

## Career Outcome of Job Experience and Gender Occurrence of Mentoring

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*The study examined the career success outcome of job experience and gender occurrence of mentoring in the Nigerian work environment. It utilized a factorial design in a survey of five hundred and ten managers from three international and seven local banks located in Lagos State, Nigeria. All the participants were involved in informal mentoring relationships. The results of the analysis of variance showed that there was no difference in career success between employees with high levels of job experience and those with low levels. In addition, job experience and gender did not combine to determine career success. Male protégés had better career success compared to their female counterparts, but the level of career success reported under male and female mentors was comparable. The gender of the protégé and that of the mentor interacted to yield four gender combinations that affected career success differently. Results showed that cross-sex combinations produced higher levels of career success compared to same-sex combinations. The findings imply that gender occurrence of mentoring is more relevant for career success among Nigerian employees. The paper recommends that training and mentoring intervention should be structured in ways that take cognizance of the gender factor.*

**Key words:** Job experience, career success, gender occurrence, mentoring and informal mentoring

### Introduction

A career provides employees with an opportunity to engage in satisfying work activity and enhances the prospect of attaining diverse goals in life. Every individual therefore, anticipates and values the success which occurs as an outcome of a chosen career (Schein, 1977; Holland, 1985; Feldman, 1988). Empirical investigations suggest that cognitive and non-cognitive factors determine the outcome of an individual's striving for a successful career (Haberfeld, 1992; Melamed, 1995). Of these two, Child (1984) argues that non-cognitive factors easily influence the possibility of career success. The present economic recession makes the experiential approach, which involves job experience and mentoring, is a favoured non-cognitive factor in Nigeria. The society and organizations have a stake in the effective management of employees' careers through this method. An employee who is successful

in his or her career will be happier doing his/her job, will be more willing to meet work requirements and performance standards, and is not likely to compromise the quality of goods and services. Consequently, an empirical investigation of the usefulness of this approach for career success in the Nigerian work setting is necessary.

Career is a time-related concept (Melamed, 1996) that is affected by relevant inputs, one of which is the number of years an employee has spent on the job. Indeed, various studies (eg. Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1993; Tharenou, Latiner and Conroy, 1994; Powell and Butterfield, 1994) indicate that experience increases the development opportunities in a job and provides a reasonable proficiency skill that leads to success in a career. Experience makes it easy for individuals to recognize what is to be done in a given situation (Okurame, 2006) and provides them with the ability to deal with career stress as it arises.

Employees with positive experience perform well over time and progress to higher levels in their career (Melamed, 1996). The realization of this link necessitated the maintenance of corporate sponsorship of employees to attend courses and training meant to update their knowledge. The acquisition and utility of job experience differs among the sexes; women and men seem to have different work and career experience paths (Melamed, 1996; Powell and Butterfield, 1994). This difference is largely due to the disparity in career interruptions, responsibilities at home and parenthood. This suggests that job experience will affect the career outcome of male and female employees differently.

Research has also demonstrated a strong link between mentoring and career success (Cox and Nkomo, 1991; Fagenson, 1989; Whitely et al., 1991; Turban and Dougherty, 1994; Okurame and Balogun, 2005). Mentoring is therefore a crucial interpersonal determinant of career success (Morrison, White, and Van Velsor, 1987; Kirckmeyer, 1998; Cox and Nkomo, 1991; Whitely, et al, 1991; Turban and Dougherty, 1994) which is recognised as a powerful tool of career management. The efficacy of mentoring as a career management tool is hinged on a developmental social learning theory which posits that behaviour is learned during interaction with others, especially when they serve as models (Sarason, Sarason, et al, 1991; Baldwin, 1992) who teach protégés to navigate the world of work (Kram, 1985).

The understanding that good mentoring is vital for a favourable career outcome ie, career success and the attainment of mentoring goals and benefits, has created a need to deal with factors that inhibit an effective relationship. Researchers such as, Ragins, (1989); and Ragins and McFarlin, (1990) argue that gender is one of these factors. Empirical investigations of the influence of a protégé's gender on mentoring benefits/outcomes have yielded contradictory findings. While several studies found that male protégés obtained better outcomes, some reported better outcomes for female protégés and a few others found no difference. Again, the literature suggests that the gender of a protégé may well interact with that of the mentor to affect career

outcome (Williams and Locke, 1999; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Indeed, empirical investigations (Kirckmeyer, 1998; Burke, Mckeen, and McKenna, 1994; Ragins and Cotton, 1991; Ragins and McFarlin, 1990; Ragins and Sunstrom, 1989; Clawson and Kram, 1984; Kram, 1985) have found an irregular pattern of interaction between different gender combinations. These studies conclude that the quality and benefits of mentoring are reduced in cross-sex compositions because of interpersonal problems that are absent in same-sex combinations. Ideologies of gender role serve as a guide to understanding the interaction of the sexes in a dyadic relationship such as mentoring (Briles, 1987; Madden, 1987; Nagel and Hagen, 1983; Mould, 1980).

Gender role theory explains that the interpersonal behaviour of men and women are learned early in life through socialization along culturally-accepted sex roles. Children learn activities within the confines of these roles through reinforcement by men and women who serve as role models in the family, community and the society at large (SSRHN, 1999). At adulthood, they have a clear idea of socially-defined roles and responsibilities, how they should be accomplished and the consequences of non-compliance with approved habits (SSRHN, 1999). Generally, men assume task roles and women are socialized along nurturing roles (Witherspoon, 1997). This role differentiation results in peculiar patterns of values, and differences in acceptable behaviour for males and females interacting in a dyadic relationship (Boldy, Wood, and Kashy, 2001; Payne and Cangemi, 1997; Udegbe, 1998; Rosener, 1990). Although, the findings of studies which examined the gendered experience of mentoring have implications for organizations in Nigeria, their practical relevance is limited by the argument that mentoring relationships occur in a socio-cultural context and are affected by it (Eti, Ogaji and Probert, 2006; Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995). In this circumstance, there is a need to investigate the gendered experience of mentoring and its career success outcome within the Nigerian culture. There is a paucity of research in this area. The present study

is therefore justified in its investigation of the career outcome of gender occurrence of mentoring.

In line with the literature review on job experience and gender issues in mentoring, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested.

Hypothesis 1: Job experience will significantly distinguish respondents on career success.

Hypothesis 2: Job experience and gender of protégé will significantly interact to affect career success.

Hypothesis 3: Gender of protégé will have a significant main effect and would interact significantly with gender of mentor to influence career success.

Mentoring relationships are of different types, but informal mentoring has been found to be more beneficial to a career than formal mentoring (Dreher and Cox, 1996; Chao, Walz and Gardner, 1992; Phillips-Jones, 1983; Klauss, 1981; Mullen, 2005; Zachary, 2005). Formal mentoring programmes in the Nigerian work environment have not been cited in literature. However, it is obvious that informal mentoring exists, since it is a foremost interpersonal relationship which develops naturally from shared admiration, aspiration, values and interests (Kalbfleisch and Davies, 1993; Sullivan, 1992; Kram, 1983, 1985). This study, therefore, focused on informal mentoring in the investigation of the gendered experience of mentoring and its influence on career success.

## Method

### Design and setting

The independent variables in this study are: job experience, gender of mentor and gender of protégé; while the dependent variable is perceived career success. Job experience was dichotomized into high and low categories; while the gender of the protégé and that of the mentor were divided into male and female. The study utilized the factorial design to ascertain the interaction effects of job experience and gender of protégé on career success as well as that between the gender of the protégé and the mentor's gender.

The study was conducted among employees in three international and seven local banks situated in four designated central business districts of Lagos State, Nigeria. The banks used in the study were selected because they have, at least, an office in each of the designated central business districts chosen as study sites. In Nigeria, banks are a fairly gender-integrated institution, and on the basis of universal banking, they provide similar banking services.

### Sample and procedure

Data for the study was collected in a survey of first-line managers from ten banks. Participants were 510 protégés (298 males and 212 females) engaged in informal mentoring relationships in their organizations. They represent a response rate of 63.75% of the 800 questionnaires administered. A deliberate attempt was made to administer the questionnaires to all identified female first-line managers in the banks sampled. This ensure that there were enough female samples for the study and afforded a less skewed ratio for both sexes, given that women are underrepresented at the managerial level in Nigeria (Udegbe, 1996) and elsewhere (Ragins and Scandura, 1999).

All participants were in the physical proximity of their mentors in their organizations. Their mean age was 34.4 years ( $SD = 5.15$ ), and they all had at least two years tenure in their present organizations. The average job experience was 6.1 years ( $SD = 3.66$ ), while position tenure was 4.75 years ( $SD = 1.65$ ). The participants were well educated: three hundred and forty (66.7%) had university degrees, thirty-one (6.1%) had professional banking qualifications, ninety-seven (19%) possessed polytechnic diplomas and forty-two (8.2%) had varying combinations of the aforementioned educational qualifications.

### Measures

The main instrument of the study was a questionnaire which measured demographic, informal mentoring experiences and career success variables. The demographic information obtained on the respondents included age, sex, job experience, position tenure and education. Parameters used as measures of informal

mentoring experience were the physical proximity of the mentor and the mentor's sex.

Career success was assessed by a 4-item subjective career success measure adjusted from Turban and Dougherty (1994). The scale is widely used to measure how successful a respondent feels his or her career has been. Using a 5-point Likert-type format, the 4 items were validated using the judgement of experts and a pre-test of items in a pilot study. All the items in the scale were considered adequate and relevant by experts. The pilot study which involved samples similar to the respondents in the main study yielded an internal consistency coefficient of 0.70. In the present study, a corrected split-half reliability of .81 was established for the 4-item scale. Factor analysis using principal component analysis followed by varimax rotation procedure resulted in a factor with Eigen value exceeding 1.00. A high score on the scale reflects a greater degree of career success.

**Result**

The interaction effects of protégé and mentor's gender on career success as well as that between job experience and gender of protégé were examined by an analysis of variance (ANOVA).

ANOVA results presented in table 1 show that the main effect of job experience is not significant,  $F(1, 502) 1.821 p > .05$ . Employees with low ( $M = 13.5$ ) and high ( $M = 13.6$ ) levels of job experience

were comparable on career success. Results reveal that the gender of the protégé had a significant effect  $F(1, 502) 3.941 p < .05$ , while the gender of the mentor did not  $F(1, 502) 2.200 p > .05$ . The mean career success score of the male protégés ( $M = 13.94$ ) was higher than that of their female counterparts ( $M = 13.29$ ), while those recorded under male and female mentors were similar. The interaction effect of job experience and gender of protégé was not significant,  $F(1, 502) 0.045 p > .05$ . The mean career success scores of male employees with low levels of job experience ( $M = 13.9$ ), male employees with high levels of job experience ( $M = 14.0$ ), female employees with low levels of job experience ( $M = 13.2$ ) and female employees with high levels of job experience ( $M = 13.2$ ) were comparable.

The interaction effect of the gender of the protégé and that of the mentor on career success was shown to be significant,  $F(1, 502) 8.940 p < .01$ . All other possible interaction effects were not significant. The significant interaction of the protégé and the mentor's gender yielded 251 male protégés with male mentors ( $M = 13.73$ ), 58 female protégés with female mentors ( $M = 12.45$ ), 47 male protégés with female mentors ( $M = 14.17$ ), and 154 female protégés with male mentors ( $M = 14.10$ ). The mean scores on career success for the four groups were subjected to the Scheffe post hoc analysis (table 2).

**Table 1. Summary of 2 x 2 ANOVA showing the main and interaction effects of job experience, gender of protégé and gender of mentor on career success**

Dependent variable	Source of variation	SS	dF	ms	f	p
Career success	Job experience	0.151	1	0.151	1.821	ns*
	Gender of protégé	36.436	1	36.436	3.941	< .05
	Gender of mentor	24.734	1	24.734	2.200	ns
	Job experience/gender of protégé	0.504	1	0.504	0.045	ns
	Job experience/gender of mentor	1.025	1	1.025	0.091	ns
	Gender of protégé/gender of mentor	100.504	1	100.504	8.940	< .01
	Job experience/gender of protégé/gender of mentor	12.249	1	12.249	1.090	ns
	Error	5643.495	502	11.242		
Total		102030.000	510			

\* Not significant



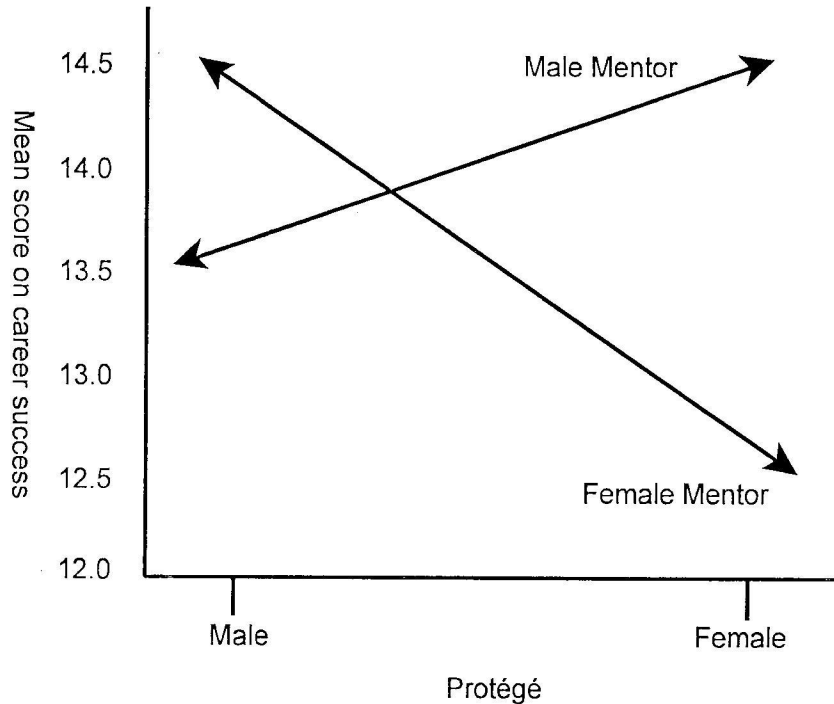
**Table 2. Summary of Scheffe's multiple comparisons for interaction effects of protégé and mentor's gender on career success**

Measure		1	2	3	4	N	M	s.d.
Career success	Male protégé-male mentor (1)	-	0.68	7.13*	1.27	251	13.73	3.15
	Male protégé-female mentor (2)		-	6.88*	0.02	47	14.17	3.02
	female protégé-female mentor (3)			-	10.46*	58	12.45	3.31
	female protégé-male mentor (4)				-	154	14.10	3.74

\* mean difference significant at 0.01

The results presented in table 2 reveal that career success in the male protégé-female mentor combination is not significantly different from that of the female protégé-male mentor group (0.02,  $p > 0.05$ ). The male protégé-male mentor combination was also not significantly different from the male protégé-female mentor (0.68,  $p > .05$ ) and the female protégé-male mentor gender combinations (1.27,  $p < 0.05$ ). On the other hand, the female protégé-

female mentor combination had a comparatively low mean score that is significantly different from the male protégé-male mentor group (7.13,  $p < 0.01$ ), the male protégé-female mentor (6.88,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the female protégé-male mentor (10.46,  $p < .01$ ) groups. This pattern of interaction which places the opposite-sex combinations above the same-sex groups is presented in figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Interaction effects of protégé's and mentor's gender on perceived career success

### **Discussion**

This study investigated the influence of job experience and gendered experience of mentoring on career success in the Nigerian work environment. It examined the main effect of job experience and its interaction with the gender of the protégé as well as the interaction effect of the gender of the protégé and that of the mentor. The results of ANOVA did not support the first and second hypotheses of the study. The results revealed that job experience did not have a significant main effect and did not interact with the gender of the protégé to affect career success. This finding contradicts previous results (e.g. Dreher and Bretz, 1991; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1993; Powell and Butterfield, 1994; Tharenou et al., 1994; Ohlott et al., 1994). It is reasoned that job experience adequately equips an employee to face the challenges of career progression.

Again, differences in experience opportunities for male and female employees are also reasoned to result in sex differences in job experience. The non-significant effects of job experience in this study suggest that the variable is not relevant for career success. A close examination of the banking sector which served as the setting for this study could help one to understand this result. The sector is a gender-integrated work environment where comparable opportunities aimed at building knowledge exist for men and women. The females in the banking sector are also a largely adjusted workforce that has successfully devised ways of attending to non-work roles without necessarily inhibiting assigned work responsibilities. Again, many of the banks have merged and streamlined their activities. This probably levelled the effects of job experience on career success. Thus, though experience is an objective merit that enhances credibility and credentials (Melamed, 1996), organizations will have to deemphasize it in programmes aimed at promoting career success.

The ANOVA results, which revealed significant main effect of protégé's gender on career success, support the first component of hypothesis 3 and

confirm the findings of studies (e.g. Burke, 1984; Reich, 1986) that sex differences exist in the experience of mentoring benefits. The non-significant main effect of the mentor's gender is inconsistent with the assertion that a mentor's sex produces different outcomes (Ragins, 1989; Dreher and Cox, 1996). The non-significant effect implies that career success is not affected by the sex of a mentor. This finding is not entirely unexpected in a sector where male and female senior executives have made comparable impact. The finding that the gender of the protégé significantly influenced career success finds explanation in the literature. The focus of mentoring support for male and female protégés differs and results in different outcomes. It is argued in the literature that career related functions and support enhances career success better than psychosocial or role modeling functions. Although, empirical findings on this issue are mixed, male protégés report higher levels of career-related functions compared to their female counterparts. It is, therefore, possible that the higher level of career success recorded by male protégés is consequent upon a greater degree of career-related informal mentoring support. From the foregoing, it plausible too that the non-significant effect of mentor's gender on career success could have resulted from the non inclusion of the amount of informal mentoring function reported under male and female mentors. A fallout of these explanations is that training programmes for mentors should attempt to build capacity for addressing inequity in the focus of mentoring support.

The analysis of the interaction effect of the protégé and the mentor's gender on career success was significant and indicative of support for the final component of hypothesis 3. Multiple comparisons for the interaction effect show that the four gender combinations that emerged were significantly different. The male protégé-male mentor ( $M = 13.73$ ), male protégé-female mentor ( $M = 14.2$ ) and the female protégé-male mentor ( $M = 14.1$ ) combinations recorded mean career success scores that are statistically equal while the female protégé-

female mentor combination ( $M = 12.45$ ) had a significantly low score. These findings are not in line with the direction suggested in the literature but they give credence to the assertion that gendered experience of mentoring relationships plays a significant role in mentoring outcome. Previous empirical investigations (eg, Burke et al., 1994; Ragins and Cotton, 1991; Ragins and McFarlin, 1990; Kram, 1985; Clawson and Kram, 1984) indicate that mentoring benefits and outcomes are higher in same-sex mentoring dyads compared to cross-sex combinations because of problems inherent in the latter. A close look at the mean scores of the four gender combinations of mentoring shows that the finding in the present study is suggestive of a reverse situation. Career success is higher with an opposite sex protégé-mentor combination than with the same-sex combination. This implies that opposite-sex combinations of mentoring enhance career success outcome better than same-sex combinations. Indeed, research evidence suggests that though opposite-sex combinations have peculiar problems, interacting in a dyadic relationship involving the opposite sex brings out the best in individuals (Noe, 1989; Helgeson and Gollob, 1991). This can be interpreted to mean that a male and a female in a mentoring relationship work harder to attain mentoring goals. Problems of opposite-sex dyads may therefore not necessarily be generalized to every organizational setting or culture. Thus, it is important for organizations to structure mentoring interventions in ways that foster the emergence of opposite-sex dyads.

The findings of the present study have shown the effects of job experience and gendered occurrence of mentoring on career success. Despite its contribution to knowledge, this study is not without its limitations. Although, a standard and a psycho-metrically established measure tapped the dependent variable of the study, the use of a self-report instrument is a fundamental issue in the research. It is possible, therefore, that some under-reporting or over-reporting took place. This could create an avenue for alternative explanations of the findings. Particularly,

therefore, it is recommended that future research in the Nigerian context utilize much more concrete measures. Second, the present study which examined the effects of job experience and gender occurrence of mentoring on career success is exploratory. It did not control for some relevant factors in career success. Foremost among these is the degree of informal mentoring support. The level of support received in informal mentoring is a predictor of career success in the Nigerian work environment (Okurame and Balogun, 2005) but this variable was not considered in the analysis. Further investigation of the gender occurrence of mentoring which incorporates or is a control for the informal mentoring function in the Nigerian environment is therefore recommended to confirm the present findings. Again, the promotion/training policies of organizations sampled which may have implications for mentoring and career benefits were not considered. It is recommended that future studies integrate this factor to fully account for the variance in career success. Finally, because the study was conducted in the banking sector, it might be suggested that its findings are organization-specific. This calls for studies in other sectors of the Nigerian work environment.

The foregoing limitations however do not erode the practical implication of the results that career success could be predicted from the gender occurrence of a mentoring relationship. This obviously has implications for organizations, in Nigeria and elsewhere, that wish to manage career success through mentoring. They will need to structure programmes aimed at fostering informal mentoring in ways that encourage opposite sex dyads and provide training on how to foster an effective/beneficial relationship in same-sex combinations.

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### Biographical Note

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