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Cultural influences in mentoring endeavors: applying the Cultural Framework Analysis Process

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the usability of the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process*, a strategy designed to examine cultural factors in mentoring endeavors and to identify whether there are patterns of cultural elements that served to hinder or facilitate mentoring programs across a variety of organizations and contexts. The process also involves identifying methods for overcoming the barriers and enhancing the facilitating factors.

Design/methodology/approach – Graduate students in a class on mentoring were given an assignment to analyze a mentoring program using the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process*. They were also asked to share their most significant learning outcomes. Data were gathered by two student groups over a two-year period. Researchers determined the usability of the analysis process by evaluating the quality of the student submissions. They aggregated the data and conducted a content analysis on the facilitating and hindering factors to determine commonalities and the lessons learned.

Findings – The *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* appears to be a useful tool in examining and dealing with cultural elements in mentoring programs and relationships. The barriers and facilitating factors were closely related to one another. The five barriers to success were matching processes; mentee attitude toward matching; lack of organizational support; static or closed organizational culture; and organizational or community culture. The five factors that facilitated mentoring endeavors were: comprehensive and flexible matching; mentee/mentor attitudes; training; organizational culture and demonstrated commitment; and a focus on mentees.

Practical implications – The ability to examine the cultural elements in the context of mentoring is vital in assuring mentoring success. Having a description of how the process was conducted should be of value to those wanting to engage in similar analyses. The findings related to the factors identified should help guide those engaged in mentoring endeavors to become more aware of elements to consider and deal with as they create and operationalize their programs.

Originality/value – There is a need to enhance the knowledge about the cultural factors involved in mentoring programs and relationships. This research study expands the understanding and presents findings about barriers and supports to mentoring that have not been previously reported. It also provides a mechanism for others to conduct similar analyses as they develop, implement and research mentoring endeavors.

Keywords Mentoring, Barriers, Culture analysis, Facilitating factors

Paper type Research paper



Mentoring has become an international phenomenon spurred on by our expanding global environment (Mullen, 2012) and the technological age (Butler *et al.*, 2013). Mentoring occurs within a context and the elements of that context influence the mentoring (Irby, 2013). The success or failure of mentoring programs is dependent upon many factors. Among the most prominent of these are the cultural aspects inherent within individuals, organizations and the society in which the program is implemented (Kochan and Pascarelli, 2012). Although there is not a universally accepted definition of the word culture (Dorfman and House, 2004), we find the one proposed by researchers in the GLOBE project captures the essence of the concept. They define culture as “Shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations” (House and Javidan, 2004, p. 15).

Although there is increasing recognition of the impact of culture on mentoring endeavors, the research on this topic in education, although growing, is still limited (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Zellers *et al.*, 2008). One of the reasons for this limited research is the difficulty in identifying the connections between culture and mentoring relationships, program structures and strategies, and outcomes. Because of an interest in this area Kochan and Pascarelli (2012) conceptualized the Cultural Framework for Mentoring. The framework posits three cultural purposes for mentoring: traditional, transitional and transformative. They propose that the cultural purpose determines the roles that mentors and mentees assume. The purpose of mentoring in the traditional frame is to transmit the culture, values or beliefs of the organization. The mentor is the teacher and the mentee is the learner. In the transitional cultural frame, the mentee and mentor operate in a partnership that tends to be more collaborative than in the traditional frame. Here, the purpose is to foster growth in the mentee and help her or him to operate successfully within the organization while still maintaining her or his own cultural identity. In the transformational frame, the mentor and mentee roles are fluid. The purpose is to stimulate mutual growth and development. This type of mentoring often has diverse foci and purposes and involves the use of group mentoring or networks. The role of the mentor or mentee is determined by whomever has expertise for the particular issue being addressed.

Kochan used the Framework as a foundation to develop *The Cultural Framework Analysis Process*, a method for identifying cultural purposes of a mentoring program; examining elements that could strengthen or hinder mentoring endeavors; and then creating strategies to minimize the barriers and maximize the facilitative factors (see also Kochan, 2013). The present research study examined the value and usability of this *Cultural Framework Analysis Process*. The process was used by students enrolled in a graduate course on mentoring, who applied the Framework to a wide variety of mentoring programs that were focussed primarily on educating or supporting youth or college students.

This paper begins with an overview of research on the relationship and influence of culture on mentoring endeavors. The overview is followed by a description of the context and purpose of the research and the methods employed. Findings are then presented along with a discussion of implications and additional issues to be considered. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research.

Research on the relationship and influence of culture on mentoring

A comprehensive review of literature on the relationship between culture and mentoring in education is available in Kent *et al.* (2013). However, a summary of the

research is included here to provide an overview of the topic and a foundation for understanding the purposes and value of the study.

Individual issues

When researching individual cultural factors related to mentoring, the topic examined most extensively is matching mentors and mentees on individual cultural dimensions such as gender, ethnicity and social class. These characteristics, along with one's life experiences, help to shape what Wedell and Malderez (2013) refer to as each person's individual biography. These characteristics impact the way people view life and interact with others. There is growing literature on mentor attributes and the mentoring process. For example, Waters (2004) found that agreeableness, openness and extroversion were significant predictors of protégé-mentor agreement about the provision of psychosocial support. George (2015) discovered a relationship between mentors' socio-demographic profile and the mentoring activities they engage in. St.-Jean and Audet (2013) discovered that a mentor's intervention style impacts mentee outcomes. Examining mentee attributes, Searby (2014) has identified mentee traits that help foster mentoring success.

Although these studies have identified personal attributes that may impact mentoring relationships, the issue of whether it is valuable for mentors and mentees to share similar characteristics, though more extensively examined, is debatable. There are those who have found that pairing people with similar demographic profiles is advantageous and perhaps even vital to mentoring success (Crawford and Smith, 2005; Marina, 2015; Tillman, 2001). Poulsen (2012) agrees that matching by similarities, such as disability, may create strong connections. However, she suggests that it may also foster distrust for those who are dissimilar and inhibit personal growth and development. While mentoring relationships often result in both the mentor and mentee learning from one another (Wedell and Malderez, 2013), some suggest that differences in cultural backgrounds foster the development and growth of those involved in the mentoring relationship in a special way (Barker, 2007). Hejlsvig (2012) refers to the outcomes of mentee/mentor cultural differences as "double mentoring."

Although there is some disagreement about the matching issue, there appears to be substantive research that indicates that individual cultural similarities and differences should be considered when establishing mentoring programs and relationships and that it is essential that those involved in such relationships are open to and accepting of cultural differences in order for mentoring relationships to succeed (Clutterbuck, 2012; Gokturk and Arslan, 2010; Kochan and Pascarelli, 2012). Researchers also stress the importance of engaging mentors and mentees in training experiences to foster this understanding (Hobson and Malderez, 2013; O'Brien *et al.*, 2010; Poulsen, 2012).

Dealing with teachers in mentoring programs across the globe, Wedell and Malderez (2013) advocate that mentors and mentees engage in an audit to examine their relationship and determine any elements within it that may be creating a negative mentoring context. They also suggest that the mentors and mentees engage in learning together through the creation of parallel learning development project designs. Both of these strategies would appear to be ideal methods for gaining an understanding of cultural differences and fostering mutual learning. Since women and minorities and those with disabilities are often not available in large numbers in settings in which mentoring occurs, some researchers suggest that forming mentoring groups, which include colleagues with similar and diverse backgrounds, can incorporate the strengths

of having similarities and differences between those involved and also promote the growth and development of all (Angelique *et al.*, 2002; Unterreiner *et al.*, 2014).

Organizational issues

The relationship between organizational culture and the elements within it and mentoring operations and outcomes has not been widely studied (Hegstad and Wentling, 2005; Plakhotnik and Rocco, 2011). However, there is ample evidence that whether the program is designed to integrate individuals previously excluded from the organization (Devos, 2008), to foster their learning and an understanding of their role (Bang *et al.*, 2015), or to change a culture – for example, to move from a culture of independence to one of collaboration (Reali *et al.* (2015), deliberate steps must be taken to ensure that the environment supports the mentoring purposes and those engaged in the process (Zachary, 2011).

Among the most prominent organizational hindrances to mentoring are the perceived power differentials between mentors and mentees (Kochan and Pascarelli, 2003; Rawlings, 2002); an absence of trust within the relationship and throughout the organization (Hobson and Malderez, 2013); a lack of openness to diversity and differences between and among people and ideas (Enomoto *et al.*, 2002; Reali *et al.*, 2015); and inadequate support for mentoring programs within the organization, for example, not providing mentor or mentee training and/or not including release time in the day for mentoring activities (Kochan, 2012; Hobson and Malderez, 2013). In order to overcome these barriers to mentoring success and create an environment in which people with diverse understandings and ideals can learn from one another, it is vital that organizations examine their practices, beliefs and values and put strategies into place that that will foster their mentoring practices and the creation of a diverse work force community (Green *et al.*, 2012; Kochan, 2012; Poulsen, 2012).

The use of multiple mentors and the establishment of communities of practice, also identified as a means of overcoming cultural barriers between individuals, have been identified as strategies for overcoming organizational barriers to mentoring success (Grogan and Crow, 2004; McCormick, 1997). It is also essential that upper level administrators provide visible support through such activities as being active participants in the mentoring program, making positive comments about the program through varied means and assuring that those involved in these endeavors are recognized and honored appropriately. It is also essential that organizations integrate the program within their organizational structures (Kochan, 2002) and that those who have power and authority assure that there is continuous monitoring of the cultural barriers within the organization that limit or hinder the mentoring process and that steps are taken to overcome them (Kochan and Pascarelli, 2012).

Societal aspects

One's individual culture and the culture of the organization are impacted by the society which one inhabits. Society thus has an influence on the mentoring context and interactions that occur between those involved in mentoring within the organization. It often influences the way in which mentoring is conceived and operationalized, especially when it is functioning within the public sector (Kochan and Pascarelli, 2003, 2012). In these situations, mentoring endeavors are generally implemented through public policy, which often involves the power to impose program attributes and rewards and punishments for compliance or noncompliance (Fransson and McMahan, 2013). Values and beliefs and interactions among people are influenced by the mores of

the broader culture (Poulsen, 2012). Policies imposed upon people and programs may also flow from these societal influences (Fransson and McMahan, 2013). These influences permeate individual and organizational interactions and endeavors. There are studies of this issue relevant to particular countries and programs that demonstrate the relationship between societal culture and mentoring and it is not within the scope of this paper to present an in-depth description of them. However, a short overview societal attributes which may influence the mentoring context and culture is presented to provide a foundation for understanding the underlying concepts involved.

In an extensive study of organizational cultures, Hofstede (1980) identified four value dimensions present in national cultures. The first is power distance. This element encompasses the relationships people have relative to societal values and degrees of equality or inequality between them based on power and wealth. The second dimension is individualism or collectivism. This deals with the value placed on the rights of the individual in relationship to the state or group. The next value dimension is masculinity-femininity. This focusses upon gender identity and roles within the society. The last dimension, uncertainty avoidance, relates to the degree to which cultures and people within them are comfortable with uncertainty and will avoid it. In 2010, Hofstede and his colleagues suggested that, on the basis of research conducted by House *et al.* (2004), the World Values Survey (2012), and the Chinese Value Survey (Bond, 2004), past, present and future focus should be added to the value dimensions. This dimension deals with the degree to which people focus on and value these elements in their day to day lives and belief systems.

When considering the impact of societal beliefs upon mentoring programs and relationships, those engaged in creating and operating these programs must be aware of the values of the broader society and determine whether the mentoring program is seeking to support, modify or overcome these values (Orland-Barack *et al.*, 2013). They must also consider how these values might hinder and facilitate program activities and assure that steps are taken to deal with them appropriately.

Research context, purposes and procedures

Whatever environment one is working in and whatever purposes the mentoring program espouses, the message is clear. The context and culture of mentoring matter and they should be examined and addressed at all levels of interaction. This section provides details about the context and purposes of the research study and the methods and procedures used.

Context and purpose

Research has demonstrated that those who are mentored earn higher salaries, receive more promotions, and have greater career and job satisfaction than those who are not mentored (Alleman and Clarke, 2000). Ehrich *et al.* (2004), in their analysis of over 300 research-based mentoring articles in the fields of education, business and medicine, found that mentoring yields positive outcomes of learning, personal growth and career development. It is common to find mentoring programs for new professionals in almost every industry or field. Therefore, it is important for graduate students to be prepared for future mentoring relationships which have the potential to assist them in psychosocial and career development.

Recognizing the importance of mentoring to individual success, one of the authors (Searby), a professor in a College of Education in a major university in the USA, created a mentoring course for graduate students to enable them to gain an awareness of the

research on mentoring, to understand the elements that help create successful mentoring programs and relationships and to encourage them to engage in mentoring relationships. Dr Searby invited Dr Kochan to work with her to develop an assignment for the class focussed on cultural aspects of mentoring.

Research questions

The research questions addressed for this study were:

- RQ1. To what extent is the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* able to be applied to mentoring programs?
- RQ2. What are the cultural factors that appear to facilitate program endeavors?
- RQ3. What are the cultural factors that appear to hinder program endeavors?
- RQ4. What were the primary lessons learned by participants who used the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* to examine mentoring programs?

Class assignment and data collection

The assignment was given to students in two classes over a two-year period. In all, 17 students participated in the study. They were graduate students from a wide variety of colleges such as Education, Business, Health, Human Sciences and Engineering. The majority of them were working professionals, earning Master's Degrees through evening classes. This assignment involved having each student use the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* developed by Kochan (2013) to investigate a mentoring program. They could select a program with which they were personally involved or one which they found interesting. In addition to raising student awareness and understanding of the impact of culture on mentoring, this assignment was used by the researchers to determine the usability of the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* and to examine whether there were patterns in individual, organizational or societal cultural elements that served to facilitate or hinder mentoring program success across the 17 mentoring programs examined.

Students were advised to provide those being interviewed with information about the assignment and how the findings would be used. The names of any organization for which the data were published are pseudonyms and no identifying information was shared publically.

Each of the 17 students involved reviewed a different program. Students were required to interview at least one program administrator and were also encouraged to interview mentors or mentees in the program if feasible. They also were directed to review program web sites and documents to garner the information needed. They were asked to combine the findings from their interviews of those engaged in the mentoring program, with their own experiences and knowledge, if appropriate and with information from program documents to complete the analysis.

Students began the analysis process by identifying the cultural purposes of the mentoring program as traditional, transitional or transformative as defined in the *Cultural Framework* developed by Kochan and Pascarelli (2012). They then applied the analysis process presented in the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process developed by Kochan* (2013). This involved examining the roles of the mentee/mentor to determine the extent to which they matched the mentoring purposes. Next, they were to consider the individual, organizational and societal barriers to the mentoring program and the elements within these contexts that might foster the program's ability to meet their cultural purposes and assure success. Students had to present evidence from the interviews, documents, or

personal experience to support their findings. For example, if they said that one of the barriers was that there was not an organizational culture of support for the program, they had to provide some evidence such as statements by the interviewees, examples found in the way the program was structured (e.g.) mentor/mentee pairs received no “off time” to participate in the process), information from the program documents, or their own personal experience in or with the program. They were then to propose strategies to minimize the barriers and maximize the facilitating dimensions.

Students were directed to write up the procedures they engaged in and their findings with specific evidence to support their statements and conclusions. They were also asked to provide a summary of their findings in written or tabular form. A sample of a student’s completed summary is presented in tabular form in the Appendix. The student is one of the authors of this research study (Edge). The program name displayed is a pseudonym. The table is presented to provide a more in-depth understanding of the process students engaged in. It is important to remember that this is just a summary chart and does not include all the evidence and information contained in the student’s report. Students were also asked to provide a summary of the most important learning outcomes of conducting the analyzing a mentoring program using the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process*.

Students were advised to define culture very broadly. For instance, a shortage of funds, which might hinder progress, could be considered as a cultural element within the organization because it might indicate a lack of organizational or individual commitment to the program. Students were also directed to consider not only visible aspects of culture such as race, ethnicity and gender, but to also examine issues related to beliefs and values of individuals, organizations and societies that might impact mentoring purposes, activities and actions.

Student grades on the assignment were not in any way related to whether they viewed the programs and any problems they might identify as being negative. Rather, they were graded on their ability to clearly state their findings and present their evidence and rationale for their conclusions.

Data analysis

For the first research question, the researchers considered the ease with which students were able to complete the assignment and the quality of the final products submitted to determine the extent to which students were they extent to which the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* was a useful procedure for identifying cultural purposes, discussing potential cultural elements that fostered or limited program success, and considering strategies to deal with these issues. To address questions 2 and 3, two of the authors (Kochan and George) conducted an independent analysis of the findings by aggregating the data on the cultural barriers and facilitating factors and a content analysis to determine commonalities and themes. They then shared and discussed their individual findings and came to a consensus on the themes for each element. They repeated the analysis process to address question 4, dealing with lessons students had learned through this assignment. The findings for each question and a discussion of their meaning and implications are included in the sections that follow.

Limitations

When considering the findings of this research study, there are four limitations to consider. First, slightly more than half (nine of the 17 students) had little or no personal experience with the mentoring program they examined. Therefore, their knowledge of

the program they investigated and its context were based on the perceptions of those they interviewed and the documents they reviewed. Second, although some students interviewed mentors or mentees, most students interviewed only program managers or administrators. Thus, these individuals may have had reason to share the more positive aspects of the program. However, since the findings involved each student combining evidence to reach their conclusions about the program they investigated and the researchers combined data from across all programs to reach their conclusions, these two limitations should have been minimized.

A third limitation involved the analysis process itself. Although the analysis and findings present cultural issues as being individual, organizational and societal, it is important to note that these are closely interrelated and often overlap. For example, in one program, focussed on mentoring college women into the field of engineering, there was a shortage of women engineers to serve as mentors, and sometimes a shortage of women to mentor. This could be the result of individual reluctance on the part of females to join this field, negative cultures within universities or other organizations which may not accept, hire, welcome or support female engineers, or societal ideas about who can or should be an engineer. Thus, at times, students had to determine a category to place the issue in. Finally, although two of the programs were operating online, with an international audience of mentors and mentees, the majority of the programs examined were situated in the USA. Despite these limitations, there were some consistent themes and patterns that emerged from the compilation of the data across the programs that should be of value when considering cultural factors that can influence mentoring activities in education.

Usability of the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process*

The first question addressed was whether the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* was usable in conducting a cultural analysis of mentoring programs. Students were advised that they should contact the professors about any questions, concerns or problems they had when using the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process*. Although some students contacted the professors to ask questions, their queries were related more to issues such as whether we thought it might be better to examine one program rather than another, or whether the documents they had to examine would be adequate, none of the students asked questions about the process or the manner in which they should define or apply “culture” to the work. Once the assignments were submitted, all but two were acceptable with the first submission. Two of the students whose papers had to be revised were asked to provide more specific evidence for their findings and conclusions. Both were able to do so. This led the researchers to conclude that the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* was easily understood and applied and that it can be a useful guide in understanding and dealing with cultural aspects of mentoring.

As might be expected, the researchers found that the value of this process was largely dependent on the quality of the data gathering process and the knowledge of the person conducting it. As one student shared:

I found that the order in which you get the information on a program can color your impressions. I wish I had had the written reports of the project before I had conducted the interview. I would have gotten more salient information had I done more extensive research before the interview.

Another student noted the importance of having an extensive body of knowledge before making decisions about cultural issues. She read materials about the

organization that made her think that it had a strong culture of diversity. However, when conducting the interview of the program manager, she discovered that the material she had read was written to reflect a reality that did not exist. She said, "If I had moved forward with my assessment of (the culture of the) mentoring program I would have based it on a great deal of misinformation. One article that I was going to use was basically put out for a recruiting tool to get women engineers in the workplace." She presented evidence that the actual culture within which this mentoring program was operating was lacking in diversity and in a desire to change and thus served as a barrier to success.

Cultural factors that facilitated and hindered mentoring endeavors

In all, 15 of the 17 programs examined focussed on educating youth or students moving to or participating in higher education. The two other programs, although not focussed on education or assisting youth or college students, had educational purposes. One program, operated by a trade organization, paired seasoned tradespersons with novices to aid them in developing their skills in order to succeed in the trade. The second program, functioning within a major corporation, was focussed on developing leadership skills in middle management employees. Thus, the findings of this study, related to the factors that support and hinder mentoring programs, have relevance for those engaged in mentoring in education who are striving to enable students and people of all ages to succeed.

Cultural barriers in mentoring

There were four cultural barriers to success. They were: matching processes; mentee attitude toward matching; lack of organizational support; static or closed organizational culture; and organizational or community culture values. Just as research in the literature focussed primarily on the issue of mentor/mentee matching, the most prominent issue noted by students in their analysis also dealt with this topic. Most, though not all, programs used some type of system to match mentors and mentees. They generally used a variety of factors to match people. Some were quite simple, while others were very complex. Some programs used, a hands-on method, in which individuals personally created the match by reading about the backgrounds and interests of the individuals involved. Others used computerized system involving an extensive set of elements and involved the use of used algorithms or a variety of personal attributes. Since human beings are involved in this process, it is quite obvious that there is no guarantee that any system, no matter how simple or complex is foolproof. Thus, while matching systems may be helpful, those involved in the process indicated the reality that no matter how well they may seek to match people, mentoring success ultimately depends upon humans beings. As one program manager, who used a complex computer system to match mentoring pairs, communicated to his organization's mentors and mentees, "It's only an algorithm folks'. At the end of the day, we're creating complex, variable human relationships, or should I say, you are, so it's still up to you to keep your expectations and demands on each other reasonable."

A second issue that served as a barrier in the matching process was the attitude of the mentee toward matching. Although many organizations stressed that mentees should try not to be too restrictive when setting parameters for matching themselves with mentors, a number of programs noted that mentees sometimes were very rigid in

the attributes they were seeking in a mentor. These attributes were often closely tied to cultural dimensions. As an example, one program specifically ignored ethnicity in matching, as the program organizers were seeking to avoid stereotyping people. They choose instead to match based upon education, interpersonal skills and mentoring style. However, in the evaluation, they found many mentees mentioned this as a problem, saying they felt they would have learned more if their mentor had been “more like them.” This desire for mentees to want to learn from someone like themselves was a consistent theme across the program data.

Although the literature previously noted, stressed the value of having mentor/mentee pairs with similar backgrounds (Crawford and Smith, 2005; Marina, 2015; Tillman, 2001), this was viewed by those interviewed and by the graduate students conducting the analysis as minimizing potential partnerships, learning and personal and professional growth. This desire on the part of the mentees was also a problem because in many situations, there were not enough mentors who possessed demographic attributes that matched those of their mentees. This lack of adequate mentors from minority groups was also noted in the literature (Johnsrud, 1991; Moore, 1982; Ragins, 2010; Swoboda and Miller, 1986). As noted earlier, mentoring research has found that having mentoring relationships across gender and racial lines yields benefits on both sides (Ragins, 1997). People different from the dominant racial or gender group bring diverse opinions and perspectives, and can enhance an individual's visibility in new places (Ensher and Murphy, 2005). Therefore, the reluctance of potential mentees to allow themselves to be matched with a mentor who differs from themselves in formal mentoring programs and its impact on mentoring success bears further exploration.

The third factor that hindered mentoring functions was a lack of organizational commitment and support. As might be expected, based on research about the importance of organizational support (Kochan, 2002; Kochan and Pascarelli, 2012; Hobson and Malderez, 2013), this resulted in hindering program implementation in a number of ways. In these situations, organizations did not integrate the program into their operations, nor did they provide adequate financial or administrative support for it. For example, one program, which was focussed on supporting first generation students at a university, received no financial or other support from the institution. It was an “add on” program funded purely through grants and donations. There was no reward or recognition within the institution for those who mentored. This made it challenging for the program coordinator to find and keep good mentors or to keep mentees involved.

Although many of the programs matched people with dissimilar backgrounds, some had little if any training and those that had training did not include issues dealing with culture. Additionally, some of these organizations did not build in time for mentors and mentees to work together, making it very hard for them to connect and often requiring them to do so on their own time. In such settings, it was difficult for anyone to make a commitment to the effort. Finally, inadequate commitment and funding often also meant that the number of staff members assigned to the program was minimal, making it difficult for them to engage in meaningful monitoring activities to determine the degree to which mentoring programs and relationships were operating successfully.

In addition to a lack of organizational support for mentoring, in some settings, the culture of the organization appeared to have a limiting effect on mentoring outcomes and perhaps on outcomes for the organization. In such settings, the organization was

adverse to change. Thus, the focus of the mentoring endeavor was on having the mentee accept all the traditions, mores and ideas of the institution. As one student wrote, mentoring using this approach may tend to stifle the new employee “by limiting outside ideas, concepts and new ways of approaching issues”. In such organizations, the values of the organization appeared to supersede those of the mentee whose role was to fit into the organization. In some situations, this meant that the mentee lost his or her cultural identity, and the resentment caused by this became a barrier to mentoring relationships or to potential program outcomes. This type of mentoring approach may be related to elements in the organization or society related to power detailed by Hofstede *et al.* (2010).

The need for the culture to be open to mentoring is addressed in the literature when dealing with issues such as teachers or other workers imposing their way of doing things as “the way” and engaging in judging others, which can have a negative impact on mentees (Hobson and Malderez, 2013). Because organizations are continually changing and diversity in organizations is growing on a global scale, if organizations remain static and seek to impose a single way of doing things on all of their employees, this issue will become more prevalent and is something that organizations planning mentoring programs will need to become more aware of.

A final cultural barrier was the attitudes of those in the community and/or organization within which the mentoring occurred. In a few situations, people within the organization or community appeared to believe that people should help themselves. Thus, they viewed mentoring as demonstrating dependency. They were therefore suspicious of mentoring programs and reluctant to participate in or support them as they viewed such initiatives as being unnecessary and something that would only be needed by people who were weak or unwilling or unable to stand on their own. This attitude may be related to issues related to individualism and collectivism (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). This is an example of the way in which societal mores can have a negative effect on mentoring programs and relationships.

Facilitating factors in mentoring

There were five factors that facilitated mentoring endeavors: comprehensive and flexible matching; mentee/mentor attitude; training; organizational culture and demonstrated commitment; and a focus on mentees. The facilitating factors are closely related to elements identified as barriers and in some cases, they helped to minimize or overcome some of these barriers. For instance, while the success of matching processes cannot be guaranteed, the degree to which programs actively worked to assure well matched teams and considered cultural aspects in the process, appeared to strengthen mentoring activities. The systems that seemed to work included a variety of elements used to match pairs. As one student shared, “mentor matching based on educational interest, interpersonal interaction and mentoring style,” seemed to be effective. Building flexibility into the system also seemed to be a positive element. As one student noted that although a comprehensive matching system was used, and it appeared to be very successful, “both mentor and mentee can opt out of the relationship” and a new match can be made if necessary. Said another, “in case the relationship does not work out, another mentee can be selected.”

The second element in foster success was the mentee/mentor attitude. While the reluctance on the part of some mentees to have mentors from a different ethnic or gender group was identified as a barrier to success, it appears, as noted in the research literature (Wedell and Malderez, 2013; Barker, 2007; Hejlsvig, 2012), that mutual respect

and commitment helped to minimize this issue in some of the programs studied. The openness of mentor and mentee to accept one another and worked toward mutual understanding, even when cultural differences existed between them seemed to foster the possibility for deeper cultural understanding. For example, one student wrote that the interviewee indicated that “students are exposed to different cultures and are forced to get out of their comfort zones. They become a family.” Said another, “openness, partnership, and sharing are encouraged.” In some cases, mentees had multiple mentors or they worked in groups. This also seemed to foster mutual understanding across cultures.

The third factor that fostered success, which may be related to the ability of the mentors and mentees to be open to cultural differences was that training was provided. This training appeared to be an important element in preparing mentors and in enhancing their role and their cultural understanding. Training ranged from a few days to periodic sessions while individuals were engaged in mentoring activities. In some programs, these training activities included a focus on cultural issues. What was specifically done in the training sessions is unknown and requires further examination. However, providing this training seemed to be an important element in mentoring success and is closely tied to the next facilitating factor—organizational commitment.

Just as a lack of commitment on the part of an organization hindered mentoring success, when the organizational culture valued and embraced mentoring and demonstrated a commitment to it, it appeared to thrive. Findings indicated that the degree to which the leadership in an organization was committed to the purposes of the mentoring program seemed directly related to the ability of the program to succeed. In such situations, the program was integrated into the organizational culture and there was sufficient funding, visibility and support within the institution. The program was adequately staffed with caring and committed people. Having this adequate and committed staff, with a person or people who monitored the mentoring relationships and outcomes appeared to be one of the most important facilitative elements in the operation of the program. These individuals helped keep relationships and programs on track. For example, one student wrote that the program coordinator “monitored the interactions that occurred between mentor and mentee” and that she “intervened when these interactions appeared to be sparse.” The need for adequate funding and structure to support mentoring programs is extensive in the mentoring literature, but the importance of a single person who monitors and facilitates relationships is something not often discussed.

As noted when discussing barriers, the values of the organization or community, which is part of the cultural context of the mentoring program directly impacted mentoring activities. Values that embraced mentoring served to enhance the process and program. For example, in a program focussed on recruiting and supporting female college students, funded by individuals in the engineering community there was a deep commitment to and a belief in the need to expand the number of women in engineering and mentoring them to help assure their success. In this instance, engineering associations and individuals contributed money to support the program. There was broad involvement through advisory boards that included constituents, community and professional leaders, to help guide and monitor program activities and levels of success. The values of this community were powerful elements in its formation and success.

The last factor that fostered mentoring was the degree to which the growth of the mentee took precedence over the needs of the organization. When the mentee was the primary focus, organizations created flexible mentoring relationships that included

networking, multiple mentors and opportunities to change mentors. In these settings there was the mentee's needs and development were central to the program. As one student wrote, "The mentors seek to instill confidence in the mentee and ask them to maintain their own identity." This approach seems to be based on a cultural belief that the individual is important and has something to contribute. This attitude helped to create greater commitment on the part of the mentee. This is an interesting finding not specifically noted in the literature on this topic, and one that should be further examined.

Lessons learned

The fourth research question addressed the primary lessons students learned from engaging in this process, of which there were four. First, as previously noted, students became more aware of the need to be open to working with and learning from others who were unlike them in order to grow and progress. A second important learning outcome was that students gained a greater understanding of the value of mentoring to both the mentor and the mentee. They wrote about the fact that mentoring sometimes led to job opportunities or opened up connections that a mentee might not otherwise have had. They also noted that mentors often were able to recruit high-level talent from the mentee group. The impact of mentoring on those involved also became very evident and students wrote about such things as "coming to realize how mentoring can enhance people's lives." Another student wrote that the assignment "enhanced my view of mentoring and the power it can have in people's lives."

Students also learned more about how to establish viable mentoring programs. As evidence of this, one student wrote, "I learned that I will need to conduct more program analyses before beginning a mentoring program here." Another noted that it would be very important to train mentees, something that not all programs have done. Students also gained knowledge of the important role that both the mentor and the mentee play in fostering the success of the program and relationships. For example, students wrote about the necessity for them to operate as a pair and emphasized the necessity of the mentor demonstrating a "willingness to care" and the mentee "having a willingness to be open to learning." Finally, students came to understand the way in which mentors and mentees must deal with cultural issues. One student captured the essence of this outcome when she wrote, "I came to understand that special attention must be paid by both parties that they acknowledge and even celebrate cultural differences." When reporting on a program in an organization where mentors worked with gang members, the student wrote, "The mentor does not have to abandon his culture in order to serve the interests of the mentee. There is an extraordinary effort [on the part of mentor and mentee] to engage value, empower, and recognize all the involved parties in the relationships."

It also appears that the concepts of cultural purposes embodied in the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* helped foster a better understanding of how context and culture influence mentoring programs and relationships. As one individual put it:

Before this exercise, I saw the match of mentor and protégé as being a function of individuals and individual cultures. In reality, the cultures of both of these individuals merge with the culture of the profession, the instructors and the corporations for which they work. Neglecting any one of these cultures may produce undesirable or at least inconsistent results.

This new awareness was beautifully described by a student who is also a teacher. She said that the activity had made her realize that she needed to reassess her role as a

teacher and to think of herself as less of a teacher and giver of knowledge and more as a mentor. She wrote:

It has helped me analyze the method in which I deliver a course. My previous experiences were at the University level where the 'chalk and talk' method was acceptable. However, as these students are often from a much more diverse background with different levels of understanding, delivering the material in a more holistic manner may prove to aid me in teaching. This has helped me to re-assess my goals in education, and how to approach students in a more meaningful way.

Reflections and future directions

The *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* appears to be useful in identifying potential cultural elements that may hinder and foster mentoring programs and relationships. Using it has also appeared to have been a very meaningful experience for graduate students and assisted them in understanding the impact of culture on mentors and mentoring. In order to fully test its usefulness, it would be valuable to replicate the study in other universities and/or educational settings.

Since this study occurred within the USA, it would also be meaningful to replicate it in other countries, with graduate students, using a similar process. In fact, such studies are presently underway in Denmark and India. These studies may validate the findings related to the barriers to and elements that foster mentoring success, provide more visible information related to the role and impact of the cultural elements identified by Hofstede *et al.* (2010) and help further the development the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process*. Although the students were given an opportunity to examine any type of mentoring program they wished, since almost all of them selected programs focussed on educational endeavors for youth and college students, it would be of value to conduct similar studies focussed on mentoring in corporate, governmental or health related settings to determine whether the types of influences found in this study are similar or dissimilar. It might also be informative to discover whether the experience of engaging in this type of cultural analysis results in similar learning outcomes for those involved.

It might be useful to create a survey from the findings of this study and conduct a quantitative study gathering data from mentors, mentees and program administrators in a variety of settings internationally to determine the extent to which the barriers and facilitating elements are present. It might also be useful to determine whether their presence is related to the type of program implemented, its purposes and the mentees being served. Another question to be addressed could be whether perceptions differ between mentors, mentees and program administrators.

Finally, prior to initiating a mentoring program, it might be helpful to use the *Cultural Framework Analysis Process* to engage individuals in dialogues dealing with beliefs about issues such as diversity, the need to sustain, modify or transform traditions and the role of mentoring in this process. This would establish a foundation for building these beliefs and values into mentoring program development, implementation and assessment.

Conclusion

Culture resides and operates within us, between us and around us. The organizational and social context we operate in, whether it is changing demographically or increasing in diversity or not, operate within a cultural context that can support or

hinder mentoring. We live in a global, technological age in which there is an expanded need to understand and communicate with people from differing nations and cultures. Mentoring is often used as a mechanism to bridge differences in cultural backgrounds. Technology is also helping to foster mentoring networks and relationships across countries and cultures. The reality of culture impacting context and the people in it, coupled with the global, technological environment within which we live, make it vital that we delve into cultural issues that can support and hinder our ability to create effective mentoring programs. The strategies employed in this study provide a method for doing so. The findings offer a foundation for thinking about these issues and clarifying them. The authors welcome replications and extensions of the study and would be happy to provide assistance or support to those who are interested in participating in such research activities.

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(See Appendix follows overleaf.)

Table AI.
Cultural analysis –
Jameston Mentor
Program

	Cultural Foci/purposes	Potential barriers	Potential facilitators	Possible actions
Leadership	Traditional The Learning Specialists are tasked with training new mentors and developing programs to keep the Tiger Mentor Program moving forward	Not enough training for new mentors is provided	Leadership is hopefully well versed on techniques to improve mentor understanding and mentee learning	Need for new training techniques; need for implementation of cultural awareness
Mentor/mentee roles	Traditional The Mentee is expected to learn/emulate study skills from the Mentor. Kochan (2013): "The relationship is similar to a teacher-learner model in a directed learning situation"	Lack of cultural understanding; lack of understanding as to what a "research-based learning and study skill" is and how to teach it. Mentees may also take offense at being told that they need a mentor	Mentors are educated adults/parents that may be sensitive to mentee needs	Use of cultural awareness workshops; training that sharpens the Mentor's knowledge of how to teach these "skills" effectively; need for mentees assigned with more cultural awareness in mind
Organizational leadership	Traditional organizational leadership has been in charge since the program was implemented	While organizational leadership is in a position to overhaul the program, the fact that they have allowed the status quo to remain suggests that they are comfortable with the current situation and unlikely to change the program	Organizational leadership is well educated and may see the need for change in certain practices as they relate to the program	Organizational leadership may choose to critique the program and ask the leadership to collaborate on a new plan

(continued)

	Cultural Foci/purposes	Potential barriers	Potential facilitators	Possible actions
Organizational Culture	Traditional/transitional Organization is concerned with keeping mentors "in their lane" and mentees on track to graduate; however the organization is attempting to help the mentee succeed academically by attempting to teach them skills that they hope will assist the mentee in being academically successful. Also, there are differences in the approaches of the leadership; finally, the racial makeup of the mentor population maintains a certain tradition	Mentor Program is unlikely to be truly transitional given the overwhelming traditional culture of the organization	Mentors with a better idea of how to teach the "skills" referenced might change the culture. Additionally, a transitional form of leadership would help move the organizational culture forward	Less of a focus on graduation rates and classroom success; more emphasis on overall mentee development not based on GPA alone
Societal issues	Traditional Mentors are predominately White females. There are at least three males, only one of which is black	There is not enough diversity within the mentor population to allow them to connect with mentees properly	There is a sense that mentees need help and mentors are willing to do what they can despite cultural differences	Training on how to handle social and cultural differences is needed

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