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# *Phases of the Mentor Relationship*<sup>1</sup>

**KATHY E. KRAM**  
Boston University

*The mentor relationship can significantly enhance development in early adulthood and also in the midcareer stage of the more experienced individual. A conceptual model derived from an intensive biographical interview study of 18 relationships in one corporate setting is presented to highlight the successive phases of this developmental relationship.*

An individual who is entering the adult world and the world of work is likely to encounter a variety of developmental tasks that are reflected in concerns about self, career, and family (Bray, Campbell, & Grant, 1974; Gould, 1978; Hall, 1976; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Schein, 1978; Super, 1957; Vaillant, 1977). A mentor relationship can significantly enhance development in early adulthood by facilitating work on these tasks (Clawson, 1980; Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977; Levinson et al., 1978). The mentor provides a variety of functions that support, guide, and counsel the young adult as this important work is accomplished.

Adult development perspectives suggest that the primary task of early adulthood is one of *initiation*, and the primary task of middle adulthood is one of *reappraisal*. Through a presentation of a conceptual model derived from empirical study, it will be demonstrated that the mentor relationship has great potential to facilitate career advancement and psychosocial development in both early and middle adulthood by providing a vehicle for accomplishing these primary developmental tasks. In addition, it is argued that the potential value of a mentor relationship is limited and that, indeed, a relationship of this kind can become destructive.

## **Theoretical Review**

A young adult, in the first stage of his or her career, is likely to be engaged in forming an occupational identity, forming a dream, forming intimate

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relationships, and forming a mentor relationship (Levinson et al., 1978). It is a time when questions about one's competence, one's effectiveness, and one's ability to achieve future dreams are most salient. Erikson (1963, 1968) describes the primary tasks of this era in terms of two polarities that become the focus of attention for the young adult: "role identity versus role confusion" and "intimacy versus isolation." Alternatively, the primary tasks of this era are stated in terms of the individual's relationship to the organization in which s/he is working. Learning the ropes of organizational life encompasses the development of requisite technical, interpersonal, and political skills, as well as a sense of competence in a particular work context or occupation (Berlew & Hall, 1966; Hall, 1976; Schein & Van Maanen, 1977; Webber, 1976). Thus the young adult is likely to seek relationships at work that provide opportunities for resolving the dilemmas posed in early adult and career years.

In contrast, the more experienced adult at midlife and/or midcareer is likely to be in a period of reassessment and reappraisal during which time past accomplishments are reviewed, and one is confronted with the challenge of readjusting future dreams and coming to terms with past accomplishments (Gould, 1972, 1978; Jung, 1933; Levinson et al., 1978; Neutarten, 1968; Osherson, 1980; Sofer, 1970; Vaillant, 1977). It has been suggested that this period of life can be extremely difficult as one realizes that life is half over and one's career has been fairly well-determined (Dalton, 1959; Jacquest, 1965; Sofer, 1970). For those who find themselves with no further advancement or growth opportunities, this time of life can be particularly troublesome (Hall & Kram, 1981; Levinson, 1976).

Entering a developmental relationship with a young adult provides an opportunity at midlife to redirect one's energies into creative and productive action that can be responsive to these salient concerns. The Eriksonian polarity at this life stage, "generativity versus stagnation," suggests the potential value of a mentor relationship. Through enabling others, the mid-life individual satisfies important generative needs (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1978) and also has the opportunity to review and reappraise the past by participating in a younger adult's attempts to face the challenges of early adulthood. Individuals may feel challenged, stimulated, and creative in providing mentoring functions as they become "senior adults" with wisdom to share; alternatively, they may feel rivalrous and threatened by a younger adult's growth and advancement.

There is considerable agreement among those who have studied mentoring that in order to understand fully the nature and impact of this developmental relationship, it is necessary to examine how it changes over time (Clawson, 1979; Davis & Garrison, 1979; Kram, 1980; Levinson et al., 1978; Missirian, 1982; Phillips, 1977). Levinson et al. (1978) acknowledge that more often than not, a mentor relationship ends with considerable ambivalence and anger, with both gratitude and resentment; and that, much like a love relationship, a battle occurs at termination of the relationship that enables mentor and protégé to separate and to move into new relationships

that are appropriate to their current developmental needs. Although Levinson et al. (1978) allude to changes in the nature of the mentor relationship over time, these are not explicitly discussed in their work.

Missirian (1982) and Phillips (1977) have made a further contribution, in their studies of female managers, by delineating phases of the mentor relationship. However, both of these models were derived from retrospective accounts of managers who described relationships from earlier in their careers, presenting the possibility of distortion in the data because of faulty recall. Second, they were derived from one perspective of the relationship, rather than from personal accounts of both parties of the relationship. Thus, they do not clearly delineate how the relationship benefits the mentor, but only how it benefits the younger individual. Third, these phase models are based solely on interviews with female managers, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a particular population that does not include the many mentor relationships that involve men. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these studies, though illuminating what generally occurs in the mentor relationship, fail to identify the factors that cause a relationship to move from one phase to the next.

The conceptual model presented in this paper clarifies the phases of a mentor relationship by systematically delineating the psychological and organizational factors that cause movement from one phase to the next. In addition, the conceptualization, derived from an intensive biographical interview study of *pairs* of managers, makes the experiences of both individuals explicit, highlighting how both can be beneficiaries of the relationship. This dynamic perspective illuminates the manner in which the mentor relationship unfolds over time as well as how each individual influences and is influenced by the relationship at each successive phase.

### Research Method

This research is based on the study of 18 developmental relationships as they are occurring. Pairs of younger and older managers involved in significant relationships with each other were interviewed at length about their relationships with each other. Thus it is a study of *pairs* of managers involved in relationships that *currently* are affecting each manager's development. In addition, these 18 relationships are in *different* phases.

Methodological decisions were guided by the premise that an appropriate research strategy emerges from careful consideration of the interaction of the problem, the method, and the person-researcher (Reinharz, 1979). The exploratory nature of the research problem suggested the need for a flexible data collection method that would encourage unpredicted aspects of the phenomenon to surface (Filstead, 1970). The emphasis on individuals' subjective experience of the relationship as the primary data for understanding the relationship's essential characteristics required in-depth clinical interviewing of a small number of individuals so that sufficient time could be spent exploring the relationship at length by obtaining personal accounts

from each member of the pair. Finally, a method was chosen that fostered a research relationship of considerable intimacy during the joint task of exploring the meaning of the relationship in an individual's career history so that valid information could be obtained and mutual learning for both investigator and participant could occur.

### **Setting and Sample**

The research was conducted in a large northeastern public utility of 15,000 employees. The management population consists of managers in a hierarchical structure with 2,000 at first level management, 1,000 at second level, 250 at third level, 55 at fourth level, and 25 in top management. Young managers between the ages of 25 and 35 who had three or more years of tenure in the organization and who were at first, second, or third levels of management were identified as the central target population. Theories of adult development and career development suggested that this group represented the population for which the need for mentoring would be greatest; if developmental relationships existed at all, they most likely would exist in this group.

Interviews with a random sample of 15 young managers who met the above criteria for selection into the research pool resulted in the identification of only 3 developmental relationships. Because theoretical sampling is more important than statistical sampling in an exploratory qualitative study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a decision was made to obtain recommendations from personnel staff of young managers who they believed had developmental relationships. This recruitment process allowed for several exploratory questions in the interview, which resulted in identification of 12 more young managers who had mentors. Three of the young managers each reported two developmental relationships, thus accounting for 18 relationships studied.

The young managers range in age from 26-34 with an average age of 31.3 years (see Table 1). They have been working in the organization for an average of 9.2 years. Eight of the young managers are male, and seven are female. They currently are in second or third level management positions. The senior managers range in age from 39 to 63, with an average age of 47. They have been working for the organization for an average of 23 years. Two of them have recently left the organization. All but one of the senior managers are male. Three of the senior managers are at third level management, the remainder are at fourth level or above. At the time of the interviews, 11 of the 18 relationships were direct reporting relationships; however, 4 of them involved an indirect reporting relationship (separated by two levels of the management hierarchy) in an earlier phase.

### **Interview Method**

The interview sequence with the young managers consisted of two two-hour sessions. During the first session, the primary task was to review the

**Table 1**  
**Sample Description**

Relationship <sup>a</sup>	Junior Manager			Senior Manager			Relationship	
	Age (in Years)	Sex	Level	Age (in Years)	Sex	Level	Age Difference (in Years)	Level Difference
1	33	M	3	44	M	4	11	1
2 <sup>b</sup>	32	M	3	49	M	4	17	1
3 <sup>b</sup>	32	M	3	46	M	4	14	1
4	34	M	3	39	M	4	5	1
5 <sup>b</sup>	33	M	3	45	M	5	12	2
6 <sup>b</sup>	33	M	3	55	M	5	22	2
7	33	M	2	46	M	3	13	1
8	31	M	3	44 <sup>c</sup>	M	4	13	1
9	33	M	3	48 <sup>c</sup>	M	4	15	1
10	33	M	3	63	M	Retired	30	2
11 <sup>b</sup>	32	F	3	41	M	3	9	0
12 <sup>b</sup>	32	F	3	44	M	4	12	1
13	30	F	2	44	M	4	14	2
14	31	F	2	44 <sup>c</sup>	M	4	13	2
15	26	F	3	48 <sup>c</sup>	M	4	22	1
16	28	F	2	47	M	3	19	1
17	31	F	2	55	M	4	24	2
18	30	F	2	42	F	Left company	12	2

<sup>a</sup>In the research sample, relationships varied from less than 2 years to 11 years. At the time of the research study, only one relationship had clearly ended, five relationships were in the cultivation phase, and the remainder had been through one or more phases of separation created by structural job changes and/or significant changes within one or both individuals. The four phases vary in length, and in some instances a recycling occurs through the cultivation and separation phases several times.

<sup>b</sup>Three junior managers had two developmental relationships that were studied. Relationships 2 and 3, 5 and 6, and 11 and 12 each have a junior manager in common. Thus, there are 15 different junior managers in the sample.

<sup>c</sup>Two senior managers were identified as significant others twice. Thus, relationships 8 and 14, and 9 and 15 each have a senior manager in common. Thus, there are 16 different senior managers in the sample.

young manager's career history and to explore relationships with more senior managers that had been important during his or her life in the organization. During the second interview session, the primary task was to explore one or two relationships with senior managers that had been important in the young manager's career. This was accomplished by reconstructing significant events as the relationship unfolded and by following the thoughts and feelings that the young manager expressed as s/he told the story.

The pivotal question at the end of the first interview that identified the relationship(s) that would become the focus of study during the second interview was, "Is there anyone among those that you have mentioned today that you feel has taken a personal interest in you and your development?" In response to this question, the young managers were able to review their feelings and thoughts in order to arrive at a clear statement of the person they wanted to talk about in the second interview. These significant others then were contacted and invited to participate in a parallel interview sequence. The study was introduced to the senior managers by reviewing how they had been mentioned by a young manager as someone who had

contributed to his or her development. All of the senior managers contacted were quite willing to participate in interviews about the relationship.

The first interview with each senior manager was parallel to the second young manager interview; the history of the relationship was explored and the senior manager was encouraged to describe his or her experience of the relationship as significant events were identified. The second session of the senior manager interview sequence was devoted to exploring the senior manager's career history. The purpose of this segment was to illuminate how the relationship with the young manager fit into the senior manager's career and, in turn, how the relationship influenced his or her development.

This research method has intervention consequences. Certain efforts were taken to minimize potential negative consequences: careful debriefing at the conclusion of the interview sequence, careful linking processes to the senior managers that insured the confidentiality of all individual interviews, and an invitation, in the feedback report, to research participants to contact the researcher with questions.

### **Analysis**

The primary method of analysis was characterized by an inductive process in which tentative hypotheses concerning developmental relationships were suggested and revised as interviews were conducted. As the number of relationships in the sample increased, themes and categories began to emerge to illuminate recurring patterns in the data. These themes and categories became the basis for the conceptual model of the phases of the mentor relationship. This inductive process, characterized by continuous movement between data and concepts until the time when sufficient categories have been defined to explain what has been observed, is described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the "constant comparative method of analysis."

The actual delineation of the conceptual model involved extensive use of illustrative quotations from the case material. This process included intuitively sorting the case material, identifying the organizing concepts, and then clarifying the link between concepts and data through written presentation. An informal test of the usefulness and accuracy of the emergent analysis evolved early in the analysis phase. When case material could not be effectively utilized to illustrate a concept, it was concluded that the concept was inadequate or inappropriate in some way. The more the accounts of managers could stand alone in illustrating the emergent analysis, the more credible was the new conceptual understanding.

### **Relationship Phases**

A mentor relationship has the potential to enhance career development and psychosocial development of both individuals. Through career functions, including sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure-and-visibility, and challenging work assignments, a young manager is assisted in learning

## Exhibit 1 Mentoring Functions

<i>Career Functions<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Psychosocial Functions<sup>b</sup></i>
Sponsorship	Role modeling
Exposure-and-visibility	Acceptance-and-confirmation
Coaching	Counseling
Protection	Friendship
Challenging assignments	

<sup>a</sup>Career functions are those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance career advancement.

<sup>b</sup>Psychosocial functions are those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in the managerial role.

the ropes of organizational life and in preparing for advancement opportunities. Through psychosocial functions including role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship, a young manager is supported in developing a sense of competence, confidence, and effectiveness in the managerial role (see Exhibit 1). In providing a range of developmental functions, a senior manager gains recognition and respect from peers and superiors for contributing to the development of young managerial talent, receives confirmation and support from the young manager who seeks counsel, and experiences internal satisfaction in actively enabling a less experienced adult to learn how to navigate successfully in the world of work.

Examination of the phases of a mentor relationship highlights the psychological and organizational factors that influence which career and psychosocial functions are provided, and it shows how each manager experiences the relationship at any given point in time. Although developmental relationships vary in length (average length of five years in the research sample), they generally proceed through four predictable, yet not entirely distinct, phases: an *initiation* phase, during which time the relationship is started; a *cultivation* phase, during which time the range of functions provided expands to maximum; a *separation* phase, during which time the established nature of the relationship is substantially altered by structural changes in the organizational context and/or by psychological changes within one or both individuals; and a *redefinition* phase, during which time the relationship evolves a new form that is significantly different from the past, or the relationship ends entirely.

### Initiation

Young managers' recollections of the first 6 to 12 months of the relationship suggest that a strong positive fantasy emerges in which the senior manager is admired and respected for his or her competence and his or her capacity to provide support and guidance. In this fantasy, the senior manager embodies an object for positive identification and is viewed as someone

who will support the young manager's attempts to operate effectively in the organizational world. With time, the senior manager's behavior lends credence to these initial fantasies, and the behavior is experienced as inviting and supportive. The young manager begins to feel cared for, supported, and respected by someone who is admired and who can provide important career and psychosocial functions:

I think being a first job in my career, there were a lot of transitions I was making, and a lot of them were hard. . . . You know—realizing that you were at the bottom—there were thousands of others like you, and you didn't know everything to start with—wanting to know and not knowing. . . and wanting challenging work and not getting it. . . .

Yet John, three levels of management away from me—he hired me—and I guess I had the feeling that he believed in me—and that even though I didn't have the right degree, I could still do it. . . . I had the feeling that in fact there was someone who recognized what I was going through and who had faith in me to make the right decisions. . . . I was able to do a lot of different projects, work with others, and really get in the know because of him. . . .

Senior managers' recollections of this period suggest that the young manager quickly comes to represent someone with potential, someone who is "coachable," and someone who is enjoyable to work with. A fantasy evolves of someone who can become an object for the transmission of the senior manager's values and perspectives on the world. The young manager is viewed as someone who can provide technical assistance and who can benefit substantially from the senior manager's advice and counsel. Thus the possibility of contributing to the young manager's growth and success is impetus for setting the relationship in motion:

Karen was the second or third person that came in. I interviewed her and I was completely impressed with her. My assessment of her was that she was a real comer—I tried to give her some advice of sorts as I got to know her—you know, understanding what the company is about. . . taking her to meetings and giving her the opportunity to present her ideas. . . .

I guess I really get an inner pride, particularly in being someone getting all that respect so fast from other people. It is kind of challenging to help them succeed. The accomplishment is not that I hired them, but that over time other people recognize them as well. That really puffs out your chest a bit. That other people agree with your assessment and judgments. . . . It's like being in a hall of fame, when they succeed because of your help—maybe you don't get all the applause, but you did a tremendous job!

Initial interactions that create and support positive expectations occur in a variety of contexts, including: a direct hire interview; an informal interaction around common work tasks; and a direct reporting relationship created by unrelated promotional decisions or through recommendation from peers that encourages the senior manager to seek out the young manager as a potential subordinate. Work on common business tasks, recommendations from significant others, and discussions of performance or departmental concerns cause each to develop an increasingly positive expectation of the value of relating to the other. In most cases there is a balance of initiative on both sides: the young manager begins to look towards the senior manager for support and guidance, and the senior manager begins to provide developmental opportunities.

The events of the first year serve to transform initial fantasies into concrete positive expectations. For example, an opportunity to work on a high



visibility project is interpreted by the young manager as proof of the senior manager's caring, interest, and respect. Alternatively, a request for assistance or a volunteered criticism of the department is interpreted by the senior manager as proof of the young manager's assertiveness and competence. These interpretations set the relationship in motion and provide the foundation for its movement to a new phase.

### **Cultivation**

During the cultivation phase, lasting from two to five years, the positive expectations that emerge during the initiation phase are continuously tested against reality. As the relationship continues to unfold, each individual discovers the real value of relating to the other. The range of career functions and psychosocial functions characterizing a mentor relationship peaks during this phase.

Generally, career functions emerge first as the senior manager provides challenging work, coaching, exposure-and-visibility, protection, and/or sponsorship. As the interpersonal bond strengthens with time, psychosocial functions emerge. In some instances they include, primarily, modeling and acceptance-and-confirmation. In other instances of greater intimacy, they extend to include counseling and friendship as well. Career functions depend on the senior manager's organizational rank, tenure, and experience, but psychosocial functions depend on the degree of trust, mutuality, and intimacy that characterize the relationship.

A young manager, after two years in a developmental relationship, notes how challenging work assignments, coaching, role modeling, and acceptance-and-confirmation contributed to his growing sense of competence and enabled him to navigate more effectively in his immediate organizational world:

It is a hard thing to put your finger on, but it is reinforcing. He has given me an awful lot of confidence in myself that I lacked before. I had almost begun to feel that I was not really of much value. . . . Now I feel that I am being pushed, advised, growing. He has given me a lot of self-confidence that has made me much stronger and more valuable a person to the company. . . . I never enjoyed speaking before groups and that sort of thing before and now it doesn't bother me. I have a certain confidence that I feel that he has given me, because he forced me into a lot of situations of speaking before a group, before superiors. . . . running a meeting. . . . he has given me this self-confidence.

For a senior manager, this phase of the relationship produced substantial satisfaction in knowing that he had positively influenced a younger individual's development. The young manager received a promotion into middle management and recently left the department:

I can tell you that the biggest satisfaction that I get is seeing someone that you have some faith in really go beyond where you expect and really seeing them get recognized for that. . . . To see them do an excellent job and see them get recognized for it is probably the most gratifying thing, like seeing your son graduate from college, like seeing your mother get a degree when she's 45 years old—it's that kind of pride that you take. You know you had faith in these people, you've helped them along, but you haven't told them what to do. . . . it's like raising children. . . . when you see those people get promoted and you're really pleased. And you say, "You know, I've had something to do with that."

Another senior manager describes his experience of the cultivation phase by noting how the young manager has grown to provide technical and psychological support. Thus he has benefited from the relationship by enabling a younger individual to make his life at work easier and more enjoyable:

He really has made it easier for me to do things that I think need doing, because I don't have to spend much time with him. With a less talented person, the other person would be taking another 5 to 10 percent of my time—so I'd be spending my time assisting that person in his operation, when I could be doing something else.

So my work life is a lot more pleasurable. He is also enjoyable to watch and to think about. . . . I enjoy thinking about him and his career. . . . I think he will make a major contribution to the company.

Finally, a young female manager discovers the limitations of her developmental relationship two and a half years after it began. She found coaching, exposure-and-visibility, counseling, and friendship. However, she yearned for someone to model and to identify with in ways she could not with her mentor:

I have yet to meet someone that I work for directly that I really want to emulate. That bothers me a lot. Jerry is close to it, but he does a lot of things that just aren't right for me. . . . He will get on my case, he will say I am a pussycat. . . . but he just doesn't fully understand that women, just by being women, can't do exactly the same things that a man will do. It is almost like I need another woman, to be in that job, where I can see her style and really try it her way.

The combined effects of psychosocial and career functions are complex, and each individual is changed in some obvious and some subtle ways. The young manager generally becomes more self-confident and optimistic about the future; and, in identifying with the senior manager, parts of self are legitimized and brought to life through modeling and incorporation of new attitudes, values, and styles of operation. Through the relationship, the young manager not only acquires critical technical skills and learns the ropes of organizational life, but s/he also has the opportunity to experience confirmation and support for whom s/he is becoming.

The overriding benefit for the senior manager is empowerment. S/he experiences the capacity to support and to nurture and, in doing so, can note the extent to which s/he has influence in the organizational world. Not only is the senior manager able to open doors, but s/he also is able to transmit values and skills that enhance the young manager's capacities. These activities give rise to personal satisfaction and provide a unique avenue for expressing oneself through the next generation of managers.

During the cultivation phase the boundaries of the relationship have been clarified, and the uncertainty of what it might become during the initiation phase is no longer present. For some there is disappointment in discovering that the relationship cannot meet important developmental needs, as with the young female manager who wanted someone whom she could emulate more fully. For others, the relationship is far richer than anticipated, and the interpersonal bond is far more intimate and personally meaningful.

### **Separation**

After a period of time ranging from two to five years, a mentor relationship moves into the third phase of separation. This phase is marked

by significant changes in the functions provided by the relationship and in the affective experiences of both individuals. Some turmoil, anxiety, and feelings of loss generally characterize this period as the equilibrium of the cultivation phase is disrupted. It also is a time when the young manager experiences new independence and autonomy, and both managers reassess the value of the relationship as it becomes a less central part of each individual's life at work.

Separation occurs both structurally and psychologically. If a structural separation is timely, it stimulates an emotional separation that enables the young manager to test his or her ability to function effectively without close guidance and support. Alternatively, if a structural separation occurs prematurely, it stimulates a period of substantial anxiety as the young manager is forced to operate independently of his or her mentor before feeling ready to do so. Finally, if a structural separation occurs later than an emotional separation, either manager is likely to resent the other as the relationship becomes unresponsive to the individual's changing needs and concerns. In all instances, this phase is a period of adjustment because career and psychosocial functions can continue no longer in their previous form; the loss of some functions, and the modification of others, ultimately leads to a redefinition of the relationship.

Three years after a structural separation created by a promotion, a young manager describes the anxiety and turmoil of the first year apart from her mentor:

I used to cry at home! What I did was much harder than ever, and the end of the first year, I said, "I made it! I must be O.K.!" The first year after I left was probably the hardest that I ever had in my life in terms of being emotionally trying. Proving myself, you know, having to prove myself more to me, than to others, as it turns out.

This young manager struggled with the temptation to return to her mentor for help. The structural separation urged her to complete an emotional separation as well. Over time she developed increasing self-confidence and a sense of autonomy:

Part of the refusal to go back to him was that I really didn't want others to think that he was the reason I got my new job and that he was a crutch. I had to prove to myself and to everybody that it was me, that I could stand alone and that I no longer needed his support. . . .

My needs have changed now. In the growing up process, because I think I'm a lot more mature than I was. . . . I would hate to think that I am now like I used to be. . . . but maybe he met the needs I had then and my needs are different now. . . . Things are different now—if I have a problem I don't think of going to him with it and maybe it's because I like to think of myself as self-reliant.

This young manager's mentor had a less stressful experience of the separation phase; as with other young managers in whom he had taken a strong interest, his dominant feelings were pride and satisfaction in seeing her move on. He missed having her around, but he accepted the separation in stride. He now continues to keep track of her performance, he continues to provide acceptance-and-confirmation and, to whatever extent possible, he will sponsor her in the future at a distance:

I thought it was a good opportunity for her to have. I felt that she had a lot of potential, this was a promotion for her, and that she could best exercise her talent at the higher level. . . .

It is different though. . . after they leave you, you kind of keep up with them—and try to follow them along, and you take great pleasure in seeing them move along in the business. That's the fun of it all. It's amazing sometimes—the nicest thing is when you talk to a peer and find out she's doing really well. . . .

There are other senior managers who anticipate such loss that they resist the separation by blocking promotional moves. Managers' comfort with their own positions seems to affect the extent to which they are willing to let their subordinates grow, separate, and move away or perhaps beyond them in organizational rank. For example, one senior manager, who recently learned that he would advance no further in the corporation, predicted no further movement for a young manager who is ready to move on:

I don't think he will ever move out of this area even though he wants to. That's my candid opinion. I think he's at the level where if he were to move out of the group, he should have done it several years ago at a lower level. Lateral movement within a large corporation should occur at a lower level. The higher up someone goes, the more this movement slows down. I think he's right at that point now. He wants to be considered for a promotion out—I think he's locked in here.

Senior managers who shared this perspective on their young managers' potential for growth all had a dim view of their own opportunities for growth and advancement. It appears that organizational conditions that create blocked opportunity affect the extent to which a senior manager will encourage the separation phase to occur. When a senior manager sees limited opportunity for personal advancement, he is likely to resent and therefore delay a structural separation that enables a young manager to advance and grow.

When structural separation is imposed prematurely, the young manager feels abandoned and unprepared to meet new challenges. The loss of critical career and psychosocial functions can be traumatic. At the same time, organizational norms and practices mitigate against continued frequent contact. In one instance pressure was exerted to move a young manager to a new department. Both managers felt that the move was premature, and both felt that they had no choice but to accommodate the request. Two years later the young manager's performance had dropped considerably, and the senior manager was angry and disappointed. The young manager had become an extension of the senior manager, and thus her failure was his own:

I cautioned against the move but my peers and my boss were extremely unsympathetic. They said it's where the business needs her and the needs of the business are more important than her feelings or my feelings. . . .

Now her poorer performance reflects on me. I was the person who got her promoted to the third level, and I was her earliest supporter. . . . So my judgment is reflected upon now—when you see one of your stars rising, and you promoted or evaluated that individual, or affected that person's career, it is very satisfying. . . . If they begin to go the other way, and you were a strong supporter, you feel disappointed and frustrated.

It is possible that the immediate trauma of the premature separation will subside, and that each someday will look back on this period with a new perspective. Whatever the long term consequences of this separation, the current experience is quite disruptive to both individuals.

The separation phase is critical to development. It provides an opportunity for the young manager to demonstrate essential job skills while operating independently without support from a mentor. At the same time, it enables the senior manager to demonstrate to self and to peers and superiors that, indeed, one has been successful in developing new managerial talent. The end of this phase occurs when both managers recognize that the relationship is no longer needed in its previous form.

### **Redefinition**

The dominant pattern for the eight relationships that reached the redefinition phase is one in which the relationship becomes, primarily, a friendship. Both individuals continue to have some contact on an informal basis in order to continue the mutual support created in earlier years. Although there is less evidence of most career and psychosocial functions, sponsorship from a distance, occasional counselling and coaching, and ongoing friendship continue. The senior manager continues to be a supporter of the young manager and takes pride in the junior colleague's successive accomplishments. The young manager, operating independently of the senior manager, now enters the relationship on a more equal footing. With gratitude and appreciation for the guidance of earlier years, the young manager is now content to continue the relationship for the friendship it provides.

The senior manager, to some degree, is removed from a pedestal in the young manager's eyes, but s/he is still recalled with indebtedness. The excitement of the first two phases of the relationship is replaced with gratitude and realism about the contribution of the relationship to the young manager's learning and advancement. For the senior manager, the young manager is proof of effectiveness in passing on important values, knowledge, and skills; there is pride in seeing the young manager move on to greater responsibility and career advancement. Both individuals acknowledge that what was is no longer; they also recognize a new bond that is more responsive to their current needs:

We can now talk about common problems, which I would have had some reservations talking to her about during the period when she was a subordinate. I guess I view it as I'm supportive of her and she's supportive of me—it's great—we have a mutual support system!

When two individuals have achieved peer status, there frequently is ambivalence and discomfort, as both adjust to the new role relationship. This may reflect the young manager's wish to continue to see the senior manager as all-knowing, or the senior manager's fear of being surpassed in some fundamental sense.

Well to me he will always be the boss. Like I don't really see myself so much as his peer because he was the boss for so long. I will probably always look toward him for advice because I have a lot of respect for him. . . . We are peers now, but to me he will always have a part as the boss—even if I were to get promoted and he weren't.

One relationship that entered a redefinition phase is characterized by significant hostility and resentment. After several years of separation a young

manager felt abandoned by her mentor and decided that the relationship was over. Although it is uncertain whether someday in the future the relationship might be renewed, at this point in time it has ended with bitterness. The young manager felt that her mentor was no longer taking an interest in her career, and at a social event she felt that he was inappropriately flirtatious towards her:

Well there is quite a bit of distance there now, and quite a bit of fear on my part—and things have changed. Since before I always knew I had an ally in my old division—a friend who happened to be in a critical level of power. It was a very secure sort of feeling. . . . After a time, and after the social encounter I became quite fearful—I mean he might go around all of a sudden and change his mind about my competence, and no longer support me! I feel very uncomfortable now—I could never go back to work in his division. . . .

I don't know how healthy it is careerwise to let a relationship like that become so important. I think I was putting my eggs all in one basket, having one sponsor and being very dependent on that one sponsor. . . . I don't want to cultivate that kind of relationship again. . . .

Perhaps the emotional intensity and expressed hostility provide a vehicle for completing psychological separation. As this young manager forms new relationships of a different kind and discovers that she can operate effectively without this relationship, her hostility may subside. It remains to be seen how a hostile termination of a developmental relationship affects both managers in later years.

The redefinition phase is, finally, evidence of changes that have occurred in both individuals. For the young manager, the ability to relate in a more peerlike fashion with the senior manager and the ability to function effectively in new settings without the immediate support of the relationship reflect greater competence, self-confidence, and autonomy. For the senior manager, the ability to relate in a more peerlike fashion with the young manager and the ability to redirect energies toward other young managers reflect competence and generativity. Both have experienced a shift in developmental tasks so that the previous relationship is no longer needed or desired.

### **Implications**

This phase model illustrates how a mentor relationship moves through the phases of initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (see Exhibit 2). Each phase is characterized by particular affective experiences, developmental functions, and interaction patterns that are shaped by individuals' needs and surrounding organizational circumstances.

This dynamic perspective delineates how a mentor relationship can enhance both individuals' development as it unfolds. When primary tasks are complementary, a mentor relationship is likely to reach the cultivation phase and to provide a range of career and psychosocial functions that enable the young adult to meet the challenges of initiation into the world of work, and the senior adult to meet the challenges of reappraisal at midlife. When, however, the young adult begins to feel established and more autonomous,

## Exhibit 2

### Phases of the Mentor Relationship

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Turning Points<sup>a</sup></i>
Initiation	A period of six months to a year during which time the relationship gets started and begins to have importance for both managers.	Fantasies become concrete expectations. Expectations are met; senior manager provides coaching, challenging work, visibility; junior manager provides technical assistance, respect, and desire to be coached. There are opportunities for interaction around work tasks.
Cultivation	A period of two to five years during which time the range of career and psychosocial functions provided expand to a maximum.	Both individuals continue to benefit from the relationship. Opportunities for meaningful and more frequent interaction increase. Emotional bond deepens and intimacy increases.
Separation	A period of six months to two years after a significant change in the structural role relationship and/or in the emotional experience of the relationship.	Junior manager no longer wants guidance but rather the opportunity to work more autonomously. Senior manager faces midlife crisis and is less available to provide mentoring functions. Job rotation or promotion limits opportunities for continued interaction; career and psychosocial functions can no longer be provided. Blocked opportunity creates resentment and hostility that disrupts positive interaction.
Redefinition	An indefinite period after the separation phase, during which time the relationship is ended or takes on significantly different characteristics, making it a more peerlike friendship.	Stresses of separation diminish, and new relationships are formed. The mentor relationship is no longer needed in its previous form. Resentment and anger diminish; gratitude and appreciation increase. Peer status is achieved.

<sup>a</sup>Examples of the most frequently observed psychological and organizational factors that cause movement into the current relationship phase.

s/he no longer will look toward the senior adult for the same kind of guidance and support. If the senior adult has other avenues for creative expression of generative needs and can accept continued growth and advancement in the younger adult, then the relationship will follow its course through separation and redefinition.

Under certain conditions, a mentor relationship can become destructive for one or both individuals (Kram, 1980). For example, a young manager may feel undermined and held back by his or her mentor, or a senior mentor may feel threatened by his or her protégé's continued success and opportunity for advancement. Either is likely to occur when a senior adult enters a difficult midlife transition and/or a young adult encounters organizational barriers to advancement. Continued research in a variety of organizational contexts will further illuminate the factors that contribute to these dysfunctional dynamics as well as the range of organizational circumstances that facilitate movement through the phases of a mentor relationship in a manner that maximizes benefits to both individuals.

The research data from which the relationship phases were delineated indicated significant limitations in cross-sex relationships. The lack of an

adequate role model in a male mentor caused young female managers to seek support and guidance from other female peers (Shapiro, Haseltine, & Rowe, 1978). Collusion in stereotypical behaviors encouraged women to maintain feelings of dependency and incompetence when they were attempting to become independent contributors (Kanter, 1977; Sheehy, 1976). Concerns about increasing intimacy and concerns about the public image of the relationship caused both individuals to avoid interaction that had the potential to provide a wide range of career and psychosocial functions. Similar complexities are likely to exist in cross-race relationships. There is a need to study further the unique attributes of cross-sex and cross-race relationships to determine whether observed relationship limitations can be alleviated.

Given that such developmental relationships are limited in value and time duration as a result of changing individual needs and organizational circumstances, it is likely that an individual will have, over the course of an organizational career, several developmental relationships that provide a range of critical career and psychosocial functions at each life/career stage. The wish to find one senior manager who will carry an individual through his or her career, and who will continue to be responsive to individual concerns, is one that is likely to generate considerable disappointment and disillusionment.

It would be fruitful, therefore, to investigate the patterns of relationships that individuals have at successive career stages in order to illuminate other developmental relationships as alternatives to the primary mentor relationship. Not only is the mentor relationship limited in value and duration, but it may not be readily available to all individuals in the early stage of a career because of organizational conditions and/or limited individual capacities to form enhancing relationships. Peer relationships appear to offer a valuable alternative to the mentor relationship; they can provide some career and psychosocial functions, they offer the opportunity for greater mutuality and sense of equality, and they are more available in numbers. Future research efforts designed to clarify the role of peer relationships in early and midcareers would offer insight into the range of developmental relationships that are possible at each career stage.

Because relationships are shaped by both individual needs and organizational circumstances, interventions designed to enhance relationship-building skills and to create organizational conditions that foster developmental relationships in a work setting should be explored. In preparation for this applied work, however, it is necessary to delineate further the characteristics of individuals who seek out and benefit from relationships with mentors, as well as the characteristics of organizations that facilitate or hinder initiation and cultivation of enhancing relationships. It is essential that next steps in research be conducted in a variety of settings so that the relevant organizational factors can be identified.



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*Kathy E. Kram is Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior, School of Management, Boston University.*