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## What's a Mentor, Anyway?

Norma T. Mertz

*The article presents a conceptual model of mentoring designed to distinguish mentoring from other kinds of supportive relationships. Built on the existing literature and a modification of Kram's (1983) distinctions of the functions of mentoring, the model uses the concepts of intent and involvement as variables for distinguishing and categorizing the bewildering array of relationships and roles referred to as mentoring in the literature.*

**Keywords:** *mentoring; supportive relationships; intent; involvement; conceptual framework*

If the professional and popular literature is to be believed, mentoring is the cure for a thousand ills, the sine qua non of personal development, professional development, and career advancement. Not only does “everyone who makes it have a mentor” (E. G. C. Collins & Scott, 1978), but everyone needs a mentor: 1st-year teachers, potential Fortune 500 CEOs, welfare mothers, employees in need of remedial help, disadvantaged youth, student teachers, newly minted assistant professors, prospective administrators, women, minorities, and the list goes on (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999; N. W. Collins, 1983; Crow & Matthews, 1998; Kanter, 1977; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Murrell, Crosby, & Ely, 1999; Muse, Wasden, & Thomas, 1988; Zey, 1984). Not only does everyone need a mentor, almost every supportive relationship is mentoring. The term is used acontextually and inconsistently (Healey, 1997) to describe a wide variety of interpersonal relationships (Crosby, 1999; Jacobi, 1991), and even “researchers can not agree on what mentors are” (Hurley, 1988, p. 38).

Definitions of mentoring come in all sizes, foci, and levels of inclusiveness. Among the most popular definitions are those that focus on the career advancement or professional development of a protégé by someone in a position of authority within the professional context (Chao, Walz, & Gardner,

1992; Fagenson, 1989; Gaskill, 1991; Kanter, 1977; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). For example, Ragins and McFarlin (1990) have proposed the following: "A high-ranking, influential member of your organization who has advanced experience and knowledge and who is committed to providing upward mobility and support to your career" (p. 321). A somewhat different, more inclusive definition encompasses personal and professional development, within or outside of a professional context (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999; Crow & Matthews, 1998; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995). For Crosby (1999) a mentor is "a trusted and experienced supervisor or advisor who by mutual consent takes an active interest in the development and education of a younger, less experienced individual" (p. 13). And an even more inclusive, and categorically or situationally specific, definition is as follows: "someone whose advice you seek and value, or someone who offers you advice and suggestions which you believe are beneficial to your academic, career, or personal life" (McCarthy & Mangione, in press). Even "people who help them do what they wanted to do or do it better" can be included (Alexander & Scott, 1983, p. 2).

Defining mentoring is made more complicated by the confusing, often contradictory, roles associated with mentoring. Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) attributed multiple roles to the mentor: teacher, sponsor, exemplar, counselor, host and guide, and developer of skills and intellect. Phillips-Young (1982) delineated six distinct mentoring roles: traditional mentoring, supportive bosses, organizational sponsors, professional mentors, patrons, and invisible godparents, suggesting early on that the character of these roles might be different. Speizer (1981) distinguished role models from sponsors or mentors, which she argued were the same thing. Josefowitz (1980), however, explicitly distinguished mentors from sponsors. She described mentors as akin to supervisors and sponsors as ones with influence in an organization. Crosby (1999), building on Kram's (1983) distinction between career functions of mentoring and psychosocial functions of mentoring, but diverging from her incorporation of these functions into one role (mentor), distinguished among role models, sponsors, and mentors, assigning career enhancement functions to sponsors and largely psychosocial functions to mentors. Stone (1999) further distinguished mentoring from coaching and counseling, which were defined in traditional supervisory terms. Crosby (1999) supported Stone's distinctions based on her review of the management literature and concluded that "coaching [was] confused with counseling, coaching confused with mentoring, and mentoring confused with coaching and counseling" (p. 2).

Although it rather overstates the case, the current state of our understanding of the term *mentoring* and of the relationships to which the term refers

constitute a veritable Tower of Babel (Genesis, 11:4-9, as cited in Tanakh, 1985). The absence of a shared, stipulative definition of mentoring and of boundaries for distinguishing mentoring from other types of supportive relationships makes it difficult to talk with one another, within or across contexts, with any sense of certainty that we are talking about the same things—researcher to researcher, researcher to participant, practitioner to researcher, practitioner to practitioner—or to maximize the potential benefits of mentoring or any other kind of relationship. And it makes it difficult, if not impossible, to build a cohesive, coherent empirical base of research (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). Healy (1997) captured the situation perfectly:

The seeds of empirical study have been cast too broadly to yield a harvest of cumulative knowledge given the inconsistent, idiosyncratic definitions of mentoring . . . employed. . . . The absence of a definitional consensus is stymieing efforts to synthesize empirical findings into a coherent body of knowledge and to identify important unanswered questions. (pp. 9-10)

In 1981, Speizer described the terms *role model*, *mentor*, and *sponsor* as “elusive concepts” and advised that the first step researchers needed to take was to establish accepted definitions of each concept. More than 20 years later, we are still without such accepted definitions, and we continue to conduct research and implement programs as if it made no difference.

The purpose of this article is to propose a conceptual framework for defining and distinguishing mentoring from related supportive relationships and for framing the foci and functions consistent with such relationships. To the greatest extent possible, it uses and builds on, rather than invents, the roles and functions explicated in the literature and attempts to place these roles and functions in a framework that may speak to supportive relationships in a variety of contexts.

## FIRST THINGS FIRST: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Business and corporate settings have long framed the context for the study of mentoring. Although empirical studies of mentoring in educational settings are comparatively few (Goodwin, Stevens, & Bellamy, 1998), they provide a rich context for looking at the range of supportive workplace relationships. Like business organizations, educational organizations have an implicit obligation to develop their employees. Unlike business organizations, they have an explicit (or at least widely understood and expressed) moral obligation to the personal and professional development of students

and to helping them take their place in the society as productive, contributing members. Indeed, the business of education is developing people. And the sheer numbers of individuals that academics are required to help and the varied services they are asked to provide, from advising students about programs to guiding doctoral research to socializing students and junior colleagues to the profession to developing junior colleagues, to name but a few, add a dimension rarely encountered in business settings and allow for looking at layers of workplace developmental relationships that may appear more unidimensional in business settings.

Beyond the need to widen the context for thinking about mentoring, two issues beg consideration. First, are all of the relationships referred to in the literature as mentoring talking about the same kind of relationship, or are there fundamental differences in the relationships, differences that can be distinguished? There is growing support in the literature for the idea that not all supportive relationships are mentoring and that a number of different types of supportive relationships exist (Bainer & Didham, 1994; Crosby, 1999; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Welch, 1997). Indeed, Kram herself acknowledged that mentoring takes a variety of forms (Kram & Hall, 1996) and differentiated mentoring from relationships such as sponsoring and peer support (Kram, 1985). In a study of African American doctoral student–faculty advisor relationships, Holland (1998) found five distinctly different kinds of relationships: formal academic advisement, academic guidance, quasi-apprenticeship, academic mentoring, and career mentoring (p.14). Furthermore, Holland found that these relationships represented a continuum, a notion suggested by Shapiro, Haseltine, and Rowe (1978) more than 25 years ago, and that the continuum represented different levels of involvement in the relationship.

The second issue begging consideration relates to largely unexamined assumptions about mentoring in the literature: that the mentor is committed to the goal of the relationship (e.g., career advancement of the protégé) or, at least, to the same goal as the protégé; and that mentoring, and by extension, other supportive relationships, are ipso facto beneficial to both parties in the relationship; that each party benefits; that each values the benefits to be derived; and that each is willing and ready to perceive or realize such benefits. Although the benefits to the protégé would appear to be a relatively visible, inherent part of the purpose for the relationship, with the outcomes seen in the realization of the purpose, the benefits to the mentor rest more on an idealization of the relationship (Crosby, 1999), on what could and should occur for the mentor, than on what necessarily occurs (Daresh, 1995). Built largely on life span developmental theory, and Erickson's (1983) concept of

*generativity* in particular, mentoring is perceived to help the mentor realize the developmental milestone of transcending the self in serving others and the future through the protégé. Although this undoubtedly occurs for some mentors, it does not necessarily occur for all.

The notion that mentors and protégés benefit from the relationship has been a cornerstone of mentoring programs and a way of selling them to what might otherwise be reluctant participants. Yet not all so-called mentoring relationships are successful or beneficial to the parties in the relationship (Mertz & Pfleeger, 2002; Tauer, 1998). Looking at mentoring from the perspective of the protégé, Eby, McManus, Simon, and Russell (2000) found that these relationships varied widely from satisfactory, or better, to dysfunctional and even harmful.

We know little about mentoring relationships from the mentor's perspective (Crosby, 1999) or about what may motivate mentors to participate in such relationships. We assume that mentoring is inherently good and beneficial to the mentor; thus, everyone should want to be a mentor. Yet that is not the case. There are differences in the willingness of senior people to commit to a relationship (Dwyer, 2000; Mertz, Welch, & Henderson, 1988; Pfleeger & Mertz, 1994), considerable variation in the frequency of mentoring (Goodwin et al., 1998; Merriam, 1983), and wide differences in the effectiveness of arranged versus naturally occurring mentoring relationships (Bainer & Didham, 1994; Conrad, 1985; Noe, 1988). In a survey of faculty ( $N = 125$ ) attitudes toward mentoring at different types of higher education institutions in one state, Goodwin et al. (1998) found that one of the three most important considerations was that it be voluntary on the part of the mentor. The other two were that there be mutual respect and that the mentor be accessible.

Theories of interpersonal relationships may help to inform such findings and provide a thoughtful basis for looking at supportive workplace relationships. It is widely accepted in the field of social psychology that motives and willingness to affiliate vary widely, as do the intents and expectations of the participants, and that many factors in the relationship and in the background and personality of the participants play a part in the establishment and continuation of a relationship (Bennett, 2000; Dwyer, 2000; Rusbult & Arriaga, 2000). Furthermore, theories of interpersonal relationships view all kinds of relationships as based on some variation of a social and emotional costs-benefits analysis. The foundational theory of interpersonal relationships, social exchange theory (Homans, 1961), posits that benefits or rewards are what each person perceives to be valuable, and although the relationship must be mutually beneficial to be satisfying, participants seek the greatest rewards at the lowest cost. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) added the notion that

rewards and costs are calculated in terms of what we perceive we deserve as well as consideration of what rewards might be derived from other, alternative relationships. Equity theory, a version of social exchange theory, adds the notion of equity in costs and benefits (i.e., we expect the costs and benefits to balance out) and suggests that dissatisfaction results if either party perceives the other to be overbenefitted (Walster & Walster, 1978).

When supportive relationships are considered through the lens of these theories, particularly from the perspective of the senior person in the relationship, a number of hypotheses seem reasonable: not all senior people will want or be willing to mentor or even engage in any particular relationship; different people will be motivated by different benefits for engaging in a relationship; the costs for engaging in the relationship will be a consideration in the willingness to do so; and relationships with different costs will have different levels of appeal. Furthermore, the presumption that parties to the relationship will approach it with the same intents and expectations is just that—presumptuous.

These considerations lend weight to the notion that there are different kinds of supportive relationships and that it is possible to conceptualize and differentiate them in terms of different costs and benefits. Furthermore, the study of interpersonal relationships not only suggests that intent (the reasons for entering the relationship) and the attendant expectations play a critical part in both the willingness to engage in a relationship and in the subsequent relationship that ensues (Dwyer, 2000) but that the degree of intimacy (investment of self) required differs in different relationships (Rusbult, 1983) and is governed by different normative rules (Dwyer, 2000).

Such considerations framed the reexamination of the existing literature on mentoring and contributed to the development of the model for categorizing and differentiating mentoring from other relationships that is presented below. A conceptual model is a visual representation of ideas designed to make those ideas (concepts) and their interrelationships coherent—a shorthand diagram for making complex ideas explicable and readily accessible. The conceptual model herein proposed was guided by the imperative to include all of the roles and functions related to workplace supportive relationships addressed in the literature, in the many contexts in which they occur, but to attempt to reconcile the conflicts in their contradictory labeling. The model is proposed not as a finished or defining product but as a work in progress, as a starting point for discussion and debate, and as a way to begin to unravel and reconcile the confusing definitional threads that limit dialogue across disciplinary, empirical, and practical contexts.

## CONCEPTUAL VARIABLES

The twin concepts of *intent*, the perceived purpose of the activity and whether that intent is sought or valued, and *involvement*, the amount of time and effort required to realize the intent, seem to be particularly salient variables for distinguishing among the types of roles and relationships discussed in the literature and for identifying the currency in which costs and benefits in relationships may be considered. These two concepts became the initial building blocks of the conceptual model.

Intent is concerned with why the relationship is undertaken, the ends sought, and how each party to the relationship sees and values those whys and ends. If intent guides consideration of whether to engage in a relationship (costs-benefits analysis), or plays a part in relationships, intent—ours and our perception of others'—is a critical consideration. What is wanted and expected of me? What will I get from the relationship? What will the other party to the relationship get? Am I willing and able to meet those expectations and help that person realize those needs?

Involvement is concerned with what is required of each party to the relationship, the physical and emotional costs, the nature and level of investment required, and the intensity of interaction required by the relationship. As with intent, if some form of cost-benefits analysis plays a role, how much is required of me, how willing and able am I to invest that amount in the relationship, and with how many am I willing to invest what degree of commitment? These are critical considerations.

Both concepts find validation in the literature on mentoring as factors in distinguishing relationships. Kram and Isabella (1985) differentiated different functions of mentoring by mentors in different positions (supervisor, peer), largely on the basis of the intent of the mentoring. Ragins (1999) recognized intent as a critical factor in relationships in her review of diversity and mentoring and identified the need to “illuminate the degree of congruency in [mentor-protégé] perceptions” of the relationship (p. 235). In defining mentoring as an *intentional relationship* for purposes of their study, something other researchers have not necessarily done, Enomoto, Gardiner, and Grogan (2002) implicitly recognized intent as a factor in supportive workplace relationships.

More directly, Pfleeger and Mertz (1994) found that only 3 of the 15 mentor-protégé relationships they studied in industry and academia were successful (i.e., realized the purposes for forming the relationship, intent). Two more pairs were partially successful. The remainder were perceived by



the participants as unsuccessful or irrelevant. The major factor distinguishing successful relationships from all of the other relationships (partially successful, unsuccessful, irrelevant) was the failure of the mentor and protégé to “share a common perspective about mentoring and what should go on in the name of mentoring” (p. 68). Mentors varied widely in terms of what they perceived should go on and in what they were willing to do for and with the protégés, and these perceptions and dispositions were reflected in more negative attitudes toward mentoring after the 18-month experience by mentors engaged in experiences that had not been successful (Pfleeger & Mertz, 1994). Although race and gender were variables in the study, and although they played a role in some of the unsuccessful and irrelevant pairs, differences in perceived intent were the distinguishing factors, not race or gender. Similarly, Heinrich (1995), in her study of doctoral students and their dissertation advisors, and Ragins and McFarlin (1990), in their study of cross-gender mentoring, also found differences in perceived intent among the parties to the relationship.

Although less direct or established, involvement as a factor that distinguishes relationships also finds recognition in the literature. Shapiro et al. (1978) described mentoring as “the most intense and paternalistic” relationship (p. 55), and Kram (1985) used the intensity of involvement to differentiate mentoring from “other less involving” intimate relationships (p. 4). In his longitudinal validation of the investment model, Rusbult (1983) found that the greater the investment, the greater the involvement and the greater the commitment.

The usefulness of the concepts for differentiating relationships is enhanced if one thinks about the many different, sometimes overlapping, responsibilities faculty are called on to undertake with students and colleagues in higher education as part of or in addition to their responsibilities to teaching, research, and service. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, advising students about courses and programs; counseling with students about problems they are experiencing; overseeing and guiding students intellectual, and at times, social and moral development; working closely with students in planning and conducting research and in preparing reports of research, theses, and dissertations; providing career advice and direction to students and junior colleagues; advising, guiding, and helping students to move into suitable positions in the field; advising junior colleagues about how to be successful as faculty members; working with junior colleagues to enhance their skills and success in the field by giving advice, critiquing their work, and/or working with them on research and projects; and advancing the entry and reputation of junior colleagues in the profession. Faculty are called on to play a great many roles with a great many people, and

the constraints of their work, the demands to provide such service, the nature of the needs to be served, and the numbers of students and junior colleagues to be served necessitate differentiating among the roles and responsibilities to be undertaken and making decisions about which and how these roles and responsibilities will be fulfilled. The various responsibilities do not require the same level, frequency, or intensity of interaction. In advising students about courses and programs, and in guiding doctoral students in the conduct of research, faculty draw on their knowledge and experience, but the guiding of doctoral students requires much more intense, frequent involvement and more concentrated effort than does advising students about the courses to take, and it engenders a far deeper investment in the work and success of the student. One can advise many more students, with less physical and emotional investment than one can guide a doctoral student, because the intent of the relationship is different and differently satisfied. Thus, one might agree to advise 30 students but would be considered crazy to agree to guide 30 doctoral students.

In conceptually distinguishing psychosocial functions of mentoring ("those aspects of a relationship that enhance an individual's sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness," Kram, 1985, p. 31) from career functions of mentoring ("those aspects of a relationship that enhance advancement in an organization"), Kram (1985, p. 24) provided a practical starting point for conceptualizing relationships functionally in terms of the variables of intent and involvement. However, in melding all natures of career-related activities into one category, she limited possibilities for making necessary distinctions among these activities. If, however, Kram's career functions are subdivided into professional development (activities designed to help individuals grow and develop professionally) and career advancement (activities designed to help individuals advance professionally), then, in concert with psychosocial functions, Kram's functional categories provide a way to distinguish kinds of activities and roles in terms of intent and involvement.

In making a distinction between career advancement and professional development, one is mindful that the latter makes a significant contribution to the former. However, in considering the intent of the relationship, there is a clear and compelling difference between the two that discretely differentiates them. It is entirely possible to promote the advancement of an individual without needing to or attending to their professional development. That might be something the individual does alone, something someone else does, or something that does not need attending to at this point. Similarly, it is entirely possible to promote the professional development of an individual without attending to his or her advancement. The individual may not be interested in advancing, or the developer may not be positioned or willing to help

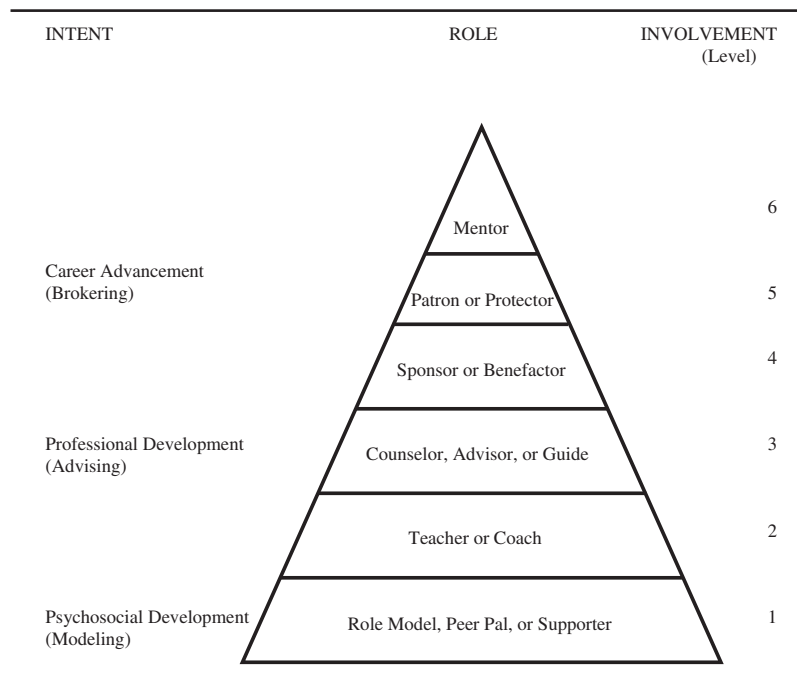
the individual advance but nevertheless possess the knowledge and skills to help the individual develop professionally.

The conceptual variables, intent and involvement, and Kram's (1985) differentiating the psychosocial from career functions of mentoring, provide a coherent way to think about and arrange the various roles and functions referred to in the literature. The resulting conceptual model is presented and explained below.

### CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The supportive workplace relationships commonly identified in the literature on mentoring are presented in Figure 1 in terms of the primary intent of the relationship and the degree of involvement (intensity) required to realize the intent. The roles represent a continuum of relationships (Holland, 1998; Hurley, 1988; Shapiro et al., 1978), but they are visualized in a pyramid to reflect the increasing involvement and intensity required by the relationship and the change in primary intent as one moves from base (modeling) to apex (brokering). The roles are arranged to suggest a hierarchy based on the degree of involvement required by the relationship (e.g., mentoring requires a greater, more intense level of involvement and interaction [Level 6] than do any of the other roles). Being a role model (Level 1) requires the lowest level of involvement and interaction. As one moves up the pyramid (from Level 1 to Level 6), the interaction and intensity of involvement increases. The numbering of levels is not designed to quantify the level of involvement but rather to signify differences from least (Level 1) to most (Level 6) in shorthand fashion. The roles are also arranged to allow for and foreshadow the likelihood of encompassing (also taking on) any or all of the roles at lower levels in the hierarchy, particularly those within the same functional intent, while still distinguishing among the primary intent of the various roles and relationships. It is not meant to suggest that individuals may not choose to serve in multiple roles, with the same person, or change roles during the relationship, but rather to provide a way to clearly determine the dominant intent at any point in time. A pyramid also allows for representing the relative capacity for engaging in the relationship at each level of involvement because of the level of involvement required (e.g., compared to mentoring, a relationship that can be exercised with relatively few, role modeling can be exercised with a great many).

Although the model recognizes three functional categories of intent and ties them to different relationships—psychosocial development (modeling), professional development (advising), and career advancement (brokering)—



**Figure 1. Supportive Work Relationship Arranged Hierarchically in Terms of Primary Intent and Level of Involvement**

different roles are associated with each category: role model or peer pal and teacher or coach with psychosocial development; counselor, advisor, or guide with professional development; and sponsor or benefactor, patron or protector, and mentor with career advancement. The placement of the roles in the pyramid speaks not only to the level of involvement required by the relationship but to the degree to which the function it serves is primary and distinguishable from the function of roles which sit above it. Thus, although it is posited that the primary intent of both role models or peer pals and of teachers or coaches is psychosocial development, the degree to which it is true may differ. Teachers and coaches may well incorporate elements of professional development as they play out their role while maintaining a primary focus on psychosocial development.

How useful might this conceptual framework built on intent and involvement be for distinguishing among relationships that are addressed in the literature on mentoring? Does it allow for addressing the myriad of supportive workplace relationships that characterize educational contexts?

## Intent

In terms of the primary intent of the relationship, three types of relationships emerge: modeling, advising, and brokering. A role model is someone to whom individuals look or to whom they turn for social and emotional support and affirmation or from whom they seek to learn something related to their “person-ness.” The primary focus is on the personal, inner life of the individual and is thus most closely aligned with psychosocial functions. The term *Role model* is used in the most inclusive sense and includes friends, teachers, peer pals, coaches, administrators, and an infinite array of others within and outside of the school setting.

Advisors use their knowledge of the school, program, institution, area of teaching, or all of these, to help others (students, student teachers, new teachers, new administrators) to learn what they need to know, to make sound educational decisions, to enhance their performance, and to grow and develop intellectually and professionally. The advisor’s primary intent is professional development. An advisor may also be concerned about the psychosocial development of the individual with whom he or she is working—the best advisors probably are. However, the primary focus of the relationship is professional development, and it is reasonable to hypothesize that it is possible to be an effective advisor without being particularly attentive to the individual’s psychosocial development, to be a good advisor without necessarily being a role model for the individual. Not unlike the supervisor in an occupational context, the advisor is focused on the present (i.e., the current situation and context in which the individual is engaged) and with maximizing that individual’s success and potential in that context. As an advisor to a peer, for example, a newly hired teacher, an experienced teacher might help the new teacher become acclimated to the work and context more quickly and easily than would be possible by trial and error, might provide inside information and advice about where to go and what to do under different circumstances, and might help the new teacher to become a more effective teacher by sharing tried and true classroom strategies and coaching the teacher in the effective use of these strategies. A good advisor, like a good supervisor, would quietly assess the competence and effectiveness of the new colleague and be willing to help the teacher assess and improve her or his performance so that it meets or exceeds the career expectations for the position.

What distinguishes brokering from advising is the fundamental focus on career advancement, helping the individual (student, junior colleague, prospective administrator) advance professionally; in common parlance, *get ahead*. The relationship is focused on what the protégé needs to do to be successful in getting ahead in the organizational or professional context and

what the sponsor, patron, or mentor needs to do to help the protégé advance. Thus, mentoring has a future orientation. The broker is not unconcerned with the protégés' current capabilities and development, but the concern is in the service of career advancement.

### **Involvement**

There are critical differences in the nature and intensity of involvement among the roles identified in the model. Although being a role model may require some level of involvement, the time and intensity of involvement is less than that required of advisors and significantly less than that required of brokers. Although time and attention are required to give advice, provide guidance, or lend a friendly, sympathetic ear, and although they may engender interest in and concern for the individual, the roles of role models and peer pals and teacher and coaches (not referring to the jobs of the same name) require comparatively low levels of involvement and interaction in and with the relationship. The emotional cost and intensity of relationships at Levels 1 and 2 are relatively low, even though one may be called on to demonstrate concern, to help the individual work through insecurities or find ways to deal with their problems, and/or be wise and compassionate or painfully honest and forthright in turn. As cold as it may sound, it does not require (although it does not preclude) emotional involvement to do these things, and ultimately, it is a matter of choice. The role model cannot only choose whether and to what extent to become involved and how much time and energy to put into the relationship but when and if to alter that investment.

This is not as true for the advisor. Although an element of free choice exists, and one can always withdraw from the relationship, it is predicated on a more formal identification of the relationship (ranging from recognized by only the parties involved to a formal recognition by the organization) and therefore carries with it ongoing and mutual responsibilities. The advisor and advisee are bound together in the relationship and have a stake in it and to its continuation over a period of time, sometimes specified, sometimes not. If the advisee runs afoul because of a failure on the part of the advisor, for example, to share information or identify a need or monitor progress, it reflects on the advisor, not merely the advisee. The new teacher who is successful in integrating into the group, and even gaining tenure, may attribute much of the success to the advice and guidance of the more senior advisor (experienced teacher), and the advisor may be justly proud of helping that junior colleague navigate the environment successfully.

The nature and level of involvement of the advisor with the advisee tends to be greater than that of the role model. The nature of the responsibilities

inherent in the relationship and the fact that advisees come to advisors for expert help and advice they are all but obligated to take (a potentially coercive element in the relationship) speak to a greater emotional involvement than that required to serve as a role model. Furthermore, there must be a level of trust that the advisor not only knows what to do but is willing to use that knowledge in the service of the advisee; here exists a level of trust greater than is required of a role model. The advisor and advisee are linked together temporally and by purpose, and each makes something of an emotional investment in the other.

Although there is clearly an emotional involvement in the advisor-advisee relationship, the intensity of the involvement may vary from relatively little to moderate. It is possible to have a successful professional development relationship with only a modest investment of time and emotional involvement, and although one may be hard pressed to help someone one does not care for much, at least to do it really well; it is possible to help someone and do it really well without investing oneself very heavily in the person. It is possible to focus solely on the business of the relationship (the intent) and to the achievement of its goals and to be mutually gratified. Furthermore, it is relevant to keep in mind that although in some instances, the advisor gets to choose the advisee, this is not always the case. The needs of the organization or situation may circumscribe such a choice, necessitating working with advisees one might not have otherwise chosen. The fact that high involvement is not required to be an effective advisor would allow one to do this.

In contrast, brokering requires a comparatively high level of involvement between the parties to the relationship to be successful. The mentor and protégé, for example, are inextricably linked together in their common purpose, the advancement of the protégé; and their relationship is explicit, to one another and often to others in the organization. The mentor is invested in the success of the protégé and is associated with her or his success (Mertz et al., 1988). Mentoring requires more of the mentor than is required of the advisor, and that puts the mentor into a more intense, intimate involvement with the protégé. Mentors are required to do more than give good information about the realities of the here and now, about the rules of the game; more than provide opportunities for protégés to demonstrate and enhance their abilities. Mentors use their networks (contacts) and reputation to support and promote their protégés for advancement, sharing their power and influence in the process. Clearly, the level of involvement may vary (perhaps from moderate to intense), but one cannot have a brokering relationship without at least a moderate level of involvement. One cannot mentor from an emotionally distant position, and given the dimensions of the relationship, a higher level of trust is necessary in mentoring relationships than in the others examined. Both

mentor and protégé need to share thoughts, understandings, dreams, schemes, and perspectives they might not ordinarily share, and they are likely to be far more exposed before one another, warts and all, than they would be in other professional relationships. A relatively high level of trust is critical to such exposure.

Although it is possible for the mentor to also serve as a sponsor or benefactor and/or as a patron or protector, and although all these roles serve a career advancement function, they are distinguished from one another by the intensity of involvement and trust required and the degree to which career advancement is the primary focus. Without diminishing the degree to which all three roles require a level of involvement that exceeds roles at lower levels of the pyramid, the role of patron or protector engenders less intensity and involvement than does that of mentor and that of sponsor or benefactor even less. In sponsoring individuals (recommending them for positions, talking them up, advancing their interests and ambitions in the organization or profession), although sponsors put their reputation and judgment on the line, there is no necessary concomitant responsibility for the performance of the person sponsored. The person sponsored is associated with the sponsor, but to a lesser degree than a patron or protector and even less than with a mentor. A mentor must be invested in the protégé to a degree not required by the sponsor or patron. Thus, it is the degree of investment, and the corresponding commitment and risk, that distinguishes these roles, as do the potential rewards and benefits to be derived in fulfilling the role.

Differences in the levels and intensity of involvement among each of the roles identified in the model correspond to differences in the number of individuals one can manage in particular roles at a given time. Unlike the role model or advisor, who is able to maintain these roles with a number of individuals at the same time (e.g., many program advisees and even multiple, but fewer, doctoral students), the mentor cannot mentor too many individuals at the same time; the investment to be made is just too costly, both physically and emotionally, and the level of trust required too intimate to be bestowed widely. Without such an investment, it may be argued, it is not a mentoring relationship. Not everyone is prepared to make this kind of commitment; not everyone possesses the abilities to realize the commitment. And even if one is prepared and able to, it will only work if there is an affinity between the mentor and protégé, an affinity that is about more than liking one another. It is about a sure sense that the person to be mentored possesses what it takes to make it (is a winner), is worth the effort, and will make the mentor proud; and it is about shared respect as persons and professionals, and perhaps, shared values (Mertz & Pfleeger, 2002; Mertz, Welch, & Henderson, 1990; Pfleeger & Mertz, 1994). This kind of relationship cannot be mandated, and if it is, it is



more likely to result, best-case scenario, in a professional development relationship. This may help to explain the difficulties encountered in arranged mentoring programs noted in the literature.

### AND NOW WHAT? CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As stated earlier, the purpose of this article is to propose a conceptual model for beginning to unravel the confusing, conflicting definitional threads that currently limit the ability to compare, connect, and build on existing research on mentoring—to help build a stipulative definition of mentoring that would be acceptable to the field and useful in building a coherent base of research. The model presented uses intent and involvement to distinguish among relationships often lumped together under the label of mentoring, arranging them in terms of psychosocial, professional development and career advancement functions. At first blush, it allows for arranging the roles and relationships described in the literature in an orderly and coherent way and for distinguishing mentoring from other roles and relationships. It is presented as a proposal, one view from one person, with the hope that it will engender the dialogue necessary to the building of a stipulative definition of mentoring.

If the model is to make a contribution to unraveling the conflicting definitional threads that impede research on mentoring, it is important to determine if the model is a valid representation of reality. Does it account for all of the kinds of supportive workplace roles and relationships that occur and that occur in different contexts? Can the roles be used to identify and predict the nature of the relationships that occur? Do the roles distinguish among the relationships sufficiently to be able to talk about them and analyze them discretely? Clearly, the model needs testing and validation to earn its place in the dialogue.

One way the validation process might begin is to have independent writers and researchers on mentoring consider the extent to which the behaviors described in the literature on mentoring, rather than the labels attributed to them, fit the roles and functions distinguished in the conceptual model. They could then address the questions of whether the model reconciles the contradictory definitions and allows for talking about supportive relationships across contexts (i.e., has content validity).

The model raises other questions that beg consideration, not the least of which is whether there are other variables in addition to or instead of *intent* and *involvement* that are just as potent for distinguishing among roles and relationships. Race and gender are two variables that have figured

prominently in the literature on mentoring. In developing the model, they were considered and set aside, not because race and gender play no part in the relationships. On the contrary, race and gender are factors in the frequency, nature, and availability of different supportive workplace relationships (N. W. Collins, 1983; Holland, 1998; Mertz et al., 1988; Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1999; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Thomas, 1990; Welch, 1997). However, race and gender are not inherent to the relationships, simply because they may be common to them. Although factors of race and gender may influence relationships, even powerfully, they are not innate to relationships or necessary factors for defining and distinguishing relationships per se, and they are surely not appropriate for doing so. Thus, although this explains the decision to set aside race and gender as variables in developing the model, it hardly eliminates them from further consideration. Nor does it exclude any other variables that may exist, but were not considered, that would prove powerful for differentiating roles and relationships.

Although any contribution of the model rests on validation and verification, it does offer immediate assistance to prospective role players (e.g., advisors, mentors) in making decisions about whether and what relationships they choose to involve themselves in and what is involved and expected of them in those relationships. It also allows for establishing with the other party to the relationship, up front, what can be expected of and from the role player, almost like a compact, thereby allowing the other party to make an informed decision about continuing to pursue the relationship. This alone might go a long way in achieving greater congruence in expectations between the parties to the relationship. And last, but hardly least, it could allow for ending the idiosyncratic practice of referring to almost every supportive workplace relationship as mentoring, reserving that term for a most particular kind of relationship, whether appropriately or usefully defined by this model or not.

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