Structuring Serendipity: Mentoring as a Component of Leadership Development
Programs in Higher Education

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Denise A. Bonebright

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Karen Seashore, Advisor
Kenneth Bartlett, Co-Advisor

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Dedication

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Abstract

The need to develop a pool of well-qualified future leaders is a key concern for human resource development scholars and practitioners in higher education. Research indicates that formal leadership development programs are most effective when they are based on experiential models. Mentoring is one experiential component that can enhance such programs by providing context, opportunities to develop and practice leadership behaviors, and assistance with career decision making.

This study was a qualitative case study of a leadership development program, the Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development, which included a variety of mentoring options. Two units of analysis were embedded in the case. By examining the program from the viewpoint of the sponsoring organizations and individual participants, the study sought to understand the organizational intent for mentoring and how it was experienced by the cohort members. Findings indicated that mentoring is most effective when activities occur within a formal structure that is grounded in a clearly articulated set of program goals and expectations and when the activities take into account the individual needs, circumstances, and experiences of the program participants.

The research related to design of formal mentoring programs is limited. This study added to the literature by proposing a definition of mentoring, identifying mentee characteristics that may influence mentoring outcomes, and proposing mentoring strategies that may be appropriate for meeting specific types of program goals. Results can be used to inform development of similar mentoring programs within higher education.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Developing the next generation of executive leaders is an important task for

human resource development (HRD) professionals in higher education. Changing

political and educational environments, along with a high number of anticipated

retirements, have intensified the competition for well-qualified executive leaders.

Sanaghan, Goldstein, and Gaval (2008) observed that in the United States college

presidents serve, on average, fewer than ten years. As a consequence, they found than in

any given year about 25% of higher education institutions are preparing for, in the midst

of, or completing a presidential transition. A recent survey of nonprofit retirement plan

sponsors found that within the higher education sector up to 20% of the workforce is

anticipating retirement within the next five years (NonProfit Times, 2013). This is

causing a range of problems for human resources professionals, including workforce skill

gaps, need for increased training, and greater responsibilities for remaining employees as

duties are reallocated.

Responding to the need to reduce pressures on leadership pipelines, scholars and

practitioners higher education, as in in the field of HRD in general, have focused on

leadership development as a strategy. Madsen (2012) noted that within HRD "leadership

development has become an important area of inquiry" (p. 4). She stated that leadership

development has implications for key areas of HRD, including career development,

training and development, and organization development and argued that it is now

"central to HRD theory, research, and practice" (p. 4).

Leadership development is also a critical focus in higher education because new leaders often enter their roles under-prepared (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Campbell, Syed, & Morris, 2010). A more professional and systematic approach to leadership development is replacing the older model of promoting outstanding faculty members into executive positions without adequate preparation for the role. In spite of this, women and minorities are often under-represented in leadership talent pools (Harris & Lieberman, 2012; Madsen, 2012). These circumstances have created a need for effective leadership development strategies for experienced, new, and potential leaders in higher education.

Background

HRD professionals have numerous options for designing and delivering leadership development programs. Scholarly and practitioner journals agree that the most effective programs are not solely based on classroom experiences, but also include experiential components that help participants apply what they learn to their daily work (Peshawaria, 2011). Common experiential components in leadership development programs include 360-degree feedback, executive coaching, challenging job assignments, action learning projects, and mentoring (Day, 2001; Rhodes, 2007). Day (2001) described this approach as helping people learn through their work rather than leaving their work to learn.

This study focused on mentoring as an experiential component of leadership development programs. Mentoring provides benefits for both mentors and mentees, as well as for sponsoring organizations. For example, Groves (2007) identified it as a "best

practice" and Solansky (2010) identified at is a "key component" in leadership development programs. Thurston, D'Abate, and Eddy (2012) stated that "the individual and organizational benefits of mentoring are important outcomes of a strong strategic HRD system" (p. 139).

While experiential learning approaches can be highly effective, Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004) observed that "leadership development practices based on this paradigm are more difficult to design and implement" (p. 27). Unlike traditional classroom-based training, experiential approaches typically involve greater investment of financial resources (for example, purchasing assessments or hiring executive coaches), program coordination (to create and monitor action learning projects, stretch assignments, and/or mentoring relationships), as well as staff time to complete 360-degree reviews and senior leader time to serve as mentors or sponsor learning projects. In relation to mentoring, Cummings and Worley (2005) stated that it is "relatively prevalent in organizations," but also noted that "artificially creating such relationships when they do not occur naturally is difficult" (p. 408). Further, Solansky (2010) noted that "having a mentor in place does not guarantee that the mentor-mentee relationship will be effective and open" (p. 679).

Research Question and Design

This study examined the question: In what ways can mentoring add value to a leadership development program in higher education? It was designed to provide new knowledge to inform the design and implementation of mentoring programs that meet the needs of institutions of higher education and the leaders who participate in the programs.

This study used a qualitative case study method to examine a specific leadership development program, the Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development (MN Partnership). Embedded within the case were two units of analysis: 1) the sponsoring organizations, which were the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and 2) the individual cohort members. The units of analysis were examined in order to provide multiple sources of evidence regarding the program's goals and outcomes.

The MN Partnership planning team consisted of six individuals, two from MnSCU and three from the U of M. I was the sixth member of the planning team; during the course of the program I changed employment from the U of M to MnSCU. My role within both sponsoring organizations provided a unique opportunity to examine the design of the program's mentoring options and participant's perception of their success. Examining program design choices as made by each sponsoring organization and as enacted by participants provided new information about how mentoring is experienced by program stakeholders.

Significance of the Study

HRD professionals within higher education are faced with the challenge of designing leadership development programs that produce tangible outcomes and meet critical organizational needs. One of the questions faced by the design teams for leadership development programs in higher education is whether, and how, to incorporate a mentoring component. Mentoring is a time-honored strategy for developing leaders, but there is little research on how to best structure formal programs to generate desired

results, particularly in the context of higher education. Including a mentoring component

has the potential to increase program effectiveness, but it also greatly increases both the

complexity of program design and the expenditure of organizational resources.

Instructional designers and program planning teams often find that relatively little

practical advice is available to inform the design of mentoring activities and ensure that

an organization's investment is used to its best advantage. There is a lack of research on

the design process for mentoring programs (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Day, 2001;

Solansky, 2010). Ligon, Wallace, and Osburn (2011) noted that while research exists

regarding effectiveness of mentoring for leadership development, "far less is clear

regarding how mentors transmit these learning outcomes from a process standpoint or

how HRD might play a role in facilitating this occurring" (p. 306). Hezlett and Gibson

(2005) observed that, "although mentoring theory, research, and practice have begun to

mature, relatively few articles on mentoring have appeared in the human resource

development (HRD) literature" (p. 446).

Zellers, Howard, and Barcic (2008) stated that higher education has been slower than

business to formalize mentoring activities for faculty. They found that previous literature focused

on informal or naturally occurring faculty mentoring relationships because of "the paucity of

empirical studies" on formal programs (p. 553). Based on a review of the literature, I found that

there are even fewer studies related to mentoring for higher education leader development.

This study contributed to the literature on leadership development by examining

both the design process and intended outcomes of mentoring in a formal leadership

development program. Findings from this study may help program planners understand the relative strengths and applications of various types of mentoring models.

Limitations of the Study

My role as a program coordinator of the MN Partnership allowed me to have access to documents and a level of shared knowledge with interviewees that might not have been available to outside researchers. At the same time, the insider role can present limitations (Yin, 2009). First, there can be a bias caused by a tendency to take an advocacy role toward the program being studied. This problem was partially mitigated by the fact that the program was designed as a pilot and there was a need to objectively decide whether or not the program was worth the fairly significant investment of time and resources. Triangulation by use of multiple sources of information was important to guard against any potential desire to portray the program in an overly favorable light. A second problem noted by Yin (2009) was that participant-observers may not have the time and attention needed to act as objective observers. That limitation was alleviated by waiting until the program was completed to begin the study. As a consequence, I was not playing an observer role during the program and field notes do not exist.

Yin (2009) stated that a limitation for case study research is the difficulty of generalizing beyond the single case. However, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), argued that qualitative case study research is not conducted with a goal of generalizability. They discussed the term *applicability,* or relevance to the study's users. While the focus of the study was one particular program, the MN Partnership shares similarities with other leadership development programs in higher education. It was my intent that readers

would be able to apply the findings to their efforts in designing mentoring activities for similar higher education leadership programs.

Terms and Definitions

      Leadership. Much has been written in an attempt to define leadership. Northouse (2004) observed that there are a "multitude of ways that leadership has been conceptualized." While acknowledging that the term has many meanings, he proposed the following definition: "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3). Kotter (2001) proposed that leadership, like management, involves "deciding what needs to be done, creating networks of people and relationships that can accomplish the agenda, and then trying to ensure that people actually do the job" (p. 86). However, he argued that management is about complexity while leadership is about change, and each requires a different set of skills and strategies.

      Leadership development. This study will focus on formal leadership development programs that are organizationally-sponsored efforts to 1) identify a group of individuals who are current or potential leaders and 2) provide them with a set of experiences designed to enhance their capacity and readiness for serving in leadership roles. The formal mentoring activities examined in this study meet the criteria defined by Douglas (1997) as being "assigned, maintained, and monitored by the organization, usually through an established program" (p. 1).

      Mentoring. For this study, mentoring will be defined as a mutually beneficial relationship, intentionally built over time, in which mentors provide resources to help

mentees achieve personal and/or professional goals while, at the same time, increasing their own personal and/or professional satisfaction and growth. This definition emerged during data analysis and reflects a broad approach that is not bounded by traditional definitions in relation to number of participants or organizational hierarchy.

Coaching. While mentors may provide coaching, the concept of coaching differs from mentoring in several ways, particularly in its focus on improvement in specific areas of performance and the relationship between the coach the person being coached. Supervisory coaching is an ongoing part of the supervisor/employee relationship, focused on performance in the employee's current position. It is often initiated by the supervisor and is less dependent on the readiness component explained in Chapter 4. Executive coaching occurs when one party is contracted to provide specific types of feedback to the other. Executive coaches are often outside of the client's organization and typically do not provide the organizational insights and networking assistance that may be part of a mentoring relationship.

Sponsoring. For this study, a sponsor is defined as a senior member of an organization who is serving as an advocate for a more junior member. The sponsor provides insight to help the individual understand and navigate the organization's culture and politics. A sponsor may also nominate an individual and support their participation in leadership development activities.

Summary

Kezar (2009) called leadership development "one of the most important conditions for the health and future of higher education" (p. ix). As HRD scholars and

professionals within higher education seek to develop the next generation of leaders, they may find that the literature is limited in regard to design and implementation of effective strategies.

This study used a qualitative case study to examine the goals and outcomes of mentoring as a component of a formal leadership development program. This strategy is regarded as potentially effective, but also as presenting significant challenges to program planners. By examining the choices and outcomes that occurred during the initial design phase and pilot implementation of the MN Partnership, the study generated new knowledge that may inform the design of similar programs.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

There is a great deal of scholarly and practitioner literature on the topic of

leadership, and a significant amount relating to leadership development. The topic of

mentoring as a leadership development strategy has been receiving more attention during

the past two decades. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the research, with

focus on questions related to leadership development in higher education.

Leadership Development

When working in the context of leadership development, it is important to

understand what is meant by the term "leadership." As pointed out in Chapter 1, the term

has many different meanings and there is a wide range of perspectives toward defining it

(Northouse, 2004). Terry (2001) noted that several perspectives represent opposing

views, such as the extent to which leaders are either "born" or "made" (p. 23) and the

extent to which it is "positional" or "everywhere" (p. 27). Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky

(2009) further distinguished between leadership and authority, and argued that authority,

power, and influence are tools of leadership but not the defining factors: "We find it

extremely useful to see leadership as a practice, an activity that some people do some of

the time" (p. 24).

Within the context of higher education, this broader view is appropriate since

much leadership happens among peers and relies little, if at all, on positional power and

authority. Leadership development within the context of higher education, of necessity,

focuses on creating collaborations and setting visions that others are willing and able to

follow. Mentoring as examined in this study occurs in leadership development programs

that align with Day's (2000) definition of "leadership development" as opposed to "leader development." Similar to Kotter's (2001) distinction between management and leadership, he argued that the leader development helps people build skills to lead human capital, while the leadership development has a social and relational context.

One important question for HRD practitioners and scholars in leadership development is the extent to which leadership can be learned. Kouzes and Posner (2002) reflected current thinking when they identified a "pernicious myth" that leadership is reserved for those with special inborn traits or positional authority (p. 385). They argued that "leadership is an observable set of skills and abilities that . . . can be strengthened, honed, and enhanced, given the motivation and desire, the practice and feedback, and the role models and coaching" (p. 386). Within HRD, practitioner organizations such as the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) are acting on the belief that leadership is teachable (Israelite, 2010). Innumerable tools, techniques, and approaches are offered by consulting firms and vendors with a broad range of qualifications. Forbes (2011) estimated that $60 billion is spent annually on leadership development. Further, the article argued that much of the money is wasted on programs that do not work (Peshawaria, 2011).

Scholars have been more cautious, but also tend to agree that leadership can be taught. Doh (2003) interviewed leaders in the field of leadership education and concluded that leadership can be taught, within certain constraints. He found that effective leaders have a "teachable frame of mind" (p. 64) which can lead to successful leadership development programs, assuming the programs include practical and

experiential components. He concluded that "leadership education, like leadership itself, must rely on heuristic approaches such as mentoring, coaching, patterning, and, trial-and-error experience" (p. 66). Charan, Drotter, and Noel (2001) proposed a model for developing leaders within organizations. They found that "internal training, mentoring, and other developmental programs aren't keeping the pipeline full" (p. 1) and identified specific developmental issues that need to be addressed as potential leaders reach new stages in their careers: new skill requirements, new ways to frame and manage time, and new values to use when deciding how to allocate one's work effort.

Assuming that leadership can be learned, a second important concept for HRD scholars and practitioners is "stickiness" of knowledge. *Sticky* knowledge carries a high cost in acquisition and transfer due to its non-routine nature or perceived difficulty to resolve (Szulanski, 1996; von Hippel, 1994). In leadership theory, this is what Heifetz and Laurie (2001) called an *adaptive challenge* – a situation in which beliefs are challenged, previously held values no longer apply, and competing legitimate perspectives exist. In identifying barriers to transfer of sticky knowledge, Szulanski (1996) found that three important factors are the inability of the recipient to understand, the ambiguity of causes, and arduousness of the relationships (defined as ease of communication and intimacy). The latter factor relates to the importance of mentoring relationships. To the extent that there is sticky knowledge involved in becoming a leader, then teaching through two-way communication and intimate relationships – such as effective mentoring – is critical.

For HRD practitioners, it is important to differentiate this definition of stickiness from the more recent definition that is common in business literature. As described, for example, in Heath and Heath (2007) knowledge that "sticks" refers to ideas that "are understood and remembered, and have a lasting impact – they change your audience's opinions or behavior" (p. 8). They argued that these ideas stick because they are simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and based on stories. Using this definition, one role of mentors is to tell compelling stories about their own experiences that will stick with the mentees and help them learn to modify their own leadership behaviors.

Developing Leaders in Higher Education

Kuchinke (2012) noted that "mentoring represents a complex social practice that is embedded in an organization's culture and climate" (p. 168). In addition to organization culture, mentoring strategies are also affected by the broader context in which the organization operates. The focus of this study is the higher education sector. In comparison, literature describing programs in the business sector often discussed shorter-term goals tied to measures such as increased profit or progress along a promotional track. Darwin and Palmer (2009) found that networking, social support, and availability of role models were often important goals for mentoring in higher education. They expressed concern that "result-oriented organizations may not perceive these benefits as valuable" (p. 134).

Several challenges are important for leadership development in the context of higher education. First, academic leaders often come to their roles with limited training or preparation (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Martin & Samels, 2004). In addition, academic

leaders are facing a critical set of issues that will impact higher education in the future. Martin and Samels (2004) identified a list of challenges required for new college presidents, including pressure to raise funds, managing competition from for-profit schools, and making decisions about technology options. Harris and Leberman (2012) expanded the list by noting that these challenges, along with pressures caused by new financial models and a global marketplace, make it difficult to attract and retain academic leaders. They proposed that part of the solution could be increased focus on developing women and minorities to fill leadership positions. Allen and Cherrey (2000) identified an additional set of leadership issues for higher education relating to global shifts "from a world of fragmentation to one of connectivity and integrated networks" and "from an industrial to a knowledge era" (p. 1). They argued that these shifts require leaders to support organizational flexibility while at the same time promoting stability and proposed that academic leaders need to develop a more systems-focused approach to their roles.

Compounding the problem, the nature of existing leadership programs in higher education may not be adequate to the current highly collaborative, decentralized, global environment. National programs have historically been based on hierarchical models and individual skill development for positional leaders (Kezar, 2009). Campus-based programs are often developed around the interests and availability of volunteer faculty and, rather than strategic program design, may resemble "what happens in a conference or annual meeting – here is one session of this topic and here is another on another topic, and let us make certain we have diversity of topics and presentation modes so the day is lively" (McDade, 2009, p. 227). In both cases, it is difficult to provide emerging leaders

with the cross-disciplinary experiences necessary to be effective in institutional leadership.

Mentoring

The origin of the term "mentor" is commonly attributed to Homer's *Odyssey* (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). In that story, Odysseus travels on a journey, leaving his son in the care of the trusted elder, Mentor. However, the strategy in which a younger person is guided in developing skills and character traits from a respected, non-parental elder was part of the human experience long before Homer, and probably before there was written language.

Traditionally, mentoring has been defined as a one-on-one relationship. For example, Cummings and Worley (2005) defined it as "establishing a close link between a manager or someone more experienced and another organization member who is less experienced" and who "takes a personal interest in the employee's career and guides and sponsors it" (p. 407). More recently, the literature has proposed new approaches and strategies for mentoring. In response to practical difficulties with establishing one-on-one mentoring relationships and to changing organizational needs, alternatives are emerging to the traditional mentoring relationship. These include peer mentoring, structured networks, and mentoring circles (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Douglas, 1997; Parker, Kram, & Hall, 2013).

Desired outcomes of mentoring. The literature described a variety of short-medium- and long-term goals that either resulted from a mentoring program or were desired as part of the planning process. Examples of short-term outcomes included

achieving career goals, building relationships, and sensemaking. Mentoring for career

goals included achieving promotion or tenure (Boerema, 2011; Kuyper-Rushing, 2001;

Stanley & Lincoln, 2005), adjusting to a new culture (Bhatia & Amati, 2010), or

orientation to new roles. Bengtson, Zepeda, and Parylo (2013) called mentoring "a key

component of the induction process" for new principles (p. 146). Relationship-building

was a second commonly stated short-term goal. Two themes were the development of

professional networks and reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Golian-Lui

(2003) observed that "learning that I am not alone in these challenges brings me great

comfort" (p. 28). A third short-term goal was sensemaking. In addition to offering

professional advice, some articles described ways mentors can help mentees understand

and make sense of their experiences. Ligon, Wallace, and Osburn (2011) discussed the

importance of the mentor's role in helping mentees learn from experiences. "Without

someone to provide explanation, sensemaking does not happen and developing

experiences may be wasted" (p. 306).

Mid-term outcomes of mentoring occur when the individuals practice their new

learning through, for example, changed patterns of decision making or engaging in social

action. Goals for mentees often included aspirational outcomes such as development of

leadership skills and increased self-confidence. For mentors, goals included the potential

that mentoring relationships could turn into professional peer relationships. Desired

organizational outcomes included an increased sense of motivation and connection to the

work. This was often expressed as a goal for programs designed to support under-

represented groups. For example, Zellers, Howard, and Barcic (2008) proposed that

women may experience mentoring differently than men, and those factors of "involving someone who cares" and "feeling of connection" are highly rated by women faculty mentees (p. 560).

The literature also discussed long-term results of mentoring that occur when the larger environment is impacted, resulting in changing social climates, organizational cultures, or community behaviors. One desired long-term organizational outcome was that as mentees advanced in their careers they would, in turn, be able to mentor others. In addition, some authors proposed that mentoring would increase employee engagement overall, expanding organizational benefits beyond those being mentored. Horvath, Wasko, & Bradley (2008) further found that the availability mentoring programs could be an attractive recruiting tool. Some articles identified long-term goals related to creating new organizational cultures that were more supportive and inclusive. Other long-term goals included increasing the leadership capacity of the organization, building stronger collaborative networks, and supporting the organization's mission and values.

Formal Mentoring

To understanding mentoring in an HRD context, it is important to draw a distinction between formal and informal mentoring. Formal mentoring differs from informal in that the relationships are developed with organizational assistance and within a specified time frame (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007). As Ehrich and Hansford (1999) observed, the two strategies "can be experienced quite differently" (p. 5). Allen, Eby, and Lenz (2006) stated that research regarding formal mentoring has focused on emulating the informal experience, and argued for "moving beyond this simple logic and

acknowledging the issues unique to formal mentorships" (p. 147). They found that two unique considerations in designing formal programs were helping participants to understand the goals and purpose of the program and encouraging commitment on the part of mentors.

Mentoring as an organizational strategy came to popular and scholarly attention in the late 1970s (Ehrich & Hansford, 1999; Tenner, 2004; Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). Popular attention was drawn to articles such as Collins and Scott's (1978) *Everyone who makes it has a mentor,* Roche's (1979) *Much ado about mentors* as early contributions. Levinson (1978) discussed mentoring in his book on adult development, and was among the first to define the roles of a mentor and identify their transitional nature. Kanter (1977) was among the first to discuss the importance of mentoring in terms of career success.

There is now a significant body of scholarly literature on mentoring from a range of disciplines including business, psychology, and human resource development. Much of this literature focuses on descriptions of personal experiences (for example, Golian-Lui, 2003; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005) or on program outcomes for mentors (Allen & Eby, 2003; Parise & Forret, 2007), mentees (Bhatia & Amati, 2010; Bengtson, Zepeda, & Parylo, 2013), and the organization (Groves, 2007; Horvath, Wasko, & Bradley, 2008). The literature related to the education sector is more limited and very little discusses design of formal programs. Excluding literature on mentoring for students, the most prevalent topics relate to experiences and outcomes of professional development programs, with a significant emphasis on college and university librarians, school

principals, and new faculty. A smaller body of literature focuses on use of mentoring to support the development of academic faculty and staff from underrepresented groups such as minority faculty members or women in sciences and engineering.

While the literature on effective design of formal mentoring programs is limited, three scholar/practitioners who have contributed to the field are Norman H. Cohen, Margo Murray, and Florence M. Stone. They will be discussed below as examples mentoring program design research over the past two decades.

Cohen (1995a) defined mentoring as a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and a learner. He proposed principles of adult mentoring that included the following six mentor roles: establishing trust, offering advice, introducing alternatives, confronting and challenging, modeling and motivating, and encouraging initiative. His *Principles of Adult Mentoring Scale* (1995b) was proposed as a way for mentors to self-assess their competencies and for program facilitators to offer training.

Murray proposed a model of "facilitated mentoring" in 1991. The revised edition of her book (2001) explored how the model had been used and proposed this definition:

> Facilitated mentoring is a structure and series of processes designed to create effective mentoring relationships; guide the desired behavior change of those involved; and evaluate the results for the protégés, the mentors, and the organization (p. 5).

Stone (2004, 2007) was a mentoring practitioner associated with the American Management Association. Her research focused on the business advantages of formal mentoring programs. She proposed definitions to distinguish mentoring from similar

behaviors such as coaching and counseling, and developed guidelines for establishing and maintaining facilitated programs. Her work addressed alternatives to one-on-one mentoring, such as providing mentorship for cross-functional teams.

Most of the literature approached formal mentoring as beneficial to individuals and organizations, or from a neutral framework. However, some authors addressed potential negative aspects of mentoring. Tenner (2004) identified a "current trend toward overvaluing mentors" and cautioned that "a mentor is only as good as the ethics and concepts that he or she imparts" (p. B7). Ehrich and Hansford (1999) reviewed the literature and proposed a framework to identify drawbacks, as well as benefits, of mentoring programs for organizations, mentees, and mentors. Baugh and Fagenson-Eland (2007) also explored both positive and negative aspects of formal mentoring. Angelique, Kyle, and Taylor (2002) discussed the limitations of traditional mentoring programs in academic settings, as well as alternatives such as peer mentoring. Parker, Kram, and Hall (2013) identified individual, relational, and contextual risk factors associated with peer coaching and proposed mitigation strategies.

Strategies for Designing and Implementing Formal Mentoring Programs

As described above, there is a great deal of literature about leadership development, including some specifically addressing issues in higher education. There is also a body of literature discussing mentoring programs, much of it either evaluative or descriptive in nature. However, there is little literature that seeks to integrate the theories into the practice of designing formal mentoring components in leadership development programs. As a relatively recent addition to the literature on management practices,

theories and frameworks for mentoring are still being explored. Murray (2001) noted that

mentoring in formal programs is in an evolutionary stage: "The strategies used in

mentoring processes are changing every day as we examine lessons learned and best

practices" (p. 1).

One decision to be made by designers of traditional mentoring programs relates to

the strategy for matching mentors and mentees. Bell and Treleaven (2011) reviewed the

literature and found that "further research into the pairing process, and its operational

details in particular, is necessary" (p. 549). They proposed effective design

considerations including allowing mentees have input in the selection process and

providing ongoing individualized support for mentees during the program. Blake-Beard,

O'Neill, and McGowan (2007) found that the matching process is challenging,

complicated by the fact that "as participants enter formal programs, they bring with them

their entering intentions, assumptions of the role, and understanding of the program's

purpose, based on their own personal mentoring experiences and life history" (p. 618).

They identified three matching strategies – administrator assigned, choice based, and

assessment based – and reviewed strengths and weaknesses of each.

The literature discussed a variety of resources that are needed for implementation

of a mentoring program. Committing the time for regular mentor/mentee meetings was

described as a critical factor, and was the most commonly cited cause for not achieving

desired outcomes. In more demanding programs, participation requirements were likely

to be clearly articulated (for example, Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005). Kuyper-

Rushing (2001) discussed the implications of requiring mentees to participate in the

program as a potential negative influence on motivation. Darwin and Palmer (2009) found that mentoring circles were less successful if "some people didn't really want to be there" (p. 132). Parise and Forret (2007) found similar detrimental effects when mentors were required to participate in programs.

While not as commonly discussed in the literature, program facilitation is an important consideration within the HRD context. The role of the coordinator in supporting mentoring is important because, as Neely (2009) found, "the more emphasis placed on program elements by program coordinators, the more successfully realized the impact from that particular element" (p. 832). While many of the coordination activities were assumed rather than discussed explicitly, all elements of a typical instructional design model were present. *Analysis* was represented by understanding the organizational context and conducting needs assessment. *Development* activities included creating guidelines about the number and types of mentoring activities and creating a strategy for matching mentors and mentees. *Implementation* activities include training to explain program goals and provide structure for mentors and mentees. An additional consideration is the need for program coordinators to create a learning environment in which it is safe for mentors and mentees to take risks (Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005). Neely (2009) also noted that program coordinators may model mentoring behavior by mentoring the mentors and by providing additional advice and support to participants. *Evaluation* was seen as important, not only at the end of a program but also during its implementation. Kuyper-Rushing (2001) discussed the value

of pilot programs, as well as the ability to use evaluation data to adjust an ongoing program.

Polarity management

In reviewing HRD literature related to instructional design and organization development, I identified a model that provided a useful framework for analyzing the data from this study. Polarity, or paradox, is a decision making framework used to manage ongoing, complex problems that involve interdependent and opposing sides. Typical polarities within higher education include centralization and decentralization, individual and team, or task and relationship. This study focuses on another common polarity, structure and flexibility. Johnson (1996) argued that when individuals or organizations treat polarities as problems to be solved, they "spend unnecessary time experiencing the downsides of that polarity" (p. 81). He proposed polarity mapping as a tool for identifying and managing the positive and negative aspects of polarities. As described in Chapter 3, this tool can be usefully applied to analyze data relating to conflicting and potentially value-laden issues.

While the tool is most commonly used by HRD practitioners, it is beginning to find its way into the literature. For example, Kise (2013, 2014) proposed it as a framework for understanding leadership and education reform, and Burns (1999) called it "the key challenge for integrated health systems" (p. 14). The paradox framework has also been used to report proceedings from a conference on cross sector leadership (Center for Integrative Leadership, 2010). Without using the framework, Tolar (2012) provided an example of a potential polarity in discussing mentoring for high-achieving women.

She found that women in the study "describe the presence of mentors as both a help and a hindrance and the absence of mentors as both benefit and deficit" (p. 172).

Johnson's (1996) polarity management model provided a structure for identifying desired outcomes and monitoring unintended consequences of program design decisions. He stated that "in a well-managed polarity most time is spent experiencing the positive aspects of one pole or the other. When the downside of a pole is experienced, it is used as a signal to move to the positive of the other pole" (p. 106). By identifying possible indicators of the downside, a planning team can be more prepared to address them should they occur.

Summary

This chapter reviewed some of the literature that informed this study. An overview of leadership development was provided, with a focus on the higher education sector. An overview of the literature on mentoring was also provided, including a discussion of formal mentoring programs. Finally, research on strategies for incorporating mentoring into leadership development programs was discussed.

The complex nature of the topic, as well as a lack of literature related to specific strategies for program design, can make it difficult for instructional designers and program planners to develop and evaluate mentoring programs that meet their organizational goals. Polarity management was introduced as a data analysis framework that can inform program design. This model will be further developed in Chapter 4 (Figure 1) and Chapter 6 (Figure 2) as a way to analyze findings from this study.

Chapter 3. Research Method

While mentoring is a time-honored way to pass leadership knowledge from one generation to the next, there is disagreement on the extent to which it can be structured as part of a formal leadership development program. As these programs proliferate, mentoring has become an important issue for HRD scholars and practitioners in higher education. This study was designed to answer the question: In what ways can mentoring add value to a leadership development program in higher education?

To address this question, I examined the case of the MN Partnership, a year-long program designed to prepare participants for senior leadership positions in higher education. Participants in the MN Partnership engaged in a range of mentorship activities, and this study was designed to explore the factors that influenced the extent to which they believed that mentoring was a valuable component of their experience during the program. In addition, I sought to understand the program design choices made by the program's planning team.

This chapter will provide the context for the study, including descriptions of the sponsoring institutions, the planning team, and the participants. It will describe the research design and methods. Finally, it will introduce two models used to analyze the data.

The Case: Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development

The MN Partnership was "designed to prepare high performing, high potential leaders for senior-level administrative roles in public higher education. . . to strengthen our leadership pipeline" (Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development,

2011a). The program was developed by a design team of HRD practitioners from the University of Minnesota (U of M) and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). Participants were academic and administrative leaders from the two sponsoring organizations. These organizations share many traits common to higher education, such as highly collaborative and consultative work environments, a hierarchical organizational structure, and a shared set of stakeholders and public expectations. They also share a joint responsibility for providing the public higher education offered throughout the state. The commonalities made it possible to design a leadership development program that would benefit participants from both systems.

The collaboration that resulted in the MN Partnership grew out of exploratory conversations between HR executives and leadership development professionals at both systems (Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2010, November 10.) The conversations were driven in part by changes in leadership at both organizations, associated with ongoing public scrutiny of public funding for higher education. This resulted in a desire on the part of the human resources organizations in both systems for greater collaboration. The need for an executive leadership development program was identified as a shared issue that could be successfully addressed by a common effort. Members of the planning team believed that pooling their efforts would result in a stronger a program than either organization could create on its own. Each organization brought to the table a shared financial commitment as well as a complementary set of resources, including strong instructional design skills and access to a wider variety of subject matter experts and potential speakers.

The pilot offering of the MN Partnership was held during the academic year 2011-2012. It involved 36 participants: 20 from the MnSCU system and 16 from the U of M. The program included individual activities such as formal coaching sessions and participation in stretch assignments to address experience gaps. It also included a series of four two-day group seminars. A mentoring component was not part of the joint program design. Rather, a variety of mentoring options were provided and implemented to varying degrees by the participants.

The program planning team consisted of the directors and two staff members from the HRD units at the U of M and MnSCU. Input was also provided by subject matter experts (SMEs) from both organizations. I participated in the planning team as a member of the organizational effectiveness staff at the U of M. During the pilot year I accepted an appointment in the talent management division at the MnSCU system office and continued my involvement in the planning team. Therefore, as a participant-observer I was able to approach the study with insider ("emic") and outsider ("etic") views of both sponsoring organizations.

The choice of a pilot program as the case presented both benefits and limitations to the study. One limitation in reviewing outcomes is that the design team did not have the opportunity to implement enhancements that might have been used in subsequent programs to mitigate design flaws. In addition, taking a snapshot of one cohort at one point in time did not allow tracking of program outcomes and participant perceptions over time. Advantages included the fact that program design process was relatively recent, which meant that more data was available than might have been the case with

more established programs. Planning team notes included discussion of design criteria, and interviews with subject matter experts provided additional information about the decision making process for program design.

Research Method and Design

This study used a qualitative research methodology. I chose this approach in order to learn how stakeholders experienced the program and how they understand the concept of mentoring. Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative research is the best approach for exploring a phenomenon to find deeper understanding and make meaning. A basic qualitative study seeks to understand "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. . . . Its overall purpose is "to *understand* how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

This was an exploratory study, in that HRD professionals do not have a large body of knowledge about the effectiveness of program design choices to incorporate mentoring into formal leadership development programs. Further research is needed on specific action steps that can be taken to create successful mentoring experiences. Instruction designers wishing to create mentoring programs need additional scholarly information and models for selecting an appropriate strategy and taking steps that will promote their desired outcomes.

This research used a case study design. As described by Yin (2009) a case study can be useful in answering questions about how or why a social phenomenon operates as it does. He stated that a single-case study design can be appropriate when the case is

unique or, alternately, when it represents a typical example. In this study, the MN

Partnership includes both unique and typical aspects. While the program represented a

common approach to developing leaders in higher education, it also provided a unique

opportunity to examine the experiences of participants who have become successful

leaders in different higher education environments, including a Big 10 research

institution, four-year public universities, and two-year community and technical colleges.

In addition, it represented a unique partnership between two systems of higher education.

My role as a member of the program planning team allowed me to have access to the

notes, records, and thought processes that went into the program design. At the same

time, the rather large size of the planning team (six people from two institutions), along

with the involvement of additional subject matter experts, meant that my findings could

be tested and validated by other members of the team.

While the study focused on a single case, it included multiple units of analysis,

employing what Yin (2009) defined as an embedded design. In addition to the overall

program, attention was given to two subunits of the case. These were 1) the sponsoring

organizations, and 2) individual members of the pilot cohort. By using an embedded case

study design, I was able to examine a specific phenomenon, the creation and

implementation of mentoring designs, in operational detail and from a variety of

viewpoints.

To manage the potentially overwhelming amount of data that can be generated by

multiple units of analysis, this study employed a tight focus on mentoring as a component

of leadership development. It was not intended to produce a comprehensive evaluation of

the MN Partnership program nor a description of participants' entire experience with the program. Rather, it focused on multiple viewpoints of mentoring, including the extent to which it was included in the program design, programmatic choices made by the design team, and lived experiences of individuals who were associated with the program.

Yin (2009) cautioned that a potential pitfall of embedded case studies can occur if too much emphasis is placed on the subunits and not the larger picture. The case can become a context rather than a focus of the study. I attempted to avoid this problem by using the data to find common themes and build a model that could be used in designing mentoring activities for similar programs.

When selecting a qualitative case study approach, other research options were considered and eliminated as less applicable to the purposes of the study. For example, a study using quantitative methods, such as a satisfaction survey of program participants, could have yielded valuable information about the nature of mentoring relationships. It could have been designed to test whether demographic factors such as age, gender, or type of previous leadership experience can predict the success of mentor-mentee pairings. However, I chose to focus on an approach that would provide rich descriptions about the nature of successful mentoring relationships in order to understand what successful mentoring relationships look like from the participant's viewpoint.

Epistemological Assumptions

A positivist research viewpoint can be defined as one in which researchers believe that reality exists independently of observation and the role of a researcher is to describe this reality in an unbiased manner (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Alternatively, interpretive

research "assumes that reality is socially constructed" (Merriam, 2007, p. 8-9). A researcher using an interpretive, or constructivist, framework believes that "social reality is constructed by the individuals who participate in it" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 21). This study was undertaken from the latter viewpoint. While I sought to understand participants' experiences, I also brought my own set of assumptions about mentoring which inevitably colored the questions I asked and the meaning I made of the data.

According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), case study research can be placed in the interpretive framework because the study's design is determined by the researcher's choices about what questions to ask, what to observe, and the lenses through which to view it. For this reason, they stated that "case study design is not an event, but an emergent process that occurs throughout the case study" (p. 454). The design of this study was indeed an emergent process, undertaken from a perspective of joint meaning-making. Semi-structured interviews occurred over a six-month period of time allowed for joint exploration of key topics. As the interviews progressed, I was to some extent able to reflect with participants about my findings and their reactions to the emerging definitions and models.

Sources of Evidence

Yin (2009) noted that a well-designed study uses as many sources of evidence as possible. For this study, sources of evidence included documentation, direct observation, and interviews.

Documentation. Documents used for this study included notes from the planning team meetings, marketing communications, participant handouts, and facilitator guides.

Some of these materials were retrieved from my personal files as part of the planning team. Others were stored in an online Moodle site that was created for cohort members. Along with the program bibliography, the site contained articles that were assigned as course readings, links to related internet sites, and discussion forums. At the completion of the program, the MnSCU system worked with an outside consultant to evaluate outcomes for the MnSCU system. Her report, along with a follow-up interview regarding her findings related to mentoring, provided another source of evidence.

Direct observation. As a member of the planning team, I was present at all formally sponsored program events, including the four program seminars and the U of M peer group gatherings. In addition, I was present at the large group program planning meetings, which began with an initial brainstorming meeting, progressed through program design, and ended with final evaluation. As the planning team's focus progressed from design through implementation, the team divided into smaller work groups and I participated in one of these groups. The meetings took place over a two-year period of time. While this study was not conducted until after the completion of the program, I was able to reflect on my experiences and my understanding of decisions that were made during design and implementation of the program.

Interviews. For this study, I conducted 29 one-on-one interviews. Individuals who were interviewed as part of this study represented two groups. Those identified as *leaders* were cohort members who participated in the MN Partnership program. Those identified as *subject matter experts (SMEs)* were associated with the program in design,

development, and/or delivery roles. The two groups are described below and a demographic comparison chart is provided in Table 1.

Leaders. The cohort members selected for the MN Partnership were perceived to be successful in their current roles and identified as having the potential to be developed further to fill executive leadership roles. I interviewed 21 of the 36 cohort members. This represented a convenience sample based on availability and my desire to gather viewpoints representing the different types of educational institutions participating in the program.

A list of job titles is not provided in Table 1 for two reasons. First, some titles are specific enough that they could be traced back to individuals and might compromise the confidentiality of the interviews. Second, given the very wide range in institutional size and complexity, it is difficult to compare leadership roles across systems based on job titles. For example, a vice president at a small community college might have a wider scope of responsibility, smaller staff, and smaller budget than an assistant vice president at the U of M or one of the larger MnSCU institutions.

In spite of the difficulty in comparing job titles, it was clear from the start of the nomination and selection process that the leaders from MnSCU were at a higher overall level of organizational responsibility, span of influence, and scope of authority than the U of M group. This was a reflection of the fact that they were selected because they had the potential to apply for presidential positions within the next one to three years, while no such specific criterion existed for the U of M. This difference was reflected in comments

quoted in the MnSCU evaluation report: "the U of M folks are at the exploratory level; the MnSCU folks are at the accelerator level" (Bryant, 2012, p. 6).

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) interviewed for this study included three of the six members of the program planning team, four institutional faculty and staff who assisted in curriculum design and delivery, and a consultant hired by MnSCU to assist participants in the experience-based learning activities and conduct a program evaluation. All members of the design team and most of the content experts had prior experience with design and delivery of leadership development programs which included formal mentoring components. Four of the SMEs had received a U of M mentor-of-the-year award for mentorship provided as part of a formal leadership development program.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Overall Characteristics (29 Total Interviews)				
Organization	U of M	15	MnSCU	14
Location	Twin Cities	18	Greater Minnesota	11
Gender	Female	19	Male	10
Cohort Member Characteristics (21 Cohort Members)				
Organization	U of M	9	MnSCU	12
Location	Twin Cities	10	Greater Minnesota	11
Institution Type	Four-Year	14	Two-year	7
Gender	Female	15	Male	6

Interview process. The final meeting of the MN Partnership was held in June, 2012. I conducted the interviews during fall semester 2012 and spring 2013. This timing helped to avoid participant interview fatigue, since the evaluation consultant conducted her interviews with MnSCU participants during the summer. In addition, it allowed a period of reflection and time to determine whether any of the mentoring experiences provided by the program produced outcomes that lasted beyond the end of the program.

Interviews were conducted using what Merriam (2009) called a "semi-structured" process (p. 89). Features of this type of interview include an interview guide identifying specific data to be gathered from all respondents and a mix of structured and open questions which are used flexibly. Questions were designed and sequenced to create a conversational flow, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2000). Interview questions focused on three key areas: 1) participants' past experiences with mentoring, if any, both as a mentor and as a mentee; 2) participants' experiences with mentoring as part of the MN Partnership program; 3) participants' definition of the elements that make up a successful mentoring relationship. Depending on the individual's role with the MN Partnership, these three topics were covered in greater or lesser detail. The interview questions are provided in the appendix.

Interviews typically lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. When possible, interviews were conducted in person. Due to participant availability or work locations at a significant distance from the Twin Cities, six of the interviews were conducted via telephone. When permission was granted, interviews were taped for later review and transcribed for further analysis.

Data Analysis

This study used interpretational analysis. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) described this as "the process of examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied" (p. 466). Because the interviews were conducted over several months, the process of reviewing interview data was iterative. I began data analysis after collecting about one-third of the interviews, and later data collection was informed by my initial findings. As the study progressed, I was able to listen to the initial interviews again and discover new themes or confirm patterns that had emerged over time.

To assist in data management and analysis, Atlas.ti, a type of qualitative data analysis software, was used. This software assisted greatly in the process of interview review and transcription. Additional data sorting and analysis was conducted using Microsoft Word software. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using a set of initial categories based on the interview guide and the literature review. Additional categories and sub-categories were created during the data analysis process. The categories were used to propose a definition for mentoring; assess the degree to which participants had prior experiences as mentors and/or mentees; and identify inputs, outputs, and outcomes associated with the MN Partnership.

In addition to interview data, I analyzed other documents including program planning notes, reading lists, and evaluation reports. These existed as hard copy files and as pages on the program's Moodle site. I managed this data primarily through topic files stored in Microsoft Word. The findings were used to provide a basis for understanding

the context of the sponsoring organizations, develop an initial data collection and analysis strategy, and inform my interpretation of participant comments.

As described in Chapter 2, paradox/polarity mapping is a decision making tool used by organization development practitioners to manage ongoing, unsolvable, problems. The concept was presented during the MN Partnership and identified by cohort members as a particularly valuable leadership skill. Of 31 program evaluations, 19 (over 60%) specifically mentioned paradox/polarity management as one of the three most useful concepts from the seminar (MN Partnership for Executive Leader Development, January 12, 2012). While Johnson's (1996, 1998) tool was designed with a future focus as a method of making decisions and managing change, I found that a modified version was a good way to structure and analyze interview data. In addition, it provided a neutral venue for discussing value-laden topics associated with formal mentoring programs. Rather than focus toward future hopes and fears, I used the tool to describe participants' past experiences. By approaching the data from a polarity framework, I was able to make sense of the participants' stories, both positive and negative, about their mentoring experiences.

Quality and Rigor of the Study

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) identified several strategies that can be employed to ensure the rigor of qualitative research. These are broadly categorized into strategies related to research design, strategies related to data collection, and strategies that that address users' needs. As described above, the study employed a qualitative case study design. It included a structured approach for conducting interviews and gathering

evidence and employed appropriate models for analyzing the data and interpreting the results. Strategies employed to ensure the rigor of data collection and relevance to users are described below.

Data Collection. Yin (2009) noted that "a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence" (pp. 114-115). I gathered data from multiple sources, as described above. Both the U of M and MnSCU had well-established leadership development programs for mid-level leaders that included mentoring components (the President's Emerging Leaders Program and the Luoma Leadership Academy, respectively). By interviewing individuals who were familiar with these programs I was able to compare findings related to the MN Partnership to mentorship experiences that occurred in a similar setting. Including SMEs who had received a mentor-of-the-year award for participating in the President's Emerging Leaders Program gave me an opportunity to compare their experiences to the experiences of participants in the MN Partnership. Including subject matter experts who helped inform program design but were not directly involved in the implementation also provided an opportunity to confirm the findings from an alternate viewpoint.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) stated that a rigorous qualitative study employs procedures to ensure adequate triangulation of sources and research perspectives. In addition to seeking a variety of perspectives during the data collection, I also gathered evidence from other studies. After conducting the initial literature review and establishing initial directions for the research, I collected and analyzed the data for this study. After I had identified key themes, I then conducted a deeper literature review.

This enabled me to compare my proposed definition of mentoring and elements of the action logic model to similar constructs described in the literature. The MnSCU evaluation report was another valuable source of triangulation. The evaluation was conducted by an external consultant, and I was able to review the report and talk to the consultant about the ways in which my findings agreed with or differed from hers.

Relevance for users. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) stated that case studies should be useful and enlightening to readers. This study has a variety of potential users, including the members of the MN Partnership planning team, program participants and sponsors, other program stakeholders, and future readers of the study. My intention was to provide useful information for program managers and instructional designers who wish to include mentoring components in leadership development programs. In addition, I intended to contribute to the scholarly literature and inform others wishing to conduct research on the topic.

I attempted to involve participants as fully as possible during the study. Because I was conducting interviews while also engaging in data analysis, I was able to ask follow-up questions during the later interviews that confirmed my initial findings or gave me new viewpoints to consider. I conducted formal interviews with about two-thirds of the program's cohort members and half of the program planning team. The remaining two members served as a sounding board during the interview and data analysis process to confirm the direction of my conclusions and, on occasion, challenge my assumptions about what I was hearing. For example, one of these individuals provided valuable

insights into the differing roles and responsibilities associated with similar job titles at the U of M and MnSCU.

Ethical Assurances

This study involved human subjects, and as such was required to undergo review by the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study fell into the category for research on groups using interview methodologies. It was approved according to the IRB's social and behavioral sciences process (University of Minnesota, 2009).

The risks for participants were similar to other studies that deal with personal life experiences. As noted by Howe and Dougherty (1993) qualitative research, with its focus on intimacy and open-endedness, requires special ethical care. I sought to create a safe interview environment for participants to share information to the extent that they found comfortable. The informed consent form and interview questions were provided in advance. Whether in person or by phone, I asked permission before taping the interviews and assured participants that I was the only one who would listen to the recordings. In one instance, a participant asked that the interview not be recorded, and that request was honored.

I followed University of Minnesota guidelines for handling confidential data, including proper storage of paper and electronic files during the study and destruction of identifiable data when the study was complete. Participants were not identified by name in the reports, and quotes were not published with identifying information. Participants

had the opportunity to review the findings to be sure nothing was said that represented them in a way they might find harmful.

Summary

This study was a case study analysis of the MN Partnership, an executive leadership development program developed for the public higher education sector in Minnesota. Embedded within the case were two units of analysis – the sponsoring organizations and the individual participants. This design provided the opportunity to understand the program from multiple viewpoints and make meaning of the mentoring activities that occurred.

This chapter summarized the case, identified data collection and analysis strategies, and described the sources of evidence. A profile of interview participants was provided. Finally, it described strategies for conducting a rigorous, high quality, and ethical study by employing appropriate qualitative research techniques.

Chapter 4. An Emerging Definition of Mentorship

When conducting case study research with embedded units of analysis, it is important to understand the extent to which the units agree on the meaning of key concepts. Therefore, a foundational area of inquiry for this study was the way mentoring was defined by the sponsoring organizations and individual cohort members of the MN Partnership. In analyzing the data, I looked for common themes and an identifiable set of behaviors that informed study participants' understanding of the concept.

This chapter proposes an empirically grounded definition of mentorship that emerged from the data. In addition, prior mentee experiences will be examined and a framework of low, medium, and high mentorship patterns will be proposed. Finally, data relating to structure and flexibility of mentoring in formal leadership development programs will be explored. The definition and associated frameworks will provide a basis from which the mentoring activities of the MN Partnership can be understood.

Mentorship as Defined for the MN Partnership

Themes from the data indicated that program stakeholders had a high level of agreement about the definition of mentorship. While the U of M and MnSCU selected different approaches to mentoring, the planning team members had a similar understanding of behaviors associated with mentoring as a result of assumptions that were shared and clarified during the design process.

The cohort members of the MN Partnership were implicitly and explicitly influenced by the definition of mentoring incorporated into the program design. Each cohort member was provided with an executive coach and an organizational sponsor.

Expectations for these roles were laid out in the program materials and orientation sessions. In addition, each sponsoring organization provided information about mentoring options. This background was reflected in the interviews as cohort members responded to questions about definitions and activities associated with mentoring.

At the same time, cohort members' definitions of mentoring were also informed by past experiences with both giving and receiving mentorship. Because of their roles as leaders within higher education, almost all of the cohort members indicated that they had served as mentors for students, faculty, and/or staff. Mentoring activities included:

- Senior faculty mentoring junior faculty

- Campus executive leaders mentoring aspiring administrators

- Faculty members mentoring students

- Supervisors mentoring employees, particularly student workers

During the interviews I asked participants to summarize their experiences into a definition of successful mentoring relationships, and probed about how their stories illustrated mentorship as contrasted to other types of professional assistance that they had experienced in their careers. Cohort members' experiences with mentoring are examined in more detail in Chapter 6.

After reviewing the data and identifying common themes, the following definition of mentoring was proposed: *Mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship, intentionally built over time, in which mentors provide resources to help mentees achieve personal and/or professional goals while, at the same time, increasing their own personal*

and/or professional satisfaction and growth. Key elements of the definition are

discussed below and illustrated with examples from cohort member interviews:

- Time and intention

- Mentoring as a mutually beneficial relationship

- Defining personal and/or professional goals

Comparison to traditional definitions of mentorship. This definition differs

from the traditional definition described in Chapter 2. First, it does not limit the number

of people involved in a mentoring relationship. As described in Chapter 5, participants

from MnSCU followed a traditional one-on-one mentoring pattern while participants

from the U of M were involved in peer mentoring groups. In addition, some participants

discussed experiences in which one individual had multiple mentors. For example,

Leader-18 proposed that people "collect mentors" who are able to provide advice about

various aspects of one's life. Leader-40 described a situation in which she worked with

several mentors as part of a focused career search.

A second way the proposed definition differs from the traditional definition of

mentoring is that it does not rely on organizational hierarchy. While a traditional mentor

is often a more senior leader who can use positional influence to provide advice and/or

sponsorship, several participants talked about reaching out to peers from other

organizations, such as community boards, who were able to be effective mentors.

Leader-38 illustrated this opinion when she stated that she finds discussions to be more

valuable when the mentor is "more of an equal."

Mentee characteristics assumed in the definition. In addition to the overt discussions during interviews, data revealed assumptions that influenced participants' definition of the mentoring relationship. Two themes were that mentees should be ready to be mentored, and that mentees should drive the relationship.

Readiness on the part of a potential mentee was seen as a critical element of a mentoring relationship. Several participants indicated that they had unsuccessful experiences as mentors when they were paired with mentees who were not ready to hear or act on feedback. As described by Leader-44, a potential mentor can then be seen as "offering, basically, unwanted advice."   On the other hand, Leader-40 described a positive experience as a mentor for a person who demonstrated readiness by knowing what he wanted, coming to each meeting with "a whole list of questions" and wanting "to soak in as much as he could."

In the role of mentee, other study participants described their own readiness to build relationships with a potential mentor. Leader-11 mentioned the importance of being "in the right place at the right time," but believed that more was needed.

> *I also was willing to accept their knowledge and accept their challenge. . . . be*
> *open and receptive to thinking about doing things differently.*

Leader-42 described readiness as "having the receptiveness to listening to new ideas." He also believed that being approached by a potential mentor who "sees something in you and seeks you out" can generate confidence and promote readiness because it "makes you more receptive to listen and work with a mentor."

Readiness was evaluated by several standards. One standard was competence in performing current work responsibilities, as observed by the potential mentor, and preferably also recognized by other leaders in the organization. Leader-13 described this aspect of readiness.

> *It's not just me recognizing that talent, but it might be supportive recognition,*
>
> *formally or informally, and that also helps me to reach out and provide*
>
> *opportunities for them.*

In formal programs, readiness is often assessed during the nomination and selection process. For example, the MnSCU cohort of the MN Partnership experienced a selection process that included a formal assessment conducted by regional presidents who would be acting as sponsors for participants (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, 2011, May).

Mentee-driven relationships. A successful mentoring experience was perceived to require willingness on the part of mentors and mentees to let mentees set the agenda and arrive at their own decisions. When describing successful mentor/mentee relationships, interviewees stated that the role of the mentor was not to set the direction of the relationship but rather to respond to mentee needs and encourage reflection through asking questions, sharing insights, and providing strategic advice. In spite of the fact that the mentor/mentee relationship was defined as mutually beneficial, almost all participants agreed that the course of the conversations should be driven by mentees. For example, Leader-15 stressed the importance he places on letting his mentees make their own choices.

My role is to listen, but not tell them what to do. I lay out the situation, my

understanding of the issues and risks, but let them make their own choice. They

need to learn to fly on their own and falling down is part of the learning process.

Leader-15 acknowledged that at times it is challenging to see mentees make choices that

are different from the ones he would have made, but he is careful not to intervene

unnecessarily.

If I see them walking toward a cliff, it depends how close they are and how steep

the cliff is as to whether I will grab them by the collar and pull them back.

Time and Intention Aspects of Mentoring

Study participants made a clear distinction between short-term and long-term

mentoring in terms of both goals and outcomes. Short-term mentoring typically lasted

from one to three years and was often associated with formal leadership development

programs. Long-term mentoring arose from a variety of situations, often informally

based on some sort of mutual interest. Several participants described relationships that

had lasted for many years, or even decades. In these relationships, the mentor often

provided long-term career guidance or advice about work-life issues.

Regardless of length, interviewees believed that mentoring relationships have an

element of intentionality. Leader-31 clearly described intentionality in developing a

relationship with a mentor:

You have to make an effort to develop that role at the mentorship level so it's not

just watching somebody. You can do that on a TED talk, right? . . . Who do you

trust enough to be able to open up a little bit not only about yourself but also trust

that they're going to give you a valuable response that's well thought out?

From a mentor's standpoint, Leader-40 believed that "it goes back to time and being

intentional and how you're going to spend time with that person, preparing. Because all

of that shows respect for what it is that they're coming to you for."

Several study participants suggested that some long-term collegial relationships

can move in and out of a mentoring framework. One example was the practice of

providing a peer mentor for new faculty members. This was seen as a short-term

relationship in which the mentor (or mentors) helped the new faculty member navigate

workplace logistics and understand the campus culture, a form of temporary mentorship.

Over time, the mentoring component of these relationships faded into normal collegial

relationships. On the other hand, Leader-40 described several relationships that started

collegially and developed into mentorship. Again, this was seen as a form of temporary

mentorship in which she sought out former peers who had been appointed to

presidencies.

> *They've helped me to write better cover letters, put together a really great resume,*
>
> *what I can anticipate if I move into interviewing process. They've sent me*
>
> *resources of what their preparation was like, just really good conversations about*
>
> *if you move into a presidency, what does that role look like.*

Mentoring as a Mutually Beneficial Relationship

The term "relationship" came up in almost every interview. One of the clear

themes in the data was that mentoring was seen as a two-way relationship. Thus, it was

seen as different from coaching, teaching, or advising which tend to be one-way relationships in which one party is often filling a professional role and may be paid to assist the other. For example, Leader-42 described mentoring as a "win-win relationship" that is different from "a supervisor/employee coaching relationship where there's information being exchanged but it really isn't as much mutual respect or collegiality."

While the mentee receives obvious benefits related to personal and/or professional goals, the mentor also benefits from the relationship. The most commonly mentioned benefits gained by mentors were learning about oneself, discovering new perspectives, and giving back to the organization and the community.

Many of the participants believed that serving as a mentor helped them to see themselves in new ways. Leader-6 described how acting as a mentor had been "growth-promoting" for her in terms of identifying her blind spots and strengths. She saw it as "a reflection back to me of how I'm seen, how I'm experienced, good and bad."

Several participants said that they were able to gain new perspectives by serving as mentors. Leader-23 stated that she finds serving as a mentor valuable to her career growth because she is able to hear different perspectives and "to see how something relatively simple or sort of obvious to me is not necessarily obvious to someone else." Leader-42 described the value of new perspectives gained when mentoring faculty.

I had a little more understanding on how. . . a faculty person thought about things

from their part of the organization, that administratively we didn't think were a

big deal, but [I learned] in their environment how something was viewed.

Leader-15 noted working with younger professionals can help expand the mentor's view of an academic field.

> *The older person has been working in the field for a long time and didn't have the same experience of learning about the field. The older one can learn more about that experience and understand better why people do things in a particular way. . . . It enhances the professional expertise of both parties.*

Leader-5 also described a situation when serving as a mentor helped him gain new perspectives.

> *I'm a better board member having had that relationship with a couple of executive directors, because I have a better appreciation of their role of trying to take the vision and the policy and procedures of a board as they set the direction for an organization, and trying to translate that into day-to-day.*

In addition to intrinsic benefits for the mentor, acting as a mentor was also described as beneficial to the organization. For example, Leader-36 believed that mentoring can help employees be more successful by gaining a broader perspective about the organization, and that this perspective both helps them perform well in their current position and be prepared to seek new responsibilities. Leader-40 believed that mentoring was important for the organization, particularly within higher education.

> *I think we're going to have too many openings coming up in higher ed. We need to start to develop faculty and staff now for these roles. And it might take a while for someone to be on that path, but we should always be talking to people about where it is they see themselves next.*

Indicators of a mutually beneficial relationship. Interview data included several themes that were indicators of a mutually beneficial mentoring relationship. These are common ground, commitment, and trust.

The first element, common ground, referred to what Leader-13 described as "some sort of common interests and goals that help match people up a little bit, just get the conversation going." Leader-44 explained that "it doesn't necessarily mean they have to be doing the same job or in the same field. But it is going to be stronger if there is something that you share." Participants indicated that it was not necessary for the mentor and mentee to share a common academic discipline; in fact, several participants sought mentors from different disciplines or administrative functions in order to expand their understanding of different parts of the organization.

When a mentoring relationship developed informally, participants indicated that the relationship often emerged out of pre-existing common ground. There was a wide range of examples, from involvement in shared projects to mutual values and a shared vision for the college. One perceived benefit of a formal mentoring program was assistance in finding common ground. In contrast to informal relationships, formal program design can provide intentional methods for coming to common ground. Program activities, such as completing assessments, reading articles, or listening to speakers, provided conversational starting points. In addition, facilitators often provided training and guidelines to assist in building the relationship.

Commitment as an element of successful mentoring relationships was identified with factors such as mutual respect and placing value on the relationship. The most

important demonstration of commitment was dedicated time. Several leaders stated that

a shared commitment to the mentor/mentee relationship resulted in intentionally making

time to meet together, preferably off campus and away from normal day-to-day work.

Leader-40 described time as "the biggest piece of mentoring."

> *You have to dedicate that to reviewing information, coming up with questions,*
>
> *time in the conversation, thinking about the feedback. When people do that, it can*
>
> *be a commitment that they've made to helping someone else.*

Just as a mentoring relationship can fail because the mentor does not have a high

level of commitment, participants said that the same problem can occur with an

uncommitted mentee. If the mentee is not willing to invest in the relationship it can

become unproductive and provide little value for either party. Leader-42 and Leader-6

both believed this problem can be associated with mandated mentorship in formal

leadership development programs. The mentee may not be ready or willing to be

mentored, and therefore may participate half-heartedly. This type of situation has

negative consequences for both mentor and the mentee, as well as the overall program.

Along with common ground and commitment, a third theme in the data that

indicated a mutually beneficial relationship was trust. Leader-15 referred to trust as "a

deeper dimension to the relationship that allows for candor and honesty." Indicators of

trust included respect, confidentiality, and acting in the others' best interest.

Supporting Mentees' Personal and/or Professional Goals

A common theme in the data was that mentors are assumed to have additional

resources that mentees lack, and that mentors have intentionally chosen to share these

resources with mentees. Examples of resources typically shared by mentors include: 1) organizational knowledge, 2) problem-solving advice, and 3) sponsorship.

Organizational knowledge: putting problems in context. Several participants described mentors who provided advice and insight about the culture of specific institutions or the nature of higher education. In some cases these relationships developed informally, but often they were part of a formal orientation program. Beyond the orientation, study participants believed that effective leaders have an ongoing need to understand the culture in higher education and one's institution, and develop the leadership savvy to navigate these. They provided examples of mentors who had helped them develop this type of organizational knowledge. For example, Leader-6 moved into higher education from a professional field, and found that mentoring "made me aware of the context in higher education which my training as a [profession] never prepared me to think about."

Advice that leads to problem-solving. A commonly described role for mentors was assisting mentees to solve problems by listening, asking questions, and sharing advice based on knowledge gained through relevant experience. For example, Leader-18 described this type of advice-giving relationship with a long-term mentor. Even though they are not in regular contact, she still considers the mentor to be "a good sounding board" and discusses important decisions, such as accepting a job offer, with her mentor.

> *She's not going to tell me what to do, but she's going to maybe mirror some of my thoughts. And I wouldn't do it [accept a job offer] without touching base with her.*

Leader-11 described the value of gaining a different perspective on leadership challenges through talking to an experienced mentor who could say "This is what I've done in the past, and see if this will work for you."

Several participants mentioned that one or two key questions from their mentors caused them to think about themselves and their careers in different ways. For example, Leader-23 described how a mentor helped her focus her career search by helping her understand her passion for a particular leadership role and sector. Because of this conversation, Leader-23 decided not to pursue certain options and to focus her job search in areas that reflect her passions.

Sponsorship. Another activity in which mentors can share resources and organizational knowledge is through sponsorship. In traditional mentoring relationships, the mentor typically has a higher level of authority within the organization and is able to provide opportunities and advocacy for the mentee. While the roles of mentor and sponsor were differentiated in the design of the MN Partnership, the roles overlapped for some cohort members, and others described previous experiences with mentor/sponsors. Leader-18 described how her mentor created a part-time leadership role in the college in order to provide her with new types of leadership experience. Leader-44 described an example of an early-career supervisor who sponsored her participation in a women's leadership program. The mentor encouraged her to explore her leadership potential, and also provided the context and an entrée to an experience to help this happen.

When mentoring others, many non-supervisory mentors described ways they engaged in sponsorship to support the mentee. This was often a function of short-term

relationships that were part of formal leadership development programs. Mentor/sponsor activities included providing development opportunities that stretched mentees' current job roles, facilitating development activities such as completion of advanced degrees, and recommending mentees for programs or career advancement. Leader-13 described how she mentored a colleague.

> *Just recently I took a director to a women's leadership retreat. I thought it would*
> *be good for her. . . . I've encouraged her and supported her in completing her*
> *bachelor's degree, and starting a master's degree and moving up in her role in*
> *[discipline]. So that kind of thing, providing opportunity.*

Types of Mentee Goals

The proposed definition includes the concept that mentors provide resources to help mentees achieve personal and/or professional goals. The data described a variety of personal and professional goals for mentees. These can be grouped into three areas of focus: career development, leadership skill development, and work-life issues. The first two were typically described as shorter-term and more targeted relationships, while the majority of the work-life mentoring occurred in longer-term relationships.

Career development. For many participants, mentors helped them develop and achieve career goals. In some cases, mentors suggested career directions that the mentees, on their own, might not have considered. Leader-46 described ways in which mentors provided this type of practical career advice and encouragement.

> *I can think of many, many examples where without a mentor saying, not only I*
> *think you'd be really good at this, but here is some advice and coaching, some*

support in terms of how to get from here to there, I would have gone in completely

different directions in my career than I ended up pursuing.

Of particular interest to the MN Partnership program was the finding that some mentors

help their mentees make career decisions regarding whether or not to pursue

administrative positions. For example, Leader-40 said that she believes part of her role is

to help faculty at MnSCU understand the organizational culture and make the choice

about whether they would like to move into administration.

Part of it is to open up a new door to understand what management is. . . .

There's so much that I think we take for granted in our daily work that they just

don't see.

Most interviewees believed that mentoring can be valuable at any point in a

professional journey as careers advance and goals change. However, some participants

believed that mentoring was particularly helpful for early career leaders and during

significant career transitions. Interviewees who had been part of early-career faculty

mentoring described it as important for their development as faculty leaders. The

transition from faculty leader to administrator was another transition point in which

mentoring was described as valuable.

Leadership skill development. In addition to providing career advice, mentoring

was also described as important in helping participants learn new leadership roles.

Leader-5 described an example in which his mentor helped him to make the transition to

leadership during his first administrative position.

I responded to an attack by being defensive. And my mentor brought me in after that meeting and said, "What you said was absolutely right. I'll back you 100%. The way you said it, that just cost you about six months of credibility." . . . He was really good about shaping me, and then when I did start to change he would give me positive feedback.

Some participants indicated that they looked for mentors who could help them develop specific leadership skills. For example, Leader-31 sought out a mentor who could help him understand governance within higher education.

We really talked deeply about governance. How governance models function, and the kind of things that were important both in state government (he had experience there as well) and the experiences that he had within MnSCU.

Leader-42 described an example of being mentored to develop new leadership skills for building relationships with the legislature. His presidential mentor helped him learn presidential skills "for which there is no formal training, but that can make a valuable difference in how someone is perceived," particularly in relation to building rapport with state legislators.

Leader-25 also had a mentor who helped her to develop leadership skills, but she stated that it was something the mentor initiated, rather than something she sought out.

At one point there was an opportunity for me to take on [new role] and he said, "I think this would be good for you, you should try it. I think you have the skills that you are not using and the opportunity would be good for you."

Work-life issues and personal development. For some cohort members, the mentoring relationship focused, at least in part, on goals that were broader than career development or leadership skills. These issues related to mentees' work-life issues or personal development. Leader-11 described an early career mentor who helped her deal with work-life issues after a divorce. This mentor encouraged her to return to school and complete her degree.

> *I'm thinking, well, I'm just going to try and survive right now. . . . But it kind of made me think more about what did I want to do with my life. . . And I did go back to school.*

Other cohort members described ways that mentors helped them address issues related to personal career and leadership behaviors. For example, Leader-5 described how an early-career mentor helped him change, "immediately and fairly completely," the way he interacted with people.

> *He could tell that I couldn't take criticism well, and I'll own that. And one of the things he said that helped me, was that I should get some 360 evaluation. He said, "you need to learn how to listen and how to accept different points of view." And I did.*

While the proposed definition of mentoring that emerged from this study was similar to other definitions in the literature, the work-life component was a stronger theme for participants in this study than I saw in the literature. It is possible that mentoring relationships in higher education focus more on this aspect due to the nature of the decisions to be made. For example, mentees at this level may be struggling with the

decision of whether to leave faculty ranks and seek executive positions. Unlike business leadership, career paths are less defined. Taking on administrative duties instead of, or in addition to, a faculty role has significant work-life implications and no clear solution. The question "why do I want to be a college president?" was often mentioned by participants in the MN Partnership and may have been a topic for mentoring discussions.

Patterns of Mentoring Relationships

An important theme from the interview data was that all participants did not experience mentoring in the same way. While almost all had served as mentors in a significant mentoring relationship, there was variation in the degree to which they had been mentees. In order for a relationship to be considered significant for this study, it had to: 1) fit the proposed definition of mentoring, and 2) result in specific, identifiable mentee outcomes such as changes in behavior, enhanced leadership abilities, and/or career advancement that participants attributed to the mentoring relationship. It appeared that a combination of personal preference and available opportunities influenced the extent to which interviewees received significant mentoring during the course of their careers and as part of the MN Partnership.

During interviews, participants described a range of prior experiences with mentoring. Some had few or no significant mentoring relationships and were defined for this study as showing a pattern of low mentorship. Most displayed a pattern of medium mentorship. They were able to identify individuals, often more than one, who played important mentoring roles in advancing their leadership careers. Finally, some participants described a pattern of high mentorship, in which they had many significant

mentoring relationships during their leadership careers. The high, medium, and low levels of mentorship seemed to be lifelong patterns, and may have influenced cohort members' mentoring activities during the MN Partnership.

Low mentorship. Of the 21 cohort members interviewed, four demonstrated a pattern of low mentorship. Three of the four had significant early-career mentoring relationships, but described these as one-time events. Leader-6 provided an example of the low mentorship pattern. She said that she had never had a significant mentor in a leadership development context, although she identified two individuals who were significant mentors during graduate school and professional training in her academic field. Once she became a leader within higher education, she said she did not have that same type of mentoring. Leader-16 stated that he had never had a formal mentor and believed that mentoring is not necessary for leadership success. This viewpoint led him to state that mentoring should be optional, even in formal development programs: "if you're trying to mandate, it's not going to work that well."

Leader-33 described a different type of low mentorship, and was an example of the negative aspects of serendipity. While some participants used phrases such as "fortunate," "lucky," and "blessed" to describe their mentoring relationships, Leader-33 was deeply frustrated by her lack of ability to develop significant mentoring relationships. She indicated that she would have liked to have a formal mentor, and in fact had been a participant in two different leadership programs that provided the opportunity. However, due to a combination of personal and work-related issues for

herself and her prospective mentors, the mentoring relationships did not achieve the goals she hoped for.

SME-2 also reflected the low mentorship pattern. She described several experiences in which she acted as a mentor and then commented that:

So, I thought, how did I miss out on that experience? . . . I am old enough that mentoring programs weren't formalized into workplaces at the level that they are now. So there may have been times in my career when I was ripe for having a mentor experience, and they perhaps didn't exist. . . . I also have a self-sufficiency, and it might be that I don't think about, or know how to ask, someone to be my mentor outside of a formal program.

Medium mentorship. Eight cohort members had a medium mentorship pattern with at least two significant mentoring relationships, but also had relatively long periods in their careers in which they were not being mentored. Leader-44 was an example. She described two early-career mentors who helped develop her leadership path, and also a peer group that provided mentoring over the years. But she also said that "I'm a person who's very personally driven, I make my own choices, I drive my own bus, so to speak. So I have in my lifetime not sought out those relationships that much."

For cohort members with a medium mentorship pattern, the type of mentoring changed depending on their career stages. Early in their careers, many participants stated that mentoring played an important role in developing their abilities to serve as leaders within higher education. As they became more advanced in their careers, participants

described positive outcomes from mentoring that related to development of specific leadership skills and engaging mutual problem solving.

High mentorship. For nine of the MN Partnership cohort members, having a mentor seemed to be a lifelong occurrence. Some described this high mentorship pattern as a fortunate happenstance, and others were intentional about seeking out mentors throughout their careers. A theme among interviewees with a high mentorship pattern was that having mentors increased their career and work-life satisfaction to the point where they regularly sought out opportunities to be mentored. Several members of this group made statements such as "I think everyone should have a mentor." Leader-48 said that she was initially mentored in a formal program and now seeks out mentors because she has learned the value of the experience, both formally and informally.

Leader-36 had a high mentorship pattern, and she described a more intentional strategy of seeking mentors. She looked to her supervisors for informal mentoring, and, in fact, said that opportunity to learn from and be mentored by supervisors had been "a factor in career decisions and whether to stay in a position." In one case, she left a position when she no longer had a supervisory mentor, and in another case she followed a supervisor/mentor from one work unit to another. In addition, she said that she still goes to a former supervisor for mentoring advice and has found that the individual is able to fill more of a sounding board role now that they no longer have a supervisor/employee relationship.

SME-21 was also an example of a high mentorship pattern. She described a specific individual who has served as a mentor for her through a series of career changes.

I have had a mentor in an official capacity, the same person, for the last 20 years.

It has had a tremendous impact on my leadership and professional development.

. . . You know who your go-to people are. The people who are going to give you

straight information, who are going to help you bounce around ideas, who are

going to set your priorities, who have the time. He was that person for me.

Structure and Serendipity in Mentoring

When defining successful mentoring relationships, interviewees drew on experiences during the MN Partnership as well as past experiences in which they had been mentors and/or mentees. Interviewees had a range of opinions about the degree to which these relationships were successful, and had mixed opinions about their preferences for formal or informal mentoring relationships.

Formal mentoring relationships occurred during the MN Partnership or similar leadership development programs. Interviewees discussed the structured nature of such relationships, including the degree to which they were able to have input regarding the match and the activities that occurred. Informal mentoring occurred through a variety of circumstances, often associated with supervisor/supervisee relationships or through some other type of common ground. Several participants used the word "serendipity" to describe the relationships, as well as statements such as "it arose organically," "we just clicked," and "there was a spark."

Leader-23, like many of the interviewees with a high mentorship pattern, believed that an effective mentoring relationship displayed both structure and serendipity.

I'd say it has to have structure, but then also sort of serendipity and flexibility. I

think it's good to know what one needs and what the expectations are, and what

the roles will be. And it also is important to develop a relationship of trust and

mutual respect so that there's a give and take, and you can move off script also if

the need be.

Johnson's (1996, 1998) polarity management model provided a particularly useful way to describe the findings describing the benefits and drawbacks of both structure and serendipity. The dichotomy was typically not described as an either-or scenario; many participants described experiences that fell into more than one quadrant. Figure 1 provides a map of the polarity.

Structure	Desired State: Build and maintain a mutually beneficial mentor/mentee relationship that supports the goals of the individual participants and the leadership development program.		Seren-dipity
	Benefits of Structure	**Benefits of Serendipity**	
	• Opportunities for people who don't have access to informal mentors • Permission to approach a potential mentor who otherwise seems inaccessible • Ability to bring up subjects that wouldn't occur in normal work relationships • Guidelines and resources for building the relationship • Assistance for resolving relationship problems • Structured start and end date	• Grows out of common interests, goals, or affinity • Relationship is able to develop naturally • Mutual trust and respect is present • Relationship may last for a long period of time • Relationship may develop into collegial peers or friendship	
	Pitfalls of Structure	**Pitfalls of Serendipity**	
	• Mentee may not want to have a mentor and only engage because it's required by the program • Mentee/mentor match may be artificial and not based on common ground • Mutual trust and respect may not develop • One or more parties may feel "trapped" in a relationship that isn't working • Successful matches require ongoing time and energy on the part of program facilitators	• All parties may not be equally invested in the relationship • Mentee may not evaluate advice critically • Less ability to define success in the relationship • It may be difficult to end the relationship gracefully	
	Negative State: Mentor/mentee relationships do not exist, or provide no mutual benefit; individual and program goals are unmet, resulting in frustration or loss of credibility for the participants and/or a negative perception of the leadership development program.		

Figure 1. Polarity map for benefits and consequences of structure and serendipity in

mentoring

Desired state and negative states. The descriptions of the desired and negative states reflect interviewees' experiences as mentors and/or mentees during the MN Partnership and other formal programs. In many cases, these experiences generated strong emotions, both positive and negative. It was clear that both the benefits and pitfalls were strongly influential in the leadership development experiences of the individuals who were telling the stories.

While the desired state was associated with both structured and unstructured mentoring relationships, the negative state related more strongly to the potential unintended negative consequences of formal programs. As a few participants observed, with less structured mentoring, if the relationship isn't working the parties will just cease to be involved. It was perceived to be more difficult to disengage from unsatisfactory mentoring relationships when an external structure existed.

Benefits of structure. For some participants, a leadership development program with a structured mentoring component provided an opportunity to develop relationships that would not have occurred informally. They believed that a formal program could provide access and opportunities that might otherwise not be available to developing leaders. Leader-11 described how participating in a formal program provided a safe way to approach a potential mentor. Because the individual was on a list of volunteers, "when I called her to talk about this, she already knew about it, she had already agreed to do it so I knew that she wouldn't reject me out of hand."

In addition to providing opportunities to develop relationships with mentors that otherwise might not have been available, some participants said that formal program

helped them connect in new ways with their current supervisors or other organizational leaders. For example, Leader-6 believed the formal structure of the MN Partnership enabled her to have career-related conversations with her presidential sponsor that she had been unable to open in the past.

> *I asked her, would you support me if I applied, do you think I'm ready for that level of leadership, what wisdom do you have for me . . . And it was an incredibly helpful situation, but [in the past] it was so difficult for me to ask her for that time and to ask her those questions.*

Another benefit of structured program was identified as the availability of resources to help build and maintain relationships with mentors. For example, Leader-9 stated that formal agreements and discussion topics can help mentors and mentees agree on and accomplish goals, that a formal program can ensure mentors and mentees do more than "get together and talk." In addition, Leader-9 found that assessments and other instruments often included in structured programs were useful. He described how a 360-degree assessment provided a useful framework for building a relationship with his mentor.

> *It makes you think about questions you should ask. It makes you get the most out of this experience that might not happen if my mentor was just this person who maybe had taken me under his wing, or we found out he went to the same school 20 years before I did.*

Leader-11 described how her supervisor/mentor during the MN Partnership used the 360-degree assessment to open a mentoring conversation.

I said "now, tell me about why you put that. Is there something I'm not doing, is

there something we need to talk about"? And he said, "yeah, I remember filling

out this form, and I remember thinking I really want to talk to her about X, Y, and

Z. So I put it a little lower because then I knew it would stick out. And then I

hoped you would ask me about it." It wasn't a test, per se, but it was his

challenge to me, would I step up to the plate and ask him about this?

Leader-36 identified an additional benefit to structured programs; they include

formal starting and ending points. She said that in serving as a mentor she appreciates

programs in which "you meet for three or four sessions, and then assume it will end."

She called it a "sunset clause" after which the mentor and mentee can continue the

relationship if they wish, or end it gracefully.

Negative consequences of structure. Several participants described negative

outcomes that can be associated with structured mentoring programs, both as a mentor

and as a mentee. The descriptions generated feelings of frustration and disappointment

with the program, the mentor/mentee, and/or themselves. Leader-46 provided a strong

description, calling her experiences as a mentor in formal programs "abysmal failures."

She described frustration with being matched with mentees and then feeling like she

could not meet their expectations.

I was often assigned to someone where our personalities or our styles didn't

mesh, or where I felt like I had very little to offer the person . . . and I would

invariably find that they had some idealized version of me in their head.

Another potentially negative consequence of structured mentoring is the opportunity cost on the part of program facilitators. Making the matches and supporting the relationship requires ongoing effort. Leader-6 said that she believed formal matching can be successful, and cited several examples from the Presidents' Emerging Leaders program. However, she said that it requires a great deal of time and energy. She described making matches itself as a form of serendipity, "It's an art, a gift. . . . What [a good facilitator] creates with his matching is that initial spark and combustion."

Benefits of serendipity. There was a belief on the part of some participants that the most effective mentoring relationships occur organically. As Leader-5 explained,

I think there's a certain amount of serendipity that the two right people just happen to find themselves at the right time. I think you can provide a framework to help with that, but I just think it's very hard to come up with a mentor/mentee program that's automatically going to slice and dice and match them up perfectly.

Leader-31 believed he gained most from unstructured mentoring relationships where he was able to work with a mentor around specific issues. He described a mentor who was an exceptional public speaker, and who was able to help him develop his own speaking skills. He believed that "in the informal setting you're going to have a lot more freedom to tap individual folk for their skills, as a mentor."

Negative consequences of serendipity. One of the drawbacks interviewees associated with serendipity, especially in formal leadership programs, is that the mentor and mentee may be unclear about how to maintain the relationship. They believed that well-intentioned people can still fail to develop a relationship without a structural

framework, and that formal matches left to grow on their own may not succeed.   Leader-13 described this problem in relation to the MN Partnership.

> *There was an expectation that we were going to work with a mentor, either our sponsor or some other mentor, but I didn't feel like there was enough structure around that. It could have been more directive, more structure around what the expectations and goals were.*

Leader-40 prefers a more unstructured style as a mentor, but also indicated that it can provide problems in formal programs when there are goals and timelines that require advance planning. She stated that "waiting until the last day" can result in difficulties with scheduling times for the mentor and mentee to meet. Leader-25 also believed mentoring requires at least a minimal set of guidelines and expectations.

> *How successful a relationship like that is depends on recognition by both parties about what they need to do and what they need to receive. On both ends. We need to talk about those and how we can make it happen and then assess how it's going.*

Summary

This chapter presented a definition of mentorship that emerged from participants' stories about their experiences both with being mentored and serving as a mentor. It reflects common themes from the interviews and the literature about what successful mentoring looks like. For purposes of this study, mentoring is differentiated from other supportive behaviors such as coaching or providing supervisory feedback. It is defined as a mutually beneficial relationship that results in satisfaction and growth for all parties.

While traditional mentoring is defined as a one-on-one relationship in which one individual has a higher organizational position or greater resources, the interviewees also described other successful patterns for mentoring relationships.

The chapter also explored two additional aspects of mentoring. Interview data was examined that demonstrated study participants showed high, medium, or low patterns of mentoring over the course of their careers. In addition, a polarity map was presented that explored the potential benefits and unintended negative consequences described by participants in relation to structure and flexibility in formal mentoring.

The definition of mentoring proposed in this chapter will be used as a framework through which to understand participants' experiences with mentoring as described in the next chapters. The mentorship patterns provide one lens for viewing the cohort members' experiences described in Chapter 6. The polarity of structure and synchronicity was a recurring theme in the data, both in relation to design decisions made by the planning team and in terms of interview data describing participants' experiences with serving as a mentor and being mentored.

Chapter 5. Mentoring as Experienced by the Sponsoring Organizations

While the core elements of the MN Partnership were designed and delivered collaboratively, each sponsoring organization approached the mentoring component with different intents, desired outcomes, and resources. The U of M and MnSCU each chose a mentoring structure that would be most appropriate for their respective cohort members. These resulted in different experiences for the individual cohort members, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. This chapter will focus on mentoring intent, design, and outcomes from the viewpoint of the sponsoring organizations.

In order to understand the organizational program design choices, it is necessary to understand the differing organizational contexts for executive leader development. This chapter will provide an overview of the sponsoring organizations and a description of the professional development environment in which the MN Partnership was created. Implications for the design of the mentoring component of the program will be discussed. Finally, the outcomes of the mentoring component will be described in relation to the organizational goals.

Two Systems, Two Cultures, Two Designs

It was apparent early in the planning process that the professional development goals for participants from each sponsoring organization would be different. The planning team discussed the importance of "building a cohort of people who have enough in common that they will be able to share experiences and learn from each other." This was raised as an early concern because the organizations had identified somewhat different audiences, with MnSCU focusing on "individuals with potential to fill president

roles," while the U of M cohort "will be a mixed group with some academic and some administrative leaders" (Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2011, January 12).

These differences desired career outcomes for their cohort members resulted in differences in the nomination and selection processes for cohort members. As described below, the nomination and selection process at MnSCU was more rigorous and had higher visibility with system leadership than did the process at the U of M. There were also differences in the design and structure of the mentoring component for participants at each of the sponsoring organizations. The differences, and the organizational contexts that generated them, are described below.

University of Minnesota (U of M). The U of M is a major research university with a flagship campus located in the Twin Cities metro area and additional campuses located in Duluth, Crookston, Morris, and Rochester. As a land-grant university, it also employs a network of extension offices throughout the state to serve as outreach vehicles. The U of M was founded in 1851, before Minnesota became a state. While it is accountable to the State of Minnesota for a portion of its funding, the University enjoys an unusual degree of autonomy from the state. Lehmberg and Pflaum (2001) noted that this unusual precedence "implied an unusual degree of independence" as compared to the more typical relationship between institutions of higher education and their state legislatures (p. xv). For the MN Partnership, it created a different organizational context at the U of M than that of MnSCU.

One implication of this greater independence from the State of Minnesota is that the majority of administrators, faculty, and faculty-like employees at the U of M are not considered to be state employees and are not represented by the bargaining units that represent state employees. This results in more role flexibility in faculty work assignments than is typically the case in a unionized environment. In some cases, academic professional and administrative staff members at the U of M are able to combine faculty-like work responsibilities with administrative roles. For example, Leader-18 indicated that as a result of her participation in MN Partnership she was interested in potentially pursuing administrative responsibilities. But at the same time, she stated that "I still want a footprint in the college, still want to be faculty." This type of role fluidity is a career option for both tenure track professors and others in leadership positions at the U of M.

Leadership development at the U of M. Leadership development at the U of M is housed in a variety of offices. While there are a variety of initiatives across campus, there has not been a long-standing tradition of system-wide leadership development. Some of the most well-known programs are described below.

Administrative leadership development at the U of M is handled by the Organizational Effectiveness unit of the Office of Human Resources. Its two most significant programs are the Women's Leadership Institute, which was established in 1998, and the President's Emerging Leaders Program (PEL), established in 2001. Both are year-long development programs for mid-level leaders. They are cohort-based and include monthly seminars and other learning activities. PEL is considerably more time-

intensive for participants, including a group action-learning project and a mentoring component (D. Dorman, personal communication, 2013).

Faculty development for the U of M is housed in the Office of the VP for Academic Affairs, which was not directly involved in the MN Partnership program, although leaders from the unit did meet with planning team members to provide feedback on program design and collaboration for the nomination and selection process (planning team discussion, personal communication, July 12, 2011). In addition, some academic units sponsor administrative and/or faculty development activities for their own employees.

Goals and selection process for the U of M cohort. The MN Partnership was designed to fill a need at the U of M for development opportunities for high potential leaders and to promote cross-unit collaboration. The organizational need for this type of program was identified by the Vice President for Human Resources and by Organizational Effectiveness staff based on a perceived gap in the leadership development offerings, which provided resources such as PEL for mid-level leaders but offered no formal programming to develop leaders for higher level positions. While the audience for this program was not well defined, it was believed that a development program was needed for academic administrators and system directors – the people who were sending their staff to programs such as PEL but themselves had fewer opportunities provided by the system (planning team discussion, personal communication, November 19, 2011). The MN Partnership was seen as a pilot effort for addressing this audience. During the participant orientation, the purpose for the program was identified as: "Career

and personal development through insight, reflection, and practice" (Minnesota

Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2011, June 27).

The U of M nomination and selection process was less structured than the

MnSCU process described below. It included informal contacts with system

administrators with a marketing focus to encourage support for the program. System

leaders such as deans, department chairs, and program directors were asked to identify

potential participants from among their leadership teams for a "unique new executive

leadership program" which included the following benefits:

> low cost participation fee; content based on U of M core leadership competencies;
>
> unique, innovative development experience; multiple leadership assessments and
>
> coaching opportunities; Minnesota venues mean low travel costs; individual
>
> attention resulting from small cohort (Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader
>
> Development, 2011, May 12).

Potential sponsors were asked to "discuss the benefits of participation with your

nominee(s)" and forward names along with a "very brief note explaining how you think

the nominee(s) you are sponsoring will grow from the experience" (Minnesota

Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2012, May 12). Nominees were then

offered the opportunity to participate in the program and asked for a statement of interest

(SME interviews, personal communication, September 14 and 27, 2012). The result

was16 cohort members who were selected to participate in the program, representing 14

different departments located on campuses in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester, Duluth,

and Crookston. Participating units included academic departments such as the College of

Education and Human Development; Soil, Water, and Climate; and Veterinary Medicine;

as well as support units such as the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs;

University Services; and Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action.

While leadership development was seen as a desirable activity, the hiring culture

of the U of M provided fewer opportunities for program participants to achieve executive

appointments than their counterparts from MnSCU. Like most research universities, high

level vacancies tended to be filled by external candidates. The former president, Robert

Bruininks, was an internal hire, but that was an unusual occurrence at an organization that

typically hires president, vice president, chancellor, and dean positions externally after

national or international searches.

Peer Mentoring Structure for the U of M. System leaders who nominated cohort

members were asked to serve as sponsors during the program. As sponsors, they were

asked to help program participants identify and successfully complete appropriate stretch

work assignments. This role was differentiated from mentoring, which focused on

helping participants deal with personal and professional questions that were raised as a

result of their program experiences. The sponsors were invited to attend the kickoff

event for dinner, a keynote presentation, and a breakout session to discuss the sponsor

role. The expectations for U of M sponsors included the following (Minnesota

Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2011, August 3):

- Support and generate suggestions for individual on-the-job stretch

  assignments or development opportunities.

- Actively support mentoring and coaching opportunities for the participant (e.g., help plan ways to incorporate the participant's new learning and skills into their ongoing work).

- Support the creation of an individual development plan (IDP) and help in providing access to development opportunities.

- Commit to support a small portion of the financial cost ($500.00) of the year-long development program.

The U of M chose to incorporate a peer mentoring component to the program rather than provide one-on-one mentors. In part this was a convenience decision, because the planning team lacked the time and resources to identify appropriate mentors for each participant and to make appropriate matches. In addition, the program did not have the organizational visibility that might have attracted senior leaders to serve as mentors.

The peer mentoring model was designed to further the program goal of promoting cross-departmental collaboration and networking. Peer mentoring discussions could provide a rich opportunity to follow up on seminars, apply learning to day-to-day work, explore common leadership challenges, and share resources to meet mutual goals. According to a description of U of M cohort program, "the peer mentoring groups are designed to enhance your Minnesota Partnership experience by providing a safe place to discuss issues and approaches, explore leadership challenges, and support each other's experience-based development assignments" (Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2011b).

The 16 members of the U of M cohort were divided into four-person peer mentoring groups. Each was assigned to a liaison from the planning team. The groups were asked to meet together to discuss what they were learning during the program and to support each other's professional development. In addition, they were given a peer learning assignment designed to help them explore a topic of interest at a deeper level (Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2011, June 27).

A variety of resources were provided to assist in developing peer mentoring groups. All MN Partnership participants received a copy of *True North Groups* (George, 2011), and the author gave a keynote presentation at the first seminar. During the first seminar and at U of M follow-up meeting, cohort members were given an overview of peer mentoring, a handout describing to the principles of circle practice (PeerSpirit, 2010). U of M planning team members said they believed that the cohort members were intrigued by the discussion of George's model and interested in applying it, but that the groups showed limited follow-through and had limited success in implementing what they learned. U of M participants stated that they were open to the idea of peer mentoring and familiar with alternatives to one-on-one mentoring, such as peer mentoring and group mentoring. Leader-48, for example, stated that "if you're in academics right now, the whole idea of [mentoring] groups is part of the academic mind."

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). The MnSCU system was created in 1995 when state law created a merger of its technical colleges, community colleges, and state universities. It is a more complex system than the U of M, with 31 institutions located on 54 campuses, including 24 colleges and seven state universities.

In addition, the system provides a network of customized training programs that provide education for industry and business. As compared to the U of M's focus on research, MnSCU emphasizes its role in developing all citizens to form a strong workforce to meet the changing needs of the state.

MnSCU is an agency of the State of Minnesota, and its employees are state employees. As such, all employee groups, including faculty and administration, are represented by bargaining units. The strong union presence at MnSCU creates a different structural relationship than that at the U of M. The lines between faculty and administration are much more clearly drawn. Within the MnSCU system, the relationship between faculty and administration is less flexible, and can be more contentious (Strehlow, 2012). While participants from the U of M did not perceive the need to make a professional choice between faculty and administrative roles, this was a theme in MnSCU participants. Their decision to pursue administrative roles required the deliberate choice to leave the faculty ranks and pursue a different career path.

Leadership development at MnSCU. Responsibility for leadership development is shared by MnSCU colleges and universities and the system office. The decentralized nature of much of the system's staff development means that depending on his or her institutional affiliation, a staff member could have a wide range of opportunities or very few. At the system level, leadership development is housed in the Talent Management unit of the system-wide Office of Human Resources. This unit manages a legally mandated program for new supervisory staff and offers a series of leadership development programs on topics such as leading change and managing project teams. It

also coordinates the Luoma Leadership Academy, a development program for mid-level leaders from across the system. Similar to the U of M PEL program, the academy is a year-long cohort program. Participants are selected through a competitive nomination and selection process (Minnesota State Colleges & Universities, 2013). The current cohort, beginning in the summer of 2013, is the seventh in what has become a well-recognized and professionally desirable program.

   Goals and selection process for the MnSCU cohort. The organizational need for a program such as the MN Partnership was more clearly defined for the MnSCU system than the U of M. It arose from a directive by the Board of Trustees to increase the number of internal candidates to fill presidential vacancies and interim positions (SME interviews, personal communication, December 27, 2012). Due to the size and complexity of the MnSCU system, there is an annual need to fill presidential vacancies. While the U of M has fewer executive vacancies and tends to look externally for qualified candidates, the MnSCU system perceives an ongoing need for strong internal candidates (Minnesota State Colleges & Universities, 2010, July 9). As a result, the MN Partnership program was developed to "identify high potential senior leaders and accelerate their development, so that they could gain needed skills and experience to competitively apply for presidencies in our system" (Bryant, 2012, p. 1). A list of measurable goals presented to system leadership included: "identify 15-20 high performing candidates who have potential (in the next 1-3 years) to compete in a national search for presidencies in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities" (Minnesota State Colleges & Universities, 2011, June 21).

Cohort members from MnSCU were identified through a competitive nomination process with review and selection by current college and university presidents. Potential participants from MnSCU were nominated by a sponsor, usually by the presidents of their institutions, and during the program participants were paired with this sponsor (or another mentor of their choice) and provided the opportunity for one-one-one mentoring.

Of the 20 cohort members from MnSCU, 14 were from two-year community and technical colleges and six were from four-year universities. They were located throughout the state of Minnesota. Cohort members from MnSCU did not meet formally outside of the four seminars. While there was no formal structure for peer mentoring, several people mentioned that the program strengthened their professional networks and three interviewees described informal peer mentoring relationships that developed between MnSCU cohort members and colleagues at other institutions or the U of M.

One-on-one mentoring structure for MnSCU. For MnSCU, the need to develop leaders who could effectively compete for presidential vacancies resulted in a strong emphasis on the sponsoring relationship. The sponsor was usually the cohort member's supervisor, who was often a college president. The planning team believed that support from a participant's sponsor was essential in the process of developing presidential candidates. A member of the MnSCU planning team explained that the program had a strong emphasis on sponsorship because:

> *We really wanted them to enhance their relationship with their top executive,*
> *senior leader, because that's the person that they need to have in their corner.*
> *Because our goal was to prepare people to be nationally competitive for*

presidential positions . . . we knew that they needed strong connection with their

senior leader who would be able to represent them with other senior executive

leaders.

MnSCU expectations for presidential sponsors included the following (Minnesota

Partnership for Executive Leader Development, 2011, July 11):

- Support and generate suggestions for on-the-job stretch assignments or
  development opportunities

- Support the mentoring and coaching opportunities for the nominee

- Support the gap assessment and identification of areas of development

- Support the nominee to consider interim or permanent positions elsewhere in
  the system

- Institutional commitment to support a portion of the financial cost ($1,000) of
  development program

A common pattern for career advancement at MnSCU would be to serve as an

academic dean, then chief academic officer, and eventually as a president for one of the

colleges or universities. Appointment to a presidential position was a desirable, and

achievable, professional goal. High-level attention from organizational leadership,

including the Board of Trustees, was paid to the development of executive leaders. A

traditional one-on-one sponsor relationship was perceived as important to help potential

candidates navigate the development process.

Because of the emphasis on the sponsoring relationship, less attention was paid to

a separate mentoring relationship. Cohort members from MnSCU were encouraged to

work with a mentor, but few resources were provided for creating or sustaining the relationship. Outside of the sponsor relationship, some participants from MnSCU chose to work with a separate individual who served as a mentor. This was typically the participant's current supervisor or another leader within the participant's campus or community. The choice of mentor, and the degree to which the cohort members participated in mentoring, was left to their discretion.

Mentoring Outcomes During the MN Partnership

In spite of the differences in mentoring structure, participant interviews indicated that the primary goals of relationship building and career advancement were achieved by some of the cohort members from both sponsoring organizations. At the same time, some cohort members from both systems expressed frustrations with their mentoring options, indicating a need for more structure and additional resources. The frustrations were echoed in the planning team interviews, which indicated that both sponsoring organizations were dissatisfied with the outcomes from their chosen mentoring designs. These outcomes are described below.

Networking and relationship building. Development of peer relationships was a stated goal of the U of M planning team. Networking was not the priority outcome for the MnSCU team, but it was hoped that participation in the program would build stronger cross-institution relationships. Data from participant interviews indicated that cohort members created peer networks both within and across their organizations. The majority of these relationships arose informally, although I interviewed two cohort members from

MnSCU who established a peer mentoring relationship with each other. The MnSCU final evaluation report also found that cohort members built cross-institution networks.

They also enjoyed the U of M partnership opportunity. Many felt it gave them the opportunity to better understand how the U of M operates and the differences in responsibility. It helped them better understand they are not competitors and, in fact, have the same values. A few will continue to network with their U of M colleagues they met in the program on work-related issues (Bryant, 2012, p. 5).

Participants from the U of M also stated that they enjoyed the opportunity to build networks with participants from MnSCU, as well as other parts of the U of M. Leader-18 described the value she found from the peer mentoring groups.

[Fellow participant] I run into a lot, because of the committees we're on. And he and I will stop and have sort of long conversations about things. . . . I think the program may have solidified a relationship that is now fundamentally different because we were connected together.

Leader-48 described a similar experience in relationship to a fellow cohort member:

When we get together we're a common entity to each other. And we're both in similar leadership positions, so we're continuing these conversations in different ways.

Overall, interviews with program planning team members and program participants indicated a positive outcome for networking and relationship-building for participants in the MN Partnership. However, while some of this result was attributed to

the mentoring structure, particularly the peer mentoring groups sponsored by the U of M, much of this result arose through informal channels.

Career advancement. Preparing cohort members to competitively apply for presidential positions was the primary objective of the MnSCU planning team. Supporting career development was one of several program objectives for the U of M. While the MnSCU goal was more specific and therefore more easily measurable, final evaluations by both groups indicated that the program was perceived as a valuable career development opportunity for participants. There were also measurable results in terms of promotional achievements. Of the cohort members interviewed for this project, one-third (seven of 21) achieved career advancement within six months of completing the program. This group included five cohort members from MnSCU and two from the U of M.

Table 2 provides a profile of cohort members who showed career advancement after participating in the MN Partnership.   Career progress included the following activities.

- Three individuals were appointed to permanent or acting president positions
- Three individuals were appointed to permanent or temporary senior leadership positions
- One individual took on a part-time administrative role and became part of the college's leadership team

Table 2

Profile of Cohort Members Who Showed Career Advancement.

Characteristics of Cohort Members	Number of Individuals
Organizational Affiliation	
MnSCU	5
U of M	2
Mentorship Pattern	
Low	0
Medium	2
High	5
At Least One Supervisor During Career who was a Mentor?	
Yes	6
No	1
Formal Mentoring During MN Partnership?	
Yes	5
No	2

Interview data indicated that participants believed mentoring played a role in cohort members' career achievements. Of the seven cohort members who experienced career advancement, five had some type of mentor during the MN Partnership. Most took advantage of the program to intentionally build or nurture a mentoring relationship with their supervisors. One individual used the program to build a stronger mentoring relationship with a current supervisor, two maintained an existing mentoring relationship with their current supervisors, and two worked with non-supervisory mentors. The remaining two did not have a mentorship relationship associated with the program.

Program Structure and Design

Even though different designs were employed, participants and planning team members from both sponsoring organizations agreed that the mentoring components were

among the weaker aspects of the MN Partnership program. Many of the individuals I interviewed believed that this component could be improved to provide greater benefit to future cohorts. Overall, participants tended to agree with the mentoring structure choices made by their respective organizations. Frustrations were generally not with the type of mentoring offered, but with the way it was implemented.

At the U of M, there was agreement among planning team members and participants that the peer mentoring component did not live up to its potential. An ambitious set of goals for the peer mentoring groups included 1) receiving group members' assistance in problem solving relating to work and/or personal issues, 2) holding each other accountable for accomplishing skill development goals, 3) sharing lessons learned during the experience-based development activities, and 4) planning and presenting a topic of interest to other U of M cohort members. Of these, both cohort members and the planning team believed that only the last was accomplished as hoped.

A variety of explanations were offered for the lack of successful peer mentoring. The most commonly mentioned were unclear expectations, lack of supportive structure to build and maintain the relationships, and a lack of common ground. One planning team member stated that "we didn't set that up on the front side well enough." In spite of their frustrations, most U of M participants were supportive of including peer mentoring in the future, but they recommended more structure and guidance during the year. Leader-36 was intrigued by the peer mentoring option, but that it was a "missed opportunity" she didn't take advantage of. She said that the leaders should be more explicit about how the group could be used, and also noted that the work product, while useful, got in the way of

more mentoring-type conversations. She concluded that the peer mentoring approach
"was the right idea, it just needed more structure." Leader-25 recommended a greater
focus in the peer groups on role playing or self-study rather than the project.

> *I think we came to really enjoy each other's company, and I think we learned*
>
> *from each other. . . . But the pressure was to get this project done rather than*
>
> *[other activities].*

Similarly, the MnSCU planning team and participants believed that the one-on-
one design was most appropriate for their system. Because program participants are
located in different geographic areas of the state, it is more difficult to bring together peer
mentoring groups. In addition, they believed that the traditional mentor/mentee
relationships were the best way to identify and remedy skill and knowledge gaps that may
be preventing people from career advancement.

At the same time, they also expressed a need for more formality and structure in
the process of selecting mentors and building the relationship. This recommendation was
reflected in the interview summaries presented as part of the MnSCU evaluation report:
"They believed mentoring would be valuable with a pre-selected list of mentors from
MnSCU accompanied by specific rules as to how they should select and use the mentor"
(Bryant, 2012, p. 10).

Along with further resources for selecting a mentor, program participants from
MnSCU also expressed a need for additional resources to help maintain the relationship
during the year. Two interviewees stated that they appreciated that sponsors were invited

to the kickoff event. Leader-40 recommended involving the sponsors more often, along with mentors if that was a separate person.

> *It was nice to have them there to listen to the speaker. Maybe just at intervals throughout, have check-in points. . . . It would have been nice to have a person there just to bounce things off about what we were learning.*

Leader-25 also recommended providing more structure for involving the mentors throughout the program: "There should be some kind of more clearly stated [expectations] for the mentors. . . . After an event we should sit down and have a conversation about what did you get from that."

Leader-44 believed that the mentoring component of the MN Partnership could be strengthened by including mentoring as a topic in one of the seminars and then providing participants with an opportunity to practice what they learned about.

> *Have one of the training modules be about mentoring and mentoring relationships . . . and then ask the participants to establish a mentor/mentee relationship with those in the program and part of the time serve as mentor and mentee.*

One disagreement over mentoring structure had to do with program requirements. Some participants thought selecting a mentor should be required, but others thought it should be optional. For example, Leader-15 suggested mentoring might not be necessary or helpful in all situations and recommended that it be a "parallel" opportunity to supplement the sponsor relationship. Those who believed mentoring should be a required aspect of the program thought it would provide a necessary opportunity to seek a "safe

place," to talk with someone outside of the day-to-day work, or even from another institution.

Summary

The organizational contexts of the sponsoring organizations resulted in significant differences in the mentoring component for cohort members from each organization. Each organization designed a mentoring structure that would support its goals for the program. The U of M's peer mentoring model was designed to enhance networking opportunities and provide peer support for leadership and professional growth. The MnSCU model focused on one-on-one sponsorship, with an emphasis on preparing cohort members to compete successfully for executive roles, particularly presidencies within the MnSCU system. Overall, program participants believed that their sponsoring organizations had chosen an appropriate mentoring design.

Participants from both sponsoring organizations identified mentoring as an area for improvement in future program offerings. Both the cohort members and the program planning team believed that more structure should have been provided for creating and maintaining the relationship, whether it was one-on-one or in a peer setting. While cohort members felt the mentoring component was among the weaker parts of the MN Partnership, they also saw the potential for enhancing this component in the future and believed that doing so would strengthen the program overall.

Chapter 6. Mentoring as Experienced by Program Participants

In examining the MN Partnership as a case of executive leader development in higher education, there were two embedded units of analysis that experienced the mentoring components of the program through differing lenses. As described in Chapter 5, the program planning team represented two sponsoring organizations, each of which had unique goals for the program. These goals were formed by organizational context, resulting in differing mentoring structures and outcomes.

At the same time, the program participants experienced mentoring through their own viewpoints. The 21 cohort members interviewed for this study were influenced by their individual circumstances as well as the mentoring design choices made by their sponsoring organizations. In addition to the background information provided as part of the leadership development program, they understood their experience of mentoring within the program in the context of the varying patterns of mentorship that they had experienced over their lifetimes. This chapter will report on the mentoring activities and outcomes from the program participants' viewpoints.

Mentoring Activities During the MN Partnership

Within the context of the MN Partnership, individual cohort members experienced mentoring in a variety of ways. Some cohort members experienced little or no mentoring during the program. Others received significant benefits from mentoring. This section will describe cohort members' activities and contributing factors that shaped these experiences. Key themes include 1) the extent to which cohort members chose to participate in mentoring relationships during the program, 2) whether or not a mentor was

also the individual's supervisor, and 3) whether the relationships were in peer groups or a more traditional one-on-one pattern.

Choosing to work with a mentor. One-on-one mentoring was not a formal part of the program structure provided by either sponsoring organization. For participants from the MnSCU system, greater emphasis was placed on sponsorship with a senior executive (usually the participant's president) giving feedback about development goals and providing opportunities to engage in stretch assignments. For participants at the U of M, a peer mentoring component was built into the program. For the most part, the groups evolved into study groups that did not meet the definition of mentoring proposed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, some individuals from each system took advantage of the program to seek out one-on-one or peer mentoring relationships.

Understanding the cohort members' choices related to mentoring required an awareness of their prior experiences, expectations, and assumptions about mentoring. One difference that appeared to influence their mentoring experiences during the MN Partnership was the extent to which they had been engaged in significant mentoring experiences in the past. As described in Chapter 2, participants could be grouped into high, medium, or low patterns of mentorship. Within each grouping, participants from both sponsoring systems were evenly represented.

As illustrated in Table 3, it appeared that cohort members with a strong past history of positive relationships with mentors (high mentorship) were more likely to engage in significant mentoring relationships during the MN Partnership. Cohort members with medium and low mentoring patterns either did not participate in mentoring

during the program or incorporated mentoring into an ongoing previously existing

relationship, usually with their supervisors.

Table 3.

Mentoring Outcomes for Cohort Members of MN Partnership

Cohort Members with Low Mentoring Pattern (4)
No mentoring during program   4
Yes (new mentor)   0
Yes (ongoing with supervisor)   1
Cohort Members with Medium Mentoring Pattern (8)
No mentoring during program   4
Yes (new)   2
Yes (ongoing with supervisor)   3
Cohort Members with High Mentoring Pattern (9)
No mentoring during program   1
Yes (new mentor)   5
Yes (ongoing with supervisor)   3

The choice to seek out a new mentor for the program as opposed to incorporating

mentoring into an ongoing supervisory relationship was an important factor in

participants' mentoring success. As described in the section below, choosing to work

with one's supervisor as a mentor resulted in mixed outcomes, and many cohort members

who chose this option indicated that they could have benefitted from selecting a different

alternative.

Choosing between supervisor and non-supervisor mentors. Assuming a

cohort member participated in a one-on-one mentoring relationship as part of the MN

Partnership, a second key theme from participant interviews was the choice of whether to

build that relationship with one's supervisor or seek a new, non-supervisory mentor. As

described in the following section, they identified both potential benefits and potential

drawbacks to either choice. A key issue for several participants was the difficulty in

locating a suitable mentor and building a relationship with that person. Leader-11 spoke

about the difficulty of finding a non-supervisory mentor.

> *That was scarier, you know, because you had to reach out. And you don't know*
>
> *the person, so you don't know that this is an OK place to be with this person. . . .*
>
> *There was that uncertainty about that kind of mentor relationship.*

Another difficulty with selecting someone other than one's supervisor as a mentor

was the perception that it may result in an awkward relationship with the supervisor who

was not selected. Leader-23 described this problem.

> *It is kind of hard, especially at the senior levels, if we've nominated somebody,*
>
> *written a letter of support, and then they don't choose us as a mentor. I think*
>
> *we'd sort of wonder why not. I think some of us have to have our president or our*
>
> *vice president [as a mentor].*

A few participants asked their supervisor to serve as their mentor and believed

that it was effective. For them, the benefit was a structured opportunity for conversations

outside of the normal work realm or building a stronger relationship with a new

supervisor. Leader-18 described how the program helped her to strengthen her

relationship with one of her supervisors.

> *The Minnesota Partnership led [supervisor] and me to my being overt about what*
>
> *my interests were. . . . I was able to say that's the kind of work that is interesting*

to me. And then he made it happen. I don't think that without the Minnesota

Partnership I would have been as comfortable saying that.

Leader-11 believed that the program helped her build a mentoring relationship with a

newly appointed supervisor.

My experience with the Partnership and working with him has really changed

things, because the supervisor relationship kind of disappeared. . . . And it helped

me to get to know [Leader] a little bit better because he and I would just talk

about leadership kind of things.

Leader-46 also believed that the program helped her build a mentoring relationship with a

new supervisor, but that "I kind of think my relationship with her would have turned out

to be out to be one of those informal mentoring relationships that just spontaneously

occurred, even if I hadn't been in the Minnesota Partnership."

On the other hand, a larger number of the cohort members who chose to be

mentored by their supervisors during the MN Partnership said that, upon reflection, they

would make a different choice in the future. Several participants from both MnSCU and

the U of M described it as a "lost opportunity" and recommended that future cohorts be

given this option more formally and that structure be provided to support the non-

supervisory relationships. For example, Leader-5 stated that "I didn't seek out a separate

mentor for this program. I probably didn't take advantage of what I could have taken

advantage of."

Lack of a formal structure for identifying a non-supervisory mentor was identified as the biggest barrier to pursuing this option. The MnSCU program evaluation report noted that:

> The majority of participants selected their sponsor as their mentor even though they could choose another person as their mentor. What became apparent during the interview was most felt uncomfortable going outside the college without specific rules in place for selecting someone else. For those who intentionally and deliberately selected a different mentor, the experience was rich and satisfying and a nice complement to the coaching (Bryant, 2012, p. 8).

In addition to lack of formal structure for selecting a mentor, another commonly-mentioned problem was the difficulty in separating the day-to-day work from mentoring. Leader-42 described that situation.

> *Instead of getting to a point where you're trying to understand about your own personal leadership development, it can easily turn into trying to solve the issue you're talking about, because both individuals are living whatever the issue is.*

Leader-23 described a similar problem with having a mentor who is also a supervisor.

> *If your mentor is your supervisor sometimes you have to truly even change locations physically to switch the tenor of the conversation. Shake it up a little bit. So we would meet off campus and that's when I could get her to talk, both of us really, to talk about things other than work.*

Peer mentoring. Cohort members from both systems described peer mentoring as the least successful mentoring option provided during the MN Partnership program.

During my interviews, most U of M cohort members were somewhat positive about the experience, but one person said that the peer mentoring experience was "colossally negative." The U of M had identified an ambitious set of goals for the peer mentoring groups that included 1) receiving group members' assistance in problem solving relating to work and/or personal issues, 2) holding each other accountable for accomplishing skill development goals, 3) sharing lessons learned during the experience-based development activities, and 4) planning and presenting a topic of interest to other U of M cohort members. Of these, both cohort members and the planning team believed that only the last was accomplished as hoped.

A variety of explanations were offered for the lack of successful peer mentoring. The most commonly mentioned were unclear expectations, lack of supportive structure to build and maintain the relationships, and a lack of common ground. Leader-25 believed the groups did not gel into a peer mentoring role and wished there had been more structure around relationship-building.

I think we came to really enjoy each other's company, and I think we learned

from each other. . . . But the pressure was to get this project done rather than

[other activities].

Leader-9 believes peers can mentor each other, but he also described some of the reasons why it didn't work for him as part of the MN Partnership.

We came together when we needed to, to get our presentation done. And that was

about it. Actually I think there was one time I thought about sending an email to

the group to ask their opinion about something, and I'm not sure what made me

not do it.

Balancing the Polarity Between Supervisory and Non-Supervisory Mentors

When describing previous experiences with being mentored and serving as a

mentor, many cohort members of the MN Partnership expressed preferences for either

creating a mentor/mentee relationship with their supervisors or for seeking mentorship

elsewhere. One group of participants preferred not to be mentored by a supervisor.

Leader-40, for example, stated "I find it harder to have a supervisor as a mentor" due to

the reporting relationship that exists between employee and supervisor. On the other

hand, Leader-46 represented another group when she described several successful

experiences in which she was mentored by her supervisors.

> *There's a school of thought that a mentor should not be a supervisor. Or if it is a*
>
> *supervisor then it's not really a mentoring relationship, but I have to say that I*
>
> *have had at least five or six supervisors who I believe have mentored me. . . . The*
>
> *mentoring has been less about how could I be successful in my role in which I was*
>
> *currently in, the role in which they were my supervisor, and more about what is it*
>
> *I see as my next step and how can I effectively get there.*

The tension between these options can be viewed as a polarity between internal

and external resources and feedback. Both choices have positive and negative aspects,

and need to be balanced over the course of the program. Depending on the individual

circumstances, participants need to create a plan for gaining the benefits and avoiding the

undesired consequences of both internal and external feedback and resources. If

participants choose their supervisors as mentors, for example, they could be encouraged to hold informational interviews with other leaders on campus. Participants who choose not to select their supervisors as mentors should create a plan for involving the supervisor in the learning process.

One method for balancing the polarity is to have more than one mentor. Several SMEs and cohort members discussed this option. For example, SME-12 has used mentoring teams in past leadership development programs and Leader-18's college uses mentoring teams to develop new faculty. Leader-23 summarized the discussion:

> *It might be a good idea to have your direct supervisor. . . but maybe [supervisor] wouldn't be the best one to be the only mentor to a person. So maybe you could encourage us to have two mentors. Maybe one who is your direct supervisor and one who is for whatever you might feel your direct supervisor would not be adept at giving you.*

A polarity map describing their opinions is provided in Figure 2.

	Desired State: Mentoring relationship(s) that lead to professional growth for the mentee and support the goals of the mentee, supervisor and organization		
Supervisor as Mentor (internal feedback and resources)	**Benefits of Supervisor as Mentor** • Mutual understanding of leadership challenges in the workplace • Supervisors can assess readiness for mentorship opportunities • Supervisor is able to provide stretch assignments and expand job roles • Supervisors can easily hold people accountable for stretch assignments and growth activities • Supervisor/mentor relationships can increase overall job satisfaction	**Benefits of Non-Supervisor as Mentor** • Perceived safety to discuss work performance problems and admit mistakes • Relationship can be more focused on mentoring • Easier to set time limits and end the relationship	**Non-Supv. Mentor (external feedback and resources)**
	Negative Consequences of Supervisor as Mentor • Supervisor could develop a negative image of the mentee • Difficult to separate mentoring from performance management • Supervisor may be too busy to focus on non-work issues • Supervisor may not have the skills to be a good mentor	**Negative Consequences of Non-Supervisory as Mentor** • Can be difficult to find mentor and make connections • Sense of disappointment if someone reaches out to potential mentor or mentee and is declined • Can create awkward relations with supervisor if someone else is selected as mentor • Mentor may not be able to directly affect the work situation	
	Negative State: Relationship(s) includes mistrust and lack of communication which result in negative consequences for mentee's career development, misalignment with supervisory and organizational goals, and/or damage to stakeholder reputations		

Figure 2. Polarity Map for supervisory and non-supervisory mentoring relationships

Desired state and negative state. The desired state of a mentor/mentee relationship with one's supervisor included many elements of the definition of mentoring provided in Chapter 2. It was seen as a mutually beneficial relationship that supported the goals of individuals and the organization. Interviewees also described potential negative consequences associated with having a mentor/mentee relationship with one's supervisor. Where the elements of commitment and trust were not present, the mentoring

relationship could result in negative impact on the mentee's career development, along with lack of progress or even negative progress toward the supervisor's goals and organizational objectives. These negative outcomes had the potential to result in damage to the reputation of the supervisor, the mentee, and/or the organization.

Benefits of internal mentor (internal feedback and resources). One benefit of a supervisory mentor described by participants was a high level of common ground based on shared experiences in the workplace. This can lead to a mutual understanding of leadership challenges, resulting in the opportunity for deeper discussions about workplace events and their impact on the organization. In addition, it was seen as logistically easier for the relationship to build over time.

A related benefit is that a supervisor/mentor is able to observe the employee's leadership actions as they take place in the workplace, making it easier to provide specific feedback about work behaviors and hold mentees accountable for development activities. Leader-25 believed that this was part of what transformed supervision into mentoring.

> *If you don't hold the other person accountable, and yourself accountable if there are things you are supposed to do. . . . I don't think it's mentoring. It's chatting or advising, or, you know, performance reviewing.*

Another benefit to the supervisor/mentor role is that supervisors are often in a position to assess readiness of potential mentees and provide opportunities to help them develop. Leader-46 said that she often ends up mentoring people she supervises because she is most familiar with their skills, abilities, and potential. While she acknowledged

that there can be a concern with "blurring supervision and mentoring," by working with her high performing staff she can see where her insights or experiences could "be helpful to them in taking whatever they see as their next step."

Finally, several interviewees believed that having a supervisor/mentor increased their satisfaction with their career choices and strengthened their commitment to their role as leaders within higher education.

Negative consequences of an internal mentor. For some participants, it was difficult to combine the supervisor/employee relationship with a mentor/mentee relationship. While those described above found it very rewarding to mentor one's employees, this group rarely or never chose to engage in mentoring relationships with their direct reports. From a mentee viewpoint, even though many of the participants believed they had positive and supportive relationships with their supervisors, they described a variety of circumstance that made it difficult or undesirable to seek mentoring from that person.

The most commonly-mentioned problem was the difficulty in separating the day-to-day work relationship from a mentoring relationship. This was often described as a function of lack of time. Leader-6, for example, stated that "right now I could really use mentoring from someone who is at a higher level of leadership." While she believed that her supervisor could provide that mentoring, she was "reluctant to ask her because she's super-busy and often feels like she's super-tired." Leader-42 described this problem as it occurred during the MN Partnership.

My supervisor was my mentor and for the most part it was fairly productive, but it was hard to separate discussions. . . . Instead of getting to a point where you're trying to understand about your own personal leadership development, it can easily turn into trying to solve the issue you're talking about.

Leader-23 described a similar problem. During the MN Partnership she said she often took her supervisor/mentor out to breakfast or dinner away from campus.

We didn't have a whole lot of time to move on to bigger things or my own personal development. . . . If your mentor is your supervisor sometimes you have to truly even change locations physically to switch the tenor of the conversation.

Another potential negative consequence of having a supervisor as a mentor is a reluctance on the part of the mentee to discuss work performance issues. Some interviewees believed that such vulnerability could lead the supervisor to develop a negative impression of the employee's career potential. Leader-15 described "not feeling comfortable" demonstrating a lack of confidence to a supervisor.

A person in a leadership role is supposed to appear confident and like they know what they're doing. You can't keep going back to them with the same issue. . . . At some point he will be tired of hearing about it. He will say "I hired you to solve these problems; I don't want to keep hearing about them."

The difficulty of separating mentoring from performance management was also described as a problem for the mentor. Leader-9 explained it this way:

The problem comes if the mentee does something in a work-related context where now the mentor has to coach or say "you shouldn't have done it that way." . . .

You have that conflict where you're supposed to be my mentor but now I'm not

mentoring you, I'm criticizing you to support you in what was really not done

well.

Some participants observed that not all supervisors have the necessary

knowledge, skill, or temperament to serve as a mentor. Several provided examples of

their own supervisors who were not able to provide effective mentoring or described

relationships in which a supervisor is able to mentor some employees and not others.

Leader-23 summarized this opinion by pointing out that each circumstance is unique and

a supervisor may not be able to provide the kind of mentoring an employee needs at a

given point in their career.

Benefits of an external (non-supervisory) mentor. Some of the cohort

members who were sponsored by their supervisors during the MN Partnership said that,

upon reflection, they would make a different choice in the future. They believed the

opportunity provided by a formal program could have allowed them to work with

mentors from different parts of the organization to expand their leadership skills and

knowledge about the institutional context in which the work takes place. For example,

Leader-42 described how selecting his president as a mentor was "a relationship of

convenience" and stated that he should have made an effort to find a president at a

different institution or an external mentor who could have provided a different viewpoint.

In addition to avoiding the time and task focus problems described above, Leader-

23 found it easier to maintain mutual trust with mentees who were not direct reports.

They might be more comfortable talking to me about the different kind of role or

different job they might want to be in. There would be a little more freedom,

because there wouldn't be a question in their mind about whether I was going to

judge them differently or evaluate them differently because they shared with me

that they were bored or they were not fulfilled in certain parts of their job.

Negative consequences of an external mentor. Several participants indicated that they found it more difficult to select non-supervisors as their mentors. In most cases, a key issue was the difficulty in locating a suitable mentor and building a relationship with that person. Leader-25 said that most of her mentors had been her supervisors because "there weren't a lot of other people out there that could fill the role." Leader-11 also spoke about the difficulty of finding a non-supervisory mentor.

That was scarier, you know, because you had to reach out. And you don't know

the person, so you don't know that this is an OK place to be with this person. . . .

There was that uncertainty about that kind of mentor relationship.

Another potential problem with a non-supervisory mentor is that the mentor may not be in a position to directly influence the mentee's daily work assignments. Leader-15 believed that a non-supervisory mentor is less able to provide support for specific work actions.

When it's your supervisor, the direct relationship between the mentor's advice is

clearer, because you feel a sense of permission to take action. The supervisor is

supporting you in what you are doing. If it's someone from another department

the link between their advice and your action is a more iterative process. They

don't know your exact situation.

Summary

This chapter examined mentoring as experienced by the participants in the MN Partnership. Twenty one cohort members were interviewed, and the resulting data indicated that cohort members had a variety of mentoring experiences during the MN Partnership, ranging from little or no mentoring to mentoring that positively influenced their perceived program outcomes.

The data revealed two key choices. The first was whether or not to participate in mentoring during the program. Findings were presented that built on the definition of mentoring proposed in Chapter 4, particularly the ways in which a life history of high, medium, or low mentorship may have influenced their experience of mentoring during the program.

If a cohort member chose to participate in mentoring, a second choice was whether to select one's supervisor as a mentor or seek a non-supervisory mentor. These choices were influenced by program design decisions described in Chapter 5, but were also by individual circumstances and past history.

While many participants described this as an either-or choice, the data can be viewed as a polarity between internal resources and feedback and external resources and feedback. This framework generated additional options, such as having more than one mentor during the program. A polarity map was provided and illustrated with participant feedback.

The next chapter will return to the larger case of the MN Partnership, using themes that emerged from the data to propose a framework for mentoring in leadership development programs.

Chapter 7. Structure and Serendipity in Leadership Development Programs

Developing the next generation of executive leaders is an important task for HRD professionals in public higher education. Changing political and educational environments, along with a high number of anticipated retirements, have led many colleges and universities to create leadership development programs to help fill their internal executive pipelines. A more professional and systematic approach to leadership development is replacing the older model of promoting outstanding faculty members into executive positions without adequate preparation for the role. As competition for well-qualified executive leaders intensifies, programs designed to prepare internal candidates to compete for executive positions have become more common.

One of the challenges faced by the design teams for such programs is the decision of whether, and how, to incorporate a mentoring component. Mentoring is a popular strategy, but there is little research on how to best structure the programs to generate desired results. Traditional one-on-one mentoring models require a pool of skilled leaders to serve as mentors; are time-intensive for mentors, mentees, and facilitators; and rely on unpredictable methods for making the match. Other models, such as a focus on executive sponsorship or peer mentoring, have been proposed as alternatives.

This study was designed to answer the question: In what ways can mentoring add value to a leadership development program in higher education? By examining the MN Partnership at a high level and from the viewpoints of the sponsoring organizations and individual participants, I proposed a framework of mentoring that may apply to similar leadership development programs in higher education. In addition, HRD considerations

for program design will be identified, and implications for practice and for further research will be discussed.

Mentoring as a Component of the MN Partnership

While the mentoring component of the MN Partnership produced mixed results, cohort members and subject matter experts who participated in the study believed mentoring could be a valuable component to leadership development programs. There was a strong recommendation that the mentoring component be expanded and formalized for future cohorts of the MN Partnership. Both cohort members who participated in mentoring during the program and those who did not believed that mentoring could assist in achievement of program goals.

This study was conducted within the first year of completion of the program. This meant that stakeholders were able to reflect on the mentoring activities while they were still reasonably fresh in their memories. Successful short-term mentoring outcomes for cohort members of the MN Partnership included:

- Creating or enhancing an ongoing mentoring relationship with supervisors, focused on helping the subordinate identify and fill skill gaps and develop qualifications for promotion;

- Creating or building ongoing relationships with a non-supervisory senior leader (sponsor) in which they could gain exposure to executive roles and explore the personal implications of seeking these roles; and

- Engaging in shorter-term guided learning relationships with a non-supervisor based on specific goals such as developing a particular skill or addressing a specific work/life issue.

The long-term outcomes of a mentoring component of a leadership development program such as the MN Partnership will not be known until several years after the program's completion. Based on my study of the program, I saw some indications of potential long-term outcomes that may occur. First, for some participants the program may result in a changed relationship with their supervisors. By providing an opportunity to open new conversations about professional development and leadership goals, it can allow for a mentor/sponsor relationship to develop where it had not existed prior to the program. Second, the program may expand professional networks and generated new collegial friendships. Because these relationships would have grown out of a professional development context, they may include a stronger peer mentoring component than is typical for professional work friendships.

The potential for collegial support could be the most significant long-term result of the mentoring component of the MN Partnership. While it is an unanticipated outcome, increased awareness of professional development and mentoring among the cohort of newly appointed presidents within the MnSCU system could result in an informal peer mentoring group to provide support to each other as they fulfill their new responsibilities. The potential was indicated as MnSCU leaders were selected for permanent and interim president positions since the conclusion of the program. There was a sense of mutual support and excitement among both leaders and SMEs from

MnSCU as the appointments were announced and it became clear that the cohort would be heavily represented among new presidential appointments. I believe this support may carry into their first few years in their new roles.

A Proposed Framework of Mentoring in Leadership Development

The findings described above and in previous chapters indicate that mentoring can add value to a formal leadership development program within higher education. Based on a review of the literature and analysis of the MN Partnership, I propose that mentoring is most effective to the extent that:

1. Mentoring activities occur within a formal structure that is grounded in a clearly articulated set of program goals and expectations; and

2. Mentoring activities take into account the individual needs, circumstances, and experiences of the program participants.

When activities occur that meet the two criteria above and are aligned with the definition of mentoring proposed in Chapter 4, formal mentorship can be of significant value in a leadership development program. Mentoring outcomes could include:

- Providing organizational context to help mentees apply what they are learning during the leadership development program

- Providing safe opportunities for mentees to practice new leadership skills and receive feedback about their behaviors

- Creating a framework in which mentees can observe mentors in action and discuss their observations

- Helping mentees consider new career directions and enact plans to move into positions of greater leadership responsibility

Analysis of the data from the MN Partnership indicated that the success of a mentoring component was not dependent on specific design choices, but rather on the process used for making the choices. The mentoring strategies chosen need to reflect the context in which the mentoring will occur. Accomplishing the two requirements of structured program expectations and responsiveness to individual participants' needs is a polarity. The appropriate design for any given mentorship program manages the two poles in a manner that is consistent with the organizational goals and desired outcomes.

Chapter 4 portrayed the polarity of structure and serendipity using Johnson's (1996, 1998) polarity management model. Both the positive and negative aspects of each pole were represented in the MN Partnership. The MnSCU design emphasized the benefits of flexibility and serendipitous mentoring, with cohort members being allowed to select their own mentors and limited structural requirements. This enabled some participants to take advantage of unique circumstances to engage in enriching mentoring relationships. At the same time, other cohort members reported that the lack of structure resulted in no mentoring or unsatisfactory relationships that did not meet program goals. The U of M design emphasized the opposite pole by providing a formalized structure for the peer mentoring groups. Participants reported that this structure enabled the groups to form and set expectations, but eventually the structural requirements for providing particular outcomes resulted in limited ability to explore emerging topics that might have been of more interest to group members.

Matching Program Goals with Mentorship Strategies

Given the necessity of managing structure and flexibility within formal leadership development mentoring programs, it is important to clearly articulate the goals the program is attempting to achieve. The goals can then be matched with a mentorship strategy that is likely to support the desired outcomes. As illustrated by the MN Partnership, differing organizational contexts and desired outcomes may lead to differing program design choices. Four examples emerged from study data and a review of the literature. In approximate order of intensity and duration, they are: high potential/executive development programs, mid-level leadership "frame breaking," mid-level leadership skill building, and leadership orientation.

High potential/executive development programs. These programs are relatively unusual in higher education, although the frequency appears to be rising. They often include release time from all or part of the participants' ongoing duties and can last at least one to two years. One strategy that can be used is to provide short-term or interim assignments to develop participants' leadership skills. Most include some type of rigorous selection process, and may include an array of assessments such as 360-degree reviews or a personality preference identification.

The culture of higher education typically does not support a business model of identifying high potential candidates for promotion. Rather, the goal of these leadership development programs is described as filling the organizational pipeline with qualified candidates and preparing cohort members to compete for executive positions. Mentoring focuses on helping mentees complete and learn from development activities. A

sponsoring relationship is often combined with, or added to, the mentorship role. These are typically one-on-one relationships in which the sponsor uses a senior position within the organization to provide development opportunities, facilitate activities that enhance promotability, and recommend mentees for programs or career advancement.

Mid-level leadership "frame breaking." A useful concept presented at the MN Partnership was Kizilos' (2012) model of "frame breaking" leadership development. Programs based on this model focus on leadership development activities which are both high-risk and outside of participants' current leadership skill set. They typically last one to two years and may include release time from current duties. Participants may apply or be nominated by organizational leaders.

Within higher education, many mid-level leaders are highly accomplished within their discipline or field, but lack the broad experience necessary to compete for higher-level positions. For example, a leader may have moved up through progressively more responsible positions within student affairs, but lack the budgetary management skills required of vice presidents. Mentorship in "frame breaking" programs focuses on identification of experience gaps, structured activities to fill the gaps, and conversations to process and make meaning of the experiences. Mentorship is usually one-on-one, and may include tactical activities such as job shadowing, committee assignments, and short-term work assignments. The mentor typically sponsors development activities or helps the mentee to find alternate sponsors.

Mid-level leadership networking and skill building. Mid-level leadership development programs in higher education often include a skill-building component,

such as a series of seminars that reinforce key leadership competencies for the organization. Such programs are also typically focused on networking and relationship-building. Given that many aspiring leaders within higher education have not had an opportunity to experience the organization from outside of their academic or functional silos, this can be a very important development strategy.

The selection process for such programs may be less rigorous than a high-potential program, but often includes some type of nomination from a supervisor or other organizational leader. When this is included, the nominator may take on all or part of the mentoring role during the program. Mentoring strategies can include one-on-one relationships in which the mentor helps the mentee make meaning of program activities and may also provide feedback about the mentee's leadership behaviors. Networking goals may be accomplished through peer mentoring or mentoring circles in which a senior leader mentors a small group of program participants.

New leader orientation. Another common goal for leadership development programs in higher education is to orient new faculty members or new leaders to the organization and its culture. These are usually short-term programs lasting one year or less. Orientation goals are often accomplished through peer mentoring, or by providing the mentee with more than one mentor, each of whom can address a particular need or issue. The expectation is that such relationships will be temporary in nature.

Table 4 summarizes typical goals for formal mentoring programs and suggests mentoring strategies that may be appropriate for achieving those goals.

Table 4.

Examples of Mentoring Goals and Appropriate Mentoring Strategies

	Sponsor/ mentor	Traditional one-on-one mentoring	Peer mentoring	Group mentoring (one mentor, 3-4 mentees)
Examples of short term goals				
Provide opportunities for mentee to engage in development activities	X	X		
Identify and address leadership skill gaps	X	X		
Learn and practice leadership skills		X	X	X
Observe mentee and provide feedback on leadership behaviors	X	X	X	
Orientation to new organization or leadership role		X	X	X
Reflect on results of assessment (360-degree feedback, style inventories, etc.)		X	X	
Reflect on program activities (readings, seminars, etc.)		X	X	X
Assist mentee in navigating the organizational culture	X	X		
Examples of longer term goals				
Achievement of professional goals, such as tenure or professional certification		X	X	X
Creating a supportive climate for members of under-represented groups		X	X	
Networking (building relationships with senior leaders and decision makers)	X			
Networking (building collegial relationships across boundaries)			X	X
Supporting leaders during role transitions		X	X	

Providing Flexibility to Respond to Individual Participant Needs

To manage structure and flexibility in mentoring program design, individual

participants' circumstances need to be taken into consideration. As described above,

program goals need to be identified and an appropriate mentoring strategy selected at the

program level, but a one-size-fits-all approach will not be successful. As described in Chapter 4, potential mentees may be at different stages of readiness for the experience. Individual participant goals need to be identified and space should be allowed for serendipitous occurrences that could lead to productive mentoring relationships. Two important components of flexibility are 1) to address each participant's needs in selecting mentors and/or sponsors, and 2) to address each participant's past experiences with receiving mentoring.

Selecting mentors and sponsors. Attention needs to be given to individual participant's needs and goals during the start-up phase. This information could then be used to make appropriate matches or to assist participants in selecting appropriate mentor and sponsor relationships. As part of this process, the participant's current supervisory relationship should be assessed. Since the supervisor is often the sponsor or nominator of the participant's involvement in the program, an appropriate ongoing role needs to be identified. In some instances, it may be appropriate for one individual (the supervisor or another organizational leader) to serve as both sponsor and mentor. In other situations, particularly where a mentoring relationship may already exist with a participant's current supervisor, participants should be encouraged to reach out to a new mentor that could provide new viewpoints.

Addressing past experiences with mentoring. An important finding from this study was that participants with higher lifetime mentorship patterns were more likely to have had a successful mentoring relationship as part of the MN Partnership, and were also more likely to have experienced career advancement during or after the program.

One implication of this finding is that people may need to learn how to be mentored as well as learning how to mentor. Interview data from individuals with a history of high mentorship indicated that they were skilled and intentional about defining goals, seeking mentoring relationships, and maintaining those relationships in a way that helped achieve the goals. They understood the differing functions of short-term and long-term mentorship and had a greater comfort level in asking for what they needed. Individuals with low mentorship patterns, on the other hand, had fewer opportunities to develop and practice the skills associated with being a mentee.

One of the functions of a formal mentoring component in an executive leader development program is the opportunity to provide knowledge and a safe space for participants with medium and low mentorship patterns to practice the mentee role. Individuals with a high pattern of mentorship may not need as much structural support, but may need encouragement to reach out to new types of mentors.   An assessment of cohort members' prior experience with mentoring could provide valuable information at the start of the program about the type of resources they are likely to need in order to be successful.

Implications for Practice

Unlike many other types of program design, mentoring programs contains an element of unpredictability that presents a challenge for HRD practitioners in higher education. Zellers, Howard, and Barcic (2008) observed that "the traditional school of thought views mentoring as a spontaneous human phenomenon in which any effort to formally manage the process negates the chemistry or magic believed to be inherent to

those relationships," while at the same time noting that "opinions continue to differ, however, about how to best level the playing field for those traditionally excluded from informal systems of mentoring" (p. 562). While the success of any given mentoring relationship cannot be guaranteed, this study indicated directions that can be taken to help provide a supportive formal structure for mentors and mentees.

A significant implication of these findings is that including a mentoring component in a leadership development program greatly increases the time and resources required from the planning team. Designing a formal mentoring component for leadership development programs cannot be a tightly managed process with highly predictable outcomes. There are a large number of variables at both the organizational and individual level that will influence any particular outcome. That being said, it is possible to set the stage for mentoring success by making thoughtful and informed program design choices that create a clear structure and address individual needs. Taking advantage of the positive elements of both structure and flexibility, while intentionally identifying and managing the potential negative consequences, can help program designers create a successful strategy. Design tools such as polarity mapping can assist in the process.

One structural consideration is need for a formal process to initiate, support, and evaluate mentoring relationships. Study participants stressed the importance of creating a mentoring agreement at the beginning of the program. This agreement should be a written description of goals for the relationship, logistical guidelines about when and how often meetings will occur, and milestones for success. It was seen as a responsibility of

the program coordinator to ensure that there was adequate structure for the initiation of mentoring relationships.

A second structural implication of the study findings is that the mentoring component needs to be monitored and supported by the program facilitators during the course of program. Mid-year evaluations should be conducted to identify whether mentoring agreements are being met. Where necessary, intervention should be offered to assist in building and sustaining the relationships. Program-sponsored mentor/mentee activities could include inviting mentors to attend keynote sessions during seminars, informal gatherings, or discussion guides related to program readings. While not all mentor/mentee pairs will need such resources, they will be useful in setting expectations and providing support where necessary.

Implications for Further Research

Murray (2001) noted that "There are still two basic schools of thought about mentoring. One is the belief that mentoring can be structured or facilitated; the other is the belief that it can only 'happen' to a few lucky or aggressive people" (p. 5). I propose that a research agenda based on a polarity/paradox framework may be a more productive way to enhance our collective knowledge. Each of the strategies for addressing mentoring has potential benefits as well as potential unintended negative consequences to be managed. Balanced presentations of research findings will enhance the literature.

This study generates many questions that could be explored by both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Studies that focus on the front end of program design would be a welcome addition to the body of literature that tends to focus on the final outcomes.

For example, if making the match between mentor and mentee is important to the outcome of one-on-one relationships, this process could be examined from a variety of viewpoints. How do skilled program mangers go about the process? Does a survey of participants in mentoring programs identify any correlations between reported success and potential matching criteria such as age, gender, and similar fields of study?

If formal mentoring programs are grounded in program goals, then a useful line of inquire relates to the extent that those goals are achieved, both in the short term and over time. Baugh and Fagenson-Eland (2007) noted that "a serious deficiency with respect to research on formal mentoring programs is the absence of a delineation of the benefits and drawbacks of such programs to the organization itself" (p. 266).

An additional question arising from this study is the extent to which low, medium, and high patterns of mentorship are a measurable construct. If an instrument could be developed to validly and reliably identify these behavior patterns, it could then be used to assess correlations among a range of desired program outcomes. For example, is high mentorship correlated with promotion to executive positions within higher education? Does an individual's pattern change over time or does it tend to be more static, such as a personality preference? In what way do mentorship patterns affect a program participant's needs and desired outcomes? Does an individual's pattern of receiving mentorship influence his or her approach to mentoring others, and if so, how?

Conclusions

Leadership development is an important responsibility for many HRD practitioners in higher education. Successful programs have the potential to make

significant contributions to institutional outcomes by ensuring an adequate pool of future leaders, enhancing the capacity and contribution of current leaders, and ensuring that the organization has the ability to be effective in today's complex teaching and learning environment. The literature indicates that such programs are most effective when they include experiential components such as 360-degree feedback, skill practice, and stretch assignments. Mentoring is an experiential component that can add value to such programs when activities occur within a formal structure that is grounded in clearly articulated program goals, and when the activities take into account individual needs, circumstances, and experiences of program participants.

Examples of program goals include high potential/executive development programs, mid-level leadership "frame breaking," mid-level leadership skill building, and leadership orientation. A framework was proposed to identify mentoring strategies that may be more or less effective in meeting these goals.

Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004) stated that in the future "the dual challenges of *understanding* the nature of leadership development and *implementing* effective leadership development practices will likely be greater than ever before" (p. 31). By examining the implementation choices and outcomes of the MN Partnership, this study uncovered key questions and considerations that need to be addressed when designing formal mentoring components in leadership development programs. Thus, this study will contribute to the literature in the field by adding to the understanding both of participants' mentoring experiences and program coordinators' choices in implementing them.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What types of experiences have you had in the past with mentoring programs (both as a mentor and as a mentee)? What, if anything, has been helpful for you? What experiences have been frustrating?

2. Did you do anything differently as a result of your mentoring experiences? (For example, taking short term actions such as updating resume, or long term actions such as making changes in career goals)

3. One goal of this study is to define what a successful mentoring experience looks like. From your perspective, what are the key elements of a successful experience?

4. What types of mentoring experiences have you had in formal programs like PEL, Luoma Leadership Academy, or Minnesota Partnership for Executive Leader Development? Were any of these activities helpful in supporting your goals for the program? Why or why not?

a. Have you continued any of the mentoring experiences beyond the end of the formal program? What have you done and how has it supported your ongoing development?

5. What suggestions would you have to help the Minnesota Partnership planning team improve the mentoring experience for future cohorts?