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CULTIVATING WOMEN LEADERS: MENTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore which strategies women in higher education found beneficial through mentoring. Interviews with eight women from a for-profit higher education institution in Southern California were transcribed and analyzed to identify themes about the mentoring phenomenon. Participants included women employed as executive directors, vice presidents, deans, and directors. The participants in this study defined success and shared their experiences from a female mentee’s perspective. Key findings showed that mentors help women establish professional networks lending mentees opportunities to make powerful connections for career advancement. The mentoring relationship also assists women in dealing with difficult situations, managing confrontation, and taking risks. Additional themes surfaced to support the implementation of a formal mentoring program in the workplace. The product of this study was a mentoring model with outcomes based on the responses from the women who participated in this research. This model involves many key players, including leaders whose buy-in is critical to support a time intensive initiative. Results indicate that the framework for a formal program for women must include goals, assessment, and evaluation. Inviting high performing female employees to participate as mentees encourages motivation and builds a pool of future leaders for growing institutions. The most important resources in a new mentoring program are the individuals and the time they are willing to participate. Pairing the right mentor with a woman is vital to building an effective relationship. Utilization of the Clifton StrengthsFinder is one way to couple women with shared strengths. Implications of this
study affect women aspiring to be leaders in higher education and the institutions for which they work.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Despite considerable gains in recent decades, women still fall short of equality with men in achieving leadership opportunities. Women occupy only one-third of all chief academic positions at four-year universities (Ward & Eddy, 2013). Institutional Capacity (2012) conveyed that women earn 27% less than men in educational administration. However, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2013) reported that over half of the individuals teaching in higher education are women.

If women play such a pivotal role in higher education, why are they still lagging behind men in leadership? How can they achieve goals and advance careers? Mentoring may be a key factor in professional development. Access to mentors helps to manage stress and enhance success (Burke & McKeen, 1990).

Many organizations have established formal mentoring programs to help develop employees (O’Neill, 2005). Individuals who participate in mentoring programs cite greater career satisfaction (Fagenson, 1989) and a positive attitude toward work (Koberg, Boss, Chappell, & Ringer, 1994). The problem for aspiring women in higher education is that they lack a mentor, an individual to assist in establishing a network and guide them to be successful leaders. A network is a complex set of relationships (Mele, 2009). Women are less adept than men at developing professional relationships (Noe, 1988), and they face challenges balancing personal and professional lives (Eagly & Carly, 2007).

Several researchers suggested that mentoring benefits women as they advance in their careers. Kimmel, Harlow, and Topping (1975) proposed decades ago that women need formal and psychological support to develop self-confidence and the competence
required for leadership roles. Young women, especially, benefit from networking with more experienced leaders (Noe, 1988; Penny & Gaillard, 2006). Mentoring has been linked to promotions and greater career satisfaction (Blake-Beard, 2001). Women in top positions have cited mentoring as one of the most beneficial ways to forge valuable, career enhancing relationships (Penny & Gaillard, 2006). “The mentee gets advice from someone who has been there” (Penny & Gaillard, 2006, p. 193).

Previous research on mentoring reported a relationship between the potential to address multiple needs and achieving career aspirations and personal goals (Burlew, 1991; Tepper, 1995). Mentoring can provide socialization that supports promotions (Burke & McKeen, 1990). Unfortunately, these mentoring relationships are more limited for women (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Noe, 1988). Mele (2009) suggested reasons for limited mentoring relationships include women not knowing how to develop networks, a preference to interact with peers, or exclusion by male managers.

The participants in this study were women who worked in for-profit higher education. These women resided and worked in Southern California. Some of them worked at campuses while others held positions at the administrative office which is a separate location from the campuses. All of them were colleagues of the researcher.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore beneficial mentoring strategies for women in higher education. The participants were female mentees, or individuals who had been mentored. A phenomenological approach was used to identify common themes from the participants through interviews (Creswell, 2013). The study included women who had participated in formal and informal mentoring relationships. The term mentoring relationship was defined as a partnership designed to increase legitimacy, provide support, and enhance attributes necessary for leadership in higher education.

The following research question guided this qualitative study: How can a woman mentor best prepare her mentee to become a successful, professional leader? The aim of the research was to develop a mentoring program for women at a for-profit university. The name of the university in this study was changed to protect anonymity.

Significance of the Study

Research suggested that some women found it difficult to connect professionally with other women (Kimmel et al., 1979). Encouraging mentoring relationships helped in developing valuable networking relationships that supported career advancement by leading to job promotions. Sharing experiences with other women helped to promote success.

Given that mentoring programs demand a considerable amount of time, it is important to explore reasons why higher education institutions may want to adopt such a program. Penny and Gaillard (2006) suggested that mentors have a positive influence on career outcomes not only for women but also the academic institutions where they are employed. Mezias and Scandura (2005) supported the idea that mentoring can be
positive for organizations by aiding in employee retention. Mentors also help employees cope with stress that shapes work attitudes (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Therefore, mentoring can positively impact an organization’s culture.

**Methodology Overview**

Qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning bestowed on a topic by the participants and rely heavily on reflection of personal perspectives (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach allowed the participants to describe their experiences as a mentee in their own words. This method “reflects on essential themes, what constitutes the nature of this lived experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 1734). As evidenced through a myriad of definitions, mentoring is a unique experience, one that differs for subjects (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Burlew, 1991; Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Kellerman, 1978; Rose, 2013).

The qualitative method was ideal for this study because the researcher aimed “to honor the voices of participants and convey multiple perspectives of participants” (Creswell, 2011, p. 7). By choosing a phenomenological approach, the researcher captured topical themes after transcribing interviews where the women shared their perspectives on mentoring. These themes contributed to the foundation of a new mentoring program, one that Mitchell University can use to support its aspiring leaders.

There are multiple approaches to a phenomenological study, but this design was based on transcendental phenomenology. “The type of problem best suited for [transcendental phenomenology] is one in which it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 1755). Using this method, the researcher gathered information from women who experienced
mentoring as a mentee. The participants were not provided a list of questions before the interview to support the transcendental nature of the study.

One of the challenges with using a phenomenological approach was finding individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. Therefore, the researcher invited more individuals than needed to participate so she would have an ample group to interview. Creswell (2013) offered that a phenomenological study can be as small as three to four participants or larger, such as ten to fifteen subjects. Invitations were sent to twenty-five women at the researcher’s place of employment.

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

The following terms were used operationally within this study. The definitions were developed in multiple ways. Some of the language was defined though the literature review. Other terms were common at the campuses and administrative office, which is located separately from the campuses. Finally, the participants in this study aided in shaping the definition of success as the women were asked to define the term in the face-to-face interviews.

*Mentor:* person who provides professional and/or personal support for the purpose of career advancement.

*Mentee:* person being mentored.

*Leader:* person in a position to make decisions about processes or policies in a university or college; person holding the title of President, Vice President, Executive Director, Dean, or Director.

*Success:* varies by individual. Loving what you do, having a positive impact or making a difference, helping others, building a team, accomplishing goals.
Theme: a central idea shared by participants.

Transcendental Phenomenology: qualitative research approach that combines significant statements to identify themes (Creswell, 2013).

Woman: a person identifying herself as belonging to the female gender.

Associate: cultural term for an employee.

Dyad: relationship consisting of one mentor and one mentee.

Shared Services: team of employees located at administrative office in Irvine, California.

Delimitations and Limitations

There were two significant limitations to this study. First, the women who participated in the study were from the for-profit sector where the researcher is employed. Findings were not intended to be generalized. Additionally, the nature of a qualitative study is an inherent limitation. The participants self-reported their experiences with mentoring. The human memory is fallible, subject to retrospective distortions and influence related to more recent experiences (Schacter, 1999).

The study was subject to two delimitations. First, only women with leadership titles of president, executive director, vice president, dean, and director were invited to interview for this study. A second delimitation was that the study was based on responses from leaders only at the researcher’s place of employment. The researcher set this boundary for the study so she would be able to identify women with a mentor. Seeking participants outside her place of employment would have required an approach other than a phenomenological study.
The research suggested some individuals describe a mentor as a role model (Kellerman, 1978). Most individuals have someone whom they admire, a role model who exhibits ideal traits, reaches desirable career stature, or attains greatness in some capacity. Mentoring is, in part, about role models. However, mentoring is more than molding a mentee to take on characteristics of the mentor. It is about developing strengths, acknowledging weaknesses, and learning whether one’s personal attributes are aligned with the organization, thereby nurturing the potential for growth (Burlew, 1991; Mezias & Scandura, 2005).

One consistent theme in each of the leadership courses in the Doctorate of Education in Leadership program at Creighton University was that leaders understand themselves (Lowney, 2003; Rath & Conchie, 2008). They understand their own strengths and weaknesses. While having a role model can be motivating and inspiring, one should not expect to aspire to greatness merely by adopting someone else’s strengths. Some traits cannot be imitated or mimicked because our experiences, personalities, and desires are unique resulting in distinctive abilities. Mentors might encourage women to develop their strengths.

Leadership is multi-faceted so mentors who encourage women to grow as leaders may need to support these mentees in a variety of ways. Larry Burlew (1991) presented a multiple mentor model that suggested mentors have several needs that may be categorized as developmental, educational, or training. Leadership encompasses all of these categories. From performance analysis to change management, leaders address growth patterns concurrent with mentoring models.
Summary

Women face challenges in their pursuit of leadership opportunities. They continue to be hindered by old values and stereotyped cast sex role expectations (Kimmel et al., 1979; Noe, 1988; Penny & Gaillard, 2006). Experts in leadership suggested women have greater opportunity for advancement with the support of a mentor (A. Eagly, personal communication, May 17, 2013; Penny & Gaillard, 2006). This study explored how mentoring supported mentees in their rise to leadership in for-profit higher education.

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to collect statements from women who were mentored. Some of the mentoring relationships were formal, but the majority of the relationships were informal. An interview format was used to collect data and identify themes.

The remaining chapters of this study include the following: Chapter two is a review of existing literature about mentoring. Chapter three outlines the methodology of this study. Chapter four is a report of the findings. Chapter five is a discussion of how the findings were used to develop a mentoring model at the for-profit institution in the study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review included recent studies on the mentoring phenomenon. It included articles about mentoring from several angles, including how institutions of higher education have integrated programs to benefit employees seeking career advancement. The review gave an overview of how mentoring has contributed as a support system (Wunsch, 1993) and provided examples of the structure of existing programs. It examined current models of mentoring relationships that enhance professional development and identified how mentors helped mentees grow.

The term ‘mentoring’ can be found in literature dated back to Ancient Greece. Mentor was a character in Homer’s *Odyssey* whose role was to provide personal advice and support to Telemachus (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). Mentoring is a subject within social science that has been of interest since Levinson popularized the topic in 1978 (Rose, 2013). Although definitions of mentoring vary drastically, the basic premise is that someone can serve as a guide, tutor, guru, or friend to help another attain goals (Burlew, 1991; Kellerman, 1978; Mezias & Scandura, 2005). This interaction may be formal or informal, professional or personal, and short-term or lasting.

Mentoring has been studied in different professions, at diverse stages in careers, and at all ages. Erickson et al. (2009) suggested that the presence of an informal mentor during adolescence could be a powerful determinant of development. Mezias and Scandura (2005) proposed that mentors are beneficial for employees who accept an international assignment because it helps mentees through the transitional phases of living abroad and returning home at the conclusion when the job is completed. Higgins
and Thomas (2001) found that mentors positively affect organizational retention in prestigious law firms. One commonality of the previous examples, and the mentoring relationship in general, is the element of professional development. Whether formal or informal, vocational or psychosocial, mentor support is intended to produce professional development (Burlew, 1991; Erickson et al., 2009; Mezias & Scandura, 2005; Rose, 2013).

Mentees who participated in mentoring programs at universities reported increased confidence, improved competence, and a better understanding of career opportunities (Edwards et al, 2011; Kimmel et al, 1979; Pfund, Pribbenow, Branchaw, Lauffer, & Handelsman, 2006). Researchers at the University of Florida found that mentoring was a productive two-way relationship that increased productivity (Edwards et al., 2011). Wichita State University adopted an innovative women’s mentoring model from a leadership manual distributed on a national level (Kimmel et al, 1979). This model introduced instruments to remove sex-role bias in the evaluation of mentoring workshops. As budget cuts and downsizing continue to hamper growth in higher education (Hoover, 2013), it is more important than ever to emphasize human resources, thereby retaining valuable employees.

A study at the University of Hawaii revealed that mentoring could be valuable for career development or advancement (Wunsch, 1993). The University piloted a program whereby women were matched with a mentor after completing a voluntary survey to identify interests, experience, and perceived needs. The mentors were tasked with supporting the mentees in three distinct areas: introduction to the University, professional development, and socio-psychological needs (Wunsch, 1993). After being matched, the
dyad worked collaboratively on an agreement stipulating the terms and goals of the relationship. This agreement was the only formal component of the mentoring relationship. The mentor and mentee were allowed to meet when they wanted and work on as many activities as the pair desired. The mentoring program was considered a success because it met the needs of the mentee, improved employee retention, and resulted in career development (Wunsch, 1993).

Gong and Chen (2014) also conducted a study to measure the impact mentoring had on career development. The researchers proposed that mentoring would positively influence the career trajectory of the mentee through job commitment and job satisfaction. They suggested that mentoring plays a significant role in personal learning, a combination of relevant job knowledge and personal development (Gong & Chen, 2014). The findings showed that mentoring “increased frequency and speed of promotion and increased job satisfaction” (Gong & Chen, 2014, p. 498).

Establishing relationships and creating professional networks are important elements of career development. Unfortunately, most networks are composed almost entirely of men (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women struggle in developing networks (Noe, 1988). When women do have access to networks, they are significantly less influential than those available to men because women tend to connect with colleagues rather than superiors in a decision making position (Forret & Dougherty, 2004).

While women have better opportunities for leadership roles in education (A. Eagly, personal communication, May 17, 2013), there is inherent discrimination in the field (Wunsch, 1993). “Over 50% of women in US public universities (but no men) reported subtle discrimination” (Wunsch, 1993, p. 352). Extending networks to several
circles, including those outside education, can lead to faster promotions and more opportunities (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Mentoring provides a channel to establish a network, seek support, and gain respect (Hunt & Michael, 1983).

Mentoring relationships aid in building a professional network. “Women come to careers determined to succeed on the basis of what they know, not on whom they know. They may be isolated without colleague connections” (Wunsch, 1993, p. 352). Career enhancing relationships are more limited for women, because women attend to associate with peers instead of individuals at a higher level (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Hence, there is a need for mentoring programs for women.

With an abundance of research available on mentoring, a focused review of literature pertaining to higher education was warranted for this study. The search for relatable articles was conducted using key words and phrases such as “mentoring”, “higher education mentor”, “mentoring women in higher education”, “mentoring leaders in higher education”, and “multiple mentors in higher education.” Articles focused on coaching and sponsoring were not included in this study because these relationships are not the same as a mentorship. While coaches and sponsors serve as advocates and provide career support, these individuals do not offer the psychosocial support and friendship found in a mentoring relationship (Thomas, 1993). In many instances, especially in the beginning stages of the literature review, the researcher sought articles that were cited as references.

Themes about mentoring are copious. Researchers continue to approach the subject with fervor, building upon current findings to establish new ideas. Themes
include the value of communication in the mentoring dyad, the benefits of having multiple mentors, and the significance of the informal mentor relationship.

**Theme One: Communication is Essential in a Mentoring Relationship**

One common theme about mentoring found in literature suggested that communication is critical to a successful mentoring relationship. A study conducted by Gail Rose (2013) to find the ideal mentor based on mentee preferences revealed that a majority of mentees would like open communication with mentors. Individuals want to be mentored by someone viewed as interpersonally competent (Mullen & Noe, 1999). Rose’s study found that communicating expectations is a necessary component in the mentoring relationship. The purpose of a mentoring relationship must be defined and mutually beneficial to bring the most value for mentors and mentees (Rose, 2013).

A pilot mentoring program at the University of Florida underscored benefits of communicating boundaries and setting expectations (Edwards et al., 2011). The program, known as Group Advantaged Training of Research (GATOR), provided formal training for mentors. Participants encouraged communication to “allocate sufficient time for mentee and other responsibilities” (Edwards et al., 2011, p. 308). They found that communicating boundaries and setting expectations was helpful.

A study of a mentoring program at an unidentified state university uncovered that a certain amount of non-serious, or playful, communication was perceived as beneficial to mentees (Young & Cates, 2005). This informal correspondence aided in breaking tension and helped in socialization. Mentees and mentors at the university expressed that playful communication helped in building a healthy relationship and connecting to one another (Young & Cates, 2005).
The communication that takes place in the mentoring relationship is rich, meaning it leads to new knowledge (Barry & Crant, 2000). This communication is often founded on attitudes shared by the mentor and mentee (Blake-Beard, 2001) and is quite simply, the exchange of accomplishments with a commitment to achieving success (Kalbfleisch, 2002). Communication is more effective when it occurs between individuals who have similar careers (Birnbaum, 2000).

The GATOR pilot at the University of Florida revealed that the quality of the match between mentor and mentee is the foundation for a purposeful relationship (Edwards et. al., 2011). Clarifying and re-clarifying concepts sets the stage for a respectful interchange, one that “consistently raises the bar” (Kantawala, 2009, p. 48). Mutual commitment increases as the mentor and mentee disclose more information and cultivate the relationship (Hill & Kamprath, 1991).

After making the connection, the dyad must nurture the relationship with communication to maintain effectiveness (Hill & Kamprath, 1991; Kalbfleisch, 2002). Young and Cate’s (2005) study of mentoring reported that communication was both easier and more effective when mentees liked their mentor. This study showed that women engaged in “playful communication,” which includes humor and telling stories, when paired with someone they liked (Young & Cates, 2005).

Communication strategies often vary depending on the nature of the mentoring relationship. Mentors may need to tailor communication to suit the audience, or present information in a way that mentees can understand the message (Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry, & van Meurs, 2009; Tepper, 1995). Power differentials impact communication. If conflict arises, the mentee will most likely have more to lose than the
mentor (Kalbfleisch, 2002). Regular meetings about participation requirements and expectations aid in boosting communication and avoiding conflict (Hansman, 1998).

Effective communication is commonly associated with leadership and is critical in creating a cohesive work environment where individuals are motivated (De La Rey, 2005). In relationships established at work, women must distinguish between private and personal topics. “Personal topics are those that deal with ways of coping at work and events at home that affect job performance. ” (Blake-Beard, 2001, p. 337). Depending on the nature of the mentoring relationship, personal and private topics may be explored. The mentee and mentor should manage the level of openness (Clawson & Kram, 1984).

Hierarchical reporting structure also impacts communication. When the mentor is positioned several vertical levels above the mentee, communication is more regulative and contractual (Tepper, 1995). Mentees reporting directly to mentors in a working environment have a desire to conform to role requirements (Blake-Beard, 2001). Subordinate women minimize emotional displays and censor context, aiming communication at strategic advancement (Tepper, 1995).

Communication style is influenced by the mentee’s perception of the relationship (Barry & Crant, 2000). When a mentee believes that her mentor has power or authority, her communication strategy is conservative (Tepper, 1995). As a result, the status and quality of the relationship is impacted (Barry & Crant, 2000). When there is a greater sense of reciprocity in the relationship, the level of dependency decreases and reported mutual benefit increases (Blake-Beard, 2001).

Communication style may change as the mentoring relationship develops. The longer the mentor and mentee interact, the more casual the conversations are likely to be,
evolving to more personal levels (Barry & Crant, 2000). As time passes, trust may develop or increase. Trust between the mentee and mentor contributes to successful outcomes (Kantawala, Hochtritt, Rolling, Serig, & Staikidis, 2009). Informal relationships reach personal interaction and cultivate trust more quickly than formal mentoring relationships (Blake-Beard, 2001).

**Theme Two: Multiple Mentors Address Multiple Needs**

Another theme that emerged from the literature postulated that having multiple mentors is a necessity. Mentees benefit most when mentoring relationships offer psychosocial and vocational support (Hansman, 1998). The needs driven approach suggests that the perceived need of mentees evolves over time and various mentors will offer different resources (Burlew, 1991; Kellerman, 1978; Mezias & Scandura, 2005). Some mentors will help with career advancement while others will promote personal growth (Burlew, 1991; Mezias & Scandura, 2005).

Burlew (1991) developed the Multiple Mentor Model to address the varying needs of a mentee. This model rests on three areas in which a mentor could provide support: training, education, and development. Training mentors have job specific knowledge and offer guidance on adapting to a work environment. Education mentors have the foresight to help with career advancement. These advisers make suggestions positioning one for promotions that may include recommendations on attaining educational degrees or networking (Burlew, 1991). Finally, the development mentor aims to help the mentee grow into a well-rounded person. This relationship is often personal and, by nature, informal.
The Ideal Mentor Scale (IMS) developed by Rose (2013) also validated the need for more than one mentor. According to her study, qualitative descriptions of a mentor are subjective. Nearly all participants throughout the mentoring relationship endorsed only two items as important values in a mentor: (1) good communication and (2) honest feedback (Rose, 2013). Values change when needs change. Mentees identify with the attitudes and values of the mentor (Lankau & Scandura, 2002) so there must be some level of alignment. The mentor and mentee must have some common values or shared belief system.

In a case study authored by Kellerman (1978), German Chancellor Willy Brandt was shown to have multiple mentors as his needs changed over time. Germany’s leader grew up without a father and found his need for guidance fulfilled at an early age by his first mentor. Brandt’s relationship with his first mentor, Julius Leber, was unusual in that Leber served as a peer and a senior. In this capacity, the mentor shaped Brandt’s political views and formed a friendship with the mentee. As the Chancellor’s career blossomed, the element of Leber’s seniority lessened. Eventually, Brandt ended the relationship. His second mentor, Ernst Reuter, came into his life much later and helped introduce the Chancellor to the vast political network in Berlin, Germany (Kellerman, 1978).

Multiple mentors are especially important in an environment where change is the norm (De Janasz, Sullivan, Whiting, & Biech, 2003). When change happens, it is no longer sufficient to have a single person serve as a mentor to meet the many needs of the mentee. Lankau and Scandura (2002) proposed that mentors help with personal learning, or knowledge acquisition. Similar to Burlew’s (1991) Multiple Mentor Model, Lankau and Scandura (2002) suggested there are three areas in which this type of learning takes
place: technical, referent, and normative. As demands in the workplace change, employees must learn new skills and techniques to facilitate professional development. “Having a mentor is likely to contribute to greater personal learning for employees” (Lankau & Scandura, 2002, p. 780).

The learning process of the mentee is dual-faceted and includes training and education. Training mentors help with technical knowledge or how tasks are performed (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). While it is important to know how to achieve peak performance, it is also important to know what others expect within an organization and the behaviors that are appropriate. Education mentors and development mentors help mentees in becoming well-rounded individuals (Burlew, 1991). It is unlikely that a single mentor can support all facets of personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Hence, establishing relationships with more than one mentor is beneficial (Burlew, 1991; Lankau & Scandura, 2002).

When needs change and careers develop, mentor networks may also change. De Janasz et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of assessing and adjusting mentor networks as knowledge is gained and careers advance. “Networks must be reviewed to determine if additional assistance is needed” (De Janasz et al, 2003, p. 86). Multiple mentors can help women understand interdependence of departments, provide political savvy, and coach behaviors (Lankau & Scandura, 2002).

As individuals change jobs or leave an institution, relationships come to an end (Tepper, 1995). When a mentee reaches the next level in her organization, her mentoring network may change as skills and knowledge expand (De Janasz et al., 2003). Recall that Burlew’s (1991) Multiple Mentor Model included a training mentor, someone to help the
mentee master the job. If the mentee changes jobs or masters the job, a new trainer is required (Lankau & Scandura, 2002).

Multiple mentors promote different aspects of a woman’s life. Women often face more challenges than men because they struggle in juggling career and family (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hunt & Michael, 1983). Even when both parents work in a two-parent household, the woman often remains the primary caretaker, thus responsible for balancing work obligations with raising a family (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As a result, women need guidance on how to develop professionally while still being able to allocate time to familial responsibilities. Multiple mentors can provide the support women need on several fronts, including emotive measures.

Mentoring relationships with other women differs from mentoring relationships with men. Often, women are comfortable with developing a psychosocial connection with a woman mentor (Hansman, 1998). Psychosocial support may include candid conversations about personal fears and anxiety (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Through the psychosocial connection, women share perceptions that often extend beyond work topics, and they provide support in times of stress and transition (Kram & Isabella, 1985). The relationship can become intensely emotional as mentors guide the mentee through personal experiences (Hunt & Michael, 1983). Many women have three or more mentors to address their various needs (De Janasz et al., 2003).

When women are mentored by men, there may be some hesitancy to share information or develop a closeness because of public perception (Hansman, 1998). Fears about sexual harassment or perceived intimacy weigh on the relationship (Clawson, & Kram, 1984; Hansman, 1998). However, when the level of closeness is managed
appropriately, women with male mentors are found to have higher compensations and more promotions than mentees with women mentors (Ramaswami et al., 2010).

Multiple mentors may have the added effect of reducing unethical behavior (Mele, 2009). The more individuals who are focused on the mentee’s behavior, the less likely mentees are to engage in unsavory behavior. Also, having multiple mentors ensures that the mentee will always have support, even if one mentor is unavailable (De Janasz et al., 2003) or the relationship with another comes to an end (Mezias & Scandura, 2005).

**Theme Three: Informal Mentoring Relationships vs Formal Mentoring relationships**

Another theme in the literature focused on the formality of the relationship (Tepper, 1995). Informal mentoring relationships may, on some level, be superior to formal dyads (Blake-Beard, 2001). Communication in informal mentoring relationships is more open (Mezias & Scandura, 2005) and mentees more frequently report that they have achieved goals (Rose, 2013). Formal mentoring is more limited and results in organizational socialization found in informal relationships (Mullen & Noe, 1999).

**Informal Relationships**

Informal relationships are built on direct communication, a method that supports the sharing of opinions and exchange of personal information (Tepper, 1995). Informal relationships form spontaneously whereas formal mentoring relationships develop because of assignment or predetermined match. Mentoring relationships in higher education do not typically form based on the needs of the mentee (Daresh, 1995).
Informal relationships last longer and are not bound by organizational objectives (Kellerman, 1978; Mezias & Scandura, 2005). In contrast, formal relationships often have defined terms, including a specific end date (Blake-Beard, 2001). Informal mentors sometimes develop a personal relationship with their mentee. In informal relationships, there is an attraction between mentor and mentee involving interpersonal interaction (Blake-Beard, 2001). Mentors come to know what drives the mentee and may be best suited to offer advice on how to attain fulfillment (Burlew, 1991). There is often alignment of personal values and interests in informal relationships (Noe, 1988).

Informal mentors engage in personal interaction with mentees more often than formal mentors and this relationship is often built on trust (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). The GATOR pilot at the University of Florida revealed mentees enjoyed relationships when trust was involved (Edwards et al., 2011). Trust is fostered more in informal mentoring relationships because the time invested is often greater than in a formal dyad. In formal mentoring relationships, the mentor and mentee view their assignment as temporary “which may inhibit the development of trust and emotional closeness” (Mezias & Scandura, 2005, p. 522).

**Formal Relationships**

Formal mentoring partnerships differ from informal relationships most notably in how they are formed and the expected outcomes. The formal mentoring relationships are often entered into because of assignment, a requirement in the workplace to participate in a formal program (Tepper, 1995). There are often a limited number of women willing to participate as a formal mentor (Hansman, 1998). There is merit to building a formal mentoring relationship on mutual needs. Mentees reap the most benefits when paired
with a mentor of their choosing. Likewise, some mentoring relationships have been shown to flourish when mentors are able to select a mentee from a pool as opposed to being assigned an individual (Edwards et al., 2011). When mentees are assigned a mentor, personality conflicts may arise and result in a lack of commitment by both parties (Noe, 1988).

Mentoring is often a voluntary action and even in formal programs, mentors often participate by choice. One reason women may opt to mentor is to attain goals (Hall & Taylor, 1996) or to prepare a successor in the event that the mentor is promoted. Failure to communicate these goals could lead to a partnership built on a poor match for the mentee and mentor, resulting in unrealistic expectations (Blake-Beard, 2001).

Formal mentoring programs are designed to support career development and socialization (Noe, 1988). As a result of positive outcomes associated with mentoring, organizations are developing formal programs for employees (Blake-Beard, 2001). The design of formal mentoring programs is similar (Haring, 1999). Critical components of these programs include teamwork and commitment (Burr et al., 2011). Goals and criteria for participation must be clearly communicated at the commencement of the pairing (Hansman, 1998). Mentees reported feeling more confident in their roles after having participated in a formal mentoring program (Daresh, 1995).

Having skilled mentors in a formal program increases the professional development to more advanced levels in a profession (Burr, Stichler, & Poeltler, 2011). A pairing with a senior employee helps the mentee gain access to networks and acquiring valuable skills (Hansman, 1998). In some instances, mentees place senior employees on a pedestal, especially in the beginning of the relationship (Kram, 1983).
“Good mentoring can be learned” (Pfund et al., 2006, p. 473). Researchers at the University of Wisconsin developed a program whereby mentors learned lessons about setting boundaries and establishing open communication. Through the training, the mentors gained a better understanding of who they were and what they had to offer the mentee. Program outcomes suggested the mentee directly reaped benefits from working with the trained mentors (Pfund et al., 2006). Untrained mentors may fail to challenge mentees (Edwards et al., 2011) or may communicate inadequately (Rose, 2003). Programs that train mentors, such as the ones established at the University of Florida and the University of Wisconsin, teach these individuals how best to communicate with mentees (Edwards et al., 2011; Pfund et al., 2006).

Mentors and mentees must be willing to work hard and pledge time to the program. The greater the amount of time is put into the relationship, the more effective a mentoring relationship will be for the mentee (Noe, 1988). Formal mentoring models work best when there is regular contact with specific meeting times (Dawson, 2014).

Evaluation and assessment are important in a formal mentoring program (Burr et al., 2011). Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women & Newborns instituted a mentoring program for developing registered nurses. The hospital formed a committee to evaluate the program and asked participants to rank their experience. The reason for this process was to determine whether the mentors were meeting the needs of the mentees and to ensure the program’s relevance. The committee at the hospital found that the program met employee needs by improving the work environment and promoting opportunities for professional development that resulted in increased employee retention (Burr et al., 2011).
A study by Noe (1988) of formal mentors in education administration suggested that the amount of time mentors and mentees participate in the mentoring program significantly impacts outcomes. Administrators in upper-level positions were assigned an educator to mentor, someone who was not a direct report, but located relatively close in geographic work proximity. The mentees who invested more time in the program, engaged in fruitful discussions during planned meetings, and were enthusiastic about their work benefited from the program. The majority of these individuals reported increased levels of confidence and greater job satisfaction after participating in the formal mentoring program.

Emphasizing role reflection is valuable in formal mentoring programs (Haring, 1999). Reflection is “considered by some as a necessity for the viability of the professional domain” (Lyons, 2010, p. 571). Reflecting on roles helps to re-emphasize the reason the mentor and mentee chose to participate in the relationship. It also keeps the dyad on track to achieve goals (Haring, 1999). The roles are open to negotiation as the relationship transforms and grows (Kantawala et al., 2009).

**Summary**

Although the definition of mentoring has changed over time, one purpose has remained consistent: promote professional development. Mentors come in many forms, including formal and informal, vocational and psychosocial partnerships. Communication is fundamental to a successful mentoring relationship. The method of communication may be personal, regulatory, or contractual, depending on the type of relationship between mentor and mentee. In any case, the pair should establish
boundaries and define purpose. This partnership may not meet all needs of the mentee in which case multiple mentors would be desirable.

In many instances, mentees engage in the partnership to advance a career. Since mentoring has shown to increase employee retention (Higgins & Thomas, 2001), it is wise to encourage this relationship both from employee and employer standpoint. Minority groups, like women, may benefit greatly from having a mentor. Women struggle with challenges different than those of male colleagues (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Mentors can assist women by offering personal and professional guidance.

Women may be able to form valuable relationships with influential individuals through the mentoring experience. Women struggle more than men in tapping into the network of decision makers because women are more inclined to form relationships with peers as opposed to leaders. By participating in a mentoring relationship, women may be able to gain the organizational visibility necessary for career advancement (Forret & Dougherty, 2004).

Women in higher education who wish to attain positions of senior leadership may benefit from a mentor. This person can serve as a training, education or development resource in the changing field. Higher education institutions continue to reform as a result of regulatory updates and decreased funding (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012). Mentors can provide guidance on adapting to these changes, managing stress, and preparing for the future. This relationship, while not indefinite, supports professional development.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore which strategies women in higher education found beneficial through mentoring. Participants were women who were mentored. A phenomenological approach was used to identify common themes from the subjects through interviews (Creswell, 2013). The site’s name was changed to Mitchell University to protect anonymity.

This study aimed to design a mentoring program for women interested in leadership at Mitchell University. Organizations with mentoring programs have increased employee retention (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Consequently, this study can have a positive influence for employees and employers as it attempts to answer the following research question: How can a woman mentor best prepare her mentee to become a successful, professional leader?

The questions asked during the interview probed the experiences of mentees. The researcher wanted to know about the attributes or qualities of the mentor that best supported the mentee. Sub-questions sought to understand participants’ perceptions of success. Defining success was important because it can have a variety of meanings or gauges, including monetary measures, personal feelings, and position title. What does it mean to succeed and how does one attain success? This study also explored the very definition of success. The researcher asked the participants to define success and incorporated these results into the design of the mentoring model.

This study was practical in nature in that the goal was to develop a mentoring model to be implemented at Mitchell University where there are aspiring leaders, women
who are seeking opportunities to advance. As the University continues to grow, it is beneficial to have leaders promoted from within, individuals who understand the student-centric culture.

The highest level of authority at Mitchell University is the Office of the President. Vice-Presidents report to the President. Executive Directors are the chief leaders at the campuses. Deans and Directors are below the Vice-Presidents and Executive Directors. Deans are primarily responsible for academic support while Directors take on administrative initiatives. The intent of this description is to denote layers of leadership. Additionally, this information is shared to convey levels within the organization to which a mentee may aspire to advance.

This phenomenological study explored how mentoring helped women in leadership positions attain success. The study was transcendental in nature, meaning the researcher set aside predetermined notions about mentoring and viewed it “freshly, as for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). The researcher bracketed her own experiences with mentoring, an approach common in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013).

The sample included eight women in leadership positions in the for-profit higher education sector in Southern California. Before interviewing the women in person, the researcher gained approval to conduct the study from the President and Creighton University’s Institutional Research Board. Participation was voluntary and the women were told they could withdraw from the study any time.

**Method**

A qualitative study allows the reader to hear about the influence of mentoring from the words of the women who experienced the phenomenon. This method “reflects
on essential themes, what constitutes the nature of this lived experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 1734). Understanding the mentoring experience required the researcher to capture a description of that experience through interviews. Therefore, a qualitative research approach best supported this study. The significance of a mentor is that this relationship may improve the opportunity women have in achieving advancement.

The requirements for participation in this study were that the participant was a woman leader in higher education who had experience with a mentor. Neither formal nor informal mentoring relationships were precluded. Rather, any relationship deemed “mentoring relationship” by the participant was included. The goal was not to determine whether mentoring had an impact but how it influenced these women.

This study sought information on the qualities of the mentor, professional and personal, that affected the mentee and influenced her career. The subjects of the interview were mentees, not mentors. This qualitative study was founded on the words of the women who had a formal or informal mentor. The setting for the study was the for-profit higher education sector.

**Sample**

The sample group for this study was defined by gender and position. This study sought participants who occupied roles of president, executive director, vice president, director, or dean. Women in these positions were considered to be in the highest levels of leadership. Experience in higher education ranged from five years to forty-two years. It was desirable to have women at various stages in their careers to learn about the level of impact mentoring had on advancement.
Twenty-five women were invited to participate in the study. Nine women responded that they had a mentor and wished to share that experience with the researcher. When it came time to schedule interviews, one of the women who initially volunteered declined the invitation. She did not provide a reason for her withdrawal from the study and the researcher did not pressure her to move forward with the interview. While women from Dallas, Texas and Miami, Florida locations were invited to participate, none of the associates employed at those campuses volunteered.

**The Researcher’s Role**

In a phenomenological study, the researcher brackets her personal experience (Creswell, 2013). The researcher had three significant mentors who supported her in her quest for leadership in higher education. She met one mentor during educational preparation and two mentors in work related roles. She experienced positive mentoring during college years and in professional work settings.

In an effort to remove her own biases, the researcher consciously avoided being influenced by her past experiences. Additionally, she did not share her mentoring experiences with participants before the interviews. One of the women did ask about the researcher’s connection with mentoring. The researcher declined to divulge how the phenomenon impacted her life until after the interview.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The phenomenological approach searches for themes about an issue from the perspectives of the individuals who experienced it (Creswell, 2013). The researcher analyzed the data in an effort to identify key themes about the influence mentoring had on the participants and created tables to track key words and phrases. As she listened to
the interviews multiple times, the researcher looked for frequently repeated words and phrases.

The Interviews

Data were collected by conducting face-to-face interviews. After gaining permission from the participants, the conversations were recorded and transcribed. The length of interviews ranged from 20 minutes to one hour. Women were interviewed in their professional environment on campus or at administrative offices. While the researcher had intended to interview 10 to 15 women in the study, it only took eight interviews to reach saturation.

An interview guide, found in Appendix D, provided a template for discussion. The order of the questions changed based on participant responses. In some instances, the women described experiences in such detail that multiple questions were answered in one response. The questions were not provided to the participants ahead of time, so the women could not rehearse responses.

In addition to the questions that queried experiences with mentors, the researcher asked each participant to describe success. The reason for this was to develop a definition of success. This study sought to explore how mentoring helped women become successful. Hence, an understanding of what success meant to the participants was essential.

Analysis of Transcript

All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Upon concluding initial recordings, the researcher asked a third party to listen to each of the recorded interviews to confirm accuracy of the transcripts. This person was not present during the
actual interviews. While listening to the interviews, the individual followed along in the written text to confirm that the researcher had accurately captured the participant responses. After this second review, the researcher sent the participants a copy of the transcription. Each participant was asked to review the work for accuracy.

**Ethical Considerations**

There were ethical considerations to this phenomenological study about mentoring women in higher education administration. The researcher asked women to describe their personal experiences with a mentor or mentors in face-to-face interview settings. In some instances, participants revealed mentor names, job duties or titles, and previous employers. To keep the study anonymous and confidential, all identifying information was removed.

Confidentiality was underscored at the onset of the interview. Each interview began with the following prefaces:

- All identifying information would be removed.
- The women could withdraw from the study at any time.

Additionally, the researcher obtained approval to conduct the study from Creighton’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix A).

**Summary**

This phenomenological study used face-to-face interviews to identify how mentoring supported the participants in achieving success. Since this was a qualitative study, interviews were used as a method of gathering data. Twenty-five women were invited to participate and nine responded that they had an experience they chose to share
with the researcher. When the interviews were scheduled, one of the women decided not to participate. No reason was given as to why she changed her mind.

The researcher recorded the interviews and looked for themes that showed how mentoring helped these women achieve their career goals. The researcher was mindful to incorporate confidentiality in the study. As affirmed by the participants, higher education is a very connected environment and revealing job duties or prior employers could have led to participant identification. Hence, identifying information was removed.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND THE EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTION

Introduction

Chapter four introduces the results of the study. The researcher shares how mentoring helped participants build relationships and the actions of mentors that were most beneficial. Additionally, participants’ definition of success are reported, the culmination of which contributes to overarching themes about what it means to be a successful woman in higher education.

The purpose of this study was to explore which strategies women in higher education found beneficial through mentoring. A phenomenological approach was used to identify common themes from the subjects through interviews (Creswell, 2013). The aim of this study was to design a mentoring program for women interested in leadership at Mitchell University.

Demographics of Participants

Nine women responded to the invitation to participate in the study. One of the women opted not to participate when the interview was being scheduled but no reason was given for her withdrawal. All of the women were in leadership positions in the for-profit sector. They served in administrative and academic capacities.

Administrative leaders worked in support services such as Admissions, Financial Aid, Compliance, Marketing, and Operations. These women led teams in non-academic sectors while academic leaders supported faculty and developed curriculum. Academic teams were comprised of deans, program chairs, and faculty. Administrative and academic leaders worked at the administrative building or at the campuses in Southern
There were no participants from campuses outside California. All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years in Higher Education</th>
<th>Administrative or Academic Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicia</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentation of Findings and Themes

The researcher interviewed the women on campus or in their office at the administrative building. The participants shared their experiences with mentoring. They divulged personal information including beliefs, feelings, desires, and values. Some of the women shared specific examples of when a mentor helped them through a difficult situation or guided them in their professional and/or personal development.

As the interviews were being transcribed, common themes emerged about the mentoring phenomenon. A table was drafted to tally participant responses as the women described attributes or qualities in mentors that helped in professional development.
Each time a participant mentioned a characteristic already cited, the researcher recorded the duplication.

The researcher listened to the interviews multiple times after transcribing them, looking for key words and phrases to develop themes. The following three themes emerged: (1) Mentors have qualities, attributes or actions that support mentees, (2) Mentors help with relationship building, and (3) The formality of the relationship between the mentor and mentee is important.

Theme One: Qualities, Attributes, and Actions of Mentors Impact Mentees

The participants identified qualities, actions, and attributes of their mentor that most supported their development. The answers that garnered multiple responses are shaded in grey in Table 2. The responses are broken into two categories. Qualities and attributes are on the left while actions are on the right.

The qualities and attributes were generally gathered in response to the questions whereby the researcher asked for a single word to describe the mentor. When asked how mentors supported the interviewees, the women usually referred to actions such as networking or modeling behavior.
Table 2

Qualities, Attributes, or Actions of the Mentor That Most Contributed to Development of Mentee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities / Attributes</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution Oriented</td>
<td>Helped with Bad News or Confrontation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Build Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Constructive Criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listener</td>
<td>Encouraged Taking Risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Model Behavior or Shared Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Stress Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Helped with Insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative</td>
<td>Helped with Leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several of the participants stated that mentors helped with delivering bad news or facing confrontation. For-profit institutions must respond to market pressures and are often managed like private businesses (Bennett, Lucchesi, & Vedder, 2010). Leaders must make difficult decisions to hold employees accountable, sometimes resulting in termination. Participants indicated mentors helped with these decisions. As one participant reported, “There was an instance when I was terminating an employee for the first time and so I reached out to [my mentor].”

One of the participants described how her relationship with her mentor developed on the heels of a termination. The participant, Nancy, was tasked with letting go of an employee at her mentor’s campus, a decision with which the mentor did not agree. Nancy terminated the individual and her mentor called her a schmuck. The comment stuck with her over the weekend when she contemplated her actions and evaluated her role as a leader. It was through this event that Nancy’s relationship with her mentor
evolved. She valued his opinion and was deeply distraught over her decision to execute the termination. She remarked, “I remember all weekend feeling bad that this person who I respected so much thought I was a schmuck.”

Another participant, Kathy, reported that her mentor helped her face a difficult colleague, someone who others feared. Kathy cited confrontation as one of her weaknesses. She said she struggled in instances when she had to stand up for herself. She reported that her mentor helped her with approaching these difficult situations and “she got me all fired up and I’m like, yeah I can do this!” Kathy was able to meet with her colleague, present her ideas, and won over her approval. She said her mentor “helped me realize that you have to face your fears because if you don’t you cannot grow.”

Mentors helped these women develop confidence and persevere in the face of challenge. Molly described how her mentors helped in attaining an advanced degree and said, “I learned quickly that it’s not only the smartest person who gets through, it’s the person who perseveres.” Molly’s mentor taught her not to give up, even when facing adversity. She learned a lot about individuals from her mentor and how to “play the game.”

Edith also said her mentors helped in building her confidence. She reported her mentor “gave me confidence to stand in front of the groups of individuals.” Jane, Edith, and Mary found this confidence beneficial in their current roles. As leaders, they are called upon to speak at board meetings and in front of large groups of individuals. Jane said her mentor told her it shouldn’t matter who is in the audience. She is more than capable of presenting herself and should not be intimidated.
While the mentors helped in building confidence, many also supported mentees with overcoming weaknesses. The participants cited a myriad of weaknesses, such as struggling with statistics, an inability to balance work and personal life, and insecurity. One of the participants described how her insecurities led to a decline in her physical health. High stress levels caused her to develop frozen shoulder, a condition characterized by stiffness in the neck and shoulder. “[I] started working for [my mentor and] I was able to lift it. I didn’t think I was ever going to be able to lift my arm again.”

Edith shared how her mentor helped keep her marriage intact. New to the vice president role, Edith was working long hours, often until one o’clock in the morning. She was not able to balance her work with her personal life. Edith watched as her mentor’s marriage began to crumble under the same pressures and she was able to make changes before it was too late. She said, “Just seeing from her own experience that she has shared with me gave me a chance to reflect and change things.”

Many of the participants cited personal growth as a result of watching their mentors in action. Felicia described how she was given permission from her mentors to model their behavior. She added her own spin, but took mannerisms and adopted best practices from mentors.

Nancy also said she tried to emulate the actions of her mentor. Recognizing that she had different beliefs than her mentor, she saw him as a model of behavior. He influenced her professionally and personally. While she professes to have other role models, no one else has mentored her in the same way. He was a man of action, someone who showed her how to do things and included her in decisions. In contrast, Jane talked about one of her mentors modeling behavior, but in a very different way. She believes
we learn from watching others, mirroring their behavior. While both of her mentors have contributed significantly to her professional development, she learned a lot about how not to behave from one of them. Her mentor had a reputation for “being short tempered and foul mouthed,” modeling behavior Jane never wanted to adopt.

In addition to modeling behavior, mentors also promoted communication. Mary said her mentor would stop by her office every morning to discuss the day’s projects. He would listen to her vent, patiently waiting as she described her challenges. Mary’s mentor shared solutions, turning their daily deliberations into problem solving discussions. She said, “He was great at focusing every conversation on a solution.”

Kathy described how she often shared ideas with her mentors before implementing new processes or embarking a new endeavor. She likened this approach to Steve Jobs, outlining how he solicited advice from engineers in his neighborhood early in his career. Like Jobs, Kathy ran her ideas by the experts in her field. She said in some cases, her mentors were so fond of what she shared that they wanted to be a part of her new projects.

Molly said she not only shared ideas with her mentor but also struggles. As she was working towards an advanced degree, Molly’s mentoring group was instrumental in overcoming obstacles. They became a shoulder to cry on or a safe place to do mock interviews and receive critical feedback. She said, “There were various things that happened in the group. One person was going to drop out, and they talked her through it.”

The degree of openness and measure of shared experiences can vary drastically with a mentor as evidenced by Edith and Jane. Edith shared personal experiences with
her mentor and the two spoke about their marriages. Edith saw her mentor’s marriage
dissolve as a result of an inability to balance work and life. Consequently, Edith reflected
on the experience and made significant changes to save her relationship with her
husband.

    Jane had a very different experience with one of her mentors. In an attempt to
share a personal situation, Jane was met with an abrasive response. She stated, “I went to
the wrong person. I was just telling [my mentor] that I needed to leave for the day and
couldn’t help the waterworks.” Jane learned that it was best not to share her personal
dilemmas with her mentor. There was an aspect of Jane’s mentor that could be “hard as
nails.”

    While a coarse approach may not be the most supportive attribute in a mentor, the
participants did report that they appreciated constructive criticism. Jane said she could
trust her mentors to be honest in their feedback. A student herself, Jane appreciated
advice that helped her grow and said, “I don’t require a lot of reassurance but [my
mentors] definitely shot holes in some of my theories about the things I might not have
been secure about.” Jane also reported that she trusted what her mentors had to say and
integrated their advice.

    Molly, Edith, and Nancy also cited honesty as an important attribute in a mentor.
Molly said she often sought advice and appreciated being able to bounce ideas off her
mentors in order to test out her theories before presenting them to a larger audience.
Edith liked that her mentor “was honest, not afraid to tell you what they think.”

    Mentors not only gave constructive criticism but they helped mentees in giving it
to others. Mary reported that her mentors “help me give constructive criticism to others.
That’s something that can be hard to do.” Leaders are only as strong as the relationships they develop with their constituency (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Good leaders give constructive criticism to help their team grow.

Theme Two: The Importance of Building Relationships

It was nearly unanimous that the participants cited networking as one of the major benefits of their mentoring relationships. For-profit education is a small sector. Mary emphasized, “It’s very, very important you don’t burn any bridges.” Many of the women who participated in this study shared previous employers. Several of them knew each other before coming to their current roles.

When asked about relationship building, a couple of the participants explained that networking led to their current position. Mary described how her mentor helped her make a connection. When her employer was looking to fill her position, Mary’s mentor put her in touch with the hiring authority. Mary knew how critical networking was, especially “in an industry like this where everybody kind of knows each other.”

Jane also found her current job through her mentor. She worked with her mentor at a previous school and ran into her at a conference. Jane’s mentor invited her to dinner, a meeting to recruit her. Many years later, Jane was promoted numerous times since relocating to California. Her mentor has since moved on to another organization but continues to influence Jane and provide support in attaining career ambitions.

Felicia had been in higher education longer than any other participant and she said networking was a necessity, that “you bring that network wherever you go.” She developed relationships with individuals across the country, at schools, within approval
agencies, and at governing programmatic bodies. Felicia was working to connect others
who had a less developed network.

Kathy always relied on networking to move into new positions. She worked in
several industries and developed strong relationships, impressing hiring authorities who
thought of her when they had an opening. She described networking as her friend. Kathy
had proven herself, showed her work ethic and ability to get things done. Her mentors
continued to call on her to participate in projects.

Molly used networking to collaborate with others. She described how she
participated in a mentoring group where eight or nine individuals would get together to
share ideas and offer support. Bouncing ideas off others in the group helped Molly with
her weaknesses. Many years later, some members of the group still got together for
support with professional development activities such as publishing articles.

**Theme Three: The Formality of the Relationship Matters**

The majority of the participants stated that they experienced formal and informal
relationships. For those that did not have both, their mentoring relationship was informal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Formal or Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mary and Edith worked for institutions that had a mentoring program for developing leaders. While Mary could not recall how she was paired with her formal mentor, she said the goal of the program was to promote succession planning. She was introduced to multiple departments of higher education to gain a better understanding of the student life cycle. Mary was required by her formal mentor to read books about different management styles.

Edith’s formal mentor was a consultant assigned by her institution to coach her on her leadership style and team development. She credited him with helping her relate better to individuals. Edith met with him weekly and reflected on issues or concerns developed on her team. Edith’s mentor also mentored others on her team which meant he had valuable insight for her on how to motivate her employees. The formal relationship ended when she left the institution which is often the case in employer sponsored mentoring programs (Hunt & Michael, 1983).

Sixty-three percent of the participants were members of formal mentoring groups. Jane described her group in detail, suggesting that she did not feel that it was safe place to share ideas. Jane remained committed to her institution but was thrown in with a group of women who had mixed reactions to their employer. Some of the women had moved on while others were still with the same school. This brought about issues with information sharing. Jane shared, “I was very uncomfortable and I wasn’t sure, as an executive leader, how much I should be sharing and not sharing.”

Molly and Virginia belonged to peer level mentoring groups while working on advanced degrees. Molly said her group helped in managing her anxiety level and prepared her for pivotal moments in her pursuit of education. They would meet every
couple weeks, sometimes just for lunch or to lift each other’s spirit. Virginia’s peers were divided into a group based on strengths. She recalls taking the StrengthsFinder and believed that individuals were paired with others who had similar strengths (Gallup, 2008).

All of the participants had at least one informal mentor. Kathy estimated she had approximately five of these relationships, one of which was still ongoing at the time of the interview. She changed mentors as her needs changed and expressed, “The relationship serves its purpose at that time and it is okay if it doesn’t continue.” While her mentors were instrumental in her career development, she did not require any personal support from them. Kathy described herself as a private woman, someone who didn’t disclose her personal life at work.

Nancy’s relationship with her informal mentor differed from Kathy’s mentoring relationships. Nancy did not distinguish between personal and professional aspects with her mentor. “For me, it’s all blended, my professional and personal life is all blended into one so I couldn’t really have success in my professional life without success in my personal life. My mentor influenced both.” Nancy’s relationship was ongoing at the time of the interview and, although they no longer worked for the same institution, she still met regularly with her mentor.

Mary also had an ongoing relationship with an informal mentor. Mary’s mentor had experience in numerous industries and she appreciated his insight into how her issues in education apply elsewhere. Although she refrained from seeking personal advice from her mentor, the two still got together occasionally in a casual setting to discuss whatever was on their minds.
Felicia suggested her informal mentors helped her on a personal level that contributed to her professional growth. She studied their behaviors and mannerisms, adopting those actions that enhanced her personal presentation. Felicia said her mentors were very knowledgeable but also effective in instituting change. They inspired her to seek advancement. Although she did not enter into these relationships with any specific goals, Felicia was able to accomplish a lot with the support of her mentors.

**Defining Success**

This study examined how mentors may encourage women to become successful leaders. In evaluating the role that mentoring played for the participants, the researcher had to define success. To harvest a better understanding of success, the participants were asked for their perceptions of what it meant to be successful. Although results varied, none of the women defined success in terms of money, rank, or title. In fact, one participant specifically stated, “Never do things for money.” Most of the responses related to helping others or gaining intrinsic rewards.

Four of the women said they considered their success to be tied to others. Two participants cited student success as a measurement while two others said building their team was important. The commitment to their institutions was also apparent. Felicia felt strongly that “helping accomplish the values and upholding the mission of the institution for which I work [determines success].” Student centricity was also at the center of that mission for the schools. Hence, the pledge to student support suggested that the personal goals of these women were aligned with the institution.

Finally, participants indicated a woman is successful if she is passionate about what she does for a career. The women talked about their work and advancement
opportunities when they described their experiences with mentoring. Several of them shared that they held multiple positions in the institution resulting from promotions. One woman stated unequivocally that she loved her job. Another participant referred to passion for work when she summed up her experiences stating mentors “make it look so easy and it’s because they love what they do.”

**Synthesis of Findings**

Unlike the schools for which Edith and Mary worked, there is no program at Mitchell University for new leaders to learn how to lead or gain a better understanding of the school’s culture. Yet, women inquire about advancement. One leader at a campus recently asked about professional development and the path to a promotion. She had come from a school with a director development program where the goal was succession planning. She described that experience and stated, “They were always looking to build a bench. You went through this program and when the next opportunity opened up, you were ready for it.”

This study sought to identify how a mentor can help her mentee become a successful, professional leader. The participants revealed that mentoring helped to attain goals, develop networks, and polish skills that lead to professional advancement. They praised mentors for guiding them through difficult situations and giving them the resources necessary to manage individuals. In general, the participants were in support of mentoring and elaborated on the importance of having the right mentor.

According to the participants, having the right mentor was one of the most important components in the relationship. The participants described qualities in mentors they felt most contributed to their success. In doing so, they discussed how they came to
know their mentor(s) and how the relationship was initiated. Nancy said her mentoring relationship developed organically. She did not seek out her mentor nor was there a formal agreement between the two.

Nancy’s informal mentoring relationship was initiated through work channels. Her mentor was on the board of directors for her employer. She said, “He looks for individuals that show some promise and he gets together for you.” While there was not a written agreement that the board member would be her mentor, he was certainly aware that he served in that capacity for Nancy.

Kathy’s relationship developed with some intention, looking for individuals with experience to serve as a mentor. As an affable person, Kathy easily established connections. Some of her mentors had been retired but they brought the knowledge that Kathy looked for in a mentor.

Jane described two of her mentors as informal. However, she met both of them through work. One was a former boss while the other was a consultant she had collaborated with in the past. Jane was also intentional in pursuing a mentor. She said she solicited a mentoring relationship with the consultant to aid in her professional development.

The informal relationships for Jane, Kathy, and Nancy had no formal rules or boundaries. These women found their mentors by happenstance and although no formal agreement was signed, they reported that their mentors willingly and knowingly entered into these relationships. In most cases, these mentoring relationships continued at the time of the interviews.
The interviews reinforced that the mentor-mentee dyad is not static. Individuals evolve and it is often the case that the relationship ends (Hill & Kamprath, 1991; Kellerman, 1978; Kram, 1983). Some participants were still in mentoring relationships at the time of the interview while others had ended. Kathy shared that most of her mentoring relationships ended naturally “because of where life takes you.” She said they served their purpose, and she had grown as a result of those relationships.

The final phase of the mentoring relationship is often referred to as separation and most commonly occurs two to five years into the relationship (Kram, 1983). As mentees experience newfound independence and autonomy, the relationship is reassessed (Kram, 1983). The needs of the mentee change, often calling for an end to the relationship (Dawson, 2014). Therefore, in designing a program for Mitchell University, the researcher must consider how long the relationship should last.

**Summary**

Eight women participated in this study to determine how mentoring contributed to professional success. The interviews revealed that building relationships was one of the greatest benefits of having a mentor. Some of the women in this study attained their current positions through networking. One even suggested she never had to find a new role. She has been recommended by individuals in authority with whom she had developed a professional relationship. Quite simply, networking supported career advancement for the participants.

The women shared how the qualities or actions of their mentors supported their career advancement. General consensus was that the women would not be in their current positions without the support of a mentor. While some of the participants had
experience in a formal mentoring program, most of the benefits were reaped from informal relationships.

Information from the interviews served as the basis in designing the mentoring model outlined in the next chapter. Chapter five introduces a mentoring program for Mitchell University and describes how it would fit in the existing environment. The challenges associated with introducing a new program and the individuals involved in that process are identified. Details regarding the implantation and evaluation are acknowledged.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter introduces a mentoring program to be implemented at Mitchell University. It includes details on the resources required to bring a new program to life and recommendations to shape mentoring relationships in the for-profit education setting. Outcomes and assessment must be considered if participants are to contribute valuable time in a fast-paced, high-demand atmosphere. The roles of leaders and other key players are explained in an effort to garner support from decision makers.

Unlike the schools for which some of the participants worked, there is no program at Mitchell University for new leaders to learn how to lead or gain a better understanding of the school’s culture. Yet, women inquire about advancement. One leader at a campus recently asked about professional development and the path to a promotion. She had come from a school with a director development program where the goal was succession planning. She described that experience and stated, “They were always looking to build a bench. You went through this program and when the next opportunity opened up, you were ready for it.”

The purpose of this study was to explore which strategies women in higher education found beneficial through mentoring. Participants were women who were mentored. A phenomenological approach was used to identify common themes from the subjects through interviews (Creswell, 2013). Women who believed they had a mentor, either formal or informal, were included in the study. The mentorship was defined as a partnership designed to increase legitimacy, provide support, and enhance attributes necessary for leadership in higher education.
The aim of this study was to design a mentoring program for Mitchell University. After interviewing eight successful women, however, it became evident that a mentoring program is not a guaranteed success. The challenge was in developing a program that would be a good fit for the University, the mentors, and the mentees. Pairing the right mentor with a mentee is essential to relationship development. Critical components, such as evaluation and assessment, were considered to measure outcomes and gauge participant support. The primary problem which led to this study was that women lacked a mentor, someone to help guide them to be successful leaders. Hence, a primary goal, to help women become successful leaders, was identified as a solution to the problem.

**Proposed Solution**

The solution to support women seeking advancement at Mitchell University is a mentoring program. There are several factors to consider in designing such a program and many people who will be affected by its implementation. Figure 1 depicts the key phases involved in introducing a new mentoring program for women at Mitchell University.

**Figure 1**

Mentoring Program Design Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Establish Goals</td>
<td>• Leadership Approval</td>
<td>• Participant Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify Participants</td>
<td>• Resources</td>
<td>• Outcomes</td>
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Development

The first phase, or development, was contingent on the completion of this study. It took four months to interview women in leadership roles within the for-profit higher education sector. These women described their experiences with a mentor that established the foundation for phase one. This first phase is where goals were established and participants identified.

The challenge with moving forward in development after establishing the primary goal was that the objective was quite vague and begged the question of how a mentor encouraged a woman be a successful leader. That qualm became the research question of this study as the researcher sought to identify how a woman mentor best prepared her mentee to become a successful, professional leader.

The results serve as the following sub-goals for the design of the new mentoring program.

1. Develop a professional network.
2. Deal with difficult situations.
3. Build confidence.
4. Increase willingness to take risks.
5. Improve change management.
6. Gain an understanding of the work culture.

Eight women leaders were interviewed about their experiences with a mentor. Responses were analyzed in an attempt to identify common themes about how mentoring helped the participants with professional development. Three themes emerged from the study. First, the qualities, attributes, and actions of mentors impact mentees. Second,
building relationships is important. Third, the formality of the relationship matters. All three of these themes were given careful consideration in the development phase and serve to support the design of the mentoring program.

Participants identified qualities, attributes, and actions of mentors that supported them in career development. Table 1 in chapter four showed that networking, help with bad news or confrontation, constructive criticism, building confidence, and modeling behavior were cited by multiple participants thereby giving them value in the design of the new model. Participants stated that networking aided in securing new opportunities, advancing to positions of leadership, and building relationships. Nearly all participants reported that the one of the greatest benefits of being in a mentorship was expanding their professional network.

Schools are part of a larger network, one that includes accrediting agencies, licensing bodies, federal and state approvers, and an increasingly diverse student pool. It is an inter-organization web that must be monitored closely (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Making connections with individuals serves a critical role in how responsive an organization can be to its environment. Mentoring is one way to tap into this web. The participants in this study had an expansive network. They worked with leaders in other states and other industries. Mary said, “Everybody kind of knows each other.”

Help with bad news or confrontation and constructive criticism share similarities. Both actions demonstrate how leaders interact with others in a difficult situation. No one likes to deliver bad news but it is inevitable in leadership positions. Leaders are responsible for terminating employees, denying time off requests, and declining candidates for open positions. They give constructive criticism during performance
reviews or when pursuing disciplinary action. These examples illustrate difficult situations in which the participants in this study identified received support from their mentors.

Mentors in the new program are also expected to provide guidance on how to help with confrontation and constructive criticism. One of the participants described how hard it was to constructively criticize others. Mentors can share techniques on how to approach these difficult situations and may even model how that action is carried out, another valuable action cited by this study’s participants. Mentors should reinforce mentees to build confidence. Recognizing a strength or providing positive feedback on performance are key ways for mentors to increase a mentee’s confidence level.

The participants also cited building confidence as important. New leaders, especially, may lack confidence because they lack experience performing the responsibilities of a leader. Reinforcement from a mentor can help to build confidence. One of the participants talked about how her mentor gave her the courage to speak in front of large groups. She said the positive feedback from her mentor reinforced that she was capable of speaking to a variety of audiences at high levels within her institution.

Given the multiple responses by participants, the following three actions are included as sub-goals for the mentoring program:

1. Introduce mentees to key people in higher education to develop a professional network
2. Provide guidance in dealing with difficult situations
3. Build confidence
Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) proposed that organizations in rapidly changing environments, like Mitchell University, operate best if they value flexibility, change, and participation. A mentoring program is one way to address change and encourage participation. The women who participated in the study had a combined average of 19 years in higher education, six of whom had been with their current institution. They experienced change. They served as change agents, helped others adopt change and found self-reliance (Rogers, 2003).

Organizations are like living organisms, open systems riddled with changing environments (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). For-profit institutions must be responsive to the market, ready to change direction quickly (Wilms, 1987). The pace of change at these institutions is aggressive and may be difficult for aspiring leaders. Since change is often unplanned (Burke, 2011). Leaders must be nimble, open to adjusting processes and procedures to adapt to the environment. Mentoring can help women cope with change.

Risk taking involves change. Several participants emphasized that their mentors encouraged them to take risks. Mary said, “Risks sometimes pay out and sometimes they don’t.” She described how she worked at a start-up school that closed. One day she had a job and the next day, she found herself unemployed. Mary was not only able to cope with her changing employment circumstances; she grew as a result of it.

Jane’s mentors also encouraged her to take risks. Moving across the country for a career opportunity was a risky change. She relocated to California to work for her school. Jane left the familiarity of the Midwest when her mentor suggested she take a job on the west coast.
Individuals react to change differently. Some resist it, others struggle with it, and few embrace it (Burke, 2011). The interviews suggested that experience played a factor in accepting change. The more often the women experienced change, the more they came to realize it was not going to smother them. Taking risks, facing change, trying new things is a part of for-profit education (Wilms, 1987). Mentors must help mentees gain an understanding of that environment and the work culture of Mitchell University.

The findings of the study served as the basis for developing the following six sub-goals of the mentoring program:

1. Develop a professional network.
2. Deal with difficult situations.
3. Build confidence.
4. Increase willingness to take risks.
5. Improve change management.
6. Gain an understanding of the work culture.

Establishing goals was only the first part of the development phase. In the second part of the development phase, the participants must be identified. This approach meant not only finding mentors and selecting mentees, but also using information from the themes that emerged suggesting that the formality of the relationship matters.

The responses from the women who participated in formal programs proposed that other institutions approached the mentoring role differently. In Edith’s case, the mentor was a consultant from outside the organization. Mary reported directly to her formal mentor as he was her boss. Jane worked with the women who were appointed as
mentors in her formal program. Molly’s experience, although slightly different because it was in a graduate program, was based on peer level mentoring relationships.

There are benefits to peer mentoring. Mentees may be more likely to relate to peers than leaders, allowing them to express concerns on a personal and professional level (Daresh, 1995). Peer mentors are also better situated than leaders to offer knowledge sharing. A study by Bryant and Terborg (2008) proposed that peer mentors possess tacit knowledge, or skills learned through personal experience. They can guide their mentees to perform daily tasks and have an understanding of what it takes to be successful in a role.

In order for the peer level support to work, there has to be an ample number of peers available and willing to serve in the mentoring capacity. Mitchell University, while a growing institution, is still small in comparison to many large for-profit systems like the ones some participants worked for previously. There are not multiple individuals in the same role to share tacit knowledge. Additionally, some departments have personnel whose job is not necessarily to mentor, but to provide the information referred to by Bryant and Terborg (2008). Such employees are not, however, considered peers of those to whom they offer knowledge sharing.

It is recommended that the mentors in the program be leaders, not peers. Several of the women who participated in the study suggested they would be interested in serving in a mentoring capacity. Felicia described how she was already mentoring one of her employees by helping her expand her network. Kathy said she would like to mentor someone much the same she was helped in her career, to give back what was given to her. Edith suggested she was at a point in her career where she would like to switch roles
and be the mentor, not the mentee. She felt that she had a lot to share with an aspiring leader.

Anyone serving in the role of vice president, dean, or director may be a mentor. Their valuable insight into what it is like to be a leader at Mitchell University would contribute to a new mentoring program. Also, it is not the intention of the researcher to train women how to mentor. Rather, women must rely on their experiences as leaders to mentor others. It is expected that they will model behavior for mentees, an action deemed desirable, as shown in table 1 in chapter four, by the participants in this study.

After identifying the mentors, the next step is to select mentees. While there may be many women who have a desire to lead, there must be a limit to the number of participants in the mentoring program. Mitchell University has an annual review process. Each employee must complete a self-assessment and their manager evaluates their work in the prior year. In addition to reviewing past performance, the employee and manager are also tasked with establishing goals for the upcoming year.

In the design of the mentoring program, the manager would make a recommendation during the annual review process for those individuals who wish to participate. Several factors should be taken into consideration before selecting an employee to participate. First, the employee must have been in her position for at least six months. Employees cannot apply for new positions until they have in their current role for this length of time. The aim of the mentoring program is to help aspiring leaders, women who seek career advancement. Since one cannot move into a new role until six months after she has served in her current role, this requirement will serve as one selection criteria.
Second, there must be consideration of the performance evaluation results. The annual review offers several categories of assessment and overall rating. To limit the number of women who may participate as mentees, the overall rating must be ‘exceeds expectations.’ Women with any other overall rating, including ‘meets expectations,’ will not be considered for the program.

Third, women must have the experience and education required to move into a leadership role. For example, leadership roles at Mitchell University require a bachelor’s degree. In instances where associates have been working at the institution prior to this requirement, evidence of pursuit is mandatory. The associate must show that she is pursuing a degree within a timeframe mutually agreed upon by her manager. Hence, if an employee wishes to participate in the mentoring program but does not have a bachelor’s degree nor does she have evidence of pursuit, she cannot be nominated by her manager.

Finally, employees must have ample time to contribute to the mentoring program. The literature review and interviews suggested that mentoring requires a time commitment. Associates must not be pulled away from their regular work assignments to participate in the program. Although meeting times are to be agreed upon by mentor and mentee, it is important to note that one of the participants cited late night meetings as a deterrent to her formal program. There may be many reasons late night meetings are undesirable, such as familial obligations or a significant commute. Consequently, meetings may be required during the workday, possibly over lunch.
In considering a program at Mitchell University, the design must have a formal method to pair individuals, some way for the committee at the University to assign employees as mentors and mentees. Although she was never able to confirm, Virginia believed she was assigned to her formal mentor based on strengths. She was required to take the Clifton StrengthsFinder before participating in the program (Gallup, 2008). This tool, the Clifton StrengthsFinder (2008), will be used to assign mentors with mentees at Mitchell University.

Nancy said her mentor helped her with her strengths and being the best leader possible. Her mentor reinforced her accomplishments and motivated her to take on new challenges. Since he was in a leadership role within the organization, Nancy’s mentor was able to inform others they worked with about Nancy’s strengths. Felicia described her mentor as her cheerleader. He helped her develop her strengths but he also modeled good behavior. She adopted her mentor’s approach and respected his ability to institute change. Many years later, Felicia demonstrated change leadership as one of her strengths. Strengths also played a critical role in Jane’s relationship. She said her mentor “would play to my strengths and set up interviews with folks.” Jane’s mentor even created a job for her based on her abilities.

Identifying and cultivating strengths is a vital part of leadership (Lowney, 2003; Rath & Conchie, 2008). The literature review and interviews showcased instances where mentors helped mentees with their strengths. Building a mentoring program to support strength enhancement has benefits. Strengths enhancement refers to improving one’s skills and abilities. The first step in doing this was to assess strengths.
Given the emphasis placed on strengths in leadership and the widespread use of the Clifton StrengthsFinder, the mentoring program was designed to use this tool to pair participants. Mentors and mentees take the assessment and are paired with someone who shares at least one strength. Since the results are ranked, all efforts are made to partner individuals based on common strengths. The Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment was designed to identify five abilities for academic, career, and personal success. “More than 1 million individuals have used StrengthsQuest to gain insights into how to use their talents to achieve success” (StrengthsQuest, 2015, ¶ 3).
Table 4

Clifton StrengthsFinder Results and Mentoring Relationship Assignment Example

(Gallup, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentee A</th>
<th>Mentee B</th>
<th>Mentee C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Deliberative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Maximizer</td>
<td>Positivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activator</td>
<td>Woo</td>
<td>Restorative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>Input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor A</th>
<th>Mentor B</th>
<th>Mentor C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includer</td>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>Futuristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Command</td>
<td>Positivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Woo</td>
<td>Arranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Woo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dyad One</th>
<th>Dyad Two</th>
<th>Dyad Three</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentee A</td>
<td>Mentee B</td>
<td>Mentee C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor B</td>
<td>Mentor A</td>
<td>Mentor C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 illustrates how the mentors will be assigned to the mentee. Although Mentee A and Mentee C share a top strength with Mentor B, Mentee A has two themes in common with Mentor B, making them a better pair. Mentee B’s top strength is strategic. Mentor A is the only participant who shares this theme. Since Mentee C’s top strength is deliberative, there are two options for this participant. First, if Mentor B is accepting multiple mentees, she could be paired with her. If not, Mentor C would be paired with Mentee C because they share the positivity theme. Finally, Mentee B shares the woo theme with Mentor B and Mentor C. However, since this theme does not rank as high as strategic, she is paired with Mentor A.
Diversity is also introduced in the design of this mentoring program. While mentors and mentees are paired based on shared similar strengths, the example in Table 3 illustrates that none of the participants share all strengths with someone else. Each mentor and mentee has a unique set of strengths. The similarities will unite the pair but the differences will introduce diversity into the relationship. Diversity adds benefits because when individuals with different viewpoints partner to achieve goals, the problem solving process is more comprehensive. Additionally, diversity enhances external networks because individuals can introduce new contacts from prior experiences (Jackson & Joshi, 2004).

One consideration in assigning the mentor and mentee must be report structure. Some of the participants shared that they spoke with mentors about personal topics. For Nancy, there was no separation of work and personal life. Jane learned that certain topics were off limits with one of her mentors. Edith credited her mentor with learning how to balance work and personal life. These responses showed that mentees benefitted from being able to discuss personal topics. Therefore, mentees in the new program would not be assigned to their direct manager if that person serves as a mentor. While it is possible that employee and manager are able to discuss personal topics, it may prohibit the mentee from sharing information.

After the mentors are assigned to the mentee, the dyad must meet and begin the first assignment which is to define success. The pair must also determine a meeting schedule. Since both participants must have their manager’s approval, they are permitted to work meetings into their workday provided it does not interfere with other duties. Although there are no formal rules regarding number of meeting or length, the mentor
and mentee are encouraged to meet once a month at minimum. This requirement ensures both parties remain vested in the mentoring relationship.

In addition to mentors and mentees, there is one other group of key people who needs to be identified in the development phase. Assessing and evaluating the success of the program is phase three but the person(s) performing these tasks must be determined during development. The program at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women & Newborns serves as an example of how to evaluate success (Burr et al., 2011). In that formal mentoring program, a committee formed to assess outcomes and asked participants to rank their experiences. A similar function could be implemented for a committee at Mitchell University.

Such a committee could serve multiple roles. First, after associates are nominated by managers, there should be a formal panel to approve participation in the program. It is possible that a healthy number of women are nominated. There will be a limited number of mentors. The committee must make the final determination of who and how many individuals may participate. The committee would also be responsible for pairing the mentor and mentee after administering the StrengthsFinder quiz (Gallup, 2008).

Also, there must be someone to make sure the program is serving a purpose and individuals are meeting regularly. One way to do this is by establishing a committee to oversee the mentoring program. Mentors will prepare a monthly report for the committee identifying meeting dates, topics discussed, and next steps. An example of the report is included in Appendix B.

The committee will be comprised of four members. Since the selection process is tied to the annual review and is directly related to talent development, the Vice President
of Human Resources must serve on the committee. She will appoint three leaders from Mitchell University to round out the four women on the committee.

Implementation

It is critical that executive leaders of Mitchell University, including the president, vice presidents, deans, and directors, endorse the mentoring program. The second phase, or implementation, begins with leadership approval. Leaders are responsible for identifying associates who may serve as good mentee candidates. They must weigh the desires of direct reports with department needs. Only those individuals who could truly devote sufficient time to the program should be nominated to participate as mentees. Leaders must be willing to allow time during the workday for associates to meet with their mentor. If this is not feasible due to current assignments, associates should not be selected to participate.

With an emphasis on internal opportunities, one outcome of the program is to build a bench to support succession planning. Executive leaders are responsible for making decisions about who leads when a new campus opens or who fills a vacancy when a vice president leaves her position. While there must be no guarantees that women who participate in the mentoring program will receive a promotion, it is essential that leaders view mentee participation as an honor and an effort towards career advancement. This will help to support program viability.

It is important to relay to leaders the benefits of a mentoring program, such as improved employee retention (Wunsch, 1993). If top performing employees are nominated for and participate in the mentoring program, it will ultimately save the institution money. There have been instances when the institutions have relied on outside
recruiting firms to fill key leadership positions. For example, Mitchell University has a department leadership opportunity available at one of the campuses. This position has been open for two months. Candidates have been sourced from the Human Resources department and external firms have been tapped to recruit. Additionally, an alternative solution for leadership support had to be identified in the interim until a director could be found. These efforts cost considerable time and money. The mentoring program may help in preparing viable employees internally who may fill vacant roles.

Many current associates have inquired about advancement opportunities or programs that support professional development. One woman shared, “My last company offered a director development program. There is nothing like that here and I don’t what’s next in my career.” The schools could lose existing associates who seek opportunity. Managers must support employee growth and development (Robbins & Judge, 2012). One way to do that is through this mentoring program.

There are additional considerations for leaders in implementing the mentoring program. One task all leaders have is motivating employees. The mentoring program may motivate associates to work harder. There will be a limited number of mentees admitted, especially in the first few years of the program. Individual performance will be measured to assist with the selection process, fueling a competitive environment (Rath & Conchie, 2008). The committee would give the final nod to those associates who will participate. Approval by a manager during the review process will not be enough to participate in the program. Only the best of the best will be accepted as mentees.

Another facet of motivating employees is goal setting. As a part of the annual review process, all managers are required to develop goals with associates for the
upcoming year. The mentoring program can help in two ways. First, it can serve as a goal itself. Those associates who expressed an interest in leading may aspire to be a part of the mentoring program. Managers can build additional goals to help associates achieve the qualifying components for participation. Second, one of the assignments in the program is to help the mentees define success. By gaining a better understanding of what success means to the women at Mitchell University, managers will better be able to support associates achieve success.

There is a bigger picture to be considered when implementing the mentoring program. In addition to retaining valuable employees, the program may attract quality talent. It is not enough to pay a higher salary or offer more time off than competitor so many employees are looking at benefits (Van Boening, Blackstone, McKee, & Rutstrom, 2006). Opportunities for advancement and support for professional development, such as a mentoring program, could appeal to candidates. Individuals often choose work based on reasons other than extrinsic rewards (Robbins & Judge, 2012).

The mentoring program may expand beyond the walls of Mitchell University through networking in an unofficial capacity. One known benefit of mentoring is growing a network (Burlew, 1991). Nearly all of the participants in this study posited that their mentors helped with networking. Building relationships with leaders at other institutions and through professional affiliations can be impactful. Academics communicate with other academics (Birnbaum, 2000). They share knowledge and make connections through forums such as LinkedIn and professional groups. Pairing aspiring leaders with senior associates helps in gaining access to networks (Hansman, 1998).
The opportunity to participate in the mentoring program may create multiple mentor support for women. It is possible that associates already have a mentor, either someone they work with or an individual outside the institution. There is no limit to the number of mentors one may have. In fact, the literature review suggested that having more than one mentor is beneficial. Women face many challenges in their professional and personal lives. It is unlikely a single mentor can address all of the mentee’s needs (Burlew, 1991; De Janasz et al., 2003).

A mentoring program could be cost effective for Mitchell University. Mentoring has been shown to aid in employee retention (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). Losing valuable employees, recruiting for replacements, and training staff could cost the institution money. If Mitchell University instituted a mentoring program for high performing individuals and as a result, retained them, there were certainly be cost benefits.

Mentoring also helps shape work attitudes and can contribute to organizational commitment (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Jane says she loved working for her employer. Kathy also indicated it was important to enjoy work. If these women were to serve as mentors for aspiring leaders, they could positively influence work attitudes and help with stress management. Stress related issues have become the fastest growing reason cited in worker’s compensation claims (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1998).

While there are financial benefits to introducing a mentoring program, there are also costs. The Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment is not free (Gallup, 2008). A single access code is $9.99. There are additional resources that may be purchased such as the book, Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why Individuals Follow.
It would be important to have the book because it describes the themes and provides insight into how to work with each strength. The book is $15.99 assuming rates are not discounted for institutions. The Clifton StrengthsFinder must be purchased in addition to the accompanying book that explores strengths (Gallup, 2008). Time is the biggest asset. There is a time commitment on behalf of the mentors, mentees, and committee members, one for which they will not be financially compensated. These individuals must communicate to allocate sufficient time to the program (Edwards et al., 2011).

The most important resource in a mentoring program is an individual’s time. Mentors give a significant amount of their time in a successful relationship. The literature review revealed that more time dedicated to a mentee is better (Dawson, 2014; Noe, 1998). Mitchell University promotes internal growth, an indicator that the institution values individuals. Leaders encourage associates to consider new opportunities that arise within the organization. This approach to internal development was evidenced in promotions, especially when new campuses were opened.

Furthermore, department leaders are encouraged to build a bench, or create a succession plan. Leaders must identify team members who can serve in their absence to support a continuity of business. A mentoring program would promote this concept and support women who serve in interim roles. Since Mitchell University is a growing institution, it is inevitable that opportunities for advancement will present themselves.

Communication is critical to the program. Initial discussions about personal goals and career ambitions lay the foundation for relationship development. This program was purposefully designed to include limited structure. The reason for this was to create as informal a mentoring relationship as possible within the constraints of a formal
beginning. While there must be an element of formality in a program designed in a work environment, the interview responses suggested informal mentoring relationships were most influential on growth and development. Hence, the mentor and mentee would be encouraged to define the relationship and its structure.

**Evaluation**

The final phase of the mentoring program is evaluation. It will be important that the mentors and mentees provide honest, reflective feedback to the committee established during the development phase to aid in assessment. Evaluating the participant experiences is central to determining whether any changes must be made to the program (Burr et al., 2011). Clear communication at the end of the program about benefits and opportunities for improvement will help the committee in assessing program viability.

At the end of the year-long assignment, the mentor and mentee will be interviewed separately by the committee. This interview should be considered an exit interview where the mentee is asked to evaluate her experience as it relates to the objectives of the program.

1. I have expanded my professional network.
2. I know how to provide constructive criticism and deal with difficult situations.
3. I am ready for change.
4. I am willing to take risks.
5. I have gained confidence in my strengths.
6. My definition of success is _________________.

The mentors will also be asked to provide feedback to the committee. As leaders in top positions, the mentors would evaluate the growth of their mentee. Also, the
mentors will be asked if they wish to continue participating. Although it will not be tied to the performance review, it will be considered if the mentee applies for an open opportunity. Additionally, those mentees who receive a “yes” response to the third question will be invited to participate as mentors the following year.

1. My mentee is ready for leadership.
2. One area in which my mentee has grown is _______________.
3. My mentee is ready to mentor.
4. I wish to continue as a mentor.

Figure 2 depicts the sequence of events to select mentees, participate in the program, and evaluate outcomes.

Figure 2
The Mentoring Program Cycle
Summary

This chapter focused on the implementation and assessment of the mentoring program. Key players were identified and their roles in adopting a program were outlined. Leaders play an important role because they will be responsible for identifying suitable associates to participate as mentees. Although the final decision lies with a committee, department leaders would nominate high performing team members to be mentored.

Implementation will occur in phases. The program will coincide with the annual performance review cycle and the commitment will last one year. After completing the programs, participants will be asked to rate their experience. The committee will evaluate whether any changes must be made to the program before a new group of mentees begins participation. Finally, some mentees may be invited to mentor in subsequent years. The program will grow as mentees become mentors. The study contributes to the greater good by developing leaders as the schools continue to grow.

Recommendations for Further Research

The literature and findings of this study reinforce the value of a mentor. Mitchell University and the women who work there will benefit from this study. They will learn how mentoring contributes to professional development and how career objectives can be attained by participating in a formal program. Readers will have an opportunity to learn about the organizational commitment of the participants who are successful leaders. They will come to understand that mentoring helps in developing strengths and overcoming weaknesses.
This study was limited in that it focused on women in for-profit higher education. The literature review suggested women have difficulty making connections that could potentially result in career growth (Kimmel et al., 1979). Only women were interviewed about their experiences with mentors. It is possible that men at Mitchell University could benefit from this study. Do men report the same benefits from mentoring relationships as women? Do men believe mentoring contributed to success in the same way that women do?

Some of the participants in this study referenced different experiences with male mentors versus female mentors. One participant even suggested she might have had a different experience if she had access to a female mentor. Further research could explore how the relationship differs if the mentor is a man versus a woman. Most of the participants mentioned networking as a powerful reason to find a mentor. Do women mentors have the same connections as men? Is the network limited with a woman mentor?

**Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to find out how mentoring could help women achieve success in higher education leadership. The research found that mentoring is impactful and aids women in attaining goals. Mentors help to establish networks, build relationships that open doors to new career opportunities or enhance existing ones. Mentors direct mentees on how to deal with confrontation, and they provide constructive criticism to employees. They are supportive and honest, good listeners and solution oriented individuals. Mentors teach, guide, offer advice on personal matters, and provide

The aim of this study was to develop a mentoring model to be implemented at Mitchell University. As a growing institution, the school has a need for leaders. Promoting individuals from within saves costs and ensures a continuity of organizational culture. There are benefits for associates and the University alike to adopt a mentoring program.

A phenomenological approach was used to capture the experiences of women who have had mentors. Their perceptions of the mentoring experience were critical in developing a goal-oriented, loosely formal program to support aspiring leaders. Face-to-face interviews captured the words of the mentees that were then transcribed and analyzed for themes. Common words, such as networking and risk-taking, emerged from the data as themes.

The researcher built a model that although formal, operates as informally as possible in a workplace. Implementing a mentoring program will require the support of individuals from multiple levels and various departments. It will be embedded in the annual review process, requires manager approval, and a desire to lead. Only high performing associates will be nominated and even then, their participation is no guarantee. A committee will make the final decision on who will be a mentor in this year-long program.

The most limited resources are time and individuals. The for-profit environment is fast-paced. Workdays are long and often flow into the evening or weekend hours. That leaves little time for a mentor and mentee to meet. Due to the time investment
required for a successful mentoring relationship, commitment to the program is crucial. Participants from this study will be invited to serve as mentors. Even if all eight agree, the mentors will be limited in number.

Implementing a mentoring program is not without its challenges but the reward is clear. Mentoring helps women gain success. The women in this study defined success and while their definitions varied, no one cited monetary compensation as the determining factor. Rather, success for the participants was intrinsic, focused on the growth of others and the organization.
References


Lowney, C. (2003). *Heroic leadership: Best practices from a 450-year-old company that*


Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

DATE: December 20, 2014
TO: Amanda Schroeder
FROM: Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral
PROJECT TITLE: [604238-1] A Phenomenological Study: Mentoring Women in Higher Education Leadership
REFERENCE #: Exempt Category #2
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: December 20, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE: December 19, 2017
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The following items were reviewed in this submission:

- Application Form - 114.1B Application for Determination of Exempt Status Surveys-interview-observation.doc (UPDATED: 12/13/2014)
- Creighton - IRB Application Form - Creighton - IRB Application Form (UPDATED: 12/15/2014)
- Letter - Invitation to Participate (UPDATED: 12/15/2014)
- Other - Dr. Brook's Signature (UPDATED: 12/15/2014)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Mentoring Questions.docx (UPDATED: 12/15/2014)

An IRB administrator has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations. All changes to approved research must be submitted to the IRB to access if the project continues to be exempt.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Nowatzke at 402-280-3580 or nowatzke@creighton.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral's records.
Appendix B

Sample Report

Mentor Report

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<th>Mentee Name:</th>
<th>Jane Doe</th>
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<td>Date(s) of Meeting:</td>
<td>3/01/15, 4/01/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose of Meeting:</td>
<td>Discuss Success</td>
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<td>Name of individual submitting this report:</td>
<td>Suzie Mentor</td>
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<td>Today's date:</td>
<td>04/08/15</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Meeting Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What action plans/observations/tasks were discussed?</td>
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<td>---</td>
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Appendix C

Interview Questions

✓ Tell me what success means to you.
✓ What qualities or attributes in your mentor most contributed to your professional success?
✓ Describe your interaction with your mentor.
  1. Was your relationship formal or informal?
  2. Did you have a specific purpose when your relationship was established?
  3. Did your supervisor actively support the relationship?
✓ What lessons did you find most valuable from your mentor?
✓ Were there needs other than professional development that your mentor fulfilled?
✓ How did you spend most of your time with your mentor?
  1. What activities did you participate in during meetings?
  2. How much time did you spend with your mentor weekly or monthly?
✓ How did your mentor help you overcome weaknesses?
✓ What did you hope to accomplish by partnering with a mentor?
✓ How did your needs change over time?
  1. Was your mentor able to help with your changing needs?
  2. How did you communicate the change in need to your mentor?
✓ How did you know the relationship was ready to end?
  1. Who ended the relationship?
  2. How was the relationship terminated?
✓ Do you believe you would be in your leadership role if you did not have a mentor?
✓ If you could describe your mentor in one word, what would it be?