

Entry

Mentoring in and Across Work Organizations

Sarah E. Riforgiate ^{1,*} , Candice Ruh ¹ , Christiana Ibiwoye ¹, Jannatul Ferdous Zinia ² 
and Gertrude Misornu Nartey ¹ 

¹ Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53211, USA; clruh@uwm.edu (C.R.); cbiwoye@uwm.edu (C.I.); gertrude@uwm.edu (G.M.N.)

² Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011, USA; jzinia@iastate.edu

* Correspondence: sriforgi@uwm.edu

Definition

Mentoring is a series of communication interactions over time that involve the exchange of experiences or accumulated knowledge between individuals in a relationship with the intent of assisting growth and developing capacity. More specifically, mentoring frequently occurs in dyads that provide developmental mentoring, career development, psychosocial support, and role modeling across a continuum of formal and informal mentoring relationships, including episodic interactions. Mentoring has a long history, from guidance documented in Homer's "Odyssey" dating back to 700 BCE, to structured mentoring programs used by organizations such as the Big Brothers (founded in 1910). However, mentoring research did not gain widespread prevalence until the 1980s when mentoring was applied across various employment sectors. This entry encompasses international scholarly publications across disciplines such as communication, business, education, medicine, engineering, psychology, sociology, and more to identify and explain key mentoring concepts, provide a comprehensive summary of existing research findings, offer strategies for effective mentoring practices, and highlight future research directions.

Keywords: mentoring; formal/informal mentoring; reverse mentoring; cohort mentoring; network mentoring; feminist mentoring; developmental mentoring; career/vocational support; psychosocial support; modeling



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1. Introduction to Mentoring

1.1. Mentoring History

Mentoring has a long history. Waymer explains that mentoring occurred for early human survival and "has been in existence since the dawn of civilization" making mentoring "firmly entrenched in our human culture" [1] (p. 403). Documentation of mentoring can be traced back to Homer's "Odyssey", estimated to have been composed around 700 BCE [2]. However, the term "mentor" first appeared in François Fénelon's work and had a profound influence on education [3]. Fénelon, the royal tutor for the Duke of Burgundy, created novels to address the Duke's behavioral issues; the most influential novel titled "Les Aventures de Télémaque, Fils d'Ulysse" (1699), portrays the character "Mentor" as someone who shared knowledge and guided in ways that were "interpersonal and mutually affectionate in nature", capturing aspects of nurturing development [4] (p. 129). As Blunsden explains, "it was the result of *The Adventures's* huge popularity during the course of the eighteenth century that the word 'mentor' came into common usage in French, German, Italian, and English to refer to a person who provides advice and guidance to

somebody less experienced.” [4] (p. 131). Garvey contends that “Fénelon’s Mentor offers us a model of Mentor that is still relevant today and includes such qualities as fostering independence and self-efficacy by supporting and challenging the learner” [3] (p. 9). Caraccioli’s later writings in 1759 reinforced Fénelon’s work and emphasized altruism in mentoring where mentors were ideally to focus on the mentee’s “holistic growth . . . without capitalizing upon or exploiting their dependence” [4] (p. 133). Not long after, in 1778, mentoring appeared in Ann Murry’s publication of “Mentoria: The Young Ladies Instructor” in the United States furthering the ideas and practice [5].

Grounded in Fénelon’s and others’ subsequent work, mentoring conceptualization and practices emanated and expanded in education fields to guide and share knowledge while enhancing mentee development. Organizations such as Big Brothers (founded in 1910) formalized mentoring programs and expanded mentoring that focused on developing youth beyond academic contexts [3,5]. By the 1980s, mentoring practices became more widespread in education. Hobson and colleagues trace “the modern rise of mentoring as a means of supporting the initial and early professional learning of beginning teachers” to programs in England, North America, and other parts of Europe, with the United States and Europe sometimes requiring mentoring programs to increase retention and attract educators [6] (p. 208).

1.2. Roots of Mentoring Research

While mentoring has a long history in educational settings in terms of theorizing and practice [6], industry’s interest in mentoring research is more recent. Prior to the 1970s, while employers were receptive and there were some experiments, there was not a systematic focus on mentoring research with only 2 publications on mentoring between 1975 and 1979 [7]. By the 1970s, mentoring and coaching research expanded with the constructs treated as two separate fields [7]. According to Underhill, “in 1983, Merriam published the first critical review of the literature on mentoring. At that time mentoring was believed to create success in the career of the protégé, but this belief was not readily substantiated by research at the time” [8] (p. 293). In the same year, Kram’s study of dyadic mentoring relationships in a public utility company identified career and psychosocial functions of mentoring in the United States [9].

Kram subsequently published “Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life” in 1985, which noted the ways mentors could provide career mentoring and use their influence to advocate on the behalf of mentees [10]. That same year in the United Kingdom, Clutterbuck and Devine’s book “Everyone Needs a Mentor: How to Foster Talent Within the Organization” was published [11]. This book included five case studies to explore how to identify and develop potential managers, equip experienced employees with knowledge and awareness of potential career options, enhance network development, and increase women’s promotions [10]. “In the first edition of “Everyone Needs a Mentor”, Clutterbuck incorporated an acronym, MENTOR, which comes from another source, to indicate that the mentor must: Manage the relationship; Encourage the protégé; Nurture the protégé, Teach the protégé, Offer mutual respect and Respond to the protégé’s needs” [10] (p. 142). Kram and Clutterbuck’s works oriented to mentoring differently based on their cultural context with Kram’s United States focus concentrating more on what mentoring does (sponsorship model) and Clutterbuck’s European focus attending more to the mentoring process (developmental model) [12,13]. By the third edition of Clutterbuck’s “Everyone Needs a Mentor”, he noted evolving work on developmental mentoring in the United States and Canada where mentoring was increasingly promoting self-sufficiency and self-reliance [14].

Around the 2000s, there was also increasing interest in making distinctions between mentoring and coaching, as well as recognition of overlapping elements [7]. As Stokes and colleagues differentiate:

Traditionally, coaching has been associated with a shorter term performance focus, with the coach portrayed as a process- rather than a content knowledge-based expert. By contrast, mentoring has a longer-term holistic focus, where the mentor has direct experience and knowledge in the setting that the mentee is operating in [9] (p. 142).

Coaches often have a specific, clear goal and provide targeted advice for improvement, which is not encumbered by social and personal expectations commonly found in mentoring relationships [15]. Even so, coaching often includes characteristics, skill sets, and experiences related to mentoring making it difficult to distinguish between the two [16]. Further, Garvey contends that there is “a hybridization of coaching and mentoring beginning to emerge across different sectors” [3] (p. 14).

Regardless of the distinction between mentoring and coaching, the practice of mentoring has increased in prominence and attracted scholarly research. By 2005–2009, there were 320 mentoring related publications, and that rate has increased in subsequent years [7]. Mentoring has been substantiated as a mechanism for personal and professional development [17–19], employee retention [20,21], and to enhance organizational culture [22,23].

1.3. Defining Mentoring

Considering extensive scholarship across international contexts and disciplines including communication, business, education, medicine, engineering, psychology, sociology and others, this entry reviews pertinent research and scholarly work to define and explore what is known about mentoring. In working to provide a comprehensive definition of mentoring, we synthesize mentoring research and theory across international contexts and disciplines in this entry. We recognize that no definition fully encapsulates all the nuances of the depth and breadth of research; therefore, we lean heavily on scholarly work to support this conceptualization. We also note variations in the conceptualization of mentoring across different international contexts. As previously noted, the foundation of mentoring research in the United States focused primarily on career sponsorship and support, whereas European work focused more on developmental aspects of mentoring [12]. While distinct cultural contexts, a greater focus on relational and developmental aspects of mentoring is gaining attention in the United States [17,20].

Broadly, mentoring is a series of communication interactions over time that involve the exchange of experiences or accumulated knowledge between individuals in a relationship with the intent of assisting growth and developing capacity [20,24–27]. As we unpack this definition further and explore mentoring scholarship, we note that across the mentoring literature, the individuals who are mentored are referred to as protégés or mentees. This entry uses the term mentees for consistency, except when quoting research studies. Below, each of the primary components of this definition is explained before discussing details of mentoring functions, formats, challenges and benefits, individual characteristics, and future research directions.

The first component of this mentoring definition, a series of communication interactions over time, highlights the important role of communication. Regular exchanges in ongoing intervals are a core feature of mentoring [25,28]. While mentoring structures and arrangements vary, mentoring relationships are developed and maintained through a series of verbal and nonverbal interactions that are necessary to nurture trust and share important experiences and knowledge [29]. These relationships generally begin by identifying mutual goals, values, and commonalities [30] which evolve through conversations over

time as mentors and mentees learn about each other, identify similarities, engage in mutual confirmation [31], and establish trust [32,33].

Poor mentor and mentee communication is problematic, because “miscommunication, differing goals, and unclear boundaries often lead to dissatisfaction,” and mentees may not receive the assistance necessary to move toward their goals [21] (p. 19). Johnson and colleagues report that the mentoring relationships they studied during the COVID-19 pandemic suffered when relational development and maintenance became limited to videoconferencing [34]. Relying on technology rather than in-person interactions can make casual conversations challenging, and missing nonverbal cues increases difficulty in developing mutual understanding [26]. Yet Megginson contends that technology enables more possibility for communication between mentor and mentee across locations and organizations because actual face-to-face communication is not required to sustain the relationship [35]. Ultimately, ongoing, regular communication is at the center of developing mentoring relationships [36].

Second, mentoring involves the exchange of experiences or accumulated knowledge, as well as assisting growth and developing capacity, emphasizing the value of mentoring relationships [1,37–39]. From a United States perspective, the importance and pervasiveness of mentoring was noted by Lorenzetti et al. who explain that mentorship is “part of the ‘fabric’ of contemporary culture and is often viewed as essential to career advancement” [30] (para. 4). Ragins further describes that “mentoring is a critical career resource that predicts advancement, compensation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, retention and even work-life balance” [20] (p. 1). Mentoring focuses on professional development and career advancement, psychosocial support to develop self-efficacy and confidence, and role modeling [19]. For this to occur, the mentor must be willing and equipped to share pertinent knowledge with the intention of enhancing the mentee’s development and career advancement. From a European perspective, mentorship is primarily focused on mentee development, where the mentor’s primary role is to support the mentee’s learning [12]. Clutterbuck’s fieldwork in 1985 resulted in identifying five developmental stages including: “rapport building, direction setting, progress making, maturation, and moving on” [10] (p. 187). Following these stages, the ultimate goal is to nurture mentees to become self-sufficient over time.

Third, mentoring involves individuals in a relationship that can be configured in a variety of ways. Mentoring relationships can be formally assigned or developed informally through voluntary interactions [31]. Mentoring has largely been conceptualized as a dyadic arrangement with a mentor and mentee [24]. The mentor is frequently more senior with extensive experience to guide the younger or novice mentee [40]. However, mentoring relationship success depends on a basis of trust and mutual respect [41], as well as the engagement of both individuals [42,43]. The International Mentoring Association emphasizes that mentoring involves an “intense, trusting, supportive, positive, confidential, low-risk relationship within which the partners can try new ways of working and relating, make mistakes, gain feedback, accept challenges, and learn from each other” [44]. Broadly, the dyadic relationship arrangement assumes a directional mentoring approach, where information is passed from the mentor to the mentee [25].

In contrast to Western contexts, Eastern mentoring relationships tend to be more formal and hierarchical. For example, “Chinese formal mentoring relationships often are ritualized with official ceremonies that mark their start” and “are embedded in mentors’ and mentees’ social networks” [25] (p. 300). In Japan, mentees respect hierarchical relationships and power distance by following the advice of their mentors [45].

Reverse mentoring is a particular dyadic relationship that is different from typical directional mentoring approaches in that the mentee is also responsible for sharing knowl-

edge and experience with the mentor for mutual benefit [3,46]. In reverse mentoring, those normally considered mentors become mentees. For example, a more senior team member can benefit from learning new technologies or developing different skill sets from more junior mentees as the relationship involves reciprocal sharing [22]. In addition to technology and hard skills, reverse mentoring can be used to help those with non-diverse backgrounds learn from those with more layers of diversity and broader cultural experience, thereby enhancing an organizational culture of inclusion [20].

Further, not all mentoring relationships are confined to dyads. For example, cohort mentoring involves cluster hiring groups of people to engage in peer mentoring with introductions to a variety of organizational mentors over time; this creates opportunities for numerous mentoring relationships and support [47,48]. Buzzanell describes how feminist mentoring practices involve bringing people together through experiences to support and nurture each other over time [17]. Overall, relationships are central to mentoring. Next, we explore research on the different mentoring functions that researchers have identified.

2. Mentoring Functions

Now that defining features of mentoring have been established, it is important to examine the functions associated with mentoring. According to Kram's work in the United States, mentoring serves many functions including career development, psychosocial support, and role modeling [49]. European mentoring research notes that mentoring attends to aspects of these functions but orients more to the process of mentoring as developmental to foster growth and self-sufficiency [12,13].

2.1. Career Development

Career development, also referred to as vocational support, includes working with mentees to develop skills that enhance job performance and sharing organizational information to assist mentee advancement [24,31]. Helping mentees understand important organizational practices, including stated and unstated norms, assists them in socializing into the organization to perform as expected [40,50]. Mentors also advocate for mentees in a variety of ways. In particular, Stokes and Merrick explain that women in the United States, as compared to Europe, have a greater need for mentor sponsorship, which includes "helping by managing politics, helping to provide exposure and visibility, assistance in getting challenging assignments, and protecting mentees" [51] (p. 208). Further, mentors are able to defend mentees in situations where they are not present, contributing to their career success [20,52]. Mentors may serve important career functions by talking mentees through decision points and difficult situations or through role-play exercises [36,43]. Further, mentors can help mentees develop networks through introductions and by encouraging mentees to attend professional development events [18,53].

2.2. Psychosocial Support

A second important mentoring function is psychosocial support, which involves a combination of psychological and social aspects such as building self-confidence and emotional support to enhance mentees' well-being. According to Weinberg and Lankau, psychosocial support occurs when mentors aid mentees "in developing their own identity within the organization while promoting a sense of self-confidence and work-role effectiveness" [31] (p. 1531). This is accomplished by establishing trusting relationships through behaviors such as affirming and encouraging mentees, confirming mentees' actions, making space for open and transparent conversations, helping mentees solve problems, and developing friendships over time [20,33]. Further, psychosocial support can extend organizational boundaries as mentors assist with work/life concerns mentees may face [17,23].

2.3. Modeling

Modeling has been classified under the psychosocial support function and as a distinct mentoring function, but regardless of how it is classified, modeling is an important aspect of mentoring [26]. Modeling involves serving as an example for mentees to learn how to conduct themselves [31]. Thus, mentees need to perceive that mentor behaviors are worthwhile examples to replicate and enact [54]. Modeling can occur through observing a formal assigned mentor or unplanned observations and interactions that are influential to mentees [25,55]. This means that mentors may not realize they are functioning as mentoring role models through their everyday interactions. Because of this, ethics is an important modeling facet. The role of mentor as a role model can get ethically complex, which requires clear ethical guidelines since it often operates outside formal systems of rules and controls [12]. Busch and colleagues contend that “ethical leaders are those who—through their regular daily interactions with their subordinates—set and role model ethical standards and make their team accountable for their (un)ethical behavior” [56] (p. 210). Ethical modeling concentrates on mentees’ long-term development and can positively influence organizational culture [56].

3. Mentoring Formats

In addition to mentorship functions, there are also several mentoring formats or modes of mentoring [51], which have a bearing on the experience and outcomes for both mentors and mentees. This section reviews formal, informal, reverse-mentoring, and feminist mentoring formats.

3.1. Formal Mentoring

Formal mentoring includes specific behavioral expectations, responsibilities, and resources with the intent to help mentees grow through the mentoring relationship [25,33]. As such, formal mentoring involves “planned programmatic interactions” where employers implement mentoring expectations that shape the mentor and mentee experiences [57] (p. 25). These programs typically include clear agreements on goals, meeting structure, and the expected duration of the relationship [40,58]. While we have differentiated formal and informal mentoring in this entry, it is important to note that rather than a dichotomy, formal and informal mentoring generally occur on a continuum with more or less structure in the mentor/mentee relationship [51].

Formal mentoring relationships can take different forms which are often tied to career-related needs and last for a defined period [59]. However, it is important to note that as mentoring relationships develop, they may continue beyond the formal program period and take on more developmental or friendship characteristics. For formal mentoring programs, organizations actively recruit and match mentors with mentees to ensure effective guidance and outcomes [31]. Participation in and expectations for programs vary by organization. While some organizations allow any employee to serve as a mentor, other programs set specific eligibility requirements based on factors like job role, demonstrated expertise, or selection by supervisors [21,60]. However, Megginson notes that many variables in matching mentors do not have empirical support, thus it is important to continue research that will “test carefully” and “enquire deeply about causal contributors to success” when evaluating mentoring programs [35] (p. 3).

Formal mentoring programs are common, with approximately 70% of United States Fortune 500 companies offering programs [54]. The purpose of formal mentoring is typically driven by motivations such as professional advancement and employee retention [33]. Programs are structured to help mentees understand how to manage professional growth within the organization because assigned mentors can explain internal career paths, profes-

sional development opportunities [18], and organizational culture that may not be obvious to mentees [23]. Further, formal mentoring allows important organizational information and practices to transfer to new members for business continuity [32,61]. These programs serve as a signal that the organization values employees' growth [25]. Thus, mentoring supports organizational goals by developing talent, enhancing productivity, and preparing future leaders [59]. Additionally, Arocho and Johnson contend that formal mentoring programs are most impactful when they emphasize reflexive practice, rather than focusing on specific skills and models [58].

An additional benefit is that formal mentorship can support workplace diversity by offering structured opportunities designed to foster organic, informal connections through mentor introductions [20]. These programs are often implemented to make sure that mentoring occurs equitably across organizational members, not leaving mentoring to chance [21]. For women and other marginalized groups, formal mentoring helps reduce or remove barriers that have historically made it difficult to form mentoring relationships [33].

3.1.1. Mentoring Dyads

Mentoring occurs in several formats, with mentoring dyads as the most common arrangement across both formal and informal mentoring relationships. Specific to this section, formal mentoring dyads involve matching a pair of individuals based on the expertise of one individual (a mentor) with the needs of another individual (a mentee) according to factors such as career level, area of expertise, or specific goals, alongside training for both parties to improve mentoring success [21]. Some goals include learning a particular role or organizational process, increasing employee productivity, or creating leadership succession capacity [41,59].

Communication and intentional matching of mentor-mentee dyads play a crucial role in fostering effective mentoring by ensuring compatibility and supporting positive interactions that meet the objectives of mentoring programs [25]. Generally, there is a legitimate power difference based on the dyad members' official positions [25] and expertise power differences since the mentoring relationship is designed to share knowledge from the mentor to the mentee [43]. Mentors often hold recognized authority and may issue "directives" as part of their role. This is particularly true in Eastern contexts [25,45]. However, mentors may choose to communicate these "directives" as a form of advice to offer guidance and encourage mentee growth that allows mentees "agency" to act on or reject the advice [25]. Even so, Zellers and colleagues caution that mentor pairings should avoid matching supervisors or individuals with decision-making authority over mentees, as this creates difficult power dynamics that can lead to unnecessary conflict, particularly during employee evaluations [33]. Megginson also advises that being aware of the "dark side [of mentoring] can lead to more judicious relationship and scheme design" [35] (p. 2).

Time spent with mentors is important for mentee development. Weinberg and Lankau's research examined the effectiveness of same- and cross-gender dyad mentoring relationships at 2 months and then one month after the 9-month formal program concluded [31]. They found that overall, mentees who spent more time with their mentors experienced significantly increased vocational, psychosocial, and role modeling benefits at both time points, but particularly at the second time point. Further, while Weinberg and Lankau identified lower vocational, psychosocial, and modeling benefits in cross-gender dyads compared to same-gender dyads at time one, these differences were not significant at time two [31]. Weinberg and Lankau concluded that "as formal mentoring relationships develop over time, mentors begin to use their time more efficiently and the negative effects of cross-gender differences dissipate" [31] (p. 1527).

While formal mentoring dyads can be beneficial, they may also come with challenges. For example, poor mentor-mentee matching can contribute to the mentorship relationship failing or ending prematurely [21], as well as a lack of time investment, incompetence, and conflict [58]. Additionally, mentees, especially from marginalized groups, might not receive the specific guidance they need if the mentor lacks expertise in those areas [17]. Although mentoring is often perceived positively, poor mentoring can hinder mentees' development [35]. Such poor practices include limited expertise, insufficient time commitment, conflicts, and other challenges [58]. Stokes and Merrick emphasize the importance of quality mentors as a "vital element of mentoring scheme design", where mentor quality can yield mentee satisfaction even in poorly designed programs [51] (p. 202). Because of these potential limitations in mentor quality, relying on a single mentor can restrict access to diverse support and resources, leading to unmet needs and dissatisfaction. This has led to other mentoring configurations.

3.1.2. Reverse Mentoring

Reverse mentoring offers a different mentoring format that exchanges traditional mentoring roles; an individual who may be considered a mentee serves in a mentorship capacity to someone who traditionally may be considered a mentor [3,26,62,63]. Age can be one criterion for reverse mentoring, whereby younger employees share their knowledge with older individuals about technology or other specific content expertise [25]. Reverse mentoring "focuses on the differences of experience, understanding, and attitudes as mentor and mentee learn about each other's worlds" [3] (p. 13). As such, reverse mentoring exchanges are expected to create a mutually beneficial relationship where both parties develop new or updated skills and understandings [64]. Additionally, reverse mentoring can enhance organizational culture and appreciation for diversity when those with non-diverse backgrounds learn from those with more layers of diversity and broader cultural experience [20]. Organizations may formally adopt reverse mentoring arrangements, or the relationships may develop informally and relationally over time [26]. As organizations consider incentives for reverse mentoring, Buzzanell recommends that rewards should be "consistent with career and lifespan phases, cognizant of difference, and in keeping with organizational cultures ... and reward systems" [25] (p. 291).

3.1.3. Group Mentoring

Group mentoring occurs when several individuals with a variety of experiences mentor each other [57]. This essentially creates conditions for peer or co-mentoring to occur. The group members comprise a range of perspectives; having multiple members and viewpoints decreases the obligation of any one member to satisfy every mentoring role [21]. Groups are often formed to address a particular need (i.e., career stage, professional challenge). For example, an academic mentoring group may exchange information, provide constructive feedback about research, and share publishing advice [29]. Additionally, a qualitative study of women in academia found that group mentoring participants experienced psychological safety, which fostered career development and overall satisfaction [63].

Group mentoring may include people within an organization in different divisions and positions, or across organizations such as mentoring groups formed by professional associations. This arrangement can build beneficial peer relationships and expand networks [51]. Group mentoring is particularly useful for mentees excluded from conventional mentoring programs, such as women, other marginalized groups, and those without strong professional networks [57].

Group mentoring can be effective if it is well structured and designed to promote collaboration and strong support networks. There is usually a formal expectation for meeting

frequency, and all group members are expected to participate and support members [21]. However, without proper planning, mentees may feel confused about how to engage [21], and groups may be ineffective or dissipate.

3.1.4. Cohort Mentoring

Formal cohort mentoring involves groups comprising individuals with specific demographic characteristics who are hired together in clusters. Because the mentees start in the organization together, they experience organizational socialization processes as a group, guided by a cohort program leader and multiple organizational members who support the cohort in different areas. Cohort mentees' expertise is assumed, and interactions are facilitated to encourage peer mentoring and supportive relationships between cohort and other organizational members [65]. Cohort mentoring enhances professional support, collaboration, and emotional well-being for both mentors and mentees [66]. In higher education, cohort mentoring has been found to foster a strong sense of community, shared understanding, and reduce feelings of isolation during critical transitions, such as moving into tenure-track faculty roles [65].

3.1.5. Network Mentoring

Network mentoring involves creating a web of relationships through identifying numerous mentors to assist in professional development. Associations like the National Association for Faculty Development and Diversity (NAFDD) promote network approaches to mentoring, arguing that relying on one person limits mentees' exposure to pertinent expertise in multiple areas [22,67]. Long and colleagues contend that the network approach provides "mentees a 'constellation' of mentors from different life domains" which "can uniquely contribute to the achievement of individual and institutional goals, including socializing, retaining, and promoting organizational members; fostering nonhierarchical, cross-cultural, interdisciplinary partnerships; and cultivating collaborative and inclusionary cultures" [68] (p. 22).

3.2. Informal Mentoring

Informal mentoring occurs through voluntary and mutually beneficial relationships rooted in the mentee's goals, values, and abilities, and includes support through feedback, role modeling, guidance, and creating opportunities [69]. Informal mentoring relationships are frequently dyadic and form organically without organizational program structure based on collaboration between the mentor and mentee to actively engage in knowledge sharing and support each other's learning [70]. As such, informal mentoring occurs through a dynamic and collaborative process in which mentors and mentees co-create meaning and growth opportunities through their responsive and momentary interactions, which are shaped by their identities, experiences, and surrounding context [25]. Because of its flexible nature and personal connection, this mentoring format levels power imbalances and fosters an open and supportive space for exchanging knowledge [70]. Moreover, informal mentoring is linked to close personal connections driven by mutual curiosity, appreciation, and the belief by both parties that they could collaborate well together, either one-on-one or in groups [21,32]. Compared to formal mentoring, informal mentoring relationships tend to be more connected, with frequent communication, and a stronger sense of closeness felt by the mentee, making these relationships more growth-oriented in nature [71].

Buell and Ragins introduce two informal mentoring types, friendship mentoring and relational mentoring, respectively. Buell conceptualizes friendship mentoring as co-constructed and collaborative where there is a peer rather than mentee/mentor relationship that is marked by reciprocity and mutual contributions [29]. Similarly, Ragins describes rela-

tional mentoring as marked by “acknowledging mutual learning” and “that the relationship needs to be high-quality” [20] (p. 2).

Under the umbrella of informal mentoring, episodic mentoring mirrors the communication dynamics and language development of informal interpersonal relationships, since both are formed based on mutual interests, attraction, and momentary connection [25]. An episodic perspective views mentoring as a series of spontaneous and momentary interactions that can occur without formal structure [72]. Interactions such as unplanned hallway conversations, drop-in visits, or informal coffee/lunch dates enable exchanging information and experiences, emotional support, and relationship development [72,73]. Therefore, with time these episodic mentoring sessions can lead to developmental outcomes similar to formal mentoring relationships. Long and colleagues’ research with engineering faculty members found that about two-thirds of the participants intentionally maintained their mentoring relationships and networks, while the remaining third discussed receiving informal, episodic mentoring that occurred spontaneously when required, such as watching colleagues, or asking questions for guidance [68].

3.3. Feminist Mentoring

“Feminist mentoring” is gaining attention in the United States, sparking numerous conversations and discussions about its distinct format characteristics in contrast to other forms of mentoring. Feminist mentoring leans into relationships similarly to informal mentoring but focuses holistically on all aspects of mentees lives [17]. Corple and colleagues define feminist mentoring as “whole-person, care-oriented mentoring” that “recognizes the emotional, spiritual, psychological, physical, and intellectual aspects of others and enacts care accordingly, rather than a professional mentoring relationship which is often pragmatic or even impersonal” [74] (p. 6). Feminist mentoring provides attentive and responsive support for the diverse aspects of mentees and their lives, fostering an environment where individuals feel valued and understood as complete human beings rather than simply professional or academic entities [37].

Buzzanell explains that “one means of capturing the benefits of mentoring while also lessening possibilities of detrimental relationships, mind-body disconnections, and negative short- and long-term consequences is through feminist co-mentoring” [17] (p. 10). Feminist co-mentoring works against hierarchy and competition by emphasizing values typically associated with feminism, including collaboration, honoring emotions, and fostering a sense of community [17]. Co-mentoring values integrative thinking, where diverse perspectives and emotional insight play a crucial role in the educational and supportive journey of mentees [17]. Ultimately, feminist mentorship focuses on the co-constructed relationship—the “us” [37].

4. Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring has gained increased attention in practice and research due to its potential benefits for mentees, mentors, and organizations.

4.1. Mentee Benefits

Mentees, as the focus of mentoring efforts, gain a great deal from positive mentoring relationships [58]. First, mentees experience career/vocational benefits when mentorship enables them to develop skills for completing tasks and a better understanding of their organizational role [75]. This occurs through organizational socialization, a process of sharing information that helps organizational members learn the norms and rules of the organization—what it means to be an organizational member and how to behave—alongside their task and role responsibilities [50]. As such, mentorship yields outcomes that result in the devel-

opment of the mentee's professional identity and career progression [27,40]. Those who are mentored report greater satisfaction with their compensation and opportunities for promotion [32], as well as broad career satisfaction [27,58,75].

Mentees may also receive information about career navigation and coaching [43,58], as well as insider information and strategies for increased organizational savvy [76]. This assists mentees in understanding the political nature of their organizations and helps protect them from missteps or harm [20]. Mentees who are "exposed to ethics-related mentoring report significantly higher levels of moral identity and moral self-efficacy than those who are not" [56] (p. 222). Successful mentoring is associated with increased engagement and overall productivity and performance [32].

Second, mentees benefit professionally from building positive relationships with their mentors and developing professional networks [18,76]. Influential mentors can enhance perceptions of mentee's "competence and career potential" which aid in building professional networks [22] (p. 284). Often mentor and mentee networks are different, so "various levels of integration into each other's networks creates opportunities for building connections between members of the two" [22] (p. 284). Networks can increase mentee visibility within the organization or their field. Intentionally developing multiple ties between mentors and mentees can lead to meaningful collaborations, and a greater sense of community and support [68].

Third, mentorship relationships provide mentees with psychosocial benefits, particularly when relationships develop over longer periods of time (6 months to over a year) [27]. Focusing on holistic and learner-centered development over time differentiates mentoring from coaching and offers important psychosocial benefits [9]. Emotional support can lower stress levels and improve work/life balance [8]. Mentorship facilitates increased self-efficacy, improves confidence over time, and builds strategies for increased resilience [20]. Additionally, mentors can provide strategies to navigate work and life challenges by identifying avenues for greater work flexibility that can help mentees manage responsibilities more effectively [36].

In informal mentoring relationships, mentors and mentees independently determine the direction and goals of this relationship [21]. This flexibility can be beneficial by allowing individuals the freedom to choose a mentor or mentee who best aligns with their needs and preferences. Compared to formal mentoring, informal mentoring relationships often lead to more positive outcomes [8,18]. Further, informal mentoring can be an essential element in supporting the development and well-being of mentees when they lack formal mentors or formal mentoring is not sufficient to meet their needs [68].

4.2. Mentor Benefits

Mentors also benefit in myriad ways through mentoring. First, many mentors gain "intrinsic fulfillment and self-satisfaction" from helping others develop professionally, which can renew their "sense of purpose" [22] (p. 4). Arocho and Johnson explain that "mentors often report benefits associated with collaboration, reflection, and personal satisfaction from mentoring" [58] (p. 90). Mentoring relationships are often mutually supportive over time and lead to personal growth for both mentors and mentees [42].

Second, mentors can extend their professional circles through their mentees' connections and experiences [69]. Mentoring diverse mentees helps "mentors to learn about diversity and develop transferable diversity related skills" while they expand their networks [20] (p. 1). Network building is particularly valuable in today's interconnected workplace and can open doors to new opportunities, collaborations, and industry insights that mentors might not have access to otherwise. Mentors also benefit from exercising reflexivity which allows them to grow from recognizing other's experiences and ideas [73].

Third, mentors not only help mentees with career/vocational development but personally gain skills and perspectives through mentoring. Mentors develop fresh perspectives from mentees which can lead to inclusive practices, allyship, and improved problem solving [20]. Through mentoring exchanges, mentors enhance their own communication skills by increasing their abilities to listen, develop relationships, and offer constructive feedback [40]. Mentors can also enhance their ability to manage others and develop leadership skills [22,60].

Finally, the act of mentoring can be career enhancing. A combination of factors such as a greater sense of purpose in their roles, renewed engagement with their work, and improved professional relationships contribute to mentors' overall job satisfaction and professional fulfillment [22,58]. Mentoring often leads to increased recognition and visibility which can enhance career success [22]. According to Welsh and colleagues, "mentors are more likely to be promoted and have higher salaries than non-mentors" [69] (pp. 139, 140) which suggests that mentoring serves as a form of leadership development and creates visibility within organizations.

4.3. Organizational Benefits

Organizational benefits from mentoring occur in several ways. First, mentorship relationships assist in training and knowledge transfer [22]. New organizational members, employees who change roles, and workers who return to organizations after a leave of absence all experience organizational socialization to establish their identity and organizational roles [77]. Mentors can help mentees acclimate, offer organization and role specific information, and pass on important institutional knowledge [24] which contributes to organizational continuity.

Second, organizations can leverage mentoring to support diverse and inclusive cultures [20]. Effective organizational mentoring structures are strengthened when supported by broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts that create favorable conditions for mentoring [27]. Supportive mentoring cultures have a positive impact on workers' sense of belonging [17], satisfaction [68], and retention [32,40]. To roughly quantify the impact mentorship can have on retention, Watson and Benson estimate it costs roughly \$96,000 to replace a single faculty member in higher education institutions. The benefits to the organizational culture are not only intrinsic; mentoring contributes to economic gains through retention and productivity [21]. As Johnson and Hackman explain, "the organization as a whole benefits because those who have been successfully mentored are more productive and more committed to the institution" [52] (p. 410). Further, organizations with a strong mentorship culture may be more appealing to those seeking employment, thereby attracting strong candidates to apply for open positions [22,25] and reducing search and screen costs. Overall, Watson and Benson assert that "a well-structured mentoring framework benefits faculty and institutions, creating a symbiotic relationship that enhances personal growth, professional success, and organizational excellence" [21] (p. 8). However, Hobson and colleagues caution that while some assert that mentoring is a low-cost alternative for employee training alongside mentors' normal job responsibilities, there is limited research to substantiate this approach [6].

5. Challenges of Mentoring

While mentoring brings numerous benefits, it is not without challenges. For example, Hobson et al. reported that since the early 1990s, various writings have issued warnings about the "dark side of mentoring" [6] (p. 210). "Much discussion of mentoring treats it as an unquestioned good. Reminders of the dark side can lead to more judicious relationship and scheme design" [35] (p. 2). Mentoring challenges highlight a need for intentional

relationship building and thoughtful meaning making during the mentoring process. Below power dynamics, relational, and institutional challenges are discussed as areas for greater consideration, particularly for formalized mentorship programs.

5.1. Power Dynamics

Power dynamics are prevalent in mentoring relationships because of organizational hierarchy, supervisory roles, and access to institutional resources that often place the mentors in positions of greater authority, power, and control [26]. People who are in senior positions often assume that they know best and hold superior knowledge simply because of their status in the organization [12]. Mentoring typically is based on a “hierarchical power model,” where organizations get their power from social networks and connections, and mentoring acts as a gateway into these informal networks [33] including some organizational members more than others. Based on this hierarchy and related power dynamics, Hobson explained that “mentoring can hinder the professional learning and development (PLD) of beginner teachers, induce anxiety and stress, and contribute to mentees’ decisions to leave the profession” [78] (p. 3).

Further, differences in experiences and decision-making authority between mentors and mentees can cause power imbalances [12]. Power differences are heightened when the mentor is seen as the expert and the mentee as the recipient of knowledge [20] or when the mentor acts as an authoritative figure to be uplifted, which leaves little room for the mentee’s individuality or agency [79]. High levels of mentor control can increase power imbalances that undermine learner autonomy [12]. Because mentors usually hold more power in mentoring relationships, they are the ones responsible for actively working to balance that dynamic [80]. Mentoring power dynamics can become particularly complex during relational transitions. For example, early mentoring relationships may be challenging if the mentor engages in excessive evaluation or judgment of the mentee, threatening the relationship [78]. Alternatively, over time when mentors and mentees start redefining their roles, negative feelings may arise due to shifting expectations and the realization that certain professional needs may no longer be fully met [37].

Sponsorship, whether formal or informal, can support a mentee’s career advancement by offering opportunities they may not otherwise have been aware of, such as participating in institutional projects [21]. However, because sponsors typically hold more institutional capital, there must be clear expectations regarding workload and recognition. Without these safeguards, unequal power dynamics can negatively impact the mentee’s experience and sense of value in the relationship [21].

5.2. Relational Challenges

While the positive outcomes of mentoring relationships are generally recognized, these relationships include challenges as well. First, formal mentorship can result in less-than-ideal matches, which limits the overall effectiveness of the relationship [80]. Difficulties with the relationship itself can stem from lack of mentee and mentor role clarity, poorly defined responsibilities, differing goals, and lack of expectations [21]. In more extreme cases negative relational outcomes include “bullying, coercion, misappropriation of mentee funding and resources, and publication parasitism” [48] (p. 2), as well as “incivility, anxiety, stress, feelings of abandonment, and intent to leave” [24] (p. 83).

Second, mentees’ needs are varying, complex, and evolve quickly in today’s ever-changing environments. Therefore, historical models of mentorship that center on receiving all mentoring functions from one individual as a “guru” are frequently insufficient to meet mentees’ needs [21]. Reliance on electronic communication also adds complexity to the mentoring relationship. Conducting mentoring via electronic modalities can inhibit

informal communication and create difficulties with relationship development progression, nonverbal communication, and perceived engagement [26]. Regardless of interpersonal or electronic interface, the time investment needed for healthy mentoring relationships may reduce the relationship quality or limit time for work and life responsibilities [81].

Third, women and marginalized groups often have less access to the benefits of formal mentoring. Long and colleagues highlight gender and racial/ethnic differences in the creation of mentoring networks [68]. While men tend to have more homogeneous and institution-based mentoring networks, women and marginalized groups have more diverse and external mentoring network constellations, which can be challenging to establish and maintain [68]. Moreover, women, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual), and other marginalized groups often face unequal access to mentorship, receive less effective support, and experience systemic and cultural barriers that hamper their professional growth and well-being [17]. Ragins and colleagues point out that female mentees with similar professional potential as their male peers receive less career support from their mentors [82]. As a result, women and marginalized groups tend to rely more heavily on external mentors and develop diverse mentoring networks [68].

Additional relational complexities can arise for individuals from marginalized groups with diverse identities. Identity differences such as age, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation may lead to miscommunication between mentors and mentees. The relationship can face significant challenges and pose costs for both mentees and mentors, especially for individuals who do not align with the dominant “ideal worker” prototype of an unencumbered and fully dedicated employee [25]. In cross-racial mentoring relationships, addressing racial dynamics can be challenging as mentees’ needs may vary based on their stage of identity development [37]. Mentors must carefully reflect on their own assumptions to determine whether discussing racial dimensions is appropriate and productive to support mentees’ growth [37].

Unfortunately, marginalized group members often face isolation, unfriendly work encounters, devaluation of their work, fewer professional development opportunities, higher attrition rates, and lower promotion success compared to their non-marginalized colleagues [21]. These factors make mentoring even more essential for the career development of marginalized groups [83]. Yet, inequitable access to institutional mentoring occurs in part because there are fewer women and marginalized group members in influential positions and mentors tend to select mentees they identify with, which limits opportunities to be mentored [33].

Fourth, mentoring can be derailed by romantic attraction which disrupts the mentoring relationship, program, and organizational environment [84]. Overall, cross-gender relationships have been found to be equally effective over time compared to same-gender relationships [31]. However, cross-gender relationships can also face unique challenges including risks of romantic overtones, mentees feeling insufficient, and exclusion from informal networks [37].

5.3. Institutional Challenges

Organizations face challenges related to mentorship program design. Mentorship can be viewed as a quick fix to systemic organizational challenges, resulting in lack of strategic and effective mentoring program implementation [19]. Quick fix programs lacking sound structural investment and design contribute to organizational cultures of fear and competition [68] where mentors do not know how to effectively mentor their mentees, leading to burnout [19]. Poorly designed mentorship programs erode organizational culture when they create confusion and conflict of interest when mentors must decide whether

to be loyal to mentees or their organization [30]. Conflict over mentoring roles can also occur when mentors are responsible both mentoring to develop and train, while also evaluating/assessing mentees [85].

Further, lack of funding and rewards, minimal organizational commitment, and lack of time investment disrupt the sustainability of mentorship programs [86]. High employee turnover rates are also problematic for organizational mentorship because they reduce access to individuals qualified to serve as mentors [21,50]. In these cases, employees may be unaware of how to form informal mentoring relationships [86] and opportunities for developing informal mentoring are often uneven [21]. Informal mentorship relationships are not sufficient if mentees experience difficulties obtaining consistent and meaningful feedback [21].

6. Effective Mentoring Qualities and Responsibilities

To promote effective mentorship programs, relationships, and results, all parties involved must work with intentionality and aligned outcomes in mind. There are numerous mentoring organizations that provide mentoring related resources including the International Mentoring Association (IMA) [87], European Mentoring Coaching Council Global (EMCC) [88], Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA) [89], and National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD) [67], among others. Below we detail some of the research on effective mentoring for mentees, mentors, and organizations.

6.1. Mentees

Mentees play an important role in shaping their own professional development by actively engaging in mentoring relationships. Engagement involves seeking guidance, asking questions, and listening attentively [2,25]. Trust is crucial for building strong and effective mentoring relationships [29]. Developing and participating in trusting relationships facilitates better knowledge transfer between mentor and mentee [25]. Further, consistent communication and a strong level of commitment support long-term development and strengthen the mentoring process [24]. The quality of communication between mentor and mentee plays a central role in how the relationship evolves and deepens over time, particularly from the mentee's perspective [2]. When mentees demonstrate a willingness to learn, recognize, and respect their mentor's knowledge and professional conduct, they are more likely to internalize positive behaviors and values [31]. Different cultural contexts should also be considered; while Western contexts may have less formality in mentoring relationships, Eastern contexts generally have stronger expectations for mentoring protocols, hierarchical relationships, and power distance [25,45].

To maximize the benefits of mentoring relationships, mentees can take a variety of actions. For example, mentees can engage in guided reflections led by their mentors [2]. Mentees are encouraged to bring their unique perspectives and contributions, fostering open dialog and mutual learning. This approach helps create a more collaborative mentoring relationship where both mentor and mentee grow through shared experiences and active engagement [37]. Mentees who are involved in the mentor-matching process are more likely to perceive their mentors as committed to the relationship. This sense of commitment, in turn, contributes to positive perceptions of the mentoring program's overall effectiveness [54].

Reciprocally, mentees who show strong abilities and enthusiasm encourage mentors to learn and seek input from them [20,40]. When mentors actively pursue mentee insights, they tend to provide more support in return [90]. Additionally, mentees can actively seek out and develop diverse and collaborative mentoring networks, forming relationships with multiple mentors from various backgrounds. These networks serve as valuable spaces for

support, empowerment, and personal growth, enabling mentees to thrive by drawing on a broad range of insights and opportunities [48].

6.2. Mentors

Mentoring relationship success relies on the interpersonal communication skills of mentors [2,91]. These communication skills include approachability, active listening, openness, and tactfulness [92], alongside empathy and the ability to give and receive feedback [91]. Johnson and Ridley advise mentors to “Drop other activities when protégé’s want to talk; give them your undivided attention. Listen to identify both overt and covert meanings in your protégé’s communication” [93] (p. 47).

It is important for mentors to avoid what Hobson terms “judgementoring”. This practice involves “an inappropriate enactment of mentoring” when mentors are “explicitly evaluative and judgmental ... [exercising] an unnecessarily directive form of mentoring” [78] (p. 9). This often occurs because mentors must both evaluate and mentor due to programmatic requirements. When mentors engage in judgementoring, mentees are hesitant to seek guidance, less open in information sharing, and may hide or downplay information that indicates weakness [78]. To overcome this, mentors should approach mentoring as a developmental and compassionate process that is broken into steps (scaffolded) and includes mentor reflexivity to improve mentoring [78]. Hobson introduces the concept of “ONSIDE mentoring” which explains six key features of mentoring: “Off-line (i.e., separated from line management or supervision) and non-hierarchical”, “Non-evaluative”, “Supportive of mentees psychosocial needs and well-being”, “Individualized—tailored to the specific and changing needs”, “Developmental and growth oriented”, and “Empowering—progressively non-directive to support mentees to become more autonomous and agentic” [78] (p. 19). These communication behaviors and orientations have been identified to improve mentoring success [78].

Additionally, scholars have identified ethical qualities of effective mentors and describe them accordingly. Effective ethical mentors possess a “strong moral compass” and a “firm sense of values” that guide their interactions [47] (p. 87). At the same time, mentors must also acknowledge that one must learn “the humility of not taking on the moral high ground” in certain situations [47] (p. 87). This blend of principled conviction and humble flexibility allows mentors to navigate ethical dilemmas with awareness and sensitivity.

Ethical mentors value authentic relationship-building over transactional exchanges; they show genuine care in their interactions, focusing on mentees’ growth rather than only pursuing instrumental goals [74]. This relational emphasis creates what Busch and colleagues describe as “a safer, and thus more reflexive, space for employees to discuss workplace moral and ethical issues” [56] (pp. 210, 211). However, a relational ethical orientation can be challenging for more hierarchical mentors to provide. Rather than simply overseeing daily ethical compliance, effective mentors concentrate on promoting long-term moral learning and growth that extends beyond daily interactions and focuses on guiding mentees’ ethical development [56]. This approach helps mentees develop moral identity and self-efficacy, giving them “a greater confidence to deal with ethical issues at work” [56] (p. 222).

Drawing from feminist mentoring principles, ethical mentors embrace reciprocity and mutuality in their relationships [74]. They exercise core values of engaging in collaborative leadership styles and deepening relationships that respect their mentees’ perspectives and experiences [47]. Such values promote shared learning opportunities where both mentor and mentee grow through their interactions, fostering an environment of solidarity and mutual support. Effective ethical mentors approach mentoring purposefully, understanding that ethical growth involves the whole person [74]. Holistic mentorship provides ethical

guidance that addresses not only professional conduct but also the integration of personal values and identity development. Mentors can be supportive and transformative in helping mentees develop the moral motivation and ethical leadership skills needed to navigate complex workplace dynamics with greater confidence in addressing workplace ethical challenges [56].

6.3. Organizations

Organizations play a central role in designing, implementing, and sometimes requiring formal mentorships to support professional growth and retention [25]. Mentoring programs can be established through human resources or integrated into broader corporate initiatives such as leadership development or diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Additionally, mentorship responsibilities may be built into specific roles, making mentoring an expectation for some employees [25]. Teo and colleagues contend that mentoring works best when it is part of a formal, structured program rather than left to chance [48]. Embedding mentorship within an organizational framework allows institutions to clearly define goals, timelines, and expectations [21]. This structure also supports consistent communication and provides training and assessment tools to help mentors and mentees succeed.

When organizations are responsible for thoughtfully pairing mentors and mentees, it is generally best to avoid assigning mentors who are also responsible for assessing the mentee's work [33,78]. While supervisors can sometimes be effective mentors, such dual roles may create a conflict of interest between evaluation and mentorship, which can undermine trust and openness in the relationship [33,78]. It is also important to make sure mentors have "broad wisdom" that comes from experience, reflection, and humanity (including emotional awareness) [94]. When recruiting mentors, previous mentoring and mentee experience "both positively relate to future willingness to mentor others" [42] (p. 126). This is likely due to understanding the mentoring experience, developing an appreciation of mentoring benefits, and the norm of reciprocity when former mentees are motivated to "give back" by mentoring others [42]. Weinberg and Lankau found that mentors with a strong commitment to their organization are also more likely to dedicate greater effort to acting as role models for their mentees [31]. Selecting and involving mentors who demonstrate high organizational commitment can improve the effectiveness and overall success of formal mentoring programs.

Further, implementing a written mentoring agreement is an effective way to reduce misunderstandings and potential relational challenges. Clearly outlining the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both mentor and mentee fosters equal contribution and collaboration, ultimately improving the quality and success of the partnership [24]. As Yun and colleagues explain, "it is more appealing to commit to a mentoring relationship when the expectations are specific and clear" [75] (p. 450). Additionally, organizations should actively support mentoring programs and processes through mentor training [6], ongoing evaluation, and by providing resources like mentoring diaries and portfolios that longitudinally track feedback and growth [81]. Since mentorship relationships are complex and non-linear, organizations should regularly evaluate mentoring programs to ensure effectiveness while promoting professional development for both mentors and mentees [48].

7. Future Directions

Given the long history of mentoring, its many functions, structures, benefits, and challenges, existing studies point to research directions to better understand mentoring and develop practical advice for mentees, mentors, and organizations. First, it is necessary to further explore the structure and formation of mentoring relationships. For example,

what are the similarities and differences in relational development stages for assigned versus self-selected or informal mentors and how do these stages influence mentoring outcomes? Clutterbuck and Lane, as well as Qureshi and colleagues, challenge researchers to more deeply explore the communication between mentors and mentees which is central to relationship formation [2,95]. Ragins encourages scholars to learn more about the relationship between friendship and mentoring [20], while Buzzanell identifies spontaneous mentoring as a potential area of exploration [25].

How do diverse mentor and mentee characteristics have bearing on relationship formation? Busby and colleagues advocate for more research to understand how diverse individuals form and negotiate mentoring relationships [24]. Do non-mentored individuals approach work relationships differently and what personal and environmental factors might inhibit them from forming mentoring relationships? Underhill aptly notes that little is known about individuals who opt out of formal mentoring or do not locate informal mentors [8]. It may be that those who are mentored have qualities that naturally bolster their success, which calls for research of both mentored and non-mentored individuals to more accurately understand mentoring relationship formation and success [8].

Second, scholars should explore individual and organizational characteristics and the associated outcomes. An important first step is to develop standardized measures that can be used across studies for consistency and to support future research, specifically meta-analyses [19]. How do various mentor and mentee characteristics and functions interact and contribute to mentoring outcomes? Underhill recommends research considering the interplay of mentee (or non-mentee) identity, self-efficacy, and mentorship experience [8].

What is the role of ethics in mentoring relationships? Busch and colleagues call for future research “to explore the roles of both moral self-efficacy and moral identity when examining the effects of ethics-related mentoring or ethical leadership on protégé/employee ethical outcomes” [56] (p. 224). Additionally, Hobson and van Nieuwerburgh “call for the widespread adoption of ethical coaching and mentoring, ... that achieve positive outcomes without causing harm or having a detrimental impact on the well-being of participants” [16] (p. 12).

There is also an opportunity to study the affective impact of mentoring for both mentors and mentees [40]. Haggard and colleagues encourage research on mentors’ experiences, including identifying motivations for serving as a mentor [26], while Yip and Walker recommend studying the functional areas of mentorship including challenging assignments, sponsorship, coaching, and protection [96]. Megginson adds that examining “vivid stories” can increase understanding of different mentoring experiences across and between nations and cultures, generating deeper understanding of nuances in mentoring experiences in context [35].

What are important outcomes of mentoring? Underhill explains “more studies are needed that examine the impact mentoring has on outcomes such as organizational commitment, intentions to stay, tenure, number of promotions, self-esteem, alternative employment opportunities, work stress, and work–family conflict” [8] (p. 302). Multiple scholars have called for longitudinal research on mentorship relationships and outcomes to enhance understanding of mentorship practices, benefits, and drawbacks over time [24,25,56].

Third, additional research is needed on the role that organizations play in both enabling and potentially constraining mentorship practices and outcomes. Eby and colleagues assert that mentors and mentees believe that institutional support is necessary for sustainable mentoring relationships [40]. With that in mind, which organizational features support mentor and mentee developmental experiences? Mann and colleagues argue the importance of the organization as an actor in mentorship to support “less-experienced employees and minority group members, particularly in the beginning stages of mentoring

relationships” [19] (p. 476), and Tillman asserts that racial and ethnic tensions can be reduced through mentoring, indicating high expectations on mentoring to produce specific organizational cultural outcomes [83].

However, organizations also need to understand how workload, expectations, and rewards impact mentoring relationships [19,40]. As Eby and colleagues write, “whether or not mentoring others enhances the mentor’s own career is likely influenced by other factors, such as the reward structure in the mentor’s institution and opportunities for upward mobility” [40] (p. 1088). This highlights the need for research to examine competing organizational messages of what is expected, experienced, and achieved via formal mentoring programs. Therefore, future research endeavors should not only study the relationships and roles of mentees and mentors, but also the role of organization and culture as indicators of meaningful mentoring success.

Fourth, it would be valuable to better understand mentoring training programs. Mentor training is increasingly being offered online as a convenient format in terms of access and flexibility. However, online training may limit the capacity to foster active situational learning and hands on skill development [12]. Therefore, future research should explore how online training can best support practice-based learning and the development of practical mentoring skills.

8. Conclusions

In summary, mentoring is a series of communication interactions over time that involve the exchange of experiences or accumulated knowledge between individuals in a relationship with the intent of assisting growth and developing capacity. Mentoring is a natural human activity that anyone can engage in, but it is also a skill that can be learned [12]. Generating a common definition applicable across multiple disciplines and professions creates a beneficial starting point from which this entry explored the functions of mentoring, various formats of mentoring, the benefits and challenges of mentoring, effective mentoring qualities, and future directions for mentoring research. While this entry is comprehensive, it is not exhaustive, as myriad connections and complexities exist between individuals, relationships, organizations, and cultures. As this body of knowledge expands, scholars and professionals across all disciplines will benefit from more deeply understanding the roles of mentees, mentors, and organizations in creating sustainable, measurable, and meaningful mentorship relationships and programs.

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