

How mentoring improves the leadership skills of those doing the mentoring

October 19 2020, by Mostafa Ayoobzadeh, Kathleen Boies



Mentoring isn't just good for the person on the receiving end. New research suggests those who serve as mentors benefit too. Credit: Unsplash

In a mentoring relationship, a more experienced person (or mentor) provides a less experienced person (or protégé) with information, support and friendship.

Mentoring can happen [in almost any context](#), including workplaces and universities. We often assume that, in mentoring relationships, protégés

are those who benefit the most. As such, the majority of mentoring research has focused on the benefits to people who are at the receiving end of mentoring support.

But what about mentors? Do they benefit from mentoring as well?

Enhancing leadership skills

To answer this question, we focused [our research](#) on the benefits of mentoring for actual mentors. We examined whether mentors gain [leadership skills](#) through providing mentoring support.

Why did we focus on [leadership development](#) as an outcome?

The majority of [leadership](#) research has examined leadership development in classroom settings or through [training programs](#). However, people can practice their leadership qualities—including negotiation, communication, emotional, interpersonal and problem-solving skills—[every day throughout many activities and assignments](#). That includes helping and mentoring others.

Mentors help their protégés solve problems, communicate many topics with their protégés and use their emotional skills to cheer up, encourage or influence their protégés. Our research suggests that performing these services helps mentors practice their own leadership skills and contributes to their development as leaders.

Leader identity and confidence

To conduct our study, we initiated [an eight-month mentoring program for Ph.D. students](#). Through various means (newsletters, graduate program directors and word of mouth, to name just a few), we invited

senior Ph.D. candidates to volunteer in the program. Ultimately, 46 agreed to participate in our study. These senior Ph.D. students were assigned to first-year Ph.D. students who had contacted us to be mentored.

At four times throughout the [mentoring program](#), we measured the extent to which mentors identified themselves as leaders (or leader identity) and the extent to which they had confidence in leading a team project (or leader self-efficacy).

Towards the end of the mentoring program, we also measured the extent to which mentors provided their protégés with mentoring support. This way, we could see the relationship between mentors' engagement in the practice of mentoring and the extent to which they gained leader identity and leader self-efficacy.

Our analysis showed that the more mentors provided mentoring support, the more they saw themselves as leaders (gained leader identity) and the more confident they became in leading a project (gained leader self-efficacy).

Gains made

Our research suggests that mentoring can be used to improve and enhance leadership skills among the members of an organization, namely students or employees. Administrators and practitioners can initiate mentoring programs not only to welcome new team members, but also to develop leadership skills in their senior personnel.

It is often more difficult for mentoring program administrators to attract volunteer mentors than protégés. Our research suggests that they can now encourage their senior members to volunteer as [mentors](#) as a way to gain or enhance their leadership skills.

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