

A Framework for Conceptualizing Competence to Mentor

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Although advertisements for jobs in academe increasingly suggest that mentoring students is a job requirement, and although academic institutions are increasingly prone to consider a faculty member's performance as a mentor at promotion and tenure junctures, there is currently no common approach to conceptualizing or evaluating mentor competence. This article proposes the triangular model of mentor competence as a preliminary framework for conceptualizing specific components of faculty competence in the mentor role. The triangular model includes mentor character virtues and intellectual/emotional abilities, as well as knowledge and skills (competencies) that are seen as expressions of training and experience. The article concludes with discussion of the implications of this model for faculty hiring, training, and evaluation.

Key words: competence, mentor, mentoring, faculty, training

Although mentoring has been a topic of great interest and burgeoning research in the business/management literature for three decades, graduate educators have only recently begun to actively define the contours and explore the outcomes of mentorships in academe. Increasingly, educators are implored to become intentional and deliberate in arranging and managing mentorships with students (Ellis, 1992; Johnson, 2002). Research indicates that a satisfying mentorship is a strong predictor of satisfaction with graduate education (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000; Cronan-Hillix, Davidson, Cronan-Hillix, & Gensheimer, 1986; Johnson, Koch, Fallow, & Huwe, 2000; Wright & Wright, 1987) and subsequent commitment to an organization (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller 2000). Faculty in graduate

schools and medical schools are strongly encouraged to be particularly intentional about mentoring women (American Psychological Association [APA], 2000; Bickel & Clark, 2000) and minority students (Blackwell, 1989). Evidence suggests that, if mentoring does not occur in graduate school, it is unlikely to occur in the student's career thereafter (Swerdlik & Bardon, 1988). For all of these reasons, at least one educator has suggested that graduate departments have a "moral responsibility" to carefully devise a system in which students can receive mentoring from faculty (Weil, 2001, p. 471).

In spite of the accelerating attention to mentoring in education, and in spite of the fact that many academic job advertisements now specify that mentoring (like research, teaching, and service) is a job requirement, there has been no previous effort to determine the components of competence to mentor among college or graduate school faculty. Lack of attention to competence may stem in part from a "positivity bias" (Duck, 1994, p. 8) among administrators, who assume that all faculty can effectively mentor and that mentorships are always positive in their effects (Bigelow & Johnson, 2001). Although graduate mentorships are pervasively positive in nature and effect, they are simultaneously complex, emotionally intense, and occasionally prone to dysfunction or negative outcome (Biaggio, Paget, & Chenoweth, 1997; Johnson & Huwe, 2002; Scandura, 1998).

Although mentorships in graduate school are clearly fiduciary relationships in which the mentor accepts the trust and confidence of the protégé to act in his or her best interest (Plaut, 1993), ethical requirements bearing on boundaries of competence are rarely applied to the practice of mentoring. The APA (2002) ethical principles enjoin psychologists to provide services only within the confines of their established professional competence, yet few faculty search committees request evidence of mentoring competence, few academic deans demand ongoing assessment of mentoring efficacy, and accreditation site visit teams rarely examine mentoring competency and outcomes, when accrediting graduate programs (Ellis, 1992). Similarly, ethical codes from major professional organizations rarely address the mentor-protégé relationship: Most organizations offer general "do no harm" statements relative to work with students (Tucker & Adams-Price, 2001).

The purpose of this article is to provide a broad framework for conceptualizing competence to mentor among graduate school faculty. The author offers a triangular model of mentor competence, which holds that competence to mentor hinges on the presence of essential virtues, abilities, and micro-skills or competencies. Further, the triangular model has both theoretical value and practical utility. Because faculty are increasingly called to mentor students, and because conceptualizations of mentoring are often divergent or idiosyncratic, there is a need for a common approach to considering competence in the mentor role. The triangular model provides such a broad conceptual model. Although the primary focus of this article is on mentoring in graduate school settings, the proposed framework may have utility in undergraduate and business settings, as well.

The balance of this article is organized into four major sections. First, the author makes the case for conceptualizing mentoring as a distinct professional activity and a unique relationship form. Second, the case is made for the importance of understanding and conceptualizing competence in the mentor role. Competence as a deep and integrated structure is differentiated from the component parts or ingredients of mentoring. Third, a triangular model of competence is offered. Finally, the author concludes with a discussion of the applied implications of the triangular model of competence—particularly those bearing on faculty hiring, training, and assessment.

MENTORING IS A DISTINCT PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP

For the purposes of this article, mentoring is differentiated from teaching, supervising, advising, and counseling—other common roles of the graduate school faculty member—in that the mentoring is mostly a task of generativity: “The mentor engages in interactions vis-à-vis the protégé aimed at passing on his or her professional legacy” (Healy & Welchert, 1990, p. 17). Generativity is the art of bringing into existence, creating, and producing; it requires an active concern for the welfare of the protégé (Barnett, 1984). Although most faculty are required to advise students, advising and mentoring are not synonymous. As Schlosser and Gelso (2001) point out, “one can be an advisor without being a mentor, and certainly one can be a mentor to someone without being that person’s advisor. It appears that far more students have advisors than mentors” (p. 158). In contrast to advising, teaching, and supervising (common and relatively discrete faculty roles), mentoring connotes intentional and generative career development, as well as some degree of personal nurturing or caregiving—typically in the context of a relatively enduring and emotionally bonded relationship.

In contrast to other faculty roles, mentoring requires a faculty member to engage in a dynamic, emotionally connected, and reciprocal relationship with the protégé. As intimate and long-term alliances, graduate school mentorships often begin informally and involve some degree of attraction based on common interests (mutual interests of an enduring and intellectual nature), mutual validation (mutual expressions of positive regard and admiration), reciprocity (sharing of one’s experience), increasing trust, and successful collaboration (Bennetts, 2002; Rogers & Holloway, 1993). An apprenticeship process, which includes frequent interaction, social activities, and increasing collegiality as the protégé nears graduation, often facilitates the mutuality characteristic of mentorships.

In sum, two elements are fundamental and distinguish mentoring from other superior–subordinate relationships: (a) reciprocity and mutuality between mentor and protégé, and (b) accomplishment of an identity transformation, as the protégé moves from neophyte to colleague over a period of years (Healy & Welchert,

1990). The following definition, adapted from Johnson (2002), serves as a reasonable starting point for exploring mentoring competence:

Mentoring is a personal relationship in which a more experienced faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced graduate student. A mentor provides the protégé with knowledge, advice, challenge, counsel, and support in the protégé's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession. Mentorships are reciprocal and mutual by design, and the ultimate goal of the relationship is development of a strong professional identity and clear professional competence on the part of the protégé (pp. 88–89).

Before competence to mentor can be effectively evaluated, it is essential that academicians share a common conceptualization of mentoring. Definitions of mentoring have historically been far too broad and strikingly inconsistent. Mentorships are often named such only retrospectively, when a professor is appreciated and honored by a protégé long after the relationship has lessened in intensity (Bennetts, 2002). In one of the earliest coherent descriptions of mentoring, Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) noted that the mentor

may act as a teacher... [and]...as a sponsor... He [the mentor] may be a host and guide, welcoming the initiate into a new occupational and social world and acquainting him with its values, customs, resources, and cast of characters. Through his own virtues, achievements, and way of living, the mentor may be an exemplar that the protégé can admire and seek to emulate. He may provide counsel and moral support. (p. 98)

Most definitions of mentoring agree that mentors encourage the dreams and support the aspirations of their protégés, provide opportunities for protégés to participate in their work, help protégés become aware of unwritten rules and politics in the organization, serve as an intentional model of professionalism, assist protégés with gaining access to the profession (including initial employment), and provide both career advice and personal counsel when needed (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Kram, 1985; Wright & Wright, 1987).

Empirical Rationale for the Significance of Mentoring

The intense interpersonal exchange that characterizes mentorships can be expected to result in rewards for the protégé, mentor, and the organization, in both business (Russell & Adams, 1997) and academic (Clark et al., 2000; Zuckerman, 1977) settings. Benefits accruing to protégés include accelerated promotion rates, greater career mobility, higher overall salaries and compensation packages, greater personal and career satisfaction, enhanced professional confidence and self-esteem, decreased role-stress, reduced work–family conflict, and a sense of

enhanced power within the organization (Burke, 1984; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1988, 1989; Heinrich, 1991; Newby & Heide, 1992; Nielson, Carlson, & Lankau, 2001; Roche, 1979; Scandura, 1992; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Wright & Wright, 1987). Reviews of mentoring outcome research repeatedly find no gender differences in the number, duration, or efficacy of mentorships (O'Neill, Horton, & Crosby, 1999; Ragins & Scandura, 1994). Women in academic settings are just as frequently mentored, and just as satisfied with their mentorships as their male colleagues (Clark et al., 2000; Fried et al., 1996).

Mentors benefit from mentorships, as well. Active mentors report enhanced career satisfaction and fulfillment, creative synergy and career rejuvenation, loyal support from previous protégés, and organizational recognition for skill in talent development (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Scandura, 1994; Russell & Adams, 1997). Because faculty may benefit substantially from the mentor role, it is particularly important that educational institutions are cautious in assigning faculty to mentor roles, and in ensuring that faculty are competent and functioning ethically in relation to protégés.

Finally, organizations and academic institutions clearly benefit substantially from the presence of a vigorous mentoring culture. When junior personnel are mentored, an organization often experiences reduced turnover, greater organizational commitment, and higher rates of productivity and employee satisfaction (Wright & Wright, 1987). Equally important is the finding that most active mentors report that their own successful experience as a protégé was a primary influence in their decision to mentor others (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997): Thus, excellent mentoring tends to perpetuate more of the same in an institution. Nowhere is this truer than in academia. In her landmark study of Nobel laureates in the United States, Zuckerman (1977) found that more than half of the 92 laureates studied served as students, postdoctoral fellows, or junior collaborators under older Nobel laureates. She concluded that the social and relational ties between masters and apprentices in science are enduring and consequential.

CONCEPTUALIZING COMPETENCE

Although most disciplines have a vested interest in training competent professionals (Ridley, Baker, & Hill, 2003), most also struggle with how to operationally define the mentor construct. As a complex and multifaceted construct, competence is often oversimplified or ignored in the literature. Further, attempts to arrive at consensus on the definition of competence have eluded authors in most fields of professional practice (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998).

Within the field of psychology, professionals are required to operate only within the boundaries of their established competence: "Psychologists provide

services, teach, and conduct research with populations and in areas only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience” (APA, 2002). Psychologists are also required to undertake relevant education, training, supervised experience, consultation, or study, when planning to begin offering services in a new area (APA, 2002). Among clinical psychologists, competency might involve conceptualization, diagnosis and assessment, appropriate interventions, and the ability to establish a working relationship with clients (Vasquez, 1992); however, when an academic psychologist begins to mentor a graduate student, indicators of competence are considerably less clear.

In addition to the general guidelines regarding ensuring competence noted earlier, many other sections of the ethical principles for psychologists have bearing on competency when serving in the mentor role. These include delegation of work to others, maintaining confidentiality, personal problems and conflicts, unfair discrimination, sexual harassment, multiple relationships, exploitive relationships, discussing the limits of confidentiality, student disclosure of personal information, sexual relationships with students and supervisees, and publication credit (APA, 2002). Additionally, psychologists are charged with maintaining competence over time, which is a particular challenge in light of evidence that the half-life of professional competence may be relatively brief—by one estimate, 10 to 12 years in psychology, and as low as 5 years in engineering and medicine (Dubin, 1972).

Although graduate school faculty must appreciate the boundaries of their own competence, both academically and with respect to relationships with students, there is relatively little consensus in the literature among definitions of competence (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998). In fact, Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (1998) note that detecting incompetence appears easier than clearly delineating competence. Nonetheless, various authors have attempted to broadly consider the ingredients of competence in professional practice. Peterson and Bry (1980) held that four factors were central to conceptualizations of competence: (a) professional responsibility, (b) interpersonal warmth, (c) intelligence, and (d) experience. More recently, Pope and Brown (1996) described two types of competence required for excellent professional practice in psychology. *Intellectual competence* was defined as acquiring knowledge, consumption and assimilation of empirical research, and the ability to conceptualize problems and solutions, while recognizing the boundaries of one’s own knowledge. *Emotional competence* was described as the ability to emotionally contain and tolerate the clinical material that emerged in the course of providing services. Although quite broad, these models highlight the multifaceted nature of competence, particularly the intellectual and emotional dimensions.

One reason for the lack of discussion of mentoring competence is a frequent assumption that mentorships are always positive relationships, and that all professionals—particularly those with PhDs—must be capable of good mentoring.

Of this assumption, Duck (1994) wrote:

In the bulk of personal relationships research, the underlying assumption is not only that relationships should be nice, but also that people are nice: They set out constructively to develop relationships, help others in need, provide support to their friends, do nice things to maintain their relationships. (p. 5)

Similarly, in mentoring research, there is typically an assumption that any manager or faculty member can, and desires to, serve effectively as a mentor to any junior person. Of course, this positivity bias is not supported by mentoring research, which shows considerable variation in the level of satisfaction obtained from mentorships (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Ragins & Scandura, 1997). Like all relationship forms, mentorships fall along a continuum. Many mentorships are highly satisfying, but others are marginally satisfying, dissatisfying, or even, at the very extreme end of the continuum, dysfunctional or harmful (Johnson & Huwe, 2002; Johnson & Nelson, 1999; Scandura, 1998).

Of particular concern for our discussion of competence to mentor in graduate school settings is the problem of *marginal mentoring*. There is often a significant degree of heterogeneity in skill among faculty who might be deemed minimally competent to mentor. That is, there is a significant distance between adequate and superior competence (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998). For example, Ragins et al. (2000) recently studied 1,162 business employees and discovered a significant problem with marginal mentors and dissatisfying mentorships. Those authors described marginal mentoring in this way:

These marginal mentors may be limited in the scope or degree of mentoring functions provided. Marginal mentors may disappoint their protégés or may not meet some or even most of the protégé's developmental needs. These mentors fall midway on a continuum anchored with highly satisfying relationships on one end and highly dissatisfying on the other end. (p. 1178)

Not surprisingly, protégés with marginal mentors had career and job attitudes that matched those of nonmentored peers—significantly less positive than those of effectively mentored peers.

On the Distinction Between Competency and Competence

A final but essential component of any effort to conceptualize competence to mentor is the crucial distinction between mentoring competencies and competence as a mentor (Ridley et al., 2003; Wood & Power, 1987). Wood and Power (1987) referred to competence as a “deep structure” (p. 414), referring to the notion that competence means more than the sum of several orthogonal or discrete

professional competencies. Specific skills, techniques, attitudes, and knowledge serve as competencies; but competence rests on an “integrated deep structure (‘understanding’) and on the general ability to coordinate appropriate internal cognitive, affective, and other resources necessary for successful adaptation” (Wood & Power, 1987, p. 414). Ridley et al. (2003) recently elaborated on Wood and Power’s distinction, highlighting the fact that competence comprises a range of competencies or micro-skills (all of which are necessary, but none of which are sufficient), and the successful management of these competencies to achieve predetermined outcomes:

Competence depends on the dynamic interplay of the various competencies while applying the model. By skillfully managing the process [mentoring], professionals can adapt to individual differences, special cases, and unforeseen circumstances. Essentially, the purpose of the integrated deep structure is to coordinate and integrate the subordinate competencies and related skills in order to attain the predetermined outcomes. (p. 25)

Thus, competence as a mentor involves more than the sum of several important but insufficient mentoring competencies. Mentor competence is a deep and integrated structure requiring the faculty mentor to skillfully manage and integrate various virtues, abilities, and focal skills—all in the service of developing a junior professional.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CONCEPTUALIZING COMPETENCE TO MENTOR: THE TRIANGULAR MODEL

To address both conceptual and practical confusion surrounding competence as a mentor in academe, the author proposes a triangular model of mentor competence (see Figure 1). The triangular model includes three essential components: mentor character virtues, mentor abilities, and mentor competencies—encompassing both knowledge and skill. These components can be viewed as forming the sides of a triangle. Although the model is triangular instead of hierarchical, the model intentionally places virtues at the base of the triangle signifying their centrality and importance in underlying the entire competence structure. Although virtues and abilities can be developed, they are less malleable and more difficult to instill than competencies. In some respects, virtues and abilities provide the necessary conditions for subsequent acquisition and expression of essential mentor competencies. Although faculty mentors may lack knowledge or may struggle with specific mentoring micro-skills, these shortcomings may be relatively easily remedied whenever the mentor has the requisite virtues and capacities for mentoring. The following section describes the three components of the triangular model of mentoring competence.

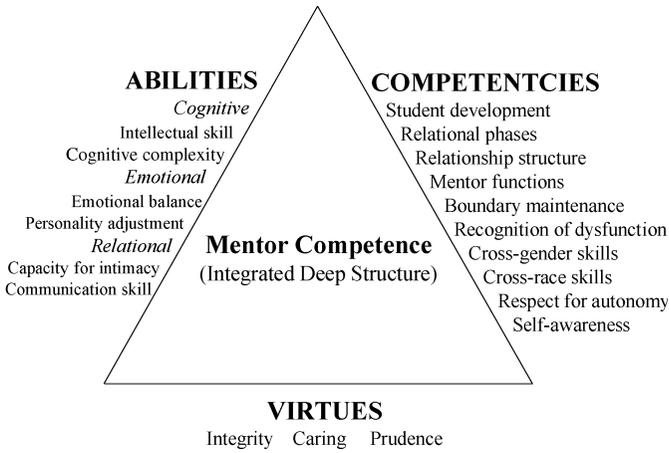


FIGURE 1 The triangular model of mentor competence.

Mentor Virtues

When queried regarding how others in the organization view their mentor, protégés in graduate school and business settings frequently describe their mentor as admired, trusted, genuine, and respected (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Burke, 1984; Clark et al., 2000). Senior academicians assert that the success of academic mentorship hinges on the formation of a relationship rooted in integrity, trust, and support (Ellis, 1992). Excellent mentoring requires three undergirding moral imperatives: (a) embracing a moral stance (engaging in mentoring for the explicit purpose of caring for the next generation), (b) creating a moral context (developing a supportive and safe place for the protégé to develop), and (c) engaging in a pedagogy of the moral (explicitly and implicitly offering a moral model of professionalism; Tucker & Adams-Price, 2001; Weil, 2001). In order to create a moral context for mentoring, I propose that mentors themselves must possess certain prerequisite moral virtues—virtues that cannot be instilled during graduate school or a new faculty orientation.

Historically defined as distinctly good or admirable human qualities that denote moral excellence or uprightness in the way one lives, virtues reflect the internal composition of one’s character. Meara (Jordan & Meara, 2001; Meara, Schmidt, & Day, 1996) has argued that character virtues should rightly serve as the foundation for professional ethics in psychology and other disciplines. In contrast to principle ethics, which undergird most professional ethical codes, virtue ethics call upon individual professionals to aspire toward ideals and to develop virtues of character that enable them to achieve those ideals. Principle ethics often focus on the question, What shall I do?; virtues ethics emphasize the agents (mentors) themselves (Who shall I be?).

Johnson and Campbell (2002) recently recommended the screening of professional psychologists (both at graduate school admission and prior to licensure) on the basis of character standards. Character represents the honesty and integrity with which a person deals with others, and moral character must serve as the foundation from which mentoring emanates or the grid through which specific mentoring actions are expressed. By ensuring that faculty mentors are people of integrity and character—in other words, that they are morally competent—academic settings will help to protect the students with whom mentors work, and simultaneously protect the public image of college and university faculty. Regarding competent mentoring of students or junior professionals in the field, at least three essential character virtues have been proposed (Johnson & Campbell, 2002; Wilson & Johnson, 2001): integrity, caring, and prudence.

Integrity. Personal integrity is required for the development of trust in any relationship and is typically demonstrated through honesty and behavioral consistency across contexts. Because trust is improbable when integrity is absent from the character of a mentor, such a faculty member is unlikely to effectively mentor students. Ideal mentorships are characterized by some degree of self-disclosure and mutuality, both of which require the presence of honesty and trust (Wilson & Johnson, 2001). Further, as fiduciary relationships, graduate school mentorships require that the mentor be capable of competently accepting the protégé's unqualified trust and confidence (Plaut, 1993). Any evidence of deficits in the area of integrity (criminal conduct, educational misconduct, or other clear evidence of dishonesty) should raise questions about a mentor's competence.

Caring. Caring can best be evidenced by a pattern of respect and sensitivity to the welfare and needs of others. Caring is a facet of the broader construct of love and serves as a prerequisite for empathy and unconditional regard, required in both therapy and mentoring contexts (Johnson & Campbell, 2002; Meara et al., 1996). Caring mentors demonstrate genuine concern for protégés, value their distinct personhood, and devote time to authentically hearing and understanding them (Kram, 1985; Wilson & Johnson, 2001). The virtue of care may also be translated into the psychosocial construct of generativity (St. Aubin & McAdams, 1995). Generative mentors possess inherent concern for the well-being of younger and even anticipated generations. Evidence of disrespect or disregard for the best interests of others would raise concerns about mentor competence.

Prudence. Finally, competent mentors evidence prudence. As a character virtue, prudence indicates planfulness, appropriate cautiousness, and evidence of good judgment in decision making—both personal and professional. It is easy to see that prudence is a prerequisite for competent mentorship. A faculty member

with a history of emotional outbursts, poor impulse control, or other evidence of questionable judgment should not be viewed as competent to mentor.

Mentor Abilities

In addition to certain core character virtues, a competent mentor must possess specific abilities or capacities, in order to skillfully and effectively fulfill the mentor role. The author differentiates abilities from skills: Although skills can be learned and significantly developed, abilities speak to a more fundamental potential or capacity. For example, a faculty member with very poor emotional intelligence is unlikely to become relationally skillful as a mentor, regardless of the extent to which they are trained and supervised in the mentor role.

Articulating core mentoring abilities is challenging, in light of the wide heterogeneity in traits and characteristics typically offered by satisfied protégés when asked to describe their mentors. Frequently mentioned abilities and traits include patience, an ability to read and understand others emotionally, genuine interest in protégés, sense of humor, intelligence, knowledge or mastery in one's field, empathy, approachability, supportiveness, and dedication (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Clark et al., 2000; Rose, 1999). A qualitative study by Jennings and Skovholt (1999) of 10 master psychotherapists offers one approach to enhancing clarity in conceptualizations of mentor abilities. Those authors determined that master therapists are characterized by specific abilities in three focal domains: (a) cognitive, (b) emotional, and (c) relational. Using the Jennings and Skovholt (1999) typology, I briefly highlight the essential cognitive, emotional, and relational capacities of competent mentors.

Cognitive abilities. Like master therapists, excellent mentors are voracious learners; they blend intellectual ability with cumulative experience, and value cognitive complexity and ambiguity both theoretically and in applied practice (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999). In this cognitive domain, competent mentors evidence substantial intellectual ability, as well as a humble appreciation of the limits of their understanding (Johnson & Huwe, 2002; Pope & Brown, 1996). Competent mentors must additionally demonstrate competence with the subject matter of their discipline, and marked expertise in their own area of specialization. Although achieving faculty status in a graduate program typically hinges on demonstration of cognitive competence, difficulty with one facet of intellectual functioning (e.g., ability to assimilate new theoretical innovations, or toleration of the complexity raised by a bright protégé's questions) might detract from the faculty member's capacity to mentor.

Emotional abilities. Mentor emotional abilities are particularly important in the eyes of protégés. Termed *emotional competence* by Pope and Brown (1996), this domain reflects on the mentor's capacity for emotional containment of material emerging in a relationship, the capacity for self-care and personal balance,

and emotional self-awareness and receptivity, or what Daniel Goleman has termed *emotional intelligence* (Goleman, 1995). Exceptional psychotherapists evidence several markers of emotional ability, including emotional self-awareness, nondefensiveness, a habit of self-reflection, and an appreciation for how one's emotional health bears on quality of work (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999). Emotional capacity is often evident in fundamental personality characteristics. Graduate students often express strong preferences for faculty mentors whom they describe as compassionate, genuine, patient, flexible, and humorous (Clark et al., 2000; Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986). In fact, Cronan-Hillix et al. (1986) noted, "the personality, not the intellect, of mentors is the prime determinant of their desirability" (p. 123). Finally, Johnson and Campbell (2002) recently recommended screening and evaluating psychologists (including those who mentor) on the basis of several essential characteristics, several of which are emotional in nature. Essential fitness characteristics might include personality adjustment (e.g., open-mindedness, flexibility, absence of personality disturbance), psychological stability (e.g., absence of a disorder that might impair performance as a mentor), and responsible use of substances.

Relational abilities. The final ability domain with strong bearing on capacity for excellent mentoring is the relational domain. Jennings and Skovholt (1999) discovered that master therapists are characterized by strong relational skills, profound commitment to the importance of a working alliance with clients, and demonstrated expertise in using relational skills in psychotherapy. Competent mentors are, above all, competent practitioners of relationships. In a study of 675 prospective protégés in business environments, interpersonal skill proved to be the primary attractant for protégés. The manager's interpersonal competence level was a more powerful predictor of protégé attraction than alternative factors (Olian, Carroll, Giannantonio, & Feren, 1988).

Among the most important of the relational capacities is the ability to communicate empathy, respect, and compassion to protégés (Allen et al., 1997) and the capacity for encouraging and appropriately managing professional intimacy (Bennetts, 2002; Rogers & Holloway, 1993). Capable mentors appreciate the fact that intimacy is essential in collegial relationships with students. Professional intimacy describes the "closeness, affection, trust, and commitment that allow and promote risk-taking and self-disclosure" (Rogers & Holloway, 1993, p. 263). Although cautious to protect important boundaries with protégés, excellent mentors nurture appropriate levels of mutuality, reciprocity, collaboration, and increasing trust, which characterize productive developmental relationships.

Mentor Competencies (Knowledge and Skills)

When a faculty member possesses requisite virtues of character, as well as essential abilities or aptitudes, on both intellectual and emotional levels, they quite likely

have the capacity for competent mentoring. Nonetheless, competence requires more than virtue and ability; competent mentors possess specific competencies—knowledge bearing on mentoring and focused skills in the mentor role. For instance, competent mentoring is predicated on an understanding of graduate student development, the phases of mentorship development, and the specific mentoring functions students are prone to require in each phase. Because mentoring knowledge is likely to correlate significantly with mentoring skill, and because many facets of good mentoring behavior have inextricably linked knowledge and skill components, I make no effort to differentiate the two in the discussion that follows.

Graduate student development and mentorship phases. Graduate education is often a period characterized by stress, insecurity, and hypervigilance (Bruss & Kopala, 1993). New students may report anxiety, instability in personal identity, and a sense of being an “imposter” in the graduate program. It is in this context that graduate students often initiate mentorships with faculty. Competent mentors are aware of the various developmental needs and transitions common of graduate students (Chickering, 1969), and understand how these correspond with common phases in the life of a mentorship.

Kram (1983) articulated four mentor relationship phases that have subsequently received considerable empirical support (Chao, 1997). In the initiation phase (6 months to 1 year), protégé and mentor begin to enjoy a relationship characterized by attraction, potential, and synergy. In the cultivation phase (2 to 5 years), the mentorship is stable and the mentor actively provides many of the essential mentor functions (Kram, 1985). During the separation phase (6 months to 2 years), the protégé completes graduate school and exits the active relational phase of mentoring. Finally, the redefinition phase encompasses an indefinite period following separation, when the mentorship ends altogether or is redefined as a collegial friendship. Competent mentors understand that at each phase in a mentorship, a protégé is likely to require varying career and psychosocial functions. New protégés may require more basic support and identity confirmation (Mehlman & Glickauf-Hughes, 1994), but protégés nearing the separation phase may require more collegiality, friendship, and pragmatic career assistance.

Structuring the mentorship. Another mentoring competency involves intentionality with respect to forming and managing mentorships with students. Although most mentorships form informally, as a result of proximity, exposure, personal chemistry, and reciprocally positive interactions, deliberate mentors consider how best to structure a developing mentorship to maximize benefit to the protégé, adherence to ethical standards, and congruence in expectation (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Brown & Krager, 1985; Johnson, 2002; Newby & Heide, 1992). When forming a mentorship, mentors should attend to the following:

1. Matching—Are the participants well-matched on important variables?
2. Expectations—Is it clear what the protégé and mentor each hope to gain from the mentorship?
3. Orientation—Does the protégé understand the mentoring concept, including behaviors expected by the mentor?
4. Frequency and duration—Is it clear to both parties how often and for what period of time the dyad is expected to meet?
5. Goals—Have mentor and protégé agreed upon both long- and short-term goals for the protégé's development?
6. Termination—Have the parties discussed an expected time frame for termination, and the possibility of a “no-fault” termination before graduation, if either party requests this?
7. Assessment—Has the mentor considered alternatives for periodic review of the mentorship's efficacy?

Salient mentor functions. Competent mentors understand the importance of each of the primary mentor functions or behaviors, and they make efforts to evaluate which functions are most relevant to each protégé as they develop and the mentorship matures. Although various roles and functions have been proposed (Kram, 1985; O'Neil & Wrightsman, 2001), factor analytic research (Russell & Adams, 1997) supports the existence of three distinct mentor function categories: (a) *Career functions* serve to enhance and facilitate career advancement of the protégé (e.g., sponsorship, exposure, visibility, coaching, protection, challenge); (b) *psychosocial functions* serve to enhance the protégé's sense of competence, identity, and work-role effectiveness (e.g., acceptance, support, confirmation, counseling, friendship); and (c) *role-modeling* serves to offer the protégé a first-hand example of achievement, success, and professional competence in the specific profession. Although mentors will not be equally skilled at delivering each of these salient functions, it is essential that mentors be deliberate models, appreciating the fact that both their implicit and explicit behavior will offer protégés a powerful example of how to be a professional.

Multiple relationships and boundary maintenance. As complex, emotionally intimate, long-term relationships, graduate school mentorships are often characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, and numerous overlapping roles (Biaggio et al., 1997; Johnson & Nelson, 1999). As an apprenticeship form, mentor relationships may include travel, social activities, and various glimpses into each other's personal lives (Plaut, 1993). In fact, graduate school mentorships are, by nature, multiple relationships, in that the mentor must often serve a wide variety of potentially conflicting roles relative to the protégé (e.g., teacher, evaluator, research/clinical supervisor, advocate/sponsor, confidant, and protector of the public trust). Because graduate school mentorships involve a clear power differential,

lengthy duration, and no clear termination point, and because the most effective mentorships typically involve reciprocal disclosure and interaction in multiple contexts (Johnson & Nelson, 1999), these relationships may pose significant risk for boundary violations. Although all faculty may struggle with boundary maintenance in closely bonded mentorships, this may be particularly difficult for junior faculty (Petrie & Wohlgemuth, 1994). In their original writing on mentoring among men, Levinson et al. noted that the mentor must strike a delicate balance between peer and parent:

The mentor's primary function is to be a transitional figure. The mentor represents a combination of parent and peer; he must be both and not purely either one. If he is entirely a peer, he cannot represent the advanced level toward which the younger man is striving. If he is very parental, it is difficult for both of them to overcome the generational difference and move toward the peer relationship that is the ultimate (though never fully realized) goal of the relationship. (Levinson et al., 1978)

As one facet of knowledge-based mentor competence, new faculty must remain vigilant to the potential exploitation of power and the violation of professional contours in mentorships (Vasquez, 1992). Blevins-Knabe (1992) recommended that faculty routinely ask themselves four important questions relative to their relationships with students:

1. Is my professional role negatively compromised?
2. Am I exploiting the student?
3. Am I increasing the likelihood of being exploited?
4. Is my behavior interfering with the roles of other faculty?

Finally, competent mentors must appreciate the fact that romantic involvement with a current protégé is nearly always unethical and quite likely to be damaging to group morale and organizational effectiveness within an academic department. Powell and Foley (1999) found that *hierarchical* romances—romances in which one participant reports directly to the other—are among the most destructive. Although no specific literature appears to address the issue of postmentorship relationships with students, at a minimum, competent mentors apply the ethical standards relative to relationships with students (APA, 2002) and decisions to enter posttherapy relationships with clients (Anderson & Kitchener, 1998). Competent mentors are sensitive to the perpetual nature of good mentoring.

Recognizing and managing attraction. Although a variety of factors contribute to the formation of graduate school mentorships, mentors are typically drawn to students who share the mentors' interests, values, and personality features. Mentors are drawn to talented, motivated, articulate, and engaging students

(Allen et al., 1997). It is therefore not particularly surprising that various degrees of emotional/romantic and sexual attraction sometimes enter into the mentoring experience. Pope, Keith-Spiegel, and Tabachnick (1986) found that 87% of psychotherapists reported having been sexually attracted to clients—at least on occasion. Further, 63% of these therapists felt guilty, anxious, or confused about the attraction. If psychologists become attracted to clients, it stands to reason that they may also find themselves attracted to talented and well-matched graduate student protégés.

Competent mentors are alert to their own responses to protégés and work to acknowledge and accept these feelings as normal, without allowing them to harm the mentorship or lead to exploitation or violations of boundaries. Further, competent mentors recognize that protégés too may struggle with feelings of attraction. In a qualitative study of female doctoral students, Heinrich (1991) found that students clearly differentiated between three experiences relative to their mentors:

1. *Sexual energy* was defined as “fun, excitement, pleasurable tension, and heightened awareness between advisor and advisee. Sexual energy did not have a positive or negative valence, and it might or might not include sexual attraction” (p. 518).

2. *Sexual attraction* “implied directionality and indicated that one or both parties were physically, psychologically, or spiritually drawn to the other in the advisement relationship” (pp. 518–519).

3. *Sexual intimacy* “connoted actual physical contact between educator and student ranging from touching to hugging, kissing, and fondling, to sexual intercourse” (p. 519).

Competent mentoring requires honest awareness of sexual energy, appropriate caution regarding sexual attraction, and careful avoidance of sexual intimacy.

Sources of mentorship dysfunction. Competent faculty mentors appreciate the fact that all relationships are fragile, and that, in some instances, mentorships will lead to negative experiences and outcomes for one or both parties (Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell, 2000; Johnson & Huwe, 2002; Scandura, 1998). Mentorship dysfunction may occur when (a) the primary needs of one or both parties are not being met, (b) the long-term costs for one or both parties outweigh the long-term benefits, and (c) one or both parties are suffering distress as a result of being in the relationship. Excellent mentors understand the common sources of mentorship dysfunction. These include the mentor’s own technical or relational incompetence, poor mentor–protégé matching, neglect or abandonment of protégés, conflict, boundary violations, exploitation, illegal or unethical behavior, unresolved cross-race or cross-gender concerns, or dysfunctional protégé traits or behaviors (Eby et al., 2000; Johnson & Huwe, 2002).

Cross-gender mentoring. Although female graduate students often report a preference for a same-gender mentor (Gilbert, 1985), the current gender imbalance—particularly at upper ranks—in academe, means that the majority of female graduate students will have a male mentor (O’Neill et al., 1999). Competent mentors understand that, although mentorships are quite important in the career development of women (Bolton, 1980; Gilbert, 1985), women may face a number of barriers to getting the kind of mentoring they want (Hite, 1985; Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1989). Specifically, female doctoral students may face subtle forms of sexism in obtaining and maintaining mentoring (APA, 2000), concerns that mentorships with male faculty members may be perceived as inappropriate (Hite, 1985), and legitimate concerns that male mentors may be less capable of offering some important same-gender role-modeling functions (Gilbert, 1985). Literature suggests that women often prefer a relational focus in the mentorship, contextual (relational) decision making, and a mentor who can intentionally model a lifestyle oriented around balancing personal and professional roles (Gilbert, 1985; McGowen & Hart, 1990). Gilbert & Rossman (1992) recommended that, when men mentor women, they must be particularly careful to empower, sponsor, and help women protégés create new self-visions and identities in the professional world. Among women returning to graduate school in midlife, focal concerns often include (a) introspective issues, (b) concerns regarding physical development and appearance, (c) awareness of time limitations, and (d) changes in the roles of mother, wife, and child (Kahnweiler & Johnson, 1980).

Finally, male mentors must understand the dynamics of dependency in relationships with female protégés. Women are often oversocialized to assume dependent stances vis-à-vis men (Gilbert, 1987). They may be encouraged to cultivate an “underfunctioning” that serves primarily to protect men—including mentors. On the other hand, some men express dependency needs through expressions of power over women, stemming from their perception that women have power over them, “Many male [mentors] lack sufficient self-awareness and understanding of their own dependency needs, particularly their need to be validated by women. . . . men in our society often define their sense of self in terms of their sexual functioning and their ability to make it with women” (Pleck, 1981, p. 558). Although there is a dearth of literature bearing on female mentor male protégé mentorships, competent mentors of both genders must be vigilant to cross-gender dynamics and concerns.

Cross-race mentoring. When a majority-group graduate school faculty member mentors a minority-group student, it is essential that he or she be competent in the mentor role. Competent cross-race mentors are not taken in by various myths surrounding cross-cultural mentoring (e.g., cross-race mentorships are no different than other mentorships, only minority faculty can mentor minority

students, simply interacting with minority students in class serves as adequate mentoring) (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999). Competent cross-race mentors work at increasing both knowledge and sensitivity concerning the racial and cultural experiences of minority group students they mentor (Bowman, Kite, Branscombe, & Williams, 1999; Smith & Davidson, 1992). Finally, excellent cross-race mentors work diligently at overcoming various obstacles to good mentoring, including (a) negative stereotypes, (b) lack of available role models, (c) student skepticism about intimacy, (d) public scrutiny, and (e) peer resentment (Thomas, 2001).

Coercion and cloning. Excellent mentoring involves a process of apprenticeship, in which the mentor trains and prepares the protégé to successfully pursue a career trajectory very much like that of the mentor. Not only are mentors initially drawn to protégés who remind them of themselves in important ways, but graduate school mentors overwhelmingly nominate as their most successful protégés those whose careers are essentially identical to their own; mentoring can involve professional cloning (Blackburn et al., 1981).

Competent graduate school mentors are sensitive to the paradox that, although cloning is often a powerful part of mentoring, it can lead to harmful coercion. For example, O'Neill and Sankowsky (2001) described the problem of theoretical abuse in mentorships:

Theoretical abuse is defined as a mentor attempting to satisfy his or her own meaning making needs at the expense of the protégé by imposing interpretations of events on the protégé. The imposition of interpretations might include trying to convince a protégé of a point of view when there is conflict about meaning, but more generally, it simply means failing to elicit, elucidate, and explore protégé meaning making. (p. 208)

Good mentoring requires the mentor to shape and prepare the protégé for a career path similar to their own, while working to discern and honor the protégé's unique mix of talents, inclinations, values, and perspectives.

Personal and professional self-awareness. A final mentoring competency involves self-awareness related to both personal and professional competence. Research indicates that approximately 60% of clinical psychologists acknowledged working with clients during periods when they were too distressed to be effective (Pope, Tabachnick, & Keith-Spiegel, 1987). If true for practitioners who typically have some training in ethics and professionalism, it seems reasonable to assume that faculty in general may also work with protégés during periods when they are personally or psychologically impaired. It is imperative that mentors recognize signals of distress or impairment and take steps to shield protégés from subsequent negative outcomes stemming from mentor distress.

Similarly, a proportion of graduate school faculty probably continue to teach and mentor students long after their professional or technical expertise has become obsolete; obsolescence is “a reduction in technical effectiveness resulting from a lack of knowledge of the new techniques and of entirely new technologies that have developed since the acquisition of the individual’s education” (Dubin, 1972, p. 488). Although faculty status often leads to assumptions of competence, such assumptions may at times be spurious. Individual faculty mentors must routinely evaluate their own technical competence.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE TRIANGULAR MODEL

There are several implications of the triangular model for conceptualizing mentor competence. The first two of these are adapted from Sternberg’s triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) and relate to the geometry of the mentor triangle. First, degree of competence (or area of the triangle) may be conceptualized as shifting between greater and lesser quantities; the larger a faculty member’s triangle, the greater the amount of deep or integrated competence in the mentor role.

Of course, this further implies that not all graduate school faculty may be competent to mentor. Because competence requires some minimum quantity of virtue and ability and a minimum number of competencies, some professionals may not possess all the components necessary to be competent as a mentor (Ridley et al., 2003). This means that a faculty member may be incompetent as a mentor, despite evidencing many of the requisite mentor competencies. Although the model does not specify minimum competence, individual faculty and those responsible for monitoring their performance will need to consider ways to define this.

A second geometric implication of the triangular model is balance among component parts of the mentor triangle. The triangle in Figure 1 is balanced, meaning that the mentor demonstrates a balance of all three components. When one component is imbalanced, the triangle becomes a scalene or isosceles triangle and indicates imbalance or inadequacy in some component of competence (Sternberg, 1986). From the perspective of protégés, administrators, and mentors themselves this imbalance would be cause for concern.

Although faculty mentors are ethically responsible for ensuring competence to mentor (APA, 2002), the most pressing implications of the triangular competence framework have relevance for academic department chairs, faculty search committees, and academic deans who make promotion and tenure decisions. These organizational implications cover the areas of faculty hiring, faculty training, and faculty evaluation.

Faculty hiring. When mentoring is a core departmental goal, faculty leaders must consider some method for establishing competence among faculty who

mentor. Mentor competence can be addressed most elegantly and significantly at the hiring phase (Bigelow & Johnson, 2001; Johnson, 2002). Currently, very few graduate programs explicitly assess a job candidate's mentoring record. Even when an advertisement specifies that mentoring competence is a requirement, there is seldom any concerted effort on the part of the selection committee to actually evaluate this component of the candidate's past performance or current aptitude. At a minimum, faculty candidates should be scrutinized regarding evidence of essential mentoring virtues (integrity, caring, prudence) and abilities (emotional intelligence, interpersonal savvy, cognitive flexibility). Each component of the triangular framework might be assessed using behaviorally oriented interviews, detailed interviews with previous colleagues and several previous student protégés, and perhaps some objective assessment of protégé satisfaction and protégé outcomes (e.g., publications, job placement, career satisfaction, proclivity toward mentoring others).

Faculty training. Once a faculty member has been hired and prepares to assume duties as a mentor to graduate students, training for the mentor role becomes imperative. Vasquez (1992) noted that "the strongest weapon against unprofessional conduct may be the education of trainees" (p. 196). Not only will mentor training diminish unprofessional or unethical behavior, it should also increase new faculty self-efficacy and confidence in the mentor role (Johnson, 2002; Weil, 2001). Based on the triangular model's competencies, departmental or university-wide programs might offer focused training on graduate student development, mentorship functions and phases, structuring mentor relationships, strategies for handling dysfunction and ethical dilemmas, coping with attraction and boundary maintenance, and cross-race and cross-gender mentoring. In addition, new faculty, and the protégés they mentor, would be well-served by a departmental or university system of sponsorship or supervision during the initial period of employment. Senior faculty with a track record of excellent student mentoring might be assigned to supervise new faculty as they initiate and structure their first graduate student mentorships.

Faculty evaluation. Finally, in addition to assisting with hiring decisions and training approaches, the triangular model would serve to guide periodic assessment of faculty mentors, particularly as they approach important career milestones, such as promotion and tenure. Although there is no standardized measure of faculty mentoring efficacy, several survey studies have begun to shed light on the mentoring characteristics and functions most important to graduate students (Clark et al., 2000; Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986; Johnson et al., 2000; Rose, 1999; Swerdlik & Bardon, 1988). Annual anonymous and department-wide surveys of graduate students could be used to assess student satisfaction with their mentor relationship and ratings of each faculty mentor's competence in delivering specific

mentor functions (Kram, 1985). Additionally, at major promotional junctures, department leadership should undertake a more careful evaluation of a mentor's track record (e.g., What are the mentor's graduates doing? How productive are they? How satisfied with their graduate school experience?). When quality and efficacy of mentoring are clearly and meaningfully tied to decisions regarding compensation and promotion, faculty are more prone to devote time and energy to ensuring their own competence in the mentor role.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Preparation of this article was supported by a grant from the Naval Academy Research Council.

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