

The Mentoring Experience: Leadership Development Program Perspectives

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Abstract

Using a semi-structured interview approach, ten mentors from a leadership development program focused on building leaders in Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences across the nation provided insights regarding their mentoring method, process, and experiences. Mentors interviewed agreed the mentoring process was beneficial for themselves as well as their mentee. However, clear thematic differences were evident depending on whether a previously existing relationship was in place between mentor and mentee. Specifically, mentoring relationships that were extensions of previous relationships tended to have less formal structures and more subjective outcomes than newly established mentoring relationship counterparts. Nevertheless, both categories of mentoring relationships indicated a desire for a formal set of mentoring expectations as well as access to program curriculum to help guide and inform the process.

Keywords: mentor, opinion leadership, leadership development

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Introduction

As a leadership developmental tool, the utility of mentoring and the mentoring process has been well established (Bass, 2008; Chun, Sosik, & Yun, 2012). Individuals that have a mentor have been found to be more likely to be promoted (Johnson, 1980), earn higher compensation (Roche, 1979), and tend to believe that they have more opportunities for career advancement and success (Fagenson, 1989). Additionally, mentoring has been shown to significantly improve retention (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 2006; Molner Kelley, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) and satisfaction (Bass, 2008) amongst mentees.

According to Bass (2008), “a mentor is likely to be an immediate supervisor of the protégé but may be found at higher levels in the organization or outside the organization among those with more experience and influence than the protégé” (p. 1091). Mentors have been found to typically act as a role model to their mentee as well as provide them with coaching, visibility, and in many cases friendship (Kram, 1985). Unlike a coach that may be more focused on analysis, improvement, and practice, mentors have tended to “provide career advice and opportunities for skill development on the job, identify needs for improvement, and promote the protégé’s reputation” (Yukl, 1998, p. 102).

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Generally mentoring relationships have been associated with on-the-job leadership training and development (Bass, 2008); however, based on the breadth of benefits associated with mentoring within organizations, the mentoring process has become more prevalent as an educational tool outside organizational confines. For example, the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business has a prescriptive mentoring program where, “prospective participants must show that they understand what a mentor-mentee relationship involves and demonstrate what they will get out the program and what they can contribute” (Murray, 2013, para. 4).

Similar to trends observed in settings such as MBA programs, leadership development programs have also been shown to benefit from mentoring relationships (Kanter, 2012). In training environments where individuals may be assembled from a large number of different institutions or organizations, mentoring can serve as a bridge between the centralized developmental activities and appropriate application once participants return home. For example, the purpose of the nine-month long LEAD21 program has been “to develop leaders in land-grant institutions and their strategic partners who link research, academics, and extension in order to lead more effectively in an increasingly complex environment, either in their current position or as they aspire to other positions” (Sapp, 2014, para. 2). During three on-site seminars participants receive exposure, information, and knowledge regarding leadership competency areas. Participants are primarily from Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences at land-grant universities located across the United States and its territories. Additionally, participants include individuals employed with USDA/NIFA. While not attending seminars, participants are expected to actively engage with a mentor to help synthesize information into local application.

Previous research has indicated that external leadership development programs focused on individuals associated with agriculture within the land-grant university system may be a valuable conduit for developing a workforce capable of addressing the issues of the 21st century (Lamm, Lamm, & Strickland, 2013). However, there is a lack of research examining the nature of mentorship activities required as part of agricultural leadership development programming. Priority area four of the National Research Agenda: American Association for Agricultural Education 2011 – 2015 (Doerfert, 2011) calls for meaningful and engaged learning in all environments with a specific need to “deepen our understanding of effective teaching and learning processes” (p. 9). Consequently, a study focused on the environmental, use, and outcome conditions associated with mentoring used as a learning tool within a leadership development program for individuals associated with agriculture within the land-grant university system may provide valuable educational and programmatic insights.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was Kram’s (1985) mentor role theory. According to Kram (1985), the mentoring relationship is structured under two functions. The first is career function and second is psychosocial function. In particular, a mentor has been expected to provide guidance and support regarding a protégé’s career as well as act as a role model providing counseling and friendship. The psychosocial aspects of mentoring are associated with “activities that influence the protégé’s self-image and competence” (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992, p. 620). According to Kram (1985) the career function activities generally emerge first followed by the psychosocial aspects.

Within an agricultural education context, several research studies have found the importance and efficacy of mentoring programs. For example, Eastman and Williams (1993) found mentoring was “significantly related to an individual’s feeling regarding his or her satisfaction with

his or her career” (p. 75). Additionally, successful student teaching opportunities were also linked to appropriately implemented and supported mentoring relationships (Jones, Kelsey, & Brown, 2014). Foor and Cano (2012) suggested that an analysis of mentor’s abilities and beliefs was one of the critical antecedents for a successful mentoring relationship and positive mentee outcomes. However, a further investigation of mentoring relationship within agricultural education contexts have been recommended (Jones et al., 2014).

Typical formal mentoring programs within organizations are prescriptive in that a junior individual is paired with a more senior executive outside of the mentee’s line of supervision (McCauley & Douglas, 1998). However, other mentoring programs may pair a mentee with an external resource or consultant (Douglas, 1997). Regardless of the structure, formally assigned mentors are typically expected to provide coaching as well as “sponsorship, protection, challenging assignments, and exposure to senior management thinking” (Day, 2001, p. 594).

Informal mentoring programs are generally less prescriptive in the expected hierarchy of the mentoring relationships, with few restrictions placed on the location of the mentor and mentee either within or between organizational boundaries (Day, 2001). Despite the lack of structure generally associated with informal programs, there has been evidence that more positive outcomes are accrued for mentee’s under such conditions (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). For example, Chao et al. (1992) found that mentees in informal mentoring relationships tended to receive more career-related support and had higher salaries than those in formal mentoring relationships.

To effectively identify the different areas in which individuals may accrue positive outcomes associated with mentoring relationships, researchers have suggested a number of categories. For example, Hunt and Michael (1983) hypothesized that mentoring may benefit mentors, mentees, and organizations. Chao et al. (1992) proposed three primary outcomes for mentees, “organizational socialization, job satisfaction, and salary, designed to cover three significant domains: learning, affective, and objective outcomes, respectively” (p. 622). However, a gap in the literature exists specifically examining the nature of the outcomes associated with mentoring relationships (Chun et al., 2012).

Mentor preparation has also been identified as an area where additional information may provide useful insights. Specifically, “from a subordinate’s perspective, improving the quality of mentoring would also improve the quality of leadership experienced. More attention is needed regarding the apparent overlap between developing sound mentoring skills and leadership development” (Day, 2001, p. 595). Although previous research has attempted to identify the characteristics of effective mentors, the influence of support processes and broader contextual expectations associated with such processes are not well understood (Allen & Poteet, 1999).

Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the role mentoring plays in a leadership development program focused on building leaders within faculty in Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are mentor/mentee relationships established?
2. What mentor processes are being used when they are not directed?
3. What role do mentors see themselves playing in developing mentees?
4. How can the mentoring process be supported and enhanced?

Methodology

Subjectivity Statement

The primary researcher for this study was Kevan Lamm, a graduate student at the University of Florida pursuing a Ph.D. in Leadership Development within the Agricultural Education and Communication department. He has a master's degree in Leadership Development from the University of Florida and a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Colorado State University. Kevan serves as a program consultant to the LEAD21 program and completed the program as a participant observer in 2013. Prior to attending graduate school Kevan was a consultant and manager with a global consulting organization where he was responsible for conducting large scale training and human performance development activities with Fortune 500 organizations. Both Kevan's parents were faculty members and administrators at a large land-grant university located in the western United States.

Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective

Constructionism was used as the epistemology for the study representing the "theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). Constructionism was chosen because it identifies the participants as the constructors of knowledge and allows them to provide meaning to the phenomenon of interest, in this case mentoring (Crotty, 2003). The theoretical perspective chosen for the study was constructivism (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). The theoretical perspective is the "philosophical stance informing the methodology... providing context for the process" (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). For this study, constructivism allowed the researchers to focus on the individual experiences of the participants and their role as mentors in a leadership development program.

Research Design

Based on the epistemological and theoretical perspectives identified, a generic or basic qualitative methodology was used (Merriam, 1988). The basic approach uses reoccurring patterns and themes to identify, describe and interpret the findings (Merriam, 1988). Ten participants were selected purposively. To be chosen, a participant had to serve as the mentor to a participant in LEAD21 during the 2013-14 Class IX experience. Participants were required to identify a mentor upon acceptance to the program and supply the organizers of the LEAD21 program with their name, contact information and position within their university system. Other than identifying who their mentor will be, the extent of the relationship was largely left up to the participant and their designated mentor. For data analysis purposes, identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality. Mentors included eight men and two women. One mentor was the president of a land-grant university, two were deans, three were associate deans, three were department chairs, and one was a senior faculty member.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method for the study (Chalofsky, 1999). The one-on-one interviews were designed to be in-depth allowing for a personal experience where the researcher could build a rapport with the interviewee. Building rapport is essential to "establishing a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee's personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). A 12-question interview guide was developed in accordance with the research questions as they aligned with Kram's (1985) mentor role theory. While each participant was asked the same 12 questions, the researcher allowed the interviews to flow naturally, engaged in probes to engage the participant in extrapolation and provide detailed descriptions of experiences with their mentees to

ensure rich data was collected (Merriam, 1988). The interviews were recorded with hand notes taken during the interview process to be used for triangulation purposes in the data analysis process. The interview recordings were transcribed and used as the primary source of data.

Content analysis was used to identify themes related to the research questions of interest. Content analysis is defined by Holsti (1969) as a process “carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules and procedures” (p. 3). The purpose of content analysis is to divide the data into categories *a priori* based on a theoretical model, in this case mentor role theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Neuendorf, 2002), and allows for “reliable, valid inferences from qualitative data” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 418). A review of mentor role theory was conducted prior to data analysis to identify the categories of interest. The coder then listened to the recordings and read through the transcripts twice prior to coding to become familiar with the material. The transcripts were then opened in the MAXQDA software program (MAXQDA, 2015) and meaningful words and phrases were identified as codes. An audit trail was kept throughout the process as additional emergent themes were identified and classified into groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At the completion of data analysis, the coder conducted a peer debrief with the other researchers to ensure the themes identified were reasonable. The other researchers were queried based on their expert knowledge of LEAD21 and the use of mentors within the program. Peer debriefing was conducted to reduce research bias and ensure rigor and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mays & Pope, 1995).

Lastly, member checking was conducted to ensure interpretation was correct and conveyed the information the participants intended (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Upon completion of the data collection process, preliminary findings were shared in a report and through a presentation.

Results

Establishment of Mentor/mentee Relationships

Mentors were asked to describe how they became involved with mentoring a LEAD21 participant. Responses tended to fall within two primary categories; first, there was an existing relationship with the participant; second, there was not an existing relationship, but the mentorship was requested by the participant or facilitated through an institutional process.

Mentors indicated that one of the primary ways they became involved as a mentor was based on a preexisting relationship they had with a participant. This was confirmed by one mentor who indicated, “we didn’t look at LEAD21 so much as creating a mentoring relationship because we already had one.” Another mentor told the story of the conversation he had with his mentee, “We knew each other and we had respected one another in the jobs that we’d done and he came to me and said you’ve been through it. I think this would be a good thing to do. Would you mind being my mentor? It was pretty straightforward.”

A second manner in which mentors indicated they had become involved was through a facilitated meeting with the participant due to a third party suggesting them as a mentor. One mentor reflected, “somebody in her department suggested that I might be somebody good to talk to about things.” Another mentor described a formal mentor matching process that their institution had initiated that included

a planned mentor program where you work with the Associate Dean as opposed to just picking out someone else to work with. We feel it’s important if you’re

mentored at that level, you'll have access to conversations and to meetings you wouldn't have if it was just maybe another faculty doing the mentoring.

A third manner that was indicated could be described as a hybrid of the two previous methods. Specifically, there may not have been an existing mentor relationship per se; however, there was a professional relationship through organizational hierarchy. One mentor indicated, "I was invited by one of our faculty members who comes from my home department." This was very similar to the experience of several other mentors. For example, one mentor noted that their mentee was "one of our faculty, the Department Head who was in the program asked if I would serve in that capacity." A novel relationship was "the person that I'm a mentor for was my former PhD student" indicating an ongoing relationship even though roles and relationship status may have evolved over time.

Processes Being Used as Part of Mentoring

Mentors indicated there were two main modes for meeting with their mentees: informal meetings that used a variety of communication channels or formal face-to-face regular meetings.

The majority of mentors indicated they had an informal mentoring process. For example, one mentor described the process as,

When he has a question or needed some advice I was always open to meeting with him or talking to him. I mean we did some face-to-face meetings, we did phone calls, we did Facebook chat, emails, the whole nine yards.

A second mentor indicated,

my mentoring for LEAD21 has been much less structured and random." Based on the nature of preexisting relationships, several mentors indicated the mentoring process was really just an extension of their established conversations. For example, one mentor said, "it's really just sort of being able to expand and extend our dialogue that we've had for several years." A second mentor shared a similar process, reflecting that they "tried to use a combination of things. We've done lunch...phone calls, emails, every way that you can communicate, he and I have always had that sort of relationship.

A second group of mentors indicated their mentoring process involved formal and informal components. One mentor stated,

Well it was not terribly structured and we certainly met a couple of times on campus...we used the opportunity of travelling together to the conference, hanging around waiting for flights, breaks at the conference, you know an occasional meal here and there to talk about some process issues related to what she was learning as a result of participating in the sessions.

A secondary theme was a tendency to begin with regular meetings, and then for the meetings to become less frequent or structured over time, for example, one mentor stated "...it varies. I would say probably early on when he was in the program it was probably every three to four weeks and lately it's been maybe more like every six to eight weeks."

A smaller group of mentors indicated they had a formal process they used throughout the program. One mentor indicated, "I invite him to all our administrative team meetings and he probably came to ninety percent of them...more specifically, he and I met on a monthly basis." A second mentor described a similar process where regular meetings were supplemented with exposure to administrative meetings and activities. He described their process as,

If we have an academic affairs event we would ask them to attend...I wouldn't call it shadowing but we have the opportunity for them to be at meetings as LEAD21 faculty where they wouldn't ordinarily...We have them attend our Administrative Council meetings, not so much mentoring but they can sit-in and hear the Deans and Department Heads' conversations. We also have an Advisory Council, which is a council that advises our Dean...between the dinners and the Council meetings and the individual meetings with us they have about two meetings a month.

Role of Mentors in Development

Mentors were asked to provide their insights into what role the mentor/mentee relationship played in developing their mentees. There were three primary themes that emerged when mentors discussed how the mentoring relationship developed their mentees. First, some mentors felt the mentoring process gave mentees an opportunity to gain insights into administrative career paths. Second, a group of mentors indicated the mentoring process gave mentees an opportunity to reflect and learn about themselves. A final group of mentors indicated they were unsure about the value that the mentoring process had on their mentees.

From an operational perspective, the most recurrent theme amongst the mentors was that the mentoring relationship developed mentees by providing them career insights. For example, one mentor indicated,

I think it's been very good. We've had long conversations about his career path because he wants to be an administrator. That's his goal...I've been able to help him develop a professional strategy at some point moving to administration at a time that he will be successful.

A second mentor said,

probably the biggest or the most important part of that would be making sure that after the experience is over that they do have an opportunity to talk about it...there's a fair amount of mobility if you want to be mobile in administrative positions.

As an extension of the administrative discussions, some mentors had even found opportunities for their mentees. For example, one mentor stated, "what I've been able to do is give him opportunities to lead."

A second theme that emerged from the mentors is the mentoring relationship provided mentees an opportunity to learn more about themselves. One mentor said, "I think that's pretty invaluable because it is different than a supervision type of relationship. It affords a lot more opportunity to really talk about things that they're struggling with, that they find challenging." A second mentor indicated,

I think given the structure of the program...it gave a participant somebody to visit with about the program, share their thoughts about what the value was being

extracted from the program and to just visit about some of the opportunities that they saw coming from the program for their own application.

A secondary theme that emerged was how mentorship can help a mentee better understand the land-grant system and their role within it. For example, one mentor stated,

He understands the land-grant is more than just a college of Ag. It is about how you serve a society ...How do we have an impact on the State. I think he really understands the full context of what a land-grant is.

A final theme that emerged was around mentors being unsure about the outcomes associated with the mentoring process. For example, one mentor stated, "You know I honestly can't say. It's like asking the question what good did your third grade teacher do you?" A reason why mentors were unable to identify the value of the relationship was sometimes attributed to lacking a specific conversation on the topic. For example, one mentor said,

I think the mentor/mentee at some point should have a discussion about what they want out of the relationship and we haven't had that. What do you want as the mentee? Where do you see yourself administratively? Do you see yourself continuing to move upward?

A second mentor had a similar experience, "I'd like to think it was very positive but I guess he and I have never specifically sat down and talked about that either." The mentors, as administrators, were very busy and sometimes quantifying value was not a priority. For example, one mentor stated, "Administratively we're very busy in our college," a second mentor indicated, "I don't think at present that we've had a culture of in fact looking at that on a systematic basis."

Supporting and Enhancing the Mentoring Process

Mentors were asked what they would change about the mentoring process. The most resounding theme across mentors was the lack of a set of expectations for the process was a limitation. One mentor summed up the process as, "I was the first person to ask- 'are there any specific requirements or guidelines or outcomes' and he told me it's a kind of up to us."

In particular, several mentors expressed a desire for a more formal structure for the process. For example, one mentor stated, "I think having more structure around... the expectations of the program or the expectations of the mentee or the mentor or both would be helpful." A second mentor had similar feedback when they stated, "making it a bit more formal and [defining] what the expectations were for us." Another mentor indicated a desire for mentor training when they suggested,

there probably could be some coaching of the mentors as to what role the mentor is supposed to play in the process. We made it up...but I was depending on [my mentee] to help me understand the value that I could have created.

A second theme emerged around the logistics of the process. For example, one mentor said they could have had more meetings when they reflected that they could have,

Probably inserted a few more meetings during the course of the year to be sure that we cover certain things, just to make sure she had everything that she needed and all opportunities were provided for her to really consider what this meant for her

and how she might be able to use what she has got out of the program and apply it.

A second mentor expressed a need for more face-to-face interaction when they stated, “I think you have to get real face time, real one on one meetings to make it work. Email and stuff like that doesn’t necessarily engage them.” Another mentor suggested a change to the expectations associated with program participants in their role suggesting that “maybe it’s encouraging administrators to build in a couple of extra days of professional leave when they come back or something along those lines that helps.” An additional recommendation was to include a project component to the program. One mentor stated, “I think that if they worked on a project they could get advising and support from a mentor to help them pull that project together.”

In addition to the constructive feedback about the process from some mentors, a minority group of mentors felt like the process worked well. For example, one mentor stated, “I’ve been pleased with it. I think we’ve got it fine-tuned.” A second mentor had a more philosophical view on the mentorship process when they stated,

I think that’s what’s nice about mentoring. You’ve got to practice it and when you practice it enough hours, and with enough opportunities, you know you get better with it like you would anything else in life. So I feel really good about the mentoring and advice I can give people now because it’s based upon a lot of experiences and opportunities I’ve had to just put myself out there.

Mentors were also asked what types of resources would assist them in further developing their mentor/mentee relationship. There were several themes that emerged regarding what resources would help. One primary theme was it would be useful to have session agendas or a program curriculum to provide context. A second primary theme was to establish a set of guidelines or expectations for the mentoring relationship.

Numerous mentors indicated that having a better idea of what was happening during the sessions would be helpful in directing their mentoring conversations. One mentor indicated, “If I, as a mentor, had a better idea of the framework and what the mentee was experiencing on the training side, I would have an opportunity to be a bit more formal in terms of structuring some discussions or dialogue.” A second mentor suggested expanding the scope of what is communicated to better inform mentoring conversations, stating

Whoever is communicating with people identified as mentors should help them understand what LEAD21 is targeting, what is the goal of the program, content, what are the objectives...So, that there is a closer connection and synergy between the mentoring program and what is happening in these three, week long sessions.

A second primary theme was the desire for some sort of formalized expectations for the mentoring relationship. Some mentors indicated a preference for a form or document with expectations. For example, one mentor suggested,

Well one thing would be if there is a handbook or just a few pages something called ‘Guidelines’ or ‘Expectations of a mentor’. You know some kind of contract. It doesn’t have to be very serious but if they could develop what are some of the ideas, suggestions, a template, activities, expectations of the mentor mentee relationship coming out of the LEAD21...It’s kind of codified so they know what to expect and the mentor knows that if they accept this person it’s reasonable for them to come by.

However, numerous mentors indicated a preference for a conference call to communicate expectations, stating

in fact, it would be better to do it as a conference call rather than a letter or some kind of a paper thing because I'm busy too and so making me take time to read through that would be more challenging. If you had me on the phone you'd have my attention.

Another mentor suggested, "I think once you get a mentor identified, having a conference call to communicate to them what the expectations are and how, from the program, the designers' and managers' perspective... What part this should play in achieving the program's goals."

In addition, one mentor suggested periodic conference calls for mentors, "Maybe if they just had a conference call with mentors or maybe there was some way in which all mentors could kind of you know hear how things were going, maybe just a conference call every now and then." Another mentor suggested providing guidance to participants in selecting a mentor by offering "some potential advantages and disadvantages of selecting a mentor that you know well versus a mentor that might be new." Additionally, there was a request for assistance with showcasing the LEAD21 program, "anything we can do to promote or showcase the program amongst our other administrators would be helpful. I'm not sure what that would look like though."

Conclusions

A number of themes emerged from the data that can inform future use of mentoring in an agricultural leadership program such as LEAD21. According to the responding mentors, the mentor/mentee relationship was generally established in one of two ways. First, the relationship was previously existing, meaning the mentor and mentee knew each other professionally or personally prior to the LEAD21 mentoring experience. Alternatively, the relationship was non-existing, meaning the mentee actively sought or was assigned a mentor that they did not know previously. Because the mentoring dyads were not organizationally designated, there were more opportunities for mentees to select mentors that they were either comfortable with or felt could help them. This approach was unlike what has been typically observed within previous mentoring research (McCauley & Douglas, 1998). However, the self-directed nature of the relationship also allowed for greater flexibility and provided insights regarding emergent mentoring relationships within an agricultural leadership development context (Day, 2001).

Consistent with Jones et al. (2014), mentors also indicated there tended to be two primary processes used for interacting with their mentee. Interactions were either formal or informal in nature. Formal interactions generally included structured meetings and scheduled check-ins. Informal interactions consisted of ad hoc meetings, or linking LEAD21 discussions to other work activity. The results of this study seem to contradict those observed by Ragins and Cotton (1999) regarding the influence of formality on mentoring relationship outcomes. In particular, in the current study less formal interactions tended to be associated with more subjective outcomes. There were fewer examples of mentors being able to clearly identify mentee benefits associated with the process.

Additionally, mentors tended to fall into two categories when asked how they see their role in developing mentees. Generally, mentors either indicated they saw their role as being subjective or objective in the outcomes associated with their mentee and the mentoring process more broadly. Mentors that tended to have a more objective perspective identified the need to provide mentees with career insights and to learn more about themselves. These career and psychosocial functions

would seem to align closely to the functions identified by Kram (1985). However, a second primary theme emerged that was more subjective in nature. In particular, some mentors were unclear about the intended outcomes associated with the mentoring relationship.

Based on the themes identified with the interview process a conceptual model linking the nature of the mentoring relationship to the structure and outcomes associated with the process has been developed and can be viewed in Figure 1. Specifically, when mentors indicated there was an existing relationship with their mentees the structure of their interactions tended to be non-formal with more subjective, or non-specific, outcomes associated with the process. To the contrary, when mentors did not have a previously existing relationship with mentees the structure of the process tended to be more intentional and formal. Additionally, mentors were able to articulate more objective outcomes associated with the mentoring relationship.

	Relationship	
	Existing	Non-Existing
Structure	Non-formal	Formal
Outcome	Subjective	Objective
Support and Enhance	Formal Set of Expectations	
	Access to Program Curriculum	

Figure 1. Mentoring within a leadership development program conceptual framework

Although mentor responses regarding structure and outcomes could generally be categorized according to whether a previously existing relationship with their mentee existed, lines of categorical delineation were less evident regarding mentors responses around supporting and enhancing the mentoring process. For example, mentors from both relationship categories indicated a desire for a more formalized set of expectations. Additionally, mentors tended to agree that access to the program curriculum would help to guide the mentoring process. For example, knowing what content areas were covered during a particular seminar would help to inform what information should be discussed during subsequent mentoring interactions. The structural themes provide

insights on the order proposed by Allen and Poteet (1999) and should continue to provide guidance regarding the most effective methods to deliver educational interventions including leadership development through mentorship in this context.

Implications and Recommendations

According to the themes that emerged from the data a number of implications and recommendations for the use of mentoring to enhance leadership development programs have been identified. However, the transferability of the implications and recommendations should be considered within the context of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data analyzed here was collected from mentors involved in a large national agricultural leadership development program for individuals that are employed at various organizations where mentors are purposively selected by mentees.

First, participants of leadership development programs should be encouraged to select a mentor with whom they do not already have an established relationship. Chances are there are a myriad of individuals willing to serve in a mentoring capacity, so reaching out to build new relationships can only add to their network. In addition, they will receive insight from a perspective they had not previously obtained. Ideally established leadership development programs may even be able to provide recommendations for mentors within or outside the home institution that fit these criteria. Additionally, participants should be encouraged to select a mentor that is only one or two levels above them within their institution (McCauley & Douglas, 1998). For example, a faculty member may want to use a department chair or an associate dean as a mentor rather than a Dean, Vice Provost or even a President of a University. The responses obtained from this research revealed the mentors closer in position to the participant were more easily able to provide suggestions for leadership roles and moving up in rank.

From a programmatic and structural perspective mentors would like to receive an introductory email welcoming them to the LEAD21. This email should include a brief introduction, an outline of what is being covered at each session and possible questions they could discuss with their mentee. Guidelines or best practices for being a mentor should also be included. After establishing the mentoring relationship, mentors should receive updates on what was covered at the end of each session from the LEAD21 staff so they know what to discuss with their mentees upon their return. This ongoing communication should assist in making the information mentees received at the session more relevant upon returning to their roles at their institutions.

Another recommendation would be to consider sharing a list of LEAD21 participants and mentors. While LEAD21 participants have the opportunity to build a network amongst their peers, there is also an opportunity for mentors to establish relationships with others engaged in the mentoring program. Benefits to mentors could aid in participation and perceived value to all engaged in the process (Hunt & Michael, 1983). For example, an optional conference call to discuss expectations and welcome mentors to the program would also provide an opportunity for networking and establishing rapport with the group.

Finally, results from the LEAD21, including success stories should be shared with mentors in the form of brief reports or marketing pieces. These results may help to provide tangible outcomes associated with their efforts, but may also serve to help mentors promote the program within their institutions (Day, 2001). The results of this study indicated mentors believed in the program and were willing to engage in positive discussions to support its continuance but this communication and marketing capacity is currently being underutilized.

A limitation of the study is the relatively small number of mentors that were interviewed. From a qualitative perspective, the intent of the study was not been to identify empirical results that generalize across situations, rather it was to identify emergent themes within a particular learning context and to use such themes to identify trends and areas for future research. For example, a more comprehensive case study (Stake, 1995) or ethnographic (Fetterman, 2010) qualitative approach may yield more rich descriptions of experiences and outcomes associated with the mentoring process. Alternately, a quantitative study may be insightful in identifying expected mentee outcomes associated with the program and then using mentoring process variables, such as existing relationship status, as predictors.

Although mentoring has been established as a common practice in leadership development activities (Day, 2001) there also remain a number of aspects that require further exploration. The intent of this research has been to provide some illumination regarding the mentoring process within a particular educational environment and in so doing “deepen our understanding of effective teaching and learning processes” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 9).

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