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

When asked to reflect on relationships that have made a difference in their lives, many people think about their mentoring relationships. However, like other work relationships, mentoring relationships fall along a continuum of quality (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Mentoring researchers have focused on understanding the qualities, characteristics, and outcomes of average relationships but have not examined the high-quality end of the continuum. At its best, mentoring has the capacity to be a life-altering relationship that inspires and transforms individuals, groups, and organizations (Ragins & Kram, 2007). High-quality mentoring exemplifies positive relationships at work (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). By neglecting the high end of the quality continuum, we unnecessarily restrict our understanding of high-quality relationships, which in turn curtails our ability to cultivate and sustain these critical work relationships.

The field of positive organizational scholarship (POS) offers an important lens for understanding high-quality mentoring (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). 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 (Ragins, 2005). The antecedents, functions, processes, and characteristics of relational mentoring will be presented, along with an agenda for future research.
Mentoring and the Relational Perspective

In this section, I first offer an overview of mentoring and define mentoring using a traditional perspective. I then describe some of the limitations of the traditional approach and present the construct of relational mentoring as an alternative frame for viewing mentoring relationships at work.

What Is a Mentor?

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

Mentoring relationships may develop informally or may be assigned as part of a formal mentoring program (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007). Formal mentoring relationships are generally not as effective as informal relationships (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). However, the quality of the relationship has been found to matter more than whether the relationship is formally assigned or informally developed (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000); high-quality formal relationships can be more effective than low-quality informal relationships. Those with mentors, be they formal or informal, generally have more positive work and career attitudes than those lacking mentors (cf., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima 2004; Underhill, 2006).

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

Finally, it should be noted that mentoring relationships are part of a developmental network of relationships that exist within and outside the workplace (Higgins & Kram, 2001). At a given point in time, individuals may have a constellation of development relationships that offer career guidance and support. As discussed later, these relationships change individuals, and these changes are carried with the individual across life thresholds and the other relationships in their developmental network. As we will see, a key tenet of relational mentoring theory is that the outcomes associated with relational mentoring have the capacity to transform other relationships in the individual’s developmental network.

Mentoring Episodes

Like other relationships, mentoring relationships can be viewed at the level of a single interaction, which are called mentoring episodes (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Mentoring episodes involve short-term developmental interactions that occur at a specific point in time. Although all mentoring relationships involve mentoring episodes, individuals can engage in a mentoring episode without necessarily being in a mentoring relationship. Individuals may come to define their relationship as an informal mentoring relationship after they reach a “tipping point” in the number, length, and quality of mentoring episodes. For example, a junior faculty member may seek advice about a career-related dilemma from a more senior member of her department. Both individuals may agree that the senior faculty member engaged in mentoring behaviors during the specific episode, but neither may view it as a mentoring relationship at that point in time. However, with repeated positive interactions, they may begin to view their relationship as a mentoring relationship.

Like mentoring relationships, mentoring episodes fall along a continuum of quality. High-quality mentoring episodes are similar to high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) and growth-fostering interactions (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1976). High-quality connections are characterized by high emotional carrying capacity (i.e., the capacity to withstand both positive and negative emotions), tensility (i.e., the capacity to withstand strain), and high connectivity (i.e., the capacity to be open to new ideas and deflect behaviors that shut down generative processes) (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Growth-fostering interactions are characterized by
mutual empathy, authenticity, and empowerment, and lead to states of zest, empowered action, increased sense of self-worth, new knowledge, and the desire for more connection (Jordan et al., 1991; Miller, 1976). The higher the quality of the mentoring episode, the more likely individuals are to view their relationship as a mentoring relationship. Low-quality episodes are unlikely to lead to mentoring relationships. Episodes that are mixed in quality may lead to mentoring relationships, but as discussed next, these relationships are more likely to be characterized as average in quality.

The Continuum of Quality
Relational mentoring theory holds that mentoring relationships involve three relational states (dysfunctional, traditional, and relational) that reflect low, medium, and high ends of the quality continuum (Ragins, 2005). Like other relationships, no two mentoring relationships are the same or stay the same over time. Mentoring relationships provide different functions based on the needs of their members, which are continually evolving. Not only are there differences between relationships in terms of quality, but relationships also transform over time to reflect various states of quality (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). The continuum of mentoring quality therefore reflects not only differences across relationships but also within them. The field of mentoring has generally focused on mentoring relationships that reflect the midpoint of the quality continuum. There has been a significant amount of research directed toward understanding dysfunctional mentoring (e.g., Eby, 2007; Eby, Butts, Lockwood, & Simon, 2004; Eby, Evans, Durley, & Ragins, 2008; Scandura, 1998), but less is known about high-quality relationships. One reason for this is that, like other fields in organizational science, the field of mentoring focuses on phenomenon experienced by the majority of workers (e.g., average phenomenon). Although this captures the experiences of more workers, it curtails our understanding of the full range of mentoring experiences, and as discussed next, creates methodological problems and issues in our research.

The Need for a Positive Organizational Scholarship Perspective
The field of POS (Cameron et al., 2003) illuminates the problems with focusing on average phenomenon: Not only do we lose sight of the extraordinary, but the very description of our constructs suffers from conceptual and methodological inadequacy. This problem is aptly illustrated in the field of mentoring. Traditional perspectives on mentoring describe ordinary relationships of average quality, but by focusing on average relationships, our very definition and measurement of mentoring becomes limited to these types of relationships. For example, traditional perspectives on mentoring view it as a hierarchical, one-way relationship in which the mentor serves as a “godfather” in helping the protégé’s career and advancement. However, research on high-quality relationships questions this view and points to its limitations in understanding the processes and outcomes associated with high-quality relationships (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Because our theory explains average relationships, our measurement soon follows, and our empirical base of knowledge becomes limited to explaining average relationships. High-quality relationships fall off our conceptual and empirical map.

A Relational Approach to Mentoring
Relational mentoring puts high-quality mentoring back on the map. It does not reject traditional perspectives; these approaches explain average or marginally effective relationships, but do not explain high-quality relationships (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). By widening the conceptual lens of mentoring, relational mentoring allows us to assess the processes, characteristics, and outcomes of high-quality mentoring. Let us now turn to the four key principles that define relational mentoring and distinguish it from traditional approaches (Ragins, 2005; Ragins & Verbos, 2007).

USE OF A DYADIC AND RECIPROCAL PERSPECTIVE
First, relational mentoring challenges the view that all mentoring is a one-sided relationship, and instead points to the mutuality and reciprocity inherent in growth-producing relationships (cf., Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Instead of viewing the mentor as a prevailing source of power and influence, relational mentoring recognizes that high-quality relationships involve the capacity for mutual influence, growth, and learning. Both members enter the relationship expecting to grow, learn, and be changed by the relationship, and both feel a responsibility and a desire to contribute to the growth and development of their partner.

Although the overall level of expertise between the mentor and protégé may be asymmetrical,
a relational perspective recognizes that expertise
shifts within a given mentoring episode, which
allows for mutual learning for both members
(Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). For example, a faculty
mentor may help a protégé with publishing an arti-
cle, but the protégé may offer expertise in new sta-
tistical analyses. Influence is shared, with the mentor
using “power with” rather than “power over” influ-
ence strategies that characterize high-quality rela-
tionships (Follett, 1924; Miller, 1976). An example
of mutual growth can be found in diverse mentor-
ing relationships; diverse mentoring relationships
involve individuals who differ in group member-
ships associated with power (e.g., race, ethnicity,
gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability)
(Ragins, 1997). These relationships offer an ideal
platform for both mentors and protégés to learn
about diversity and to grow from the unique experi-
ences of those with different backgrounds, cultures,
nationalities, and experiences.

RELIANCE ON COMMUNAL NORMS AND
GENERATIVE PROCESSES
Second, relational mentoring calls to question
exchange paradigms and the instrumental approach to
mentoring. An instrumental approach uses a trans-
actional frame and values the relationship for what
it can do rather than what it can be. Instrumental
approaches use a social exchange framework (Blau,
1964, Homans, 1958, 1974) that relies on exchange
norms in the relationship. With exchange norms,
partners give to each other with the expectation that
they will receive a “return on their investment.” For
example, mentors may expect allegiance in return
for the favors bestowed on their protégés. In turn,
protégés may be advised to use their mentors as a
career resource and to “trade them in” when a better
mentor comes along. In contrast, relational mentor-
ing is a close relationship that is governed by com-
munal norms (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993), in
which individuals give to their partners on the basis
of need rather than on the basis of expected
returns.

EXTENDED RANGE OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES
Third, relational mentoring expands the range of
dependent variables used to capture the effective-
ness of mentoring relationships. Current approaches
use traditional criteria of career success, such as
advancement and compensation, which fail to cap-
ture the outcomes associated with high-quality
relationships (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Miller &
Stiver, 1997). Relational mentoring draws on the
relationship and the POS literatures to identify a
broad range of dependent variables that reflect per-
sonal growth and development, as well as the acqui-
sition of relational skills and competencies that may
be transportable across work roles and organiza-
tional boundaries (Fletcher, 1996; Kram & Ragins,
2007). A POS perspective offers an array of poten-
tial outcomes that include positive psychological
capital (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007), thriving
(Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant,
2005), flourishing (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008;
Keyes & Haidt, 2003), resilience (Luthans, 2002;
Luthans et al., 2007), and a host of other POS out-
comes identified in this volume.

Expanding the criteria base allows for a more
accurate assessment of the effectiveness of mentor-
ing relationships. For example, a high-quality rela-
tionship may help its members develop a professional
identity or balance work and family, but may not
lead to a change in compensation or advancement.
Researchers who use compensation or advancement
as evidence of effective mentoring may conclude
that the relationship is ineffective, when in fact the
relationship may be exceptionally effective in meet-
ing the unique needs of its members.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH
Finally, a relational perspective takes a holistic
approach that incorporates and acknowledges the
interaction between work and nonwork domains
(Ragins, 2008). Although traditional perspectives
view work relationships only in terms of work out-
comes, a holistic perspective recognizes that high-
quality relationships can influence the quality of life
within and outside the workplace (Ragins & Dutton,
2007). Relationships change people, and these
changes are not left at the workplace door. The reach
of high-quality mentoring may extend beyond the
workplace and may influence the individual’s ability
to cope with challenges that spill over across his or
her life domains (Ragins, Lyness, & Winkel, 2010).
For example, high-quality mentoring may build
an individual’s self-efficacy and her capacity for com-
passion (Boyatzis, 2007), as well as her emotional
intelligence (Cherniss, 2007), her capacity to cope
with stress (Kram & Hall, 1989), and her ability to
balance work and family demands (Greenhaus &
Singh, 2007). Although this chapter focuses on work
relationships, a developmental network perspective
holds that people have constellations of developmen-
tal and mentoring relationships that exist within and
outside the workplace (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Using a holistic perspective, high-quality mentoring
relationships outside the workplace can build an individual’s relational resources, which can be carried into the workplace and influence her ability to develop high-quality relationships at work.

In sum, in contrast to traditional, one-sided approaches to mentoring that use exchange models to predict a restricted range of instrumental outcomes, a relational approach widens the lens of mentoring to include high-quality, interdependent relationships that use communal norms to facilitate mutual growth, learning, and development within a career context. Relational mentoring incorporates a holistic perspective, and views mentoring as a positive work relationship that influences the quality of life within and outside the workplace. Let us now turn to a more in-depth review of the antecedents, processes, and outcomes that may be found in high-quality mentoring relationships.

Antecedents of Relational Mentoring

In this section, I review the individual, relational, and organizational factors that may lead to high-quality mentoring relationships. A number of individual variables may predict people’s ability to develop and sustain high-quality mentoring relationships (cf., Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Ragins, 2005, 2009; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). These include their self-structures of mentoring, their relational skills and knowledge, and other individual differences variables, such as personality, attachment styles, and emotional intelligence.

The Self-structures of Mentoring

Self-structures of mentoring involve three components: mentoring identities, mentoring schemas, and mentoring as possible selves (Ragins, 2005, 2009; Ragins & Verbos, 2007).

MENTORING IDENTITIES

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

Mentoring identities are a type of relational identity that involves individuals defining themselves in terms of their mentoring relationships (Ragins, 2009). Both mentors and protégés have mentoring identities, and these identities may range from positive to negative. Positive mentoring identities involve states of positive self-cognition (e.g., “Who am I? I am a good mentor.”). The individual not only defines him- or herself in terms of the mentoring relationship, but this self-structure also gives the individual positive cognitive and affective associations. Individuals who have positive mentoring identities are posited to be more motivated and better able to develop high-quality mentoring relationships than are those who do not have a positive mentoring identity (Ragins, 2009).

MENTORING SCHEMAS

Mentoring schemas are the second self-structure that influences relational mentoring. Mentoring schemas are “fluid cognitive maps derived from past experiences and relationships that guide mentor’s and protégé’s perceptions, expectations, and behaviors in mentoring relationships.” (Ragins & Verbos, 2007, p. 101) Drawing on relational schema (Baldwin, 1992; Planalp, 1985, 1987) and social cognition theory (Fiske, 1992; Markus, 1977; Markus & Zajonc, 1985), mentoring schema theory holds that individuals hold mental maps of mentoring that shape their expectations, frame their experiences, and motivate their behaviors in mentoring relationships (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Essentially, mentoring schemas are knowledge structures of what mentoring relationships “look like.” Mentoring schemas involve expectations about what mentors and protégés do in the relationship, what the relationship provides, and how it functions. As discussed later, relational mentoring involves a unique set of functions that distinguish it from average or dysfunctional relationships. Individuals who incorporate relational functions into their mental maps of mentoring should be more likely to develop high-quality mentoring relationships than are those who do not incorporate relational functions (Ragins, 2005). An example of a mentoring schema that would predict the development of a high-quality relationships is “Good mentors learn from their protégés and are able to grow in the relationship.” An example of a schema that would be less likely to result in a high-quality relationship is “Protégés should always listen to their mentors as the mentor knows best.”

MENTORING AS POSSIBLE SELVES

Possible selves reflect the selves we wish to become, as well as the selves we fear becoming (Markus &
Nurius, 1986). Mentoring as a possible self is defined as “a future oriented representation of oneself in a mentoring relationship” (Ragins, 2009, p. 243). The possible selves of mentoring range from positive to negative, reflecting the best and worst visions of oneself in a future mentoring relationship. Examples of different possible selves include: “I see myself as an effective, wonderful mentor,” “I can’t picture myself as a mentor,” and “I would be an awful mentor.” Those who hold positive self-visions should be more motivated to enter and sustain a high-quality mentoring relationship than are those who lack visions or hold negative visions of themselves in mentoring relationships (Ragins, 2005).

These three self-structures influence one another and are also affected by past and current experiences in mentoring relationships (Ragins, 2005). Those who have had high-quality mentoring relationships in the past, either as mentors or as protégés, may be more likely to have positive self-structures that allow them to develop and sustain high-quality relationships in the future. In contrast, those who lack these experiences may be less likely to incorporate mentoring into their identity structures; mentoring becomes tangential to who they are and who they aspire to be.

Even the experience of witnessing high-quality relationships can help individuals develop mentoring self-structures that offer a foundation for high-quality mentoring relationships. For example, high-quality mentoring relationships can be a source of role modeling for others in the organization, particularly if such relationships occur in high-ranking, visible positions. To the extent that mentoring culture is driven from the top, the presence of high-ranking relational mentoring may create mentoring cultures that both value and model high-quality relationships.

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

**Relational Skills, Caches, and Differences**

**RELATIONAL SKILLS**

Mentors and protégés should be more likely to develop and sustain high-quality relationships when they have the ability to engage in effective communication, empathic listening, personal learning, and self-reflection (Kram & Ragins, 2007). Emotional intelligence, emotional competence, and the ability to be compassionate may also help individuals develop high-quality mentoring relationships (Boyatzis, 2007; Cherniss, 2007; Fletcher, 1998; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Boyatzis (2007) observes that, by exhibiting compassion, mentors and protégés help each other engage in intentional change behaviors that allow them to achieve their dreams and aspirations.

Using Stone Center relational cultural theory (RCT) (Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997), Fletcher and Ragins (2007) identified a set of individual antecedents to relational mentoring. These include the ability to be authentic, adaptive, empathetic, interdependent, and vulnerable in the relationship (see also Fletcher, 1998, 1999). Another key antecedent is the ability to engage in fluid expertise; fluid expertise allows individuals to move from an expert to nonexpert role, to acknowledge help, and to give credit to others without losing self-esteem or needing to engage in “face-saving gambits” (Fletcher, 1998). Mentors in particular need to be able to put aside their hierarchical roles and formal position in order to enter the relationship from a place of mutual vulnerability, interdependence, and fluid role relationships. They must have the emotional stability and self-awareness necessary to allow for mutual influence in the relationship; influence that is based on needs and abilities, rather than on hierarchically prescribed roles and traditional power relationships.

**THE RELATIONAL CACHE CYCLE**

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

Relational caches are likely to be developed in high-quality relationships, and because people share and build relational skills in growth-producing relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997), they are also likely to be passed between members of these relationships. Moreover, since mentoring relationships exist within a broader network of other relationships (Higgins & Kram, 2001), members in high-quality mentorships may pass their relational caches to others in their social network. This becomes an iterative process in which mentors and protégés help each other broaden and build their skill caches, and in so doing develop relational caches that are passed along to members of their other relationships both within and outside the workplace.
In essence, a holistic perspective recognizes that individuals do not leave their relational skills at the workplace door, but carry them into other relationships nested within their homes, communities, and professional networks. Similarly, relational skills that are developed outside the work domain can be carried back into the workplace and can influence the quality of workplace mentoring. This suggests that the ability to develop high-quality relationships outside the workplace should spill over and influence relationships within the workplace and vice versa. An iterative cycle of positive relationships could therefore be developed that includes relationships nested in the workplace, the home, the community, and the profession.

**INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

A number of individual difference variables may influence an individual’s ability to develop and sustain high-quality relationships. Although there has been a lack of research on personality characteristics that predict high-quality mentoring, a recent review of the literature on mentoring and personality suggests that individuals who exhibit prosocial personalities, altruism, other-oriented empathy, and openness to experience may be more likely to engage in relational mentoring than are those who lack these attributes (cf. Turban & Lee, 2007; Allen, 2003; Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996; Bozionelos, 2004).

Given the relational skill set identified earlier, it would be reasonable to expect that individuals who had strong self-esteem, emotional stability, and emotional intelligence would be more likely to seek and develop high-quality mentoring relationships than would those who lack these attributes. Individuals with strong learning goal orientations (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003) should be attracted to the mutual learning processes inherent in high-quality mentoring relationships. Finally, attachment styles may influence the closeness of the mentoring relationship (Noe, Greenberger, & Wang (2002) and the motivation to enter a mentoring relationship (Wang, Noe, Wang, & Greenberger, 2009). According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), individuals with secure attachment styles may be better able to develop close relationships than would those who either avoid close relationships or experience anxiety in the presence of intimacy. Those with secure attachment styles are also better able to adhere to the communal norms that characterize close relationships (Bartz & Lydon, 2008). It is 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 attachment 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 relationship. Schema congruency should not only influence 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 expectations about the relationship.

Second, mentoring relationships are likely to be of higher quality when both members hold communal 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 relationship (Allen & Eby, 2008), and communal norms reflect the deepest form of relational commitment (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993); so, it is reasonable 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 learning 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 dissimilarity 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).
However, related research indicates that, over time, individuals find deep-level similarities that form the basis of effective work relationships (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). This suggests that members of diverse mentoring relationships may need to make a more concerted effort to discover similarities involving personality, values, and interests, and that diverse relationships may take more time to develop into high-quality mentoring relationships than demographically homogeneous relationships (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002; Ragins, 1997).

The fourth characteristic that may influence relational quality is the structure of the mentoring relationship. For example, whereas informal relationships often develop on the basis of shared interests and commonalities, formal mentoring relationships are usually assigned by a third party and are therefore less likely to have this advantage. In recognition of this limitation, some formal programs involve mentors and protégés in the matching process, and existing research indicates that this procedure may yield higher-quality relationships (Allen et al., 2006).

Even so, formal relationships are usually contracted to last between 6 months and a year, which restricts the time needed to reach a high-quality state (Ragins, 2005). In contrast, informal mentoring relationships usually span between 3 and 5 years, which allows more time for members to establish trust, reciprocity, and interdependence in the mentoring relationship.

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

**Organization Antecedents**

Mentoring relationships do not exist in a vacuum but are nested within the organizational context. Some organizations promote a mentoring culture that values shared knowledge, collaboration, and learning (Eby, Lockwood, & Butts, 2006). These cultures should be more likely to promote relational mentoring than organizations that are characterized by competitiveness, hierarchical relationships, and traditional forms of power that restrict mutual learning, reciprocity, and interdependence in work relationships (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007).

In sum, characteristics of the individual, relationship, and organization may influence the ability of individuals to develop high-quality mentoring relationships. Let us now turn to a more in-depth examination of the functions and processes of high-quality mentoring relationships.

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

_The Evolution of Mentoring Functions_

Over 25 years ago, Kathy Kram (1985, p. 22) defined mentoring functions as “those aspects of a developmental relationship that enhance both individuals’ growth and advancement” (italics added). Although this definition took a dyadic perspective, the functions described in her landmark book focused primarily on what the mentor provides to the protégé. Kram described two classifications of mentor functions, career development and psychosocial, and identified discrete functions or behaviors within each of these categories. Career development functions help protégés advance in the organization and include five subcategories: sponsoring advancement, providing job coaching, increasing positive exposure and visibility in the organization, offering protection, and giving challenging assignments. Mentors also provide _psychosocial functions_, and the four subcategories here include role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship.

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

Relational mentoring builds on this existing work in two key ways. First, hearkening back to...
Kram’s (1985) initial definition, relational mentoring examines the functions and processes provided by both members of the relationship. Second, because relational mentoring seeks to explain processes involved in high-quality relationships, the range of functions in the relationship are extended to include the qualities, behaviors, and characteristics found in close interpersonal relationships (Duck, 1994; Mashek & Aron, 2004), high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), growth-fostering interactions (Jordan et al., 1991; Miller, 1976), and positive relationships at work (Dutton & Ragins, 2007).

Relational mentoring offers a third category of mentoring functions: relational functions. Relational functions do not substitute for career development or psychosocial functions, but represent an additional category that reflects high-quality relationships. From the negative side of the spectrum, research has presented new measures that capture the functions, behaviors, and characteristics found in dysfunctional mentoring relationships (Eby et al., 2004, 2008). Mirroring this work from a positive perspective, this section describes relational functions, and a preliminary measure of relational functions is provided in Table 39.1.

Relational Functions

Relational functions represent a third category of mentoring functions that reflects the characteristics, behaviors, and attributes that may be found in high-quality mentoring relationships. The list of such characteristics can be extensive, but here I am only identifying key functions that may be displayed by both mentors and protégés in high-quality relationships and episodes. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but reflects core attributes drawn from related research and theory in the relationships, social psychology, social cognition, and mentoring literatures. Drawing on this work, relational functions may include six subcategories: personal learning and growth, inspiration, affirmation of selves, reliance on communal norms, shared influence and mutual respect, and relational trust and commitment.

PERSONAL LEARNING AND GROWTH

Learning can be both a process and an outcome of mentoring relationships (Kram & Ragins, 2007; Lankau & Scandura, 2007). In terms of process, high-quality mentorships differ from traditional relationships in the mutuality, type, and degree of learning. Traditional approaches view the mentor as 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 relationships involve fluid expertise, in which expertise shifts depending on the mentoring episode or interaction (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 learning should occur in high-quality relationships because learning is based on the individual’s task expertise or knowledge, rather than on their hierarchical 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 relationships (cf., review by Lankau & Scandura, 2007), high-quality relationships are more likely to produce 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 developmental needs, reactions, and patterns of behaviors (Kram, 1996; Higgins & Kram, 2001). Learning therefore can involve not only the sharing of information 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 feedback that illuminates the “blind spots” in their relationships with others, while giving them insights into their personal strengths and weaknesses.

INSPIRATION

Inspiration is an evoked psychological state derived 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.”).

Mentors and protégés have the capacity to inspire each other in their mentoring episodes and relationships. 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 development 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*)

(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. |
| Function: Shared Influence and Respect |
| 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. |
| Function: Trust and Commitment |
| 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.

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that mentors may serve as role models for their protegés. Role modeling approaches, but does not fully capture the possibilities for inspiration in high-quality mentoring relationships; members are not only "inspired by" others (e.g., the mentor serving as a role model), but can also be "inspired to" engage in new and creative behaviors and may also engage in a reciprocal and synergistic process of mutual inspiration (e.g., "inspired with"). Traditional perspectives on role modeling ignore the possibility of mutual inspiration in which the mentor both inspires and is inspired by his or her protégé. Another distinction is that role modeling involves emulation and admiration, whereas inspiration can involve sparks of creativity that allow both members of the relationship to think about things in fresh and new ways (Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer, & Ryan, 2010). Mutual inspiration can involve synergistic "thinking outside the box" behaviors that can be beneficial for both mentors and protégés (Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin, & Cassidy, 2010). High-quality relationships offer the psychological space in which inspiration can thrive (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), and it is reasonable to expect that both mentors and protégés will report that their partner inspires them, gives them a fresh perspective, and helps them think about work and life in new ways.

29. AFFIRMATION OF IDEAL, BEST, AND AUTHENTIC SELVES

The self is not formed in a vacuum, but is crafted through relationships with others (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). High-quality mentoring relationships may help their members develop three aspects of the self: their ideal selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), their best selves (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005), and their authentic selves (Goffman, 1959; Harter, 2002).

Ideal selves represent the selves we wish to become in the future; they reflect our hopes, dreams, and aspirations, as well the skills, abilities, achievements, and accomplishments that we wish to attain (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Research from the close relationships literature indicates that partners play a key role in helping each other reach their ideal selves. Drawing on interdependence theory (Kelley, 1983; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996) and the ideal self literature (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), Drigotas and his colleagues offer the idea of the Michelangelo phenomenon (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). Using the metaphor of the sculptor who helps the true form emerge from the stone, the Michelangelo phenomenon describes the role that close partners play in affirming one another’s pursuit of the ideal self and the means by which the self is shaped by a close partner’s perceptions and behaviors (Drigotas, 2002; Drigotas et al., 1999).

The Michelangelo phenomenon has great utility for explaining the processes involved in high-quality mentoring. This phenomenon holds that an individual can help his partner reach his ideal self by offering affirmations that confirm the partner’s beliefs about himself and by behaving in ways that are congruent with his partner’s ideal self (Drigotas, 2002; Drigotas et al., 1999). Partner affirmations take the form of perceptual affirmation, in which partners view each other in terms of their ideal selves, and behavioral affirmations, in which individuals help their partners engage in behaviors that
are aligned with their ideal selves by directly eliciting or creating opportunities to engage in desired behaviors, or by decreasing the opportunity to engage in behaviors that conflict with ideal selves.

Existing research has found support for this phenomenon and has found that movement toward ideal selves predicts positive outcomes reflecting relational and personal well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, emotional well-being, self-esteem, vitality, relational stability, relational satisfaction) (Dritogas, 2002; Dritogas et al., 1999; Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009).

By providing affirmation, high-quality mentoring relationships may also help their members develop their “reflected best self.” Reflected best selves are defined as “an individual’s cognitive representation of the qualities or characteristics an individual displays when at his or her best” (Roberts et al., 2005, p. 713). Reflected best selves share some features of the ideal self, but focus more on the qualities and characteristics the person currently has rather than on those they wish to possess (cf. Higgins, 1987).

According to Roberts and colleagues, mentoring relationships are relational resources individuals can use to develop portraits or mental representations of who they are when they are at their personal best. Through behavioral and perceptual affirmation, mentors and protégés may help each other expand their collective constellation of possible selves and provide the opportunity to bring their best selves forward in their mentoring relationship.

In addition to best and ideal selves, high-quality mentoring relationships may also affirm the presentation of the authentic self. The authentic self represents one’s “true or real self” (Gergen, 1991; Mitchell, 1992). Unlike ideal and best selves, authentic selves include not only our best, but also our worst traits, characteristics, and attributes.

High-quality relationships allow for the affirmation of the authentic self (Mitchell, 1992; see also Roberts, 2007). Unlike other relationships in which the authentic self is repressed, hidden, or distorted (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980), high-quality relationships offer the relational space, affirmation, and acceptance needed to close the space between the presented and the actual self (Roberts, 2007; Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). Drawing on self-verification theory, such congruence may lead to positive outcomes for the individual (Swann, 1983, 1987) and their work relationships (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004).

**RELIANCE ON COMMUNAL NORMS**

A key factor that distinguishes high-quality relationships from other relationships is the reliance on communal norms (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993). In relationships governed by communal norms, the focus is on the partner’s well-being, and benefits are given in response to the partner’s needs without expecting repayment (Clark & Mills, 1979). In contrast, in exchange relationships benefits are given with the expectation that a comparable benefit will be provided in return. The individual receiving the benefit incurs an obligation or debt to return a comparable benefit to his or her partner. Clark and Mills point out that communal relationships vary in strength (Clark & Mills, 1993; Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004); in strong communal relationships individuals feel a strong responsibility for the welfare of their partner, whereas in weak communal relationships, people take on less responsibility for their partner’s welfare. They observe that norms vary across relationships, with communal norms being more likely to be enacted in close relationships involving family members and friends, whereas exchange norms prevail in relationships between employers and their employees (Clark & Jordan, 2002).

Like other relationships, mentoring relationships may vary by the type and strength of relationship norms. Since mentoring relationships can range from close personal relationships to formally assigned relationships that embody a contractual relationship, it is reasonable to expect that high-quality mentoring relationships are more likely to rely on communal rather than exchange norms, and that the stronger the communal norm, the higher the quality of the relationship (Ragins, 2005). As a related construct, reciprocity can be governed by either communal or exchange norms, and it is expected that mentoring relationships that use exchange-based norms for reciprocity should be of lower quality and have more problematic outcomes than relationships that rely on communal-based norms for reciprocity. For example, mentors who expect or require that their protégés return a comparable benefit may be viewed as exploiting their protégé (cf., Shore, Toyokawa, & Anderson, 2008), whereas protégés who give to their mentor but later expect a benefit in return may be viewed as manipulative (Eby et al., 2008). In contrast, mentors and protégés who give to each other because of concern for the well-being of their partner and their relationship not only reflect a state of relational mentoring,
but also offer a foundation for other relational processes that further enhance the relationship. The use of social exchange models may therefore explain average, marginal, or even dysfunctional mentoring relationships, but do not capture the relational processes inherent in high-quality relationships.

7 SHARED INFLUENCE AND MUTUAL RESPECT
Relational mentoring is characterized by shared influence, which involves the process by which members influence and are influenced by each other (Ragins, 2005). Mutuality is the norm in high-quality mentoring, and influence is based on the individual's expertise in a given mentoring episode, rather than on their hierarchical position (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Although by definition mentors have more experience in work or career domains, protégés bring their own insights, life experiences, and talents to the table, and mentors in high-quality relationships value and are influenced by their protégés' perspectives.

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

Shared influence reflects interdependence in the relationship. Interdependence in close relationships involves vulnerability (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) and may also involve the ability of individuals to empower one another in a relational sense. Relational empowerment involves reciprocal influence, mutual empathy, concern, and vulnerability in the relationship (Surrey, 1991), and therefore differs from other forms of empowerment that focus more on control over work functions (Spreitzer, 2008). Although empowerment is often used interchangeably with shared influence, it is important to preserve this distinction when examining mentoring relationships. Mentors who are supervisors may empower their protégés by giving them more control over their work functions. This may be in addition to, or in place of, shared influence, which is a mutual process that is not limited to work functions (Jordan, 1991). Shared influence is broader in scope than empowerment, and is better able to describe processes in a range of mentoring relationships.

6 RELATIONAL TRUST AND COMMITMENT
Although there are many different conceptualizations of trust (Lewicki Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006), trust is commonly defined as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). Rousseau and colleagues observe that trust is not a behavior or a choice, but rather a psychological condition that reflects the willingness to be vulnerable under conditions of risk and interdependence.

Relational trust may best reflect the processes in high-quality mentoring, as this type of trust comes from the relationship itself (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; McAllister, 1995). Relational trust reflects communal norms (Clark & Mills, 1979), in that individuals perceive their partners as being committed to the relationship and that they give on the basis of need rather than self-interest (McAllister, 1995), and also incorporates elements of respect (Frei & Shaver, 2002). Relational trust develops through repeated interactions (Rousseau et al., 1998), or in the case of mentoring, mentoring episodes (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Lewicki and colleagues observe that trust is influenced not only by the length of the relationship, but also by the frequency and depth of interactions, and the diversity of challenges that are successfully faced in the relationship (Lewicki et al., 1998).

Relational trust is intricately connected to commitment in high-quality work relationships and other close relationships (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). In their analyses of trust processes in positive relationships at work, Pratt and Dirks (2007) point out that traditional perspectives on trust use a social exchange perspective (e.g., "I'll trust you if you trust me"), which does not explain how trust can be broken and then repaired in high-quality relationships. They offer the idea that trust is a relationship-based commitment in high-quality relationships. The commitment to the relationship allows individuals to experience both the negative effects of personal vulnerability as well as the positive benefits of being in a trusting relationship.
Applying these perspectives to the mentoring arena, it is reasonable to expect that high-quality mentoring relationships involve affective forms of relational trust that are grounded not only in the commitment to the partner, but also in the commitment to the relationship. The development of this type of trust not only takes time, but the opportunity to engage in mentoring episodes that challenge the relationship and allow members to illustrate their commitment to each other and the relationship.

Future Directions
Future research could examine the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of high-quality mentoring relationships. Researchers could use the self-structure of mentoring framework (Ragins, 2009) and mentoring schema theory (Ragins & Verbos, 2007) to examine how mentoring identities, schemas, and possible selves combine to influence the development of high-quality relationships. Self-structures are shaped by past relationships and episodes, but what types of specific experiences are most important for developing relational mentoring? Can individuals develop positive self-structures from observing others, or do they need direct experience? Do these relationships differ for those in formal mentoring relationships, and how can organizations promote the development of positive self-structures in the workplace?

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

The Relational Mentoring Index (RMI; Table 39.1) provided here offers a first step in examining the functions and processes of high-quality mentoring relationships. Future research needs to validate the instrument and assess its ability to predict outcomes of high-quality relationships. The RMI could also be tested in conjunction with traditional measures of mentoring roles and functions in order to assess the added variance in outcomes that can be accounted for by an inclusion of measures that tap the characteristics of high-quality relationships. Since the measure taps relational functions provided by both members of the relationship, a dyadic approach can be used to assess the psychometric properties of the instrument for both mentors and protégés.

A relational approach to mentoring also opens the doors to examining an expanded array of outcomes associated with the fields of POS (Cameron et al., 2003), positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2002), and positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007). Mentoring scholars have assessed the quality of mentoring relationships using traditional measures that reflect protégé’s job attitudes, compensation, and advancement, but a relational approach offers an array of outcomes that reflect personal growth, learning, and development for both members of the relationship (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Ragins, 2005; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Using a holistic perspective (Ragins, 2008; Ragins & Dutton, 2007) the reach of relational mentoring may extend beyond the workplace to influence quality of life in the nonwork domain, and may predict such outcomes as life satisfaction, physical and psychological health, balance, and well-being. The affirmation of identity in high-quality relationships has particular resonance among those in marginalized identity groups (Ragins, 2007; Roberts, 2007), and future research could examine the conditions under which mentoring helps workers manage marginalized and stigmatized identities (Ragins, 2008). Finally, by providing relational functions that build resilience and capacity, high-quality mentoring may be a relational resource that buffers both protégés and mentors from stressful life events and challenges that originate from within and outside the workplace.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the field of POS expands the lens used to view mentoring relationships. Relational mentoring offers mentoring and relationship scholars an unobstructed vision of the possibilities of mentoring relationships and the potential of these relationships to influence the quality of life across domains.

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