Factors of mentor attrition from an after-school community-based mentoring program

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores factors of mentor attrition from the perspective of 11 former mentors all of whom prematurely exited a community-based mentoring programme serving low-income African American girls. Themes of *scheduling conflicts, lack of programme structure*, *disconnection from the mentoring organisation,* and *loss of relationship* emerged to describe the process of withdrawal and associated distress of termination. Recommendations for strategies to promote mentor retention are addressed.

Key words: mentoring, mentor attrition, community based mentoring programs

Introduction

Youth mentoring programmes are considered a powerful intervention for at-risk or disadvantaged adolescents associated with increases in positive behaviour, emotional regulation, and academic achievement (DeBois & Karcher, 2014; Maldonado, Quarles, Lacey, & Thomson, 2008; Spencer & Liang, 2009). Given the reported beneficial effects of youth mentoring these programmes have grown exponentially over the past few decades, with an estimated 5 million American youth involved in either school or community-based mentoring programs, and approximately 2.5 million adult volunteers serving as mentors (Spencer, 2006). Nonetheless, not all youth mentoring relationships succeed as most youth-mentoring matches terminate within six months (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Karcher, Benne, Gil-Hernandez, Allen, Roy-Carlson, Holcomb, & Gomez, 2006). Moreover, early termination can lead to less than optimal and even deleterious effects for already vulnerable youth (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). While researchers have illuminated structural aspects of mentoring associated with favourable outcomes (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), less is known about why mentors withdraw from programs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore factors of mentor attrition from the perspective of former mentors who elected to depart a mentoring programme before completing their term of commitment.

Mentoring

In general, many definitions of youth mentoring encompass the components discussed by Dondero (1997) who described a mentor as, "one who listens to, cares for, gives advice, and shares information and life/career experiences with a young person requiring assistance" (p. 882). Experts in youth resiliency studies contend that negative outcomes resultant from inadequate resources and support can be counterbalanced by a positive relationship with an older youth or adult role model (Chan & Henry, 2014; Brown, 2004). Indeed, mentoring has been found to contribute to several areas of youth development including social and emotional well-being, cognitive growth, and identity formation (Rhodes et al., 2006), as well as academic achievement, pro-social behaviour, self-concept, and interpersonal relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Because mentoring programmes have historically targeted at-risk youth, the militating effects of mentoring have been examined through the lens of race and gender. In particular, researchers have found mentoring programmes exert a positive influence on academic and behavioural indicators for African American males (Anderson, 2007; Maldonado et al., 2008; Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992; Townsel, 1997). Similarly, scholars have found that Latino youth can experience significant positive change on a variety of psychological and academic outcome measures, resultant from school and community based mentoring programmes (Barron-McKeagney et al., 2001; Karcher, 2008). Gender studies examining the effects of mentoring for at-risk girls have detected benefits associated with increases in girls' body image, self esteem, and prevention of high risk sexual behaviours (LeCroy, 2005; Maldonado et al., 2008).

Knowledge amassed from over 5 decades of research attests to the benefits of youth mentoring associated with mentee gain, however less in known regarding the contextual benefits experienced by mentors (Jones & Brown, 2011). Traditionally the mentoring dyad has been as represented as a 'top down' relationship wherein an older mentor imparts his, or her, knowledge, skills, and wisdom upon a younger protégé (Bova, 2000; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). This depiction supports the notion of the mentee as the singular beneficiary within the dyad and underscores the mentor role as an outlet to exercise personal and, or, professional altruism (Jones & Brown, 2011). Alternative models emphasise the reciprocal nature of the mentoring relationship; while the mentor uses his or her experience as tool for mentee growth, the process of serving as a mentor can engender one's personal growth (Kochan & Timble, 2000; Langer, 2010).

Evidentiary support for this reciprocal model of mentoring is evident in studies of workplace mentoring. Gilligan (1999) discovered that mentors experienced a greater sense of purpose in life by attending to the social and emotional needs of their mentees. Black, Suarez and Medina (2004) found that serving as a role model enhanced mentors' knowledge resulting in a sense of generativity and career rejuvenation. Additional studies indicate that mentoring can provide an avenue for self-improvement through enhanced self-perception, social relatedness (Karcher et al., 2006), and the development of wisdom and guidance skills (Colley, 2001). Although fewer in number, studies examining the perspective of adults who have mentored disadvantaged youth corroborate the findings of work-place mentoring studies. Terry (1999) reported that adult mentors expressed feeling more in touch with youth issues through their experiences as a mentor. Philip and Hendry (2000) found that adult volunteers attributed increases in self-awareness, insight, and psycho-social functioning, directly to their role as a youth mentor.

The power of mentoring as a stimulus for self-improvement, particularly for disadvantaged youth, has resulted in the meteoric rise of mentoring programmes (Ensher, & Murphy, 2005; Karcher et al., 2006; Liang, Bogat, & Duffy, 2014; Spencer & Liang, 2009). Nonetheless, not all mentoring relationships

are successful and in some cases terminated relationships can cause psychological harm and skill regression for the mentee. Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that premature termination (less than 3 months) of mentoring was associated with decreases in perceptions of scholastic competence and self-worth among youth mentees. Conversely, the strongest predictive variable associated with positive outcomes for mentoring is length of time and consistent contact (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Spencer, 2006). Rhodes and Lowe (2008) found that optimum effects of mentoring occurred in relationships that endured for multiple years. According to Spencer (2006), consistent contact must exist between the mentor and mentee for a minimum of one year in order for mentoring to be beneficial (Spencer, 2006).

Although researchers have failed to reach consensus in respect to the minimum period of time mentoring relationships must operate to promote positive outcomes, longer relationships are considered superior (Colley, 2001; Karcher et al., 2006; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Spencer, 2006). Unfortunately, 40% of youth mentoring relationships are terminated within the first six months (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Researchers who have examined the process of mentor attrition have found that dissonance around mentor expectations can serve as a precursor to termination (Colley, 2001; Eby & McManus, 2004; Karcher et al., 2006). Mentors often enter the relationship with elevated expectations for their mentee growth and expect to witness rapid results. Unfortunately, high expectations are reportedly displaced by feelings of futility when their mentees progress is perceived as disproportionate to their own efforts to assist them (Eby and McManus, 2004). Rhodes and colleagues (2006) suggested that mentors prematurely disengage from the relationship if a bond is not formed in a timely manner that involves trust, authenticity, empathy, mutual respect attunement, and sensitivity. Programme deficiencies related to inadequate orientation, training, supervision, and contact with the organisation have also been identified as factors that weaken mentors' commitment (Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 2015).

Mentoring outcomes have predominantly been assessed by evaluating changes in a mentees attitude, beliefs, and behaviours (Anderson, 2007; Barron-McKeagney et al., 2001; Karcher, 2008). Given this focus, the impacts of failed mentoring experiences have largely been examined from the mentees perspective (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). Nonetheless a limited number of studies have emerged that attest to the psychological cost of unsatisfactory relationships upon the mentor. One study exploring mentors' experiences of mentoring highly aggressive elementary children, found that challenging volunteer experiences can negatively impact a mentor's self-efficacy, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness (Faith, Fiala, Cavell, & Hughes, 2011). Negative mentor experiences are also associated with abuse, harassment, sabotage, and a mentees unwillingness to learn (Scadura, 1998). Mentors may also encounter ethical dilemmas, resultant from their role of a confidant without the authority to directly intervene (Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009). While additional research is merited, it would seem reasonable to infer that negative mentoring experiences may cause undue distress and compromise the overall volunteer experience.

Extant studies support for the notion that the mentoring dyad can create a mutual needs satisfying environment that can be a catalyst for mentor and mentee growth (Black et al., 2004; Gilligan, 1999; Spencer & Liang, 2009). Conversely, negative mentoring experiences can have a psychological cost for both mentor and mentee, associated with declines in self-esteem and psychological wellbeing (Faith et al., 2011; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Relational dissatisfaction is most notably marked by mentor attrition (Stuckas, Clary, & Snyder, 2014), yet limitations in the literature make it difficult to understand the complex factors that undergird a mentor's decision to terminate a mentoring relationship. The relative neglect of issues unique to mentor experience weakens understanding of the mentoring process and commensurate theory development. Over 4,500 organisations across the United States depend on volunteers to power their youth mentoring programmes, yet 40% of mentoring relationships end

prematurely (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), therefore becoming more attune to the subjective experience of mentors may provide a useful tool for promoting mentor retention. The goal of this qualitative study is to address a dearth in the mentoring literature by exploring the meaning former mentors ascribed to their decision to withdraw prematurely from a mentoring program. Two broad research questions were developed to guide the inquiry: (1) What was the dominant factor or set of factors that that caused you to leave the mentoring program? (2) How did your experience with the programme and your mentee influence this decision?

The Mentoring Programme

The mentoring programme in this study is part of a national organisation that provides afterschool enrichment to girls aged 6-18 from low-income families. The programme's mission is to reduce risk and promote positive adjustment through mentoring and psycho-educational programming designed to build self-esteem, leadership, healthy choices, and career development. The grant supported mentoring programme is offered in three formats: On-site individual, off-site individual, and group mentoring (on-site only). The regional branch serves 175 majority African American girls, many of whom participate in one of the three types of mentoring programs. The mentoring programme is coordinated by one full-time employee and is powered by a population of over 50 mentors. The all-female mentor population constitutes a heterogeneous group with a notable range in respect to age and ethnicity. While the organisation does not use a formalized mentor–mentee matching process, new mentors can request to work within a particular region of the city and with a girl of a certain age range. Mentors are encouraged to commit to one-year terms of service, and for those mentors whose seasonal work and sports schedules preclude long term commitment, group mentoring is encouraged. Upon acceptance into the programme mentors participate in a three-hour group orientation. Depending on the type of mentoring programme requested, new mentors are either assigned to a specific site, or provided with the contact information of a prospective mentee's parents with whom they are required to meet before commencing off-site mentoring. No further formal training or professional development activities are offered to the mentors subsequent to the initial training session, however the mentor coordination office encourages mentors to seek their assistance as issues arise. Presently the organisation reports an average mentor attrition rate of 80% in an August to May reporting period.

Methodology

The Sample

In keeping with the case study design we employed a typical case sampling technique (Patton, 2002). This is a sampling procedure that qualifies participants based on their familiarity with a culture or programme being studied. The goal of this investigation was to understand the factors that informed mentors decision to exit a mentoring program. We identified 11 former mentors who had served as mentors between 6 months to 1 year, all of whom departed the programme prior to their committed term. The sample consisted of 4 African and 7 Caucasian women ranging in age from 19-60.

The Case Study Approach

We used a descriptive case study approach to investigate the process of mentor attrition from an afterschool enrichment programme serving predominately African American girls. Case studies can be comprised of an institution, program, community, or individual. The unifying feature is that cases are single entity systems with clearly demarked parameters and a finite number of affiliated members (Merriam, 1998). A case study design was fitting for the current study given its focus on a specific programme within a bounded organisation. Descriptive case studies are considered advantageous when

little outcome data is available (Creswell, 1998), and given noted limitations in knowledge regarding mentor attrition, a descriptive case design provided a suitable methodology for data collection and analysis. According to Creswell (1998) case studies start with a quandary, followed by an in-depth investigation of the problem in context. This process in turn elicits an in-depth understanding of the system in which the problem resides. The deleterious effect of mentor attrition constituted the central dilemma experienced by the programme in the current inquiry. Accordingly, we were interested in developing understanding through exploring contextual factors associated with the attrition process from the perspective of former mentors. Utilising a descriptive case study approach we constructed a narrative report to describe the phenomena under investigation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews conducted by members of our research team trained in qualitative interviewing. Initial contact was made with 15 former mentors, 11 of whom agreed to participate in the IRB approved study, and expressed a preference for remote participation. 11 former mentors were interviewed individually on three separate occasions via telephone conferences that lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Semi-structured interviews provided a flexible tool that created consistency across interviews in respect to overall focus, yet allowed participants' subjective interpretations to prevail (Lincoln & Guba,1985). During the first round of interviews we followed Glaser's recommendation (1992) to develop understanding of the problem from the participants' perspective by asking neutral questions that elicit concrete recollections and descriptions. In subsequent interviews the process of theoretical sampling narrowed the foci to explore relevance and dimensions of emergent themes (Glaser, 1992). Two members of the research team were responsible for the co-construction of themes. Utilising an analysis procedure developed by Shkedi (2005) that tailors the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) to align with case study inquiry. Shkedi's employs a four-stage data analysis procedure: Initial, mapping, focused and theoretical. Because the goal of this research project was not to build theory we followed Shkedi's recommendation (2005) to omit the theoretical stage from the data analysis process. In the first stage of data analysis we transcribed the interviews verbatim, and repeatedly read the interview transcripts and interviewer's session notes. Next we began the coding process by using an open coding system, wherein we assigned initial tentative meaning units to the data. In the next step of the initial stage we compared and questioned the initial meaning units in order to work them into larger categories. Once categorisation was achieved, we began to map relationships and connections between them (Shkedi, 2005). Mapping provided the foundation for the subsequent 'focused' stage in which we identified central or core themes that became the focus of the study.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation is the process employed in qualitative inquiry to establish the validity of findings through exploring the phenomena from multiple perspectives (Patton, 2002). In an effort to support the cogency of derived themes we embedded the data collection and analysis process with three sources of triangulation: Data, investigator, and theoretical (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). *Triangulation of data* was achieved through closely aligning the development of themes to meanings ascribed by the participants. As we developed our understanding, tentative themes emerged that were subsequently sampled during the second and third round of interviews. This process afforded participants an opportunity to verify, or dispute, our initial interpretations and collaborate in the construction of knowledge. In the final stage of data analysis, we provided participants with a copy of emergent themes and asked them to provide feedback on the accuracy of the themes and relevance to their experience. *Investigator triangulation* was addressed through the use of a parallel data analysis process wherein researchers independently coded data and mapped relationships between initial meaning units. In the final focused stage of data analysis researchers merged findings to collaboratively co-construct tentative themes. *Theory triangulation* was

addressed by inviting a colleague, skilled in qualitative inquiry, yet unfamiliar with the current study, to review a clean copy of the transcripts free of notes or categories (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The auditor read the transcripts and identified categories without prior knowledge of our analysis. The scope and nature of the categories identified by the auditors closely echoed those established by members of our research team, thus, further validating the results presented herein.

Results

Factors to mentor attrition

Out of the 11 former mentors, 5 had served as individual on-site mentors, 4 served as off site individual mentors, and 2 had served in a group mentoring capacity. Despite the differences in the structural aspects of their service, mentors' decision to leave the programme converged around four core themes: *Scheduling conflicts, programme structure*, *Disconnection*, and *The Loss of termination.* While pragmatic factors prompted the participants to terminate mentoring, participants expressed feelings of guilt and troubling emotions resultant from the breach in the mentee-mentor relationship. Interestingly, relational problems between the mentor and mentee did not emerge as a critical determinant in their decision-making process.

Scheduling conflicts

Participants identified schedule conflicts as a dominant factor in their decision to terminate the mentorship relationship. Mentors volunteered with no specific finish time in mind. Participants joined the mentorship programme to, "giveback to the community," to be a, "positive role model and a friend," and, "to network professionally". However, busy schedules and work commitments created obstacles for mentors to continue participating. For example, one participant said, "My schedule was crazy, so the decision to leave was not really my own." Participants expressed a desire to be fair to their mentee and avoid letting them down but scheduling conflicts prevented sustaining long-term mentoring relationships. Some of the participants were university students and arranged to mentor in congruence with their semester schedules, skipping the summer months altogether. University students had made initial commitments based on their work and school obligations, but their schedules changed every semester. For instance, one participant attributed her decision to leave to her fickle school schedule, "I didn't plan to do it only for a school year, but my schedule kept changing from semester to semester and I couldn't be consistent." Another said, "I'm on the [university] tennis team and our schedule changes constantly." The other participants interviewed cited moving out of the city and illness as reasons to end the relationship. "I felt really bad about exiting the programme because I didn't really want to [but became ill]; I enjoy working with the kids.

Lack of programme structure

The participants all noted a lack of structure in the mentorship programme characterised by the absence of consistent communication, formal feedback, and professional development. This aspect of experience created a sense of role ambiguity that participants recognised may have contributed to a wane in their commitment. Most of the participants entered the mentorship programme without prior mentoring experience or having formed any expectations. They recognised that the initial training session was helpful and staff were supportive, however participants repeatedly noted that the session's focus on, "What not to do", left them wondering how to establish and develop a meaningful mentoring relationship with their mentee. Subsequent to the initial training no additional professional development activities were offered to mentors. Participants thus, expressed feelings of uncertainty and anxiety in regard to developing a productive mentorship relationship and the process of becoming a mentor. One participant

said, "[the experience] is almost like you're being thrown to the wolves and you're left to figure it out." Central to this concern was a fear that they would be an ineffective mentor or disappoint their mentee. One participant said, "I didn't have any expectations. I just knew that there was a girl who needed a mentor and I didn't want to go in with any expectations because if it didn't match or meet or it came below, I didn't want to disappoint."

Participants expressed a need for more guidelines and feedback. Although the mentors were satisfied with the quality of their relationship with their mentee, many suggested a need for validation from the mentorship organisation regarding mentee progress. One participant said, "We had to do a monthly mentor report and I know we submitted them, but I'm not sure what was done with them. Giving feedback on that would be good." The absence of structured guidelines for working with mentees gave rise to a disconcerting experience for one mentor after the relationships had ended. The participant complained that she, "didn't know it was against the rules to contact my mentee…the parents got really mad at me." In the absence of clear guidelines for termination this participant felt the organisation had placed her in a vulnerable position. The participant's frustration toward the organisation was epitomized by her candid remark, "I didn't leave mentoring, just the organisation."

Disconnection from the mentoring organisation

Disconnection from the organisation and other mentors is contextually related to the theme of *programme structure*, however, it emerged as a distinct theme characterised by a feeling of isolation from the organisation and community of mentors. In addition to guidelines and training, participants expressed a desire for increased communication with the organisation and other mentors. Participants thought more communication would be, "beneficial to all parties" involved in the mentorship process. Since there was no training or education subsequent to the introductory training, the majority of the participants felt weakly connected to the organisation's administration. Ideas emerged from participants' narratives that would have increased opportunities for networking with peers and the organisation. One interviewee stated, "I think some activities we [mentors] would have benefited from, kind of to encourage each other." A formal meeting to share ideas for activities and topics of discussion for the mentor/mentee relationship was suggested by several of the participants. One participant said: "…just having that dialogue, you know, the directors and the employees of the operation – they can throw out ideas and come together, or even the kids can make suggestions for things they'd like to do." Although participants felt a need for more community with fellow mentors and the organisation, none of the former mentors conveyed this interest to the mentor programme coordinator prior to exiting the program.

Loss of the relationship

Reflecting on the termination of the relationship with their mentees, participants reported a sense of loss, describing this experience as, "extremely difficult". One interview participant said,

> I really wanted to be able to do it [continue mentoring] and I loved doing it, so it was really a hard decision for me to do but I just knew that I couldn't continue to put in all the time that it required with mentoring that she deserved … I was kind of upset with myself.

Another participant had initiated mentoring when she moved to the city as a means to offset loneliness, yet was compelled to withdraw when her seasonal work as a tax consultant saturated her schedule. Conversely, it seemed less distressing for mentors when both parties could no longer continue the relationship.

I decided to make the decision not to continue because she[mentee] moved to a different school district and wasn't able to continue the rest of the school year. That actually made it a little easier because it wasn't that she was being left… so I wasn't completely abandoning her.

Participant narratives outline the contrast between the initiation and the termination of the relationship.

"At the beginning I felt so much hope and excitement, then at the end I just faded away." In this respect, the absence of organisational structure negatively influenced the termination process as most participants felt a need for more guidance from the organisation. For example, one participant said, "I think it would have been easier to terminate if there was a do list or exit interview."

Another participant stated:

I just think that if they had standard procedures on how to operate as far as leaving, everyone would've been of one accord, and everybody would've had the same understanding versus say well, she's gone, so what? Get her a new mentor. Then be done with it.

Discussion

The mentoring organisation in this study experienced elevated rates of mentor attrition resultant in a perpetual cycle of recruitment that created disturbances at both the individual and programmatic level. Using a case study design the purpose of this study was to identify the reasons former mentors ascribed to their decision to prematurely leave a mentoring program, and was guided by two broad research questions: (1) What was the dominant factor or set of factors that that caused you to leave the mentoring program? (2) How did your experience with the programme and your mentee influence this decision? Themes of *scheduling conflicts, lack of programme structure*, *disconnection from the mentoring organisation,* and *loss of relationship* emerged to describe the process of withdrawal and associated distress of termination. Case studies provide a pragmatic approach to research that support programme evaluation processes by illuminating the context within which systemic problems occurs (Creswell, 1998). While strategies for mentor retention practices discussed herein are contextual to the mentoring programme under study, by situating results in the wider research, the results may be useful for understanding general factors that contribute to attrition in other community-based youth mentoring programs.

Mentor dissatisfaction toward their mentee has been consistently associated with mentor attrition (Colley, 2001; Karcher et al., 2006; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Spencer, 2006). Nonetheless, the participants in the current study dismissed the notion that frustration toward their former mentee influenced their departure. Mentors' emotional attachment to their mentee was evident in the loss surrounding termination, and in this respect supports reciprocal models, which depict the mentoring dyad as a mutual, need satisfying relationship (Black et al., 2004; Gilligan, 1999). This finding is further supported by the testimony of participants whose decision to become a mentor was made, in part, to make new relational connections.

Time management was a dominant theme central to the former mentors' decision to withdraw from the program. Although the mentors felt connected to their mentee, the exigencies of their daily lives eventually interfered with their ability to sustain a long-term volunteer commitment. According to

Spencer (2007), there is a tendency in youth mentoring research to emphasise positive aspects of the experience for both mentor and mentees, and in this respect may account for a lack of information regarding inherent impracticalities associated with the maintenance of long term mentoring relationships. Many of the participants expressed an interest in resuming mentoring as their schedules opened up, yet were unsure if the organisation would allow them to rejoin the program. Given the substantial time afforded to mentor recruitment, the organisation could manage the flow of mentors into and out of the system by recommending group mentoring for prospective mentors unsure of the length of time they can dedicate to service, and create a structured re-entry option to encourage former mentors to return.

Lack of programme structure was a persistent complaint voiced by all participants, characterised by an absence of professional development opportunities, communication and formal feedback. This finding converges with data from other studies that demonstrated on-going training, orientation, supervision, and contact with the organisation are instrumental to retention efforts (Stuckas & Tanti, 2005). A comprehensive review of national mentoring training standards indicated that on average mentoring organisations dedicate 3 hours to pre-match training (Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000). Yet, researchers have noted that single session training is fundamentally insufficient given that mentoring relationships are characterised by five distinct phases of development: introduction, relationship building, growth, maturation, and transition (Murphy and Ensher, 2006). With this in mind, researchers have recommended that programmes offer on-going training that attends to the professional development needs of mentors at each of these critical stages (Stukas et al., 2014).

Within the current study, the initial pre-match induction training offered by the mentoring programme provided rudimentary information to guide mentors through the introductory phase, yet evident in their narratives was a need for follow-up workshops focused on relationship building and communication strategies. In addition to a desire for more training, the mentors expressed an interest in connecting to the wider population of mentors within the organisation. Because the mentors identified peer support as a potential resource that may have improved their experience, it is plausible that mentor networks could be created to offset factors associated with mentor attrition. Nonetheless, little is known regarding the ameliorative function of peer-support within mentor programs, and this preliminary finding requires corroboration through follow-up and corollary investigations.

As a consequence of the programme's weak structures for outreach, mentors experienced a sense of disconnection characterised by role insecurity and lack of direction. Feelings of doubt have been found to diminish mentor self-efficacy, affecting the quality of the relationships and mentoring outcomes (Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2014). Certainly the participants in this study had at times questioned the impact of their efforts especially when mentees demonstrated no discernable growth. Closely, associated to mentors' desire for validation and support was participant frustration that they received little feedback regarding their service. Findings from previous research indicate that mentor commitment diminishes when mentors' efforts are not reinforced by evidentiary gains in their mentee's development (Eby & McManus 2004). The participants mentioned submitting monthly reports for which they received no feedback. In response to this perceived breach in communication the organisation could introduce a feedback process to provide mentors information on indicators of mentee growth (e.g. academic, behavioural, attitudinal).

Most compelling was participants' sense of loss and guilt associated with termination. Abrupt and premature endings of mentoring relationships are associated with mentee skill regression and feelings of rejection (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), yet little has been written about the experience of termination from the mentee perspective. Participant sadness toward the dissolution of their relationship contrasts to the

hope and excitement of their earlier experiences as a mentor. This finding indicates that mentors, too, experience the deleterious effects of termination. Following a developmental model of mentoring, all relationships will eventually come to an end. Therefore, activities that prime both the mentee and mentor for closure could be implemented to normalise negative emotions, reinforce positive growth, and acknowledge mentor contributions. Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonica (2014) have suggested that preparing a mentee for termination is a function of informed consent, and should be addressed by mentors at the outset of mentoring and periodically throughout the relationship. Instituting formal policy, rituals, and activities that train mentors to prepare for closure may also assuage negative feelings associated with the transition. Recommendations, located in the wider literature, include developing explicit closure policies, providing ideas to celebrate endings and process emotions, conducting exit interviews to solicit feedback and ensure both mentee and mentor are not adversely affected by the termination (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonica, 2014).

Limitations

The themes derived from the research were based on former mentors' narratives that conveyed their contextual experience within a mentoring organisation. The themes do not necessarily reflect the experiences or perceptions of other former mentors who did not participate. Despite, achieving thematic saturation in the data analysis, this limitation restricts transferability of results to the overall population of former mentors who served this particular organisation. Furthermore, follow-up research could be conducted with current mentors to explore the relevance of emergent themes to their experience within the organisation. Finally, relational issues was a non-theme in this current inquiry and contrasts to the research that cites negative experiences between the mentor-mentee relationship as instrumental to the mentor attrition process (Eby &McManus, 2004; Rhodes et al., 2006; Scadura,1998). Quantitative inquiry could complement this study by exploring aspects of the mentor-mentee relationship, which may have influenced mentor departure, through an empirical lens.

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