

## **Relationship Between Mentoring and Career Development of Agricultural Education Faculty**

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The 1980s and early 1990s will likely be remembered as a period of economic decline, financial cut-backs, and overall "belt-tightening" throughout much of American society. This era of limited resources has resulted in a renewed interest in the importance of individuals to organizational success (Willbur, 1986). Employees are being recognized as valuable resources, and successful organizations are working to maximize their existing human resources.

The corporate world has been bombarded with literature emphasizing the value of people. Popular books by Peters and Waterman (1982), Kanter (1983), Naisbitt (1982), and Naisbitt & Aburdene (1985) stress the importance of human resource development to organizational success. The renewed interest in capitalizing on human resources has not escaped the academic world. Baldwin and Blackburn (1983) emphasized that the effectiveness of a college or university is directly linked to the quality and vigor of its faculty members. Today's conditions of limited resources and ever-increasing demand for accountability have made the optimum performance of a faculty a top priority in higher education.

Faculty career development is recognized as an important factor in maintaining faculty vitality (Hynes, 1984; Ruch, 1984; Braskamp et al., 1982; Baldwin and Blackburn, 1983). Career development and advancement are believed to be influenced by a variety of personal characteristics; however, evidence suggests that environmental and organizational factors also play a significant part in the academic career development process (Fowler, 1982). One such factor is that of mentoring. "Today one can find mention of mentoring in almost every publication aimed at management, administrators, educators, human resource professionals, and the general public" (Murray, 1991, p. xiii); however, its role in career development has received only limited study. Examples of successful mentoring models are found more frequently in business than in education.

A major function of a mentoring relationship is to facilitate a person's career growth and success. Although Levinson (1978) advocates that a mentor is fundamental to all aspects of one's development, other researchers and theorists view the primary benefits of mentoring as those affecting performance in the workplace (Zey, 1984; Kram, 1985; Kanter, 1977).

Kram (1985) summarized mentoring functions into two broad categories that she termed career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions are those aspects of a relationship that enhanced learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in an organization, Psychosocial functions are those aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional role.

While career functions serve primarily to aid advancement up the hierarchy of an organization, psychosocial functions affect each individual on a personal level by

building self-worth inside and outside the organization. According to Kram (1985, p. 2), when a relationship provides both career and psychosocial functions, “it best approximates the prototype of a mentor relationship.” The range of specific functions provided vary from one relationship to another.

Zey (1984) described the most intense and useful function of mentoring as sponsorship. The mentor puts his or her reputation on the line by actively promoting the protege and by giving him or her important responsibilities. Kanter (1977) viewed sponsorship as extremely important to organizational success. Sponsors hold positions in organizations that enable them to stand up for the person being sponsored and to promote that person for promising opportunities.

Kram (1985) described mentoring functions similar to those of Zey (1984). Mentors use their organizational influence to provide opportunity for the protege to gain exposure and visibility in the organization. They also coach and protect their proteges. Among the psychosocial functions described by Kram are role-modeling, counseling, friendship and acceptance, and confirmation.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which the career development of university agricultural education faculty has been influenced by mentors, and to examine the relationship between mentoring and selected indicators of career development. Secondary purposes of the study were to identify functions performed by mentors, and to develop a profile of the mentors of university agricultural education faculty.

Objectives of the study were to:

Determine the extent to which the professional career development of university agricultural education faculty had been influenced by a mentor or mentors.

Determine the relationship between mentoring influence and selected indicators of career development.

Identify functions of persons serving as mentors to university agricultural education faculty.

Identify characteristics of persons serving as mentors to university agricultural education faculty.

### **Procedures**

The accessible population for this descriptive study consisted of all agricultural education faculty holding positions at four-year colleges or universities in the United States. Faculty members in the population must have held a rank of assistant professor or higher, and have been listed in the 1988 Directory of Teacher Educators in Agriculture, or the 1987 Agriculture Teachers Directory. A total of 279 individuals were identified as being eligible for inclusion in the study's population.

A mailed questionnaire was used to collect data. A research instrument was developed which consisted of four parts. The first part identified the functions performed by the respondents' mentors, and provided an indication of the respondents' Perceptions of the extent to which their professional careers had been influenced by a mentor. The 27 mentoring function items included in the instrument had been adapted from an instrument developed by Willbur (1986) which was used to study the influence of mentoring on the career success of business executives. Examples of these ideas are: "helped me set realistic performance goals", "expressed pride in my success", "gave me objective criticism", and "helped me publish an article or book". Responses to mentoring function items were summed to generate an overall composite mentoring score. A post hoc reliability coefficient was calculated, and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

The second part of the research instrument provided descriptive information **about the** individuals who had served as mentors to the respondents. The third part was designed to generate information about the respondents' career development. The items (listed in Table 1) were objective measures of commonly accepted indicators of academic career growth. Respondents were also asked to indicate their satisfaction with the current professional position, and with their career progress. The final part of the instrument contained questions intended to provide descriptive information about the respondents.

A panel of judges determined the content and face validity of the instrument. Three of the judges were in the agricultural education profession and two were familiar with theories of adult development.

A usable return rate of 78.66% (220 instruments) was achieved. A nonrespondent follow-up was conducted. A series of t-tests revealed no significant difference between respondents and nonrespondents.

### **Analysis of Data**

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences X (SPSSX). Frequencies, means, standard deviations, and percentages were used to describe the data. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationship between the composite mentoring score, and selected indicators of career development.

### **Results**

Nearly all respondents (93.66%) indicated that their professional careers had been significantly influenced by one or more individuals. In this study, the term mentor was used to describe these influential individuals. The definition of mentor was kept very broad due to the exploratory nature of the study. The level of perceived influence by a mentor on the respondents' career development was determined by calculating a composite mentoring score based on responses to 27 items pertaining to functions performed by mentors. The possible range of composite scores was from 0 to 432. The actual range of scores was from 197 to 423.

To examine the relationship between mentoring and career development, 11 indicators of career development were selected, and a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient calculated between respondents' composite mentoring score and their performance on each indicator of career development. As shown in Table 1, significant relationships were observed between mentoring and only two of the career development indicators, "grants received" and "master's students advised".

Table 1. Pearson product-moment correlations between composite mentoring scores and selected indicators of career development

Indicator of career development	Coefficient	Probability
Years to reach associate professor	.02	.408
Years to reach full professor	-.19	.069
Administrative positions held	.12	.080
National leadership positions held	.03	.382
National awards received	.03	.382
Professional awards from state or local level	.09	.162
Journal articles published	.12	.080
Books authored or coauthored	.02	.408
Grants received	.20**	.009
Doctoral students advised	.07	.221
Master's students advised	.20**	.009

<sup>a</sup>This correlation was computed for full professors only, using the number of years to move from associate to full professor.

Two career development measures were also correlated with respondents' composite mentoring scores. Respondents' satisfaction with their current professional position, and their satisfaction with their career progress were both positively related to the composite mentoring score (see Table 2).

Table 2. Pearson product-moment correlations between composite mentoring score and indicators of career satisfaction

Indicator of career satisfaction	Coefficient	Probability
Satisfaction with current position	.286**	.001
Satisfaction with career progress	.337**	.001

Respondents were also asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed that their mentor had performed each of 27 selected mentoring functions. The most important mentoring functions were the following: influenced my career in a positive way, supported my efforts to advance in my career, took a personal interest in the development of my career, expressed pride in my success, recognized my potential as an effective educator, praised my efforts in the presence of others, been someone I could rely on for support during critical times, and used his/her influence to assist my advancement by recommending me for promising opportunities. The least important mentoring functions were: insisted I stand on my own at all times, helped me publish an article or book, assisted me by voluntarily taking on the role of teacher to improve my skills, and cautioned me to avoid actions that might harm my career.

The mentors described by university agricultural education professors were, in many respects, similar to their professors. The mentors and proteges were typically white males of a similar social class, employed as university professors, and holding doctoral degrees in agricultural education. Mentors were typically between eight and 20 years older than their proteges, held the rank of full professor, and were considered by respondents to have considerable influence in their professional field. Mentors provided the greatest professional support during the early stages of the protege's career, that is, during graduate school and their first professional position following graduate school.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Most university agricultural education professors perceived their professional careers to have been significantly influenced by another person or persons. The extent of mentoring influence on the professional development of agricultural education faculty varied widely, and only a few individuals appeared to have experienced intensive, comprehensive relationships that are typical of "true" mentorships. The majority of agricultural education faculty have experienced relationships that may more appropriately be described as role modeling, counseling, or guiding.

Mentors of agricultural education professors provide many functions for their proteges. Proteges considered functions pertaining to both career development and psychosocial development to be important. Mentors of university agricultural education faculty were similar to their proteges in race, social class, educational level and professional field. They are considered by their proteges to be highly influential in their professional field. Mentors of university agricultural education faculty were most important to their proteges early in the protege's professional career.

Mentoring was not found to be significantly related to the performance of university agricultural education professors on most (9 of 11) objective indicators of career development included in this study. However, mentoring was found to be significantly related to an individual's feeling regarding his or her satisfaction with his or her career.

Professors who experienced higher levels of mentoring were more satisfied with their current jobs and with their career progress. It is possible that the emotional support gained through a mentoring relationship provides agricultural education faculty with the security of knowing they have a person to whom they can turn for advice or guidance. Such support may result in confidence regarding one's competence and performance.

The following recommendations were made to the agricultural education profession: Agricultural education faculty are influential in the career development process of younger professors and graduate students. All faculty should recognize the potential impact of their behavior and attitudes on the profession. Efforts should be made by each individual to develop and maintain realistic but positive attitudes regarding the agricultural education profession. High professional standards should be upheld by each faculty member.

Agricultural education professors benefit from a variety of functions performed by mentors. Many of these functions that benefit the psychosocial development of the protege are also considered to be important. Agricultural education faculty who find themselves in mentoring roles should recognize the importance of the quality of the mentoring relationship, and strive to develop those aspects of the relationship that benefit both the professional and personal lives of their proteges.

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