  
 22 2010). High-quality relationships offer the psycho-  
 23 logical space in which inspiration can thrive (Dutton  
 24 & Heaphy, 2003), and it is reasonable to expect that  
 25 both mentors and protégés will report that their  
 26 partner inspires them, gives them a fresh perspec-  
 27 tive, and helps them think about work and life in  
 28 new ways.

29 **AFFIRMATION OF IDEAL, BEST,  
 30 AND AUTHENTIC SELVES**

31 The self is not formed in a vacuum, but is crafted  
 32 through relationships with others (Cooley, 1902;  
 33 Mead, 1934). High-quality mentoring relation-  
 34 ships may help their members develop three aspects  
 35 of the self: their ideal selves (Markus & Nurius,

1986), their best selves (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, 36  
 Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005), and their authentic selves 37  
 (Goffman, 1959; Harter, 2002). 38

Ideal selves represent the selves we wish to 39  
 become in the future; they reflect our hopes, dreams, 40  
 and aspirations, as well the skills, abilities, achieve- 41  
 ments, and accomplishments that we wish to attain 42  
 (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Research 43  
 from the close relationships literature indicates that 44  
 partners play a key role in helping each other reach 45  
 their ideal selves. Drawing on interdependence 46  
 theory (Kelley, 1983; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; 47  
 Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996) and the ideal self liter- 48  
 ature (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), 49  
 Drigotas and his colleagues offer the idea of the 50  
*Michelangelo phenomenon* (Drigotas, Rusbult, 51  
 Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). Using the meta- 52  
 phor of the sculptor who helps the true form emerge 53  
 from the stone, the Michelangelo phenomenon 54  
 describes the role that close partners play in affirm- 55  
 ing one another’s pursuit of the ideal self and the 56  
 means by which the self is shaped by a close part- 57  
 ner’s perceptions and behaviors (Drigotas, 2002; 58  
 Drigotas et al., 1999). 59

The Michelangelo phenomenon has great utility 60  
 for explaining the processes involved in high-quality 61  
 mentoring. This phenomenon holds that an indi- 62  
 vidual can help his partner reach his ideal self by 63  
 offering affirmations that confirm the partner’s 64  
 beliefs about himself and by behaving in ways that 65  
 are congruent with his partner’s ideal self (Drigotas, 66  
 2002; Drigotas et al., 1999). Partner affirmations 67  
 take the form of *perceptual* affirmation, in which 68  
 partners view each other in terms of their ideal 69  
 selves, and *behavioral* affirmations, in which indi- 70  
 viduals help their partners engage in behaviors that 71

1 are aligned with their ideal selves by directly eliciting  
2 or creating opportunities to engage in desired  
3 behaviors, or by decreasing the opportunity to  
4 engage in behaviors that conflict with ideal selves.  
5 Existing research has found support for this phe-  
6 nomenon and has found that movement toward  
7 ideal selves predicts positive outcomes reflecting  
8 relational and personal well-being (e.g., life satisfac-  
9 tion, emotional well-being, self-esteem, vitality,  
10 relational stability, relational satisfaction) (Drigotas,  
11 2002; Drigotas et al., 1999; Kumashiro, Rusbult,  
12 Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007; Rusbult, Kumashiro,  
13 Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009).

14 By providing affirmation, high-quality mentoring  
15 relationships may also help their members develop  
16 their “reflected best self.” Reflected best selves are  
17 defined as “an individual’s cognitive representation of  
18 the qualities or characteristics an individual displays  
19 when at his or her best” (Roberts et al., 2005,  
20 p. 713). Reflected best selves share some features of  
21 the ideal self, but focus more on the qualities and  
22 characteristics the person currently has rather than  
23 on those they wish to possess (cf. Higgins, 1987).  
24 According to Roberts and colleagues, mentoring  
25 relationships are relational resources individuals can  
26 use to develop portraits or mental representations of  
27 who they are when they are at their personal best.  
28 Through behavioral and perceptual affirmation,  
29 mentors and protégés may help each other expand  
30 their collective constellation of possible selves and  
31 provide the opportunity to bring their best selves  
32 forward in their mentoring relationship.

33 In addition to best and ideal selves, high-quality  
34 mentoring relationships may also affirm the pre-  
35 sentation of the authentic self. The authentic self  
36 represents one’s “true or real self” (Gergen, 1991;  
37 Mitchell, 1992). Unlike ideal and best selves,  
38 authentic selves include not only our best, but also  
39 our worst traits, characteristics, and attributes.  
40 High-quality relationships allow for the affirmation  
41 of the authentic self (Mitchell, 1992; see also  
42 Roberts, 2007). Unlike other relationships in which  
43 the authentic self is repressed, hidden, or distorted  
44 (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980), high-quality  
45 relationships offer the relational space, affirmation,  
46 and acceptance needed to close the space between  
47 the presented and the actual self (Roberts, 2007;  
48 Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). Drawing  
49 on self-verification theory, such congruence may  
50 lead to positive outcomes for the individual (Swann,  
51 1983, 1987) and their work relationships (Swann,  
52 Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004).

#### RELiance ON COMMUNAL NORMS

53  
54 A key factor that distinguishes high-quality relation-  
55 ships from other relationships is the reliance on  
56 communal norms (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993). In  
57 relationships governed by communal norms, the  
58 focus is on the partner’s well-being, and benefits are  
59 given in response to the partner’s needs without  
60 expecting repayment (Clark & Mills, 1979). In  
61 contrast, in exchange relationships benefits are given  
62 with the expectation that a comparable benefit will  
63 be provided in return. The individual receiving the  
64 benefit incurs an obligation or debt to return a com-  
65 parable benefit to his or her partner. Clark and Mills  
66 point out that communal relationships vary in  
67 strength (Clark & Mills, 1993; Mills, Clark, Ford,  
68 & Johnson, 2004); in strong communal relation-  
69 ships individuals feel a strong responsibility for  
70 the welfare of their partner, whereas in weak com-  
71 munal relationships, people take on less responsibil-  
72 ity for their partner’s welfare. They observe that  
73 norms vary across relationships, with communal  
74 norms being more likely to be enacted in close rela-  
75 tionships involving family members and friends,  
76 whereas exchange norms prevail in relationships  
77 between employers and their employees (Clark &  
78 Jordan, 2002).

79 Like other relationships, mentoring relationships  
80 may vary by the type and strength of relationship  
81 norms. Since mentoring relationships can range  
82 from close personal relationships to formally  
83 assigned relationships that embody a contractual  
84 relationship, it is reasonable to expect that high-  
85 quality mentoring relationships are more likely to  
86 rely on communal rather than exchange norms, and  
87 that the stronger the communal norm, the higher  
88 the quality of the relationship (Ragins, 2005). As a  
89 related construct, reciprocity can be governed by  
90 either communal or exchange norms, and it is  
91 expected that mentoring relationships that use  
92 exchange-based norms for reciprocity should be of  
93 lower quality and have more problematic outcomes  
94 than relationships that rely on communal-based  
95 norms for reciprocity. For example, mentors who  
96 expect or require that their protégés return a com-  
97 parable benefit may be viewed as exploiting their pro-  
98 tege (cf., Shore, Toyokawa, & Anderson, 2008),  
99 whereas protégés who give to their mentor but later  
100 expect a benefit in return may be viewed as manipu-  
101 lative (Eby et al., 2008). In contrast, mentors and  
102 protégés who give to each other because of concern  
103 for the well-being of their partner and their relation-  
104 ship not only reflect a state of relational mentoring,

1 but also offer a foundation for other relational pro-  
 2 cesses that further enhance the relationship. The use  
 3 of social exchange models may therefore explain  
 4 average, marginal, or even dysfunctional mentoring  
 5 relationships, but do not capture the relational pro-  
 6 cesses inherent in high-quality relationships.

#### 7 SHARED INFLUENCE AND MUTUAL RESPECT

8 Relational mentoring is characterized by shared influ-  
 9 ence, which involves the process by which members  
 10 influence and are influenced by each other (Ragins,  
 11 2005). Mutuality is the norm in high-quality men-  
 12 toring, and influence is based on the individual's  
 13 expertise in a given mentoring episode, rather than  
 14 on their hierarchical position (Fletcher & Ragins,  
 15 2007). Although by definition mentors have more  
 16 experience in work or career domains, protégés bring  
 17 their own insights, life experiences, and talents to the  
 18 table, and mentors in high-quality relationships value  
 19 and are influenced by their protégés' perspectives.

20 Hand-in-hand with shared influence is mutual  
 21 respect. Respect involves elements of admiration,  
 22 appreciation, and encouragement (Ferguson, 2003),  
 23 and in close personal relationships, incorporates a  
 24 perception that the partner has "admirable moral  
 25 qualities" that include wisdom, self-discipline, honor,  
 26 patience, and self-knowledge (Frei & Shaver, 2002).  
 27 Mutual respect is a prerequisite for shared influence  
 28 in mentoring relationships, and these characteristics  
 29 should be associated with mutual growth, learning,  
 30 and development in the mentoring relationship.

31 Shared influence reflects interdependence in  
 32 the relationship. Interdependence in close relation-  
 33 ships involves vulnerability (Rusbult & Van Lange,  
 34 2003) and may also involve the ability of individu-  
 35 als to empower one another in a relational sense.  
 36 Relational empowerment involves reciprocal influ-  
 37 ence, mutual empathy, concern, and vulnerability  
 38 in the relationship (Surrey, 1991), and therefore dif-  
 39 fers from other forms of empowerment that focus  
 40 more on control over work functions (Spreitzer,  
 41 2008). Although empowerment is often used inter-  
 42 changeably with shared influence, it is important to  
 43 preserve this distinction when examining mentor-  
 44 ing relationships. Mentors who are supervisors may  
 45 empower their protégés by giving them more con-  
 46 trol over their work functions. This may be in addi-  
 47 tion to, or in place of, shared influence, which is a  
 48 mutual process that is not limited to work functions  
 49 (Jordan, 1991). Shared influence is broader in scope  
 50 than empowerment, and is better able to describe  
 51 processes in a range of mentoring relationships.

#### RELATIONAL TRUST AND COMMITMENT

52 Although there are many different conceptualiza-  
 53 tions of trust (Lewicki Tomlinson, & Gillespie,  
 54 2006), trust is commonly defined as "a psychologi-  
 55 cal state comprising the intention to accept vulner-  
 56 ability based upon positive expectations of the  
 57 intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau,  
 58 Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). Rousseau  
 59 and colleagues observe that trust is not a behavior  
 60 or a choice, but rather a psychological condition  
 61 that reflects the willingness to be vulnerable under  
 62 conditions of risk and interdependence.

63 Relational trust may best reflect the processes in  
 64 high-quality mentoring, as this type of trust comes  
 65 from the relationship itself (Lewicki, McAllister, &  
 66 Bies, 1998; McAllister, 1995). *Calculus-based trust*  
 67 involves the individual making a rational decision  
 68 to trust using an economic transaction approach,  
 69 whereas relational trust has an affective foundation  
 70 based on emotional bonds and the degree to which  
 71 members express genuine care and concern for their  
 72 partners (Lewis & Wiegert, 1985; McAllister,  
 73 1995). Relational trust reflects communal norms  
 74 (Clark & Mills, 1979), in that individuals perceive  
 75 their partners as being committed to the relation-  
 76 ship and that they give on the basis of need rather  
 77 than self-interest (McAllister, 1995), and also incor-  
 78 porates elements of respect (Frei & Shaver, 2002).  
 79 Relational trust develops through repeated interac-  
 80 tions (Rousseau et al., 1998), or in the case of men-  
 81 toring, mentoring episodes (Fletcher & Ragins,  
 82 2007). Lewicki and colleagues observe that trust is  
 83 influenced not only by the length of the relation-  
 84 ship, but also by the frequency and depth of interac-  
 85 tions, and the diversity of challenges that are  
 86 successfully faced in the relationship (Lewicki et al.,  
 87 1998).

88 Relational trust is intricately connected to com-  
 89 mitment in high-quality work relationships and  
 90 other close relationships (Wieselquist, Rusbult,  
 91 Foster, & Agnew, 1999). In their analyses of trust  
 92 processes in positive relationships at work, Pratt and  
 93 Dirks (2007) point out that traditional perspectives  
 94 on trust use a social exchange perspective (e.g., "I'll  
 95 trust you if you trust me"), which does not explain  
 96 how trust can be broken and then repaired in high-  
 97 quality relationships. They offer the idea that trust is  
 98 a relationship-based commitment in high-quality  
 99 relationships. The commitment to the relationship  
 100 allows individuals to experience both the negative  
 101 effects of personal vulnerability as well as the posi-  
 102 tive benefits of being in a trusting relationship.

1 Applying these perspectives to the mentoring  
2 arena, it is reasonable to expect that high-quality  
3 mentoring relationships involve affective forms of  
4 relational trust that are grounded not only in the  
5 commitment to the partner, but also in the commit-  
6 ment to the relationship. The development of this  
7 type of trust not only takes time, but the opportu-  
8 nity to engage in mentoring episodes that challenge  
9 the relationship and allow members to illustrate their  
10 commitment to each other and the relationship.

### 11 **Future Directions**

12 Future research could examine the antecedents, pro-  
13 cesses, and outcomes of high-quality mentoring  
14 relationships. Researchers could use the self-struc-  
15 ture of mentoring framework (Ragins, 2009) and  
16 mentoring schema theory (Ragins & Verbos, 2007)  
17 to examine how mentoring identities, schemas, and  
18 possible selves combine to influence the develop-  
19 ment of high-quality relationships. Self-structures  
20 are shaped by past relationships and episodes,  
21 but what types of specific experiences are most  
22 important for developing relational mentoring? Can  
23 individuals develop positive self-structures from  
24 observing others, or do they need direct experience?  
25 Do these relationships differ for those in formal  
26 mentoring relationships, and how can organizations  
27 promote the development of positive self-structures  
28 in the workplace?

29 Future research could also empirically examine  
30 the relational cache cycle (Kram & Ragins, 2007).  
31 Do the relational competencies developed in high-  
32 quality mentoring relationships help individuals  
33 create and sustain other high-quality relationships  
34 within and outside the workplace? Are relational  
35 caches passed between partners in high-quality  
36 mentoring relationships, and can these caches be  
37 passed across relationships to social networks within  
38 and outside the workplace? Do these processes build  
39 on each other to create an iterative cycle of positive  
40 relationships across life domains?

41 The Relational Mentoring Index (RMI; Table 39.1)  
42 provided here offers a first step in examining the  
43 functions and processes of high-quality mentoring  
44 relationships. Future research needs to validate the  
45 instrument and assess its ability to predict out-  
46 comes of high-quality relationships. The RMI could  
47 also be tested in conjunction with traditional mea-  
48 sures of mentoring roles and functions in order to  
49 assess the added variance in outcomes that can be  
50 accounted for by an inclusion of measures that tap  
51 the characteristics of high-quality relationships.  
52 Since the measure taps relational functions provided

by both members of the relationship, a dyadic 53  
approach can be used to assess the psychometric 54  
properties of the instrument for both mentors and 55  
protégés. 56

A relational approach to mentoring also opens 57  
the doors to examining an expanded array of 58  
outcomes associated with the fields of POS 59  
(Cameron et al., 2003), positive psychology (Snyder 60  
& Lopez, 2002), and positive organizational behav- 61  
ior (Luthans, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007). 62  
Mentoring scholars have assessed the quality of 63  
mentoring relationships using traditional measures 64  
that reflect protégés' job attitudes, compensation, 65  
and advancement, but a relational approach offers 66  
an array of outcomes that reflect personal growth, 67  
learning, and development for both members of the 68  
relationship (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Ragins, 69  
2005; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Using a holistic per- 70  
spective (Ragins, 2008; Ragins & Dutton, 2007) 71  
the reach of relational mentoring may extend 72  
beyond the workplace to influence quality of life in 73  
the nonwork domain, and may predict such out- 74  
comes as life satisfaction, physical and psychological 75  
health, balance, and well-being. The affirmation of 76  
identity in high-quality relationships has particular 77  
resonance among those in marginalized identity 78  
groups (Ragins, 2007; Roberts, 2007), and future 79  
research could examine the conditions under which 80  
mentoring helps workers manage marginalized and 81  
stigmatized identities (Ragins, 2008). Finally, by 82  
providing relational functions that build resilience 83  
and capacity, high-quality mentoring may be a rela- 84  
tional resource that buffers both protégés and men- 85  
tors from stressful life events and challenges that 86  
originate from within and outside the workplace. 87

### 88 **Conclusion**

89 In conclusion, the field of POS expands the lens  
90 used to view mentoring relationships. Relational  
91 mentoring offers mentoring and relationship schol-  
92 ars an unobstructed vision of the possibilities of  
93 mentoring relationships and the potential of these  
94 relationships to influence the quality of life across  
95 domains.

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