An Exploratory Study of the Relative Effectiveness of Different Types of Sales Force Mentors

By: Thomas G. Brashear, Danny N. Bellenger, James S. Boles, and Hiram C. Barksdale Jr.

Thomas G. Brashear, Danny N. Bellenger, James S. Boles, and Hiram C. Barksdale, Jr., "An Exploratory Study of the Relative Effectiveness of Different Types of Sales Force Mentors," *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management,* 26 (Number 1, Winter 2006), pp. 7-18. https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134260101

Abstract:

This paper presents the findings of an *exploratory* study investigating the effects of mentoring in a sales setting. Salespeople who had manager mentors inside the organization where they work had high performance and a low intention to leave. Those with peer mentors inside the organization also had a low intention to leave *but* lower performance. Salespeople with mentors outside the organization where they work had high performance *but* also a high intention to leave. Finally, salespeople with no mentor had relatively low performance and a high intention to leave. These results suggest that manager mentors inside the organization produce the best combination of results. Study results also raise serious questions about the effects of peer mentoring and mentors outside the organization. The findings suggest two important hypotheses for testing: (1) that peer mentors produce low turnover intentions and high commitment in *poor* performers, and (2) that mentors outside the organization produce high turnover intentions and low commitment in *high* performers.

Keywords: mentorship | salespeople | managers

Article:

The training and development of new salespeople requires an enormous investment of time and resources. Billions of dollars are spent annually on training and developing salespeople (Training 2003). This investment includes a combination of both internally and externally sourced trainers.

Regardless of the initial formal training a salesperson receives, he or she may require additional support, direction, and guidance—particularly during the early stages of his or her career. This assistance can provide the salesperson with information concerning the organization's internal workings and behavioral norms that may not be explicitly stated during training. One approach to providing this supplemental assistance to salespeople and other employees is mentoring.

Mentoring has come to play an important role in today's corporate setting. It is used as a career training and development tool (Hunt and Michael 1983), as an integration tool for new hires (Kram and Hall 1996), and as a means of socialization and acclimation for salespeople (Fine and Pullins 1998).

The effects and the nature of mentoring relationships have been examined in a variety of contexts ranging from social services (Kelly 2001) and academic settings (Tillman 2001) to employees in energy and high-tech companies (Raabe and Beehr 2003). There has been a limited amount of research that has examined mentoring in a sales environment (e.g., Fine and Pullins 1998; Pullins and Fine 2002; Pullins, Fine, and Warren 1996). More mentoring research is needed on sales jobs due to the uniqueness of the role played by salespeople (Bagozzi 1980). The sales job has several unique characteristics relative to many other types of jobs (Dubinsky et al. 1986). These include the physical, social, and psychological separation from other line and staff personnel; its boundary role between customers and the organization; the salesperson's requirement of persistence and self-motivation; its demand for coping with uncertainty and interpersonal conflict; and the delayed results of one's efforts, which contribute to disillusionment. These factors suggest that the technical and emotional support that mentoring may provide could be even more critical in selling environments where it might be difficult for inexperienced salespeople to receive support if they are separated geographically from potential sponsors or colleagues (Noe 1988).

One important consideration relative to mentoring relationships and mentoring program design that has not been explored is the relative impact of different types of mentors (a peer inside the organization versus a manager inside the organization versus a mentor outside the organization). This study compares salespeople in four categories on the dimensions of performance, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. The four groups are those with no mentors, those having a peer mentor inside the firm, those with a manager mentor inside the firm, and those having mentors from outside the firm. A combination of high performance and high organizational commitment with low turnover intentions is, of course, the desired result from an organizational perspective.

MENTORING

Conceptualizing and Defining Mentoring

Mentoring is a type of developmental relationship that provides support for the enhancement of an individual's career development and organizational experience (Thomas 1993). A mentor can be defined as an individual who has advanced experience and knowledge and is committed to providing upward mobility and support to one's career. He or she may or may not be in the protégé's organization and may or may not be an immediate supervisor (Ragins 1989).

Mentoring has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Kanter (1977) portrays a mentor as a powerful figure who aids the protégé in moving through the organizational ranks. According to Kanter, mentors "fight for" the protégé, assist the protégé in "by-passing the hierarchy," and "reflect" their power off the protégé, giving the protégé indirect power. This conceptualization of mentoring is the basis for recommendations that managers mentor minorities and females in managerial positions (Alleman and Gray 1986; Phillips-Jones 1982; Zey 1984).

An alternative and perhaps more encompassing conceptualization is offered by Levinson et al. (1979). They view mentoring as an important relationship in adult development—especially in work settings. Bass and Stogdill (1990) note that a mentor not only pulls protégés up the organizational ladder but also develops them by transmitting elements of the mentor's knowledge, experience, and status.

Kanter (1977) describes a mentor as a sponsor who uses power to promote protégés. To Levinson et al. (1979), a mentor is a multirole "adult" figure. Phillips-Jones (1982) describes mentors as influential people who significantly help protégés reach major life goals. This is consistent both with Kanter's (1977) use of the power concept and Levinson et al.'s (1979) depiction of a mentor's major role as supporting and facilitating a protégé to help him or her achieve success. Carmine, attempting to synthesize both the role and function of mentors, provides the following definition:

> Mentoring is a complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise that incorporates interpersonal or psychosocial development, career and/or educational development, and socialization functions into the relationship. (1988, p. 10)

In this study, mentoring is defined as a career-oriented relationship between a more senior salesperson or manager (mentor) and a junior or newly hired salesperson (protégé), initiated for the development of the protégé's understanding of his or her roles, the social and political nature of the organization, and the advancement of the protégé's career.

Types of Mentors

There is some debate as to whether supervisors should be categorized as mentors. Some cite the obvious conflict between a supervisor's expectations of immediate results and his or her role of nurturing his or her employee. It has been asserted that a protégé may be more guarded in a supervisor–subordinate mentoring relationship and that the environment may be less likely to be open and "safe" (Kram 1983). In contrast, Mullen (1994) contends that protégés who have managers as mentors feel more comfortable communicating with them than their counterparts who are more organizationally distanced. Certainly, employee development is a goal for most managers (McManus and Russell 1997). After all, bosses are aware of their protégés' developmental needs and are required to monitor their performance (Ragins and McFarlin 1990).

Clearly, the roles of supervisor and mentor may overlap. The leader–member exchange theory (McManus and Russell 1997) of leadership focuses directly on one-to-one relationships between supervisors and subordinates, much like mentoring. Both are developmental relationships in the workplace. However, although all of the salespeople responding in the current study had a supervisor, only one-third considered that person to be a mentor. A primary factor in the mentoring relationship is the extent to which the mentor and protégé identify with each other and the extent to which the mentor sees him or herself in the protégé. It appears that the majority of supervisor–subordinate relationships do not constitute mentor–protégé relationships.

Since peers share information, offer career and personal advice and encouragement, and socialize with each other, it should not be surprising to find that they often fulfill the functions of a traditional mentor. “Peer relationships appear to offer a valuable alternative to the [traditional] mentor relationship; they can provide some career and psychosocial functions, they offer the opportunity for greater mutuality and sense of equality, and they are more available in numbers” (Kram 1983, p. 623).

Peers have no formal advantage over the potential protégés in the workplace and are likely to wield only informal social influence. They can, however, offer advice and information on how to accomplish goals, point out potential chances for advancement, and socially reinforce good work behavior. Peers often have one significant advantage—they have frequent contact with coworkers. This fact, combined with their social influence, offers the potential for mentoring. Peers may or may not be directly responsible for mentoring junior employees, and the rewards for such activities may be confined to their personal satisfaction; thus, the motivation of peers to act as mentors may be limited. Peer mentoring has generally been found empirically to increase organizational commitment and lower intentions to leave (Raabe and Beehr 2003).

Much of mentoring literature, from a sales standpoint, has focused on peer mentoring relationships (e.g., Fine and Pullins 1998; Pullins, Fine, and Warren 1996). It has been described as the training and support provided when a relationship develops between a more experienced salesperson (the mentor) and a less experienced salesperson (the protégé) (Pullins, Fine, and Warren 1996). As noted earlier, peer mentoring may be particularly important to salespeople because of their tendency to be geographically remote (Dubinsky et al. 1986).

Internal mentors are those employed in the same organization as the protégé. External mentors are those employed outside of the protégé’s organization. Internal mentors may be able to provide more organizational resources to their protégés and are generally more accessible. Also, they are believed to be in a better position to protect, sponsor, or offer challenging assignments to their protégé.

External mentors may have more “interorganization resources” and may be in a better position to provide long-term career guidance, particularly as it relates to mobility across organizations (Ragins 1997).

The Theoretical Basis of Mentoring

The intent of the current research is twofold. First, a test of theory will be conducted relative to the presence or absence of mentoring as it affects selected outcome variables. Two theories (social exchange theory and social learning theory) link mentoring to specific outcomes. It is not the purpose here to provide an extensive review of these theories, as they have been discussed in detail in the literature, but, rather, to test the linkages that they suggest. Second, an exploration of the relative impact of different types of mentors on selected outcomes is conducted. There is no theory available that addresses the relative impact of these different types of mentors. Rather, the literature suggests that they all have a desirable effect on outcomes. No empirical study to date has addressed the relative influence of different types of mentors in the same work setting. Thus, the second part of this effort is exploration rather than theory testing.

Social exchange theory has been considered to be one foundation for understanding and framing mentoring. Social exchange theory contends "an individual is attracted to another if he expects associating with him to be in some way rewarding for himself, and his interest in the expected social rewards draws him to the other" (Blau 1985). A mentor offers three types of rewards or support to protégés: social support, role modeling support, and vocational support (Scandura 1992). These types of support are theorized as having a positive effect on selected work outcomes.

Social learning theory is another important theoretical framework that has been applied to mentoring. Social learning theory emphasizes inactive and observational learning. Inactive learning involves direct interaction with the mentor. Observational learning involves learning by observing or imitating the mentor. Direct interaction and observational learning may be used to acquire useful behavior patterns and to heighten expectations regarding one's ability to successfully perform job-related tasks (Bandura 1977; Noe 1988).

The management literature indicates that there are two distinct types of personal learning (Lankau and Scandura 2002). One type is "relational job learning," and the second type is "personal skill development learning." Relational job learning involves increased understanding about the interdependence of one's job and that of others. Personal skill development learning involves acquiring new skills and abilities that enable the individual to form better working relationships. Lankau and Scandura (2002) hypothesized that mentors facilitate personal learning through various coaching behaviors. They found that imitating mentors appeared to play a key role in influencing protégés' learning and that personal learning may explain how mentoring influences work-related outcomes.

BENEFITS OF MENTORING

The mentoring literature suggests there are activities that, when performed by mentors, should enhance work outcomes of protégés. These work outcomes are referred to as mentoring benefits (Wilson and Elman 1990). Zey (1984) describes the "mutual benefits model," with mentors, protégés, and organizations all receiving benefits from the mentoring process. The protégé receives increased role clarity, protection, promotion opportunities, and support. Organizational benefits are derived from the development of employee talent, which yields high performance, increased organizational commitment, and lower levels of turnover. Work outcomes examined in the current study affect both the organization and individuals. They include increased performance, organizational commitment, and a lower intention to leave.

Performance

The effect of mentoring on protégés' performance has received considerable attention. Results indicate that having a mentor increases an individual's ability to perform. Research conducted in a variety of occupations/professions demonstrates significant differences between performance levels of mentored and nonmentored employees (e.g., Dreher and Ash 1990; Feldman and Thomas 1992; Peluchette and Jeanquart 2000; Ragins and Cotton 1999). Through a mentor's teaching, coaching, and role modeling, protégés develop competencies and effectiveness (Hunt and Michael 1983).

Productivity increases come from a more appropriate use of time and resources, and as a result of the mentor's extensive coaching/teaching. According to Zey (1984), the best example of productivity increases comes from mentoring relationships in the sales force. The mentor "intervenes to develop the protégé's ability to sell a product or a product line" (Zey 1984, p. 104).

Mentoring's effect on salesperson performance occurs as the protégé acquires skills, motivation, and role clarity. The mentoring function of coaching/teaching provides a role model for necessary skills in the sales, interpersonal, and technical areas and, ultimately, leads to high performance. Role modeling by the mentor allows for vicarious learning by the protégé. Roles are more clearly understood as they are observed in their proper context and not simply explained in an abstract training environment.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment plays an important role in many processes related to employee performance and organizational success (Mowday, Porter, and Steers 1982). It has been shown to be a consequence of group–leader relations, role states, and job satisfaction (e.g., MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Mathieu and Zajac 1990). Organizational commitment is also related to employee intention to leave and turnover (Johnston et al. 1990).

Johnston et al. (1990) found that two organizational factors affect organizational commitment in the early stages of sales employment: leadership role clarification and leadership consideration. Both leadership behaviors had a direct, positive effect on organizational commitment. The study also found that leadership behaviors had an indirect effect on organizational commitment (mediated by role ambiguity, role conflict, and satisfaction).

Mentors have been found to promote organizational commitment and the performance of citizenship behaviors (McManus and Russell 1997). Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found the five strongest antecedents of commitment to be job scope, perceived personal competence, job challenge, leader communication, and participative leadership. Mentors serving as role models help to increase the protégé's self-efficacy and the formation of realistic expectations, which leads, in turn, to higher levels of personal competence. Mentors may also develop their protégés by presenting them with challenging assignments and fulfilling leadership roles (Kram 1983).

The mentor–protégé relationship is important to the development of a new employee's sense of membership and understanding of the organization's products, goals, and structure (Zey 1984). This increased understanding and the protégé's successful skill training result in increased effectiveness (Bates 1993). This makes the organization a more amenable career site and may lead to increased commitment. The closeness of the mentor–protégé relationship can also affect commitment to closer relationships with others in the organization, which can increase organizational commitment (Heimann and Pittenger 1996).

Intention to Leave

Salesperson turnover is another important issue in sales management because of the high cost of recruitment and training and the cost of lost sales due to unserved demand (Futrell and Parasuraman 1984; Lucas et al. 1987). Intention to leave is important because it is directly linked to turnover (Lee and Mowday 1987).

Johnston et al. (1990) extended the turnover literature by explicitly examining the effects of role clarity and leader consideration on salesperson turnover. Sager, Varadarajan, and Futrell (1988) tested the indirect effect of salesperson satisfaction on turnover, with satisfaction first affecting thoughts of quitting and, subsequently, attitudes toward job search and quitting. They report that job satisfaction directly and indirectly affects various stages of the turnover process. McNeilly and Russ (1992) also found that organizational commitment was negatively related to propensity to leave. Mentoring may indirectly affect turnover through job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. The linkages between mentoring and the principal antecedents of turnover suggest that mentoring can indirectly reduce turnover intentions and turnover behavior (Morris 1995; Ragins and Cotton 1999). The work of Chandrasekaran et al. (2000) supports this indirect linkage by demonstrating the relationships of affective and continuance commitment as well as role ambiguity and role conflict on intentions to leave the organization.

Mentored Versus Nonmentored Salespeople

Since there is limited academic research examining the effect of mentoring in a sales context (Fine and Pullins 1998; Pullins, Fine, and Warren 1996), the hypotheses are comparative in nature. Previous literature provides a theoretical foundation and empirical support pertaining to the effect of mentors on salesperson work outcomes, including performance, organizational commitment, and intention to leave. Based on that review, the following hypotheses were developed to determine if support for them can be replicated in this context:

> *H1: Mentored salespeople will exhibit higher mean levels of sales performance.*
>
> *H2: Mentored salespeople will have higher mean levels of (a) affective commitment and (b) continuance commitment.*
>
> *H3: Mentored salespeople will have lower levels of intention to leave the organization.*

Note that *no hypotheses* are proposed for the different types of mentors. This is due to a lack of direction from theory or past empirical results indicating that one type should be expected to produce superior results. The beginning proposition is that all types of mentors should produce results superior to those of nonmentored salespeople. This is the exploratory aspect of the research.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The data come from the Life Insurance Marketing Research Association (LIMRA), which controlled when each construct was measured. The sampling frame included newly hired, fulltime insurance salespeople from 60 U.S. and Canadian life insurance companies that were tracked over a multiyear period. The data used here were collected in three waves using a mail survey. The first data collection was initiated within the first three months of a sales agent's employment. The second and third data collections came at one year and three years, respectively.

The initial sampling frame included approximately 19,000 beginning sales representatives from the 60 insurance companies represented. This new-hire mailing resulted in 5,073 usable questionnaires, for a response rate of 27 percent. For the subsequent mailings, sales agents who responded to the previous survey were included in the mailing. The response rate for the one-year survey was 67 percent and for the three-year survey was 66 percent. The presence or absence of a mentor was assessed in the new-hire survey. Performance was assessed in the one-year survey, and commitment and intention to leave in the three-year survey.

Measures

All multi-item scales were subjected to both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to purify the scales, along with tests of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (see Table 1). Scale items used in the study are included in the Appendix. Unless otherwise noted, responses were given on a five-point Likert-type response scale.

Table 1. Internal Consistency of Measures

Measure	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Performance	1	—
Affective Commitment	6	0.87
Continuance Commitment	4	0.75
Turnover Intentions	5	0.88

Mentoring Relationship

The salespeople were asked in the *initial survey* (conducted during the first three months of employment) if they had a mentoring relationship (defined as a "career-oriented relationship between a more senior salesperson, a manager, or a person outside the organization and yourself that was initiated to help you develop a better understanding of your roles, the social/political nature of the work environment, and advance your career"). If the salespeople had a mentor, they were asked to indicate if that mentor was a manager inside the firm, an agent (peer) inside the firm, or a person outside the organization. The mentor–protégé relationships involved in this study were informal in nature. Informal mentoring relationships are developed between the individuals without that behavior being mandated or compensated by the organization (McManus and Russell 1997).

Research suggests that informal mentoring relationships tend to produce higher levels of satisfaction, greater support, and increased benefits relative to formal mentoring relationships (Chao, Walz, and Gardner 1992; Fagenson-Eland, Marks, and Amendola 1997; Ragins and Cotton 1999; Ragins, Cotton, and Miller 2000). It could be asserted that these relationships were formed by mentors due to an expectation that the salesperson in question would be a high performer, committed to the organization. The fact that the relationships were established very early in the salespersons' tenure with the organization makes this possibility unlikely. If future job outcomes were clear at that point, the organization likely would not have hired the future low performers.

Performance

Performance was measured by a self-report of the number of policies sold for the previous 12-month period. The number of policies sold is an industry standard for performance. Performance was measured at the *end of the first year* of employment (one-year survey). Self-reported performance has been shown to be reliable in previous sales force research (Churchill et al. 1985).

Commitment

Two dimensions of commitment were included in the study: continuance and affective commitment. Affective commitment is "a strong belief in and acceptance of the organizational goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (Mowday, Porter, and Steers 1982, p. 27). On the other hand, continuance commitment, sometimes termed *calculative commitment,* is "the outcome of an individual's decision to remain with an organization because of the personal time and resources already devoted to the company and because of the financial costs of changing jobs" (Commeiras and Fournier 2001, p. 239). The items used were adapted from measures developed by McGee and Ford (1987). The continuance commitment measure had four items, whereas affective commitment was assessed with six items. As operationalized by McGee and Ford, affective commitment is an affirmative desire to stay with the organization, whereas continuance commitment indicates a lack of good options for other employment. Continuance commitment might be expected from low performers with fewer options. Commitment was assessed on the three-year survey. Both dimensions of commitment were included to examine the possible differential impact of mentoring on the two types.

Intention to Leave

Intention to leave is an expressed desire to find employment in another firm within a specified period of time. It was measured by a multi-item measure included in the three-year survey (Mowday, Koberg, and McArthur 1984).

Description of Sample

The initial survey of the newly hired salespersons (potential protégés) included both individuals who obtained mentors and those that did not and contained a variety of demographic information. The average newly hired salesperson was 35 years old. Respondent ages ranged from 19 to 49. Forty-nine percent had a bachelor's degree or graduate education. Eighty percent of the new salespeople had been employed previously, with 23 percent coming from other insurance sales positions, 22 percent from managerial positions outside of insurance, and 18 percent from insurance managerial positions. Ninety percent were white, 71 percent were married, and 68 percent had one or more children.

Data Analysis

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. A number of covariates, such as age and past sales experience, were examined and found to have no significant impact.

COMPARING SALESPEOPLE WITH VARIOUS TYPES OF MENTORS AND NO MENTOR

H1, H2, and H3 compared salespeople with various types of mentors and no mentor on their levels of performance, organizational commitment, and propensity to leave. A summary of results appears in Tables 2 through 5. H1 predicts higher levels of performance for mentored versus nonmentored salespeople. The results shown in Table 2 support this hypothesis.

Table 2. ANOVA for Performance

Group	**Mean***	***n***	***F*-statistic**	***p*-value**	**η^2****
Nonmentored	19.04	729	5.23	0.00	0.03
Mentored	22.17	2,596			
Individual Analysis					
Nonmentored	19.04bd	729	6.67	0.00	0.01
Outside Mentored	25.40ac	308			
Agent/Peer Mentored	20.06bd	1,113			
Manager Mentored	23.39ac	1,127			

Notes: *Differs from: a = nonmentored; b = outside mentored; c = agent/peer mentored; d = manager mentored; **$\eta^2 = SSB/(SSB + SSW)$ (Carroll and Nordholm 1975).

Further analysis was performed to explore comparisons between the individual mentoring types (nonmentored, outside mentored, agent/peer mentored, and manager mentored). The overall results for the ANOVA were significant ($p < 0.01$). Salespeople with mentors have higher levels of performance ($p < 0.05$). Pairwise analysis using Scheffe tests indicates that salespeople with manager mentors and outside mentors have higher levels of performance than nonmentored or agent/peer-mentored salespeople. Salespeople with agent/peer mentors were not statistically different from nonmentored salespeople ($p > 0.05$).

Two dimensions of organizational commitment, affective and continuance, were tested in H2a and H2b. Results (see Tables 3 and 4) indicate that salespeople with mentors were found to have higher levels of both forms of commitment, ($p < 0.01$) and ($p < 0.05$), respectively. These findings support H2a and H2b.

Table 3. ANOVA for Affective Commitment

Group	Mean*	*n*	*F*-statistic	*p*-value	η^2**
Nonmentored	3.38	187	31.65	0.00	0.06
Mentored	3.79	315			
Individual Analysis					
Nonmentored	3.38cd	187	19.11	0.00	0.11
Outside Mentored	3.46cd	78			
Agent/Peer Mentored	3.84ab	98			
Manager Mentored	3.97ab	131			

*Differs from: a = nonmentored; b = outside mentored; c = agent/peer mentored; d = manager mentored.

Table 4. ANOVA for Continuance Commitment

Group	Mean*	*n*	*F*-statistic	*p*-value	η^2**
Nonmentored	3.05	189	4.97	0.02	0.01
Mentored	3.22	316			
Individual Analysis					
Nonmentored	3.06d	189	2.62	0.02	0.02
Outside Mentored	3.11	78			
Agent/Peer Mentored	3.25	97			
Manager Mentored	3.29a	133			

*Differs from: a = nonmentored; b = outside mentored; c = agent/peer mentored; d = manager mentored.

Salespeople with agent/peer mentors or manager mentors have higher mean levels of affective commitment than both nonmentored and outside-mentored salespeople. For continuance commitment, those salespeople with manager mentors are significantly higher than nonmentored salespeople. The agent/peer-mentored and outside mentored groups are not significantly different from nonmentored salespeople.

H3 predicts that mentored salespeople will have lower levels of intention to leave. ANOVA results support the hypothesis ($p < 0.05$). Salespeople without a mentor and those with outside mentors have the highest levels of intention to leave and are significantly different from salespeople with manager or agent/peer mentors (see Table 5). Finally, there is no significant difference between the outside-mentored and nonmentored salespeople with regard to propensity to leave the organization. Outside mentors are not associated with a reduction of turnover intentions, whereas inside mentors are associated with significantly lower turnover intentions.

Table 5. ANOVA for Turnover Intention

Group	Mean*	*n*	*F*-statistic	*p*-value	η^2**
Nonmentored	1.96	235	3.69	0.00	0.00
Mentored	1.82	389			
Individual Analysis					
Nonmentored	1.96cd	235	4.09	0.00	0.02
Outside Mentored	2.07cd	108			
Agent/Peer Mentored	1.79ab	120			
Manager Mentored	1.73ab	235			

*Differs from: a = nonmentored; b = outside mentored; c = agent/peer mentored; d = manager mentored.

The results indicate that mentoring affects the levels of salespeople's work outcomes as hypothesized. Specifically, individuals with mentors have higher levels of performance and organizational commitment and lower intention to leave. From an exploratory perspective, internally mentored salespeople (those with manager or agent/peer mentors) have a significantly lower propensity to leave than either nonmentored or outside mentored. Salespeople with manager mentors and outside mentors have significantly higher levels of performance than either nonmentored or agent/peer mentored. It appears that outside mentors relate to higher performance but not to retention, agent/peer mentors relate to higher retention but not higher performance, and manager mentors relate to both higher performance and retention.

DISCUSSION

Mentoring is one management approach that can address the expensive and critical functions of training and developing new salespeople in both sales skills and organizational socialization. Mentoring has been examined as a training and socialization tool with previous research studying various aspects of peer mentoring in a sales setting (e.g., Fine and Pullins 1998; Pullins, Fine, and Warren 1996). The current study, however, is the first to compare the effectiveness of various types of mentors in a sales setting. Our findings indicate that manager mentors are the most effective type.

One basic research question addressed by the current study was to determine whether or not salespeople with mentors have work outcomes different from salespeople with no mentor. Results indicate differences between mentored and nonmentored salespeople. With respect to performance, the current findings are consistent with results from research in nonsales contexts (Chao, Walz, and Gardner 1992; Scandura 1992; Turban and Dougherty 1994).

Previous research also suggests that mentoring affects an employee's organizational commitment (e.g., Heimann and Pittenger 1996; Kram 1983). The current study extends the literature by including two dimensions of commitment—affective and continuance. Both commitment dimensions were found to be greater for mentored salespeople. Examining these two dimensions contributes to a greater in-depth understanding of mentors' effect on their protégés' commitment. In addition, prior to this study, no empirical research has been conducted linking mentoring directly with intention to leave. Mentored salespeople were found to have lower turnover intention than those with no mentor.

A second issue addressed by this study involves the effect of different types of mentors on protégé outcomes. Findings indicate that the type of mentor matters. For example, protégés with manager mentors and agent/peer mentors have the lowest levels of intention to leave. Salespeople with manager mentors and outside mentors have higher performance when compared to salespeople with agent/peer mentors or no mentor. Salespeople with manager mentors also have higher levels of affective and continuance commitment when compared to nonmentored salespeople. These findings suggest that, whenever possible, manager mentoring should be utilized, because it appears to be the most effective form of mentoring.

One possible explanation for the superior performance of protégés of manager mentors is enhanced knowledge management. Knowledge management is aimed at improving business and individual performance through ongoing learning and adaptation. Manager mentors may be more knowledgeable than peers in terms of the behaviors that produce better outcomes. They may also be in a better position to motivate protégés to adopt those behavior patterns. Many external mentors are also likely to be managers in other organizations. Thus, they may have a similar effect on protégé learning and adaptation. The downside to these external mentors is their possible lack of loyalty to the organization employing the protégé. This can lead to lower levels of commitment to the organization among protégés of external mentors.

This study demonstrates that, for the industry being examined, mentoring matters. Further, the type of mentor a young salesperson has also matters. Our findings indicate that a manager in the mentoring role is likely to produce the most positive results for the firm. The downside to having managers take on the mentoring role is that they may not always have time to provide the ideal level of contact with their protégé. However, external mentors and peer mentors also have to do their own work as well as provide guidance. Thus, the sales manager, whose role is to "manage" and produce results, may, in fact, have as much time to engage in mentoring tasks as outside or peer mentors.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

From a theory-testing perspective, this study provides support for the theories of social exchange and social learning that link mentoring to work-related outcomes. These findings add to a large body of empirical work that supports the linkage of mentoring with work outcomes. From a theory-testing perspective, it suggests that different types of mentors have differing effects on performance, organizational commitment, and intention to leave. One possible explanation for these differential effects is the interplay between social exchange and learning as the power relationship and information flow vary in the mentor–protégé relationship.

A manager is in a more powerful position in a relationship with a protégé than would be the case for a peer. The peer can offer suggestions but may have less influence on behavior than would a manager. Managers may also have a broader base of information than peers. A peer can offer social support that builds a sense of belonging and commitment, but may not have the power and knowledge to alter selling behaviors in a desirable way. Outside mentors, who are often managers in other organizations, may have the same type of knowledge advantage as internal managers. This may also give them a great deal of expert power in the relationship with a protégé. On the other hand, outside mentors have no particular loyalty to the protégé's organization, and, because of this, they may not foster the type of organizational commitment that an internal manger would instill.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study has a variety of implications for sales force management. First, mentors affect a salesperson's work outcomes. Developmentally, mentors can provide needed information to new salespeople, thereby enhancing performance and commitment while lessening propensity to leave. In mentoring relationships, learning occurs during ongoing work experiences—reducing the time and costs of formalized training sessions. Finally, these developmental relationships can allow salespeople to vicariously learn successful selling scripts.

Managers are encouraged to look at mentoring as a resource for improving performance and lessening turnover. This can be encouraged without a formal program that assigns mentors to new employees. Having either an inside manager mentor or an outside mentor was related to increased salesperson performance. This was not the case for salespeople with peer mentors or no mentor.

Salespeople with a peer mentor or an inside manager mentor had a lower intention to leave. Thus, the inside manager mentor was related to the best outcomes for the organization. Given the tremendous costs involved with hiring and training, the retention of high-performing salespeople in the early stages of employment is an important issue.

In summary, having mentors helps, and the type of mentor matters. Although all types of mentors were shown to increase some work outcomes, manager mentors are the most likely to have high-performing protégés with a low intention to leave the organization. Managers can provide more information and guidance to the new entrants—particularly in a sales context. Other salespeople who act as peer mentors may have to take away from their own selling activities to mentor. While the information and guidance they provide a new salesperson may be valuable, they do not have the power to require the protégé to put their teaching into practice. Further, there is some evidence that helping behavior among salespeople in an insurance setting may hurt the unit's performance (Podsakoff and MacKenzie 1994). In addition, a peer mentor's knowledge of effective sales techniques may not be as broad, and peers may have less impact on the protégé's behavior than a manager mentor. By encouraging the transfer of mentoring roles to managers, agents can focus on their own productivity.

Outside mentors are also related to higher levels of performance. However, they did not instill organizational commitment or lower the intention of the protégé to leave the firm. In this sales force context, inside manager mentors were more effective (see Figure 1).

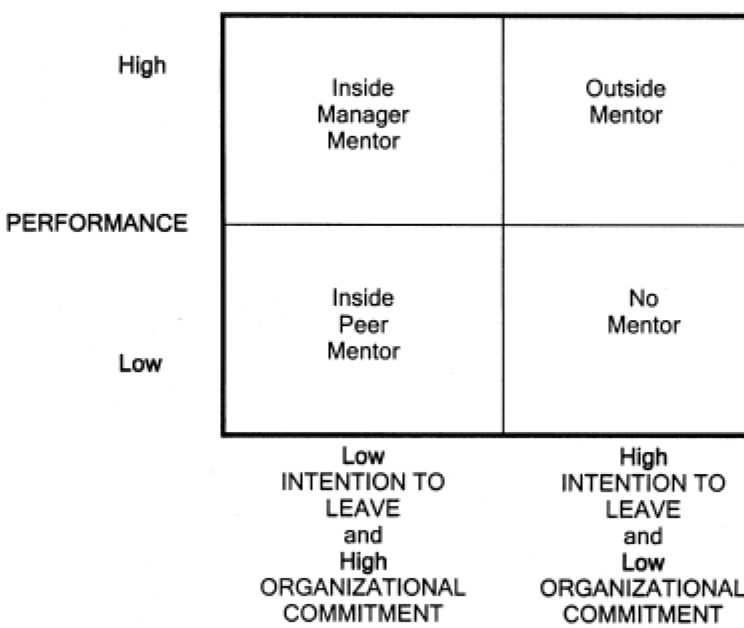

Figure 1. Results Relative to Mentor Type

To encourage mentoring by managers, the firm needs to ensure the span of control for each manager is such that they can spend the time needed with their protégés soon after their entry into the sales force. The evaluation and compensation system also needs to reward effective mentoring. To be successful long term, mentoring needs to become a part of the corporate culture.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

This study is based on data collection conducted over a three-year period. While a variety of limitations are associated with the use of such data (Lucas et al. 1987; Vermunt 1996), that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Further, time periods may mask intervening factors that may have affected the variables examined in the study—which is the case with all data collected over time.

This research also is confined to salespeople in a single industry—insurance. Lucas et al. (1987) detailed the differences between insurance salespeople and other sales positions. Such salespeople may be very autonomous, and the higher performers are very likely to be "self-starters." This could impact the effects of mentoring, as could the fact that insurance is an intangible product that may require different selling skills compared to tangible goods.

Hypotheses flowing from this exploratory effort relative to the differential effects of different types of mentors should be tested in a variety of other contexts. Reward orientations and self-efficacy may also need to be included in future studies. Saks (1995) suggests that self-efficacy can have a moderating affect when measured at the initiation of a job and a mediating one when measured after training and initial career adjustments. Controlling for self-efficacy that existed prior to joining the firm would better capture the true affect of any mentoring activities on subsequent sales force work outcomes. Future studies should also look at other mentoring forms (e.g., formal versus informal) and explore other marketing jobs when testing the influence of mentoring. Likewise, the moderating influence that ethnicity may have on mentoring should be examined in future research (Thomas 1993).

REFERENCES

Alleman, E., and W. Gray (1986), *Design Productive Mentoring Programs,* Info-Line Monograph, Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.

Bagozzi, R.P. (1980), "The Nature and Cause of Self-Esteem, Performance, and Satisfaction in the Sales Force: A Structural Equation Approach," *Journal of Business Research,* 53 (3), 315–331.

Bandura, Albert A. (1977), *Social Learning Theory,* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

——— (1986), *Social Foundations of Thought and Action,* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bass, Bernard M., and Ralph M. Stogdill (1990), *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook on Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications,* 3d ed., New York: Free Press.

Bates, T. (1993), "How External Mentoring Works," *Management Development Review,* 6 (4), 6–9.

Blau, G. (1985), "Relationship of Extrinsic, Intrinsic, and Demographic Predictors to Various Types of Withdrawal Behaviors," *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 70 (3), 442–450.

Carmine, Cheryl N. (1988), "Issues in Research on Mentoring: Definitional and Methodological," *International Journal of Mentoring,* 2 (2), 9–13.

Carroll, R.M., and L.A. Nordholm (1975), "Sampling Characteristics of Kelley's Epsilon Squared and Hay's Omega Squared," *Educational and Psychological Measurement,* 35, 541–554.

Chandrasekaran, Murali, Kevin McNeilly, Frederick A. Russ, and Detelina Marinova (2000), "From Uncertain Intentions to Actual Behavior: A Threshold Model of Whether and When Salespeople Quit," *Journal of Marketing Research,* 37 (November), 463–479.

Chao, Georgia T., Pat M. Walz, and Philip D. Gardner (1992), "Formal and Informal Mentorships: A Comparison of Mentoring Functions and Contrast with Nonmentored Counterparts," *Personnel Psychology,* 45 (Autumn), 619–636.

Churchill, Gilbert A., Jr. (1987), *Marketing Research: Methodological Foundations,* Chicago: Dryden Press.

———, Neil M. Ford, Steven W. Hartley, and Orville C. Walker (1985), "The Determinants of Salesperson Performance: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Marketing Research,* 22 (May), 103–118.

Commeiras, Nathalie, and Christophe Fournier (2001), "Critical Evaluation of Porter et al.'s Organizational Commitment Questionnaire: Implications for Researchers," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 21, 3 (Summer), 239–245.

Dreher, George F., and Ronald A. Ash (1990), "A Comparative Study of Mentoring Among Men and Women in Managerial, Professional, and Technical Positions," *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 75 (October), 539–546.

Dubinsky, Alan J., Roy D. Howell, Thomas N. Ingram, and Danny N. Bellenger (1986), "Sales Force Socialization," *Journal of Marketing,* 50 (October), 192–207.

Fagenson-Eland, E.A., M.A. Marks, and K.L. Amendola (1997), "Perceptions of Mentoring Relationships," *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 51, 29–42.

Feldman, Daniel C., and David C. Thomas (1992), "Career Management Issues Facing Expatriates," *Journal of International Business Studies,* 23 (Second Quarter), 271–293.

Fine, Leslie M., and Ellen B. Pullins (1998), "Peer Mentoring in the Industrial Sales Force: An Exploratory Investigation of Men and Women in Developmental Relationships," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 18, 4 (Fall), 89–104.

Futrell, Charles M., and A. Parasuraman (1984), "The Relationship of Satisfaction and Performance to Salesforce Turnover," *Journal of Marketing,* 48 (Fall), 33–40.

Heimann, Beverly, and Khushwant S. Pittenger (1996), “The Impact of Formal Mentorship on Socialization and Commitment of Newcomers,” *Journal of Managerial Issues,* 8 (Spring), 108–117.

Hunt, David M., and Carol Michael (1983), “Mentorship: A Career Training and Development Tool,” *Academy of Management Review,* 8 (July), 475–485.

Johnston, Mark W., A. Parasuraman, Charles M. Futrell, and William C. Black (1990), “A Longitudinal Assessment of the Impact of Selected Organizational Influences on Salespeople’s Organizational Commitment During Early Employment,” *Journal of Marketing Research,* 27 (August), 333–344.

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss (1977), *Men and Women of the Corporation,* New York: Basic Books.

Kelly, M.J. (2001), “Management Mentoring in a Social Service Organization,” *Administration in Social Work,* 25 (1), 17–33.

Kram, Kathy E. (1983), “Phases of the Mentor Relationship,” *Academy of Management Journal,* 26 (4), 608–625.

———, and D.T. Hall (1996), *Mentoring in a Context of Diversity and Turbulence,* London: Blackwell.

Lankau, M.J., and T.A. Scandura (2002), “An Investigation of Personal Learning in Mentoring Relationships: Content, Antecedents, and Consequences,” *Academy of Management Journal,* 45 (4), 779–790.

Lee, Thomas W., and Richard T. Mowday (1987), “Voluntarily Leaving an Organization: An Empirical Investigation of Steers and Mowday’s Model of Turnover,” *Academy of Management Journal,* 30 (October), 721–743.

Levinson, Daniel J., C.N. Darrow, E.B. Klein, M.H. Levinson, and B. McKee (1979), *The Season’s of a Man’s Life,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Lucas, George H., A. Parasuraman, R.A. Davis, and Ben M. Enis (1987), “An Empirical Study of Salesforce Turnover,” *Journal of Marketing,* 51 (July), 34–59.

MacKenzie, Scott B., Philip M. Podsakoff, and Michael Ahearne (1998), “Some Possible Antecedents and Consequences of In-Role and Extra-Role Salesperson Performance,” *Journal of Marketing,* 62 (July), 87–98.

Mathieu, John E., and Dennis M. Zajac (1990), “A Review and Meta-Analysis of the Antecedents, Correlates and Consequences of Organizational Commitment,” *Psychological Bulletin,* 108 (September), 171–194.

McGee, G.W., and R.C. Ford (1987), “Two (or More?) Dimensions of Organizational Commitment: Reexamination of the Affective and Continuance Commitment Sales,” *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 72 (November), 638–642.

McManus, Stacy E., and Joyce E.A. Russell (1997), “New Directions for Mentoring Research: An Examination of Related Constructs,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 51 (August), 145–161.

McNeilly, Kevin M., and Frederick A. Russ (1992), "The Moderating Effect of Sales Force Performance on Relationships Involving Antecedents of Turnover," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 12, 1 (Winter), 9–20.

Morris, S.G. (1995), "Turnover Among Professionals: The Role of Person–Culture Fit and Mentoring Auditors, Accountants," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver.

Mowday, Richard T., C.S. Koberg, and A.W. McArthur (1984), "The Psychology of the Withdrawal Process: A Cross-Validation Test of Mobley's Intermediate Linkage Model of Turnover in Two Samples," *Academy of Management Journal,* 27 (March), 79–94.

———, Lyman Porter, and Richard M. Steers (1982), *Employee–Organization Linkages: The Psychology of Commitment, Absenteeism, and Turnover,* San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Mullen, E.J. (1994), "Framing the Mentoring Relationship as an Information Exchange," *Human Resources Management Review,* 4 (3), 257–281.

Noe, Raymond A. (1988), "An Investigation of the Determinants of Successful Assigned Mentoring Relationships," *Personnel Psychology,* 41 (Autumn), 457–459.

Peluchette, JoyVan Eck, and Sandy Jeanquart (2000), "Professionals' Use of Different Mentor Sources at Various Career Stages: Implications for Career Success," *Journal of Social Psychology,* 140 (5), 549–564.

Phillips-Jones, Linda (1982), *Mentors and Protégés,* New York: Arbor House.

Podsakoff, Philip M., and Scott B. MacKenzie (1994), "Organizational Citizenship Behaviors and Sales Unit Effectiveness," *Journal of Marketing Research,* 31 (August), 351–363.

Pullins, Ellen B., and Leslie M. Fine (2002), "How the Performance of Mentoring Activities Affects the Mentor's Job Outcomes," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 22, 4 (Fall), 259–271.

———, ———, and Wendy L. Warren (1996), "Identifying Peer Mentors in the Sales Force: An Exploratory Investigation of Willingness and Ability," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science,* 24 (2), 125–136.

Raabe, Babette, and Terry A. Beehr (2003), "Formal Mentoring Versus Supervisor and Co-Worker Relationships: Differences in Perceptions and Impact," *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 24 (3), 271–293.

Ragins, Belle R. (1989), "Barriers to Mentoring: The Female Manager's Dilemma," *Human Relations,* 42 (1), 1–22.

——— (1997), "Antecedents of Diversified Mentoring Relationships," *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 51 (1), 90–109.

———, and John L. Cotton (1999), "Mentor Functions and Outcomes: A Comparison of Men and Women in Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships," *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 84 (4), 529–550.

———, and D. McFarlin (1990), "Perception of Mentor Roles in Cross-Gender Mentoring Relationships," *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 37 (3), 321–339.

———, John L. Cotton, and Janice S. Miller (2000), "Marginal Mentoring: The Effects of the of Mentor, Quality of Relationship, and Program Design on Work and Career Attitudes," *Academy of Management Journal,* 43 (6), 1177–1194.

Sager, Jeffrey E., P. Varadarajan, and Charles M. Futrell (1988), "Understanding Salesperson Turnover: A Partial Evaluation of Mobley's Turnover Process Model," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 10, 1 (May), 20–35.

Saks, A.M. (1995), "Longitudinal Field Investigation of the Moderating and Mediating Effects of Self-Efficacy on the Relationship Between Training and Newcomer Adjustment," *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 80 (April), 211–225.

Scandura, Terri A. (1992), "Mentorship and Career Mobility: An Empirical Investigation," *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 13 (March), 169–174.

Thomas, David A. (1993), "Racial Dynamics in Cross-Race Developmental Relationships," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 38 (2), 169–194.

Tillman, Linda C. (2001), "Mentoring African American Faculty in Predominantly White Institutions," *Research in Higher Education,* 42 (3), 295–325.

Turban, Daniel B., and Thomas W. Dougherty (1994), "Role of Protégé Personality in Receipt of Mentoring and Career Success," *Academy of Management Journal,* 37 (June), 688–702.

Training (2003), "2003 Industry Report," *Training,* 31, 22d Annual: 29–64.

Vermunt, Jeroen K. (1996), *Log-Linear Event History Analysis: A General Approach with Missing Data, Latent Variables, and Unsolved Heterogeneity,* Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.

Wilson, James A., and Nancy S. Elman (1990), "Organizational Benefits of Mentoring," *Academy of Management Executive,* 4 (November), 88–93.

Zey, Michael G. (1984), *The Mentor Connection,* Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin.

APPENDIX. Measure Items

Continuance Commitment

1. I feel I have too few options to consider leaving this agency.
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my agency right now even if I wanted to.
3. Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my agency right now.
4. It would be too costly for me to leave my agency in the near future.

Affective Commitment

1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my agency.
2. I feel "emotionally attached" to this agency.
3. This agency has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
4. I feel like "part of the family" at this agency.

5. I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this agency.
6. I enjoy discussing my agency with people outside it.

Turnover Intention

1. I will probably look for a job in a different company in the next year.
2. I would turn down an offer from another company if it came tomorrow. (reverse scored)
3. I plan to stay with this company for quite some time. (reverse scored)
4. I am not sure that this is the job for me.
5. I often think about quitting.