

**DO PEERS SUPPLEMENT OR SUBSTITUTE FOR MENTORS
IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTING?**

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ABSTRACT

Prior research indicates that within public accounting firms both mentoring and peer relationships exist and that the two relationships are likely to differ in certain ways. The current study was designed to provide additional evidence on the role and function of each relationship by explicitly examining both relationships. Practicing auditors from local, intermediate, and Big-Five firms responded to a survey which included questions on mentoring and peer relationships that they have been involved with and the functions served by these relationships. The results of the study indicate that peer relationships are used to supplement mentoring relationships more often than they are used to substitute for mentoring relationships. Mentors generally function better on the issue of internal sponsorship, while peers generally function better on the issue of social support. Additionally, the results of the study indicate that respondents with experience with both mentoring and peer relationships rate higher the advancement outcomes related to salary, promotions, and assignments than those respondents who have not participated in mentoring or peer relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

Within public accounting firms, there exist a range of developmental relationships [Scandura 1992], which include both mentoring relationships and peer relationships. Mentors may be characterized as higher ranking organizational members, who possess significant experience and knowledge and are committed to providing support to a protégé's professional career [Collins 1983; Kram 1985; Roche 1979]. A peer is committed to providing support to the individual's career. In contrast with a mentor, a peer is an organizational member of the same rank [Kram and Isabella 1985]. Kram and Isabella [1985] contend that fundamental differences exist between the two kinds of relationships. For example, they characterize mentoring as a "one-way helping dynamic", whereas they characterize a peer relationship as a "two-way exchange" [Kram and Isabella 1985,129].

Prior research in accounting [Dirsmith and Covaleski 1985; Scandura 1992; Scandura and Viator 1994; Street and McKnight 1996; Viator and Scandura 1991; Viator 1999] has focused primarily on mentoring relationships with limited attention being given to peer relationships. While the prior work has yielded important insights on the potential benefits and functions of mentoring, little is known about the potential benefits and functions

of peer relationships among public accountants. Research has examined the association of mentoring and public accountants' intentions to stay at the firm, but there has been no examination of the association of having a peer and intentions to remain. Furthermore, to the extent that peer relationships may supplement or substitute mentoring relationships, research that does not examine both peer and mentoring relationships may be limited. For example, when there are concurrent occurrences of mentor and peer relationships, the presence or absence of a peer relationship may attenuate the association between mentoring and certain outcomes.

This paper reports the results of a study examining mentoring and peer relationships in public accounting firms. To conduct the study, participants were mailed a survey questionnaire containing, in part, questions about whether they have had a relationship with a mentor and/or peer. If they had either or both relationships, they responded to questions about the functions of mentoring and peer relationships. The questionnaire also contained demographic and organizational outcome questions.

The study extends the existing research in three primary ways. *First*, the current study explicitly examines both mentoring and peer relationships and provides evidence on frequency of peer relationships and whether peer relationships substitute for or supplement mentoring relationships. Kram and Isabella [1985,

129] contend that, while both relationships “provide a range of career-enhancing and psychosocial functions,” peer relationships appear to offer “unique developmental opportunities” to foster a sense of expertise, equality, and empathy. To the extent that peer and mentoring relationships are substitutes, involvement in one relationship would lower the likelihood of being involved in the other. However, if mentoring and peer relationships supplement one another, then involvement in one relationship would not lower the likelihood of being involved in the other. So far, there has been no research that explains the association between mentoring and peer relationships in accounting organizations.

To address, in part, the issue of peers substituting for or supplementing mentors, this study examines the relative frequency of respondents classified into one of four groups involved in: (1) a mentoring relationship only, (2) both a mentoring and peer relationship, (3) a peer relationship only, and (4) neither relationship. Further addressing this issue, the study examines the perceived functions of mentoring and peer relationships among those who have experience with both of these relationships. On one hand, to the extent that the two relationships are substitutes, then their perceived functions should be perceived similarly. On the other hand, to the extent that the two relationships supplement each other, then differences should exist in the perceived functions of the two

relationships. For example, if peer relationships supplement mentoring then individuals should perceive peer relationships to serve certain functions better than mentoring relationships.

To address this aspect of the study, a broader set of functions is considered than that of previous research [Viator and Scandura 1991; Scandura and Viator 1994]. In this regard, certain questions were included to address the potential roles of internal and external sponsorship. Internal sponsorship might be particularly important in a public accounting firm, where audit teams are formed and reformed for each changing engagement. External sponsorship may provide the individual with the visibility outside the firm that is necessary in practice development.

Second, the study examines the extent to which individuals' relationship decisions (e.g., to participate in mentoring and/or peer relationships) are associated with gender, rank, and organizational size. This aspect of the study extends prior research that has examined the association between gender and rank and whether the individual has had a mentoring relationship [Scandura and Viator 1994; Viator and Scandura 1991].

Third, this study examines the extent to which individuals' relationship decisions are associated with key organizational outcomes. In this regard, the current study not only extends research by including both mentors and peers but also improves

upon prior research by considering a broader set of outcome variables. In particular, the study examines perceptions regarding job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and advancement issues such as promotion, salary, and client assignments.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: the background and research questions are developed in the next section. The methods used in the study and the results of the study are presented in the following two sections. The last section of the paper is a discussion of the implications of the study.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

An initial exploration of mentoring relationships within public accounting firms was conducted by Dirsmith and Covaleski [1985]. Based on a qualitative methodology, the authors report that all participants believed that mentoring exists in public accounting firms. While this finding is consistent with research outside of accounting [Fagenson 1989; Kram 1983; Hunt and Michael 1983], their discussion recognizes that the work setting of public accounting firms differs substantially from most other firms. For example, individuals are members of temporary audit teams that are assembled for each audit client and disbanded at the completion of the engagement. Thus, over the course of a year members of public

accounting firms are assigned to work with numerous supervisors and come into contact with numerous peers. This arrangement ensures that members have the opportunity to meet a relatively large sample of potential mentors and peers. However, the temporary nature of the work teams may inhibit the development of a peer and/or mentoring relationship, which is based, in part, on trust and comfort [Dirsmith and Covaleski 1985]. Additionally, the work setting of public accounting firms, especially the large firms, has been characterized as very competitive and stressful [Dalton, Hill, and Ramsey 1997].

Dirsmith and Covaleski [1985] identify a range of benefits to mentors, protégés, and firms resulting from mentoring relationships. Their paper details the benefits to protégés in terms of audit task information (e.g., about the *how* and *why* of an audit task), socialization information, and “business” information. Business information relates to how the firm is managed and run as a business, which entails managing certain key numbers or ratios. Additionally, this information relates to the power and politics of how the firm is run. Social information, which was also conveyed, was characterized as having limited value. Within public accounting firms, Dirsmith and Covaleski [1985] also found that mentoring relationships are used as part of the management and control process. For example, mentors might help protégés sort out trade-

offs between audit quality and audit cost that arise during the course of an audit [McNair 1991].

Frequency of Mentoring and Peer Relationships

Viator and Scandura [1991] report the results of a survey of members of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) employed by large public accounting firms. The study examined, in part, whether the respondent had a mentoring relationship and whether having a mentor was associated with rank, gender, and turnover intentions. The results of the study indicated that over 77% of respondents reported having a mentor. This percentage is substantially higher than a study by Ragins and Cotton [1991], in which 47% of the research and development professionals in their sample indicated having a mentoring relationship.

While research indicates that peer relationships exist in public accounting firms [Dirsmith and Covalleski 1985; Scandura 1992], no study has documented the extent to which peer relationships exist in public accounting. Additional evidence on the incidence and nature of peers would appear to be important in gaining an understanding of how developmental relationships other than mentors are used by accounting professionals. A peer relationship is likely to be formed when it is perceived as helping the career of each peer. For example, peers can benefit one another by sharing information,

discussing career strategy, and providing for emotional and psychological needs [Kram and Isabella 1985]. This discussion leads to the first research question.

Research Question #1:

What is the frequency of peer relationships among public accountants and does it differ from the frequency of mentoring relationships?

Peer Relationships: Substitute for or Supplement to Mentoring Relationships

Prior research outside of accounting suggests that peer relationships may either substitute for or supplement mentoring relationships [Kram and Isabella 1985; McManus and Russell 1997]. Kram and Isabella [1985] contend that peer and mentoring relationships each are able to provide career-enhancing and social support functions to organizational members. This suggests that the two relationships might be substitutes for one another. Along this line, Kram and Isabella [1985,129] state: “For individuals who do not have or want mentors, peers seem essential. They can coach and counsel; they can provide critical information; and they can provide support in handling personal problems and attaining professional growth.”

Alternatively, differences between the two relationships suggest that a peer relationship may offer unique benefits that

would supplement a mentoring relationship. For example, Kram and Isabella [1985] note that peer and mentoring relationships utilize different approaches as a means to satisfy career-enhancing or social support functions. They also suggest that peer relationships offer unique developmental opportunities. These developmental opportunities are tied, in part, to the fact that peers, who are of the same organizational rank, have less power and influence than mentors do. The absence of power concerns may make it easier for peers to provide social support functions than mentors. However, because peers lack power and influence their ability to provide career-enhancing functions may be limited. This suggests the following research question.

Research Question #2:

Are peer relationships substitutes or supplements to mentoring relationships?

Mentor/Peer Relationships and Gender, Rank, and Firm Size

Prior research has examined whether certain individual or organizational variables are associated with having a mentoring relationship [Ragins and Cotton 1991; Scandura and Viator 1994; Viator and Scandura 1991]. This research has addressed the extent to which certain individual attributes or certain organizational features might explain an individual's decision to participate in a mentoring relationship.

Ragins [1989] maintains that: (1) females face greater barriers, therefore females may be less likely to be involved in a mentoring relationship than males; (2) regarding barriers to mentoring, females are likely to have fewer informal opportunities such as “men’s rooms and golf courses” [1989,7] to meet and nurture relations with potential mentors, who traditionally have tended to be male; and (3) potential female mentors, because they are relatively few in numbers, may have less time available to sponsor a protégé. Consistent with these concerns, Ragins and Cotton [1991] found that perceived barriers to mentoring relationships were greater among female employees than among male employees.

Within public accounting settings, concerns have also been raised that females face greater barriers to mentors than males [Pillsbury, Capozzoli, and Ciampa 1989; Ried, Acken, and Jancura 1987]. Viator and Scandura [1991] examine whether gender is associated with the tendency of public accountants to be protégés. They report that females and males were equally likely to have mentors. This study extends that research by examining whether gender is related to involvement across both mentoring and peer relationships. Potentially, females may be more likely to enter peer relationships than males. For example, this might occur to the extent that females value psychosocial functions more than males. This leads to the following research question.

Research Question #3:

Is gender associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?

Rank also may be associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships. In this regard, Viator and Scandura [1991] found that rank was significantly associated with whether public accountants had formed a mentoring relationship. Whereas over 85 percent of managers had a mentoring relationship, less than 60 percent of junior accountants had mentoring relationships. To some extent this finding may reflect that power and influence take on greater importance with increasing rank, which creates additional incentives to seek out a mentor with increasing rank. For example, promotion to partner depends largely on whether the manager is perceived as acting “partner-like.” Mentors can take an active role in teaching behavior and shaping impressions to facilitate a manager’s transition to partner [Dirsmith and Covaleski 1985]. Again, this study extends that area of research by examining whether rank is related to involvement across both mentoring and peer relationships.

Plausibly, peer relationships may occur more often among employees of lower rank. Such employees may benefit from the social support functions that a peer offers. Further, because of the pyramid structure of accounting firms potential peers are more

plentiful than potential mentors. This discussion leads to the next research question.

Research Question #4:

Is rank associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?

Prior research in accounting has not examined the potential role, if any, of firm size on the extent to which mentor and/or peer relationships are used. Viator and Scandura [1991] and Scandura and Viator [1994] limited their surveys to public accountants employed in larger firms. Thus, it is not clear whether their results are generalizable to public accountants employed in smaller firms. The work environments of large public accounting firms have been characterized as very competitive and stressful [Dalton, Hill, and Ramsey, 1997]. Consistent with this characterization are turnover rates, which have been found to be highest among large public accounting firms [Hooks and Cheramy 1994]. This heightened level of competition and stress within large public accounting firms may create incentives to seek out mentors and/or peers. Potentially, mentors can offer coaching and protection whereas peers can offer mutual support. Conversely, competition among peers may inhibit development of peer relationships. This discussion leads to the following research question.

Research Question #5:

Is firm size associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?

Mentor/Peer Relationships and Organizational Outcomes

Viator and Scandura [1991] and Scandura and Viator [1994] examined the role of mentoring and mentoring functions, respectively, on the turnover intentions of Big-Six public accountants. In the former study, the authors find that 66 percent of respondents with a mentor intend to remain with their firm for at least five years but that only 29 percent of respondents without a mentor intend to remain with their firm for at least five years. Further, the respondents with mentors planning to quit and those planning to stay differed primarily in ratings of mentoring activities related to the coaching function. Scandura and Viator [1994] reported a similar pattern of results.

The current study extends the foregoing line of research in two ways. *First*, a broader set of organizational outcomes is included in the current study. This is important because advocates of mentoring relationships contend that mentoring provides many benefits, only one of which is reduced turnover. For example, among manufacturing managers, Scandura [1992] found a significant association between having a mentor and managers' salary levels and promotions. Within the public accounting setting,

examples of other organizational outcomes are job satisfaction and advancement variables related to promotion, salary, and client assignments. *Second*, the current study explores involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships. Thus, the current study can provide evidence on whether peer relationships provide the same organizational benefits as mentoring relationships and whether involvement in both relationships provide greater organizational benefits than involvement in only one relationship. This discussion provides the basis for the next research question.

Research Question #6

Are perceptions of organizational outcomes associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?

METHOD

A survey methodology was used in the current study. A survey approach is appropriate, in part, because the focus was on assessing the nature of mentoring and/or peer relationships from a large cross-section of public accountants in the practice of auditing. Given this focus, it was important to include a diverse sample of respondents. Further, a diverse sample was also needed as a basis for determining whether involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships is associated with gender, rank, or firm size. Given the objectives of the study, the authors believed that a survey

approach represented the best method. Nevertheless, no approach is without shortcomings. A potential disadvantage of using a survey approach is the non-response bias. That is, the potential exists that the perceptions of those that did respond to the survey may differ from the perceptions of those that did not.

Subjects

A survey questionnaire was mailed to 2,000 CPAs using an AICPA membership list. The AICPA randomly selected 1,000 males and 1,000 females from among those identified as being in the field of auditing and employed by a firm with 10 or more AICPA members. A self-addressed postage-paid envelope was provided for return of the survey materials. Two mailings were conducted. The second mailing to those not responding to the first mailing was sent approximately three weeks after the initial mailing and took the form of a reminder post card. Surveys were returned by 243 recipients, with one being unusable. Thus, the analysis is generally based on the responses from 242 recipients. This represents a response rate of slightly over 12%. In order to determine the existence of non-response bias, respondents were separated into early and late respondents in accordance with the two mailings. Analysis of demographics indicated no significant differences across rank, gender, or firm size.

Table 1 provides descriptive information about participants' backgrounds. As shown, females responded more frequently than males. Perhaps this indicates that females tend to have a greater interest in developmental relationship issues than males. Concerning rank, an equal number of respondents were senior/supervisors and managers. Fewer responses were received from partners and staff. In terms of firm size, the largest number of respondents was employed by local firms, followed by Big-Five firms and then by intermediate sized firms.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

Panel A: Gender						
	<u>Total</u>				<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>
	<u>242</u>				<u>90</u>	<u>152</u>

Panel B: Mean (Standard Deviation) Years of Experience by Professional Rank		
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Years of Experience</u>
Staff	20	3.4 (3.5)
Senior/Supervisor	82	6.5 (3.8)
Manager	82	9.5 (3.7)
Partner	56	20.8 (7.7)
Other	<u>2</u>	13.0 (6.4)
Total	<u>242</u>	

Panel C: Respondents by Employer Firm Size			
	----- Firm -----		
<u>Total</u>	<u>Big-Five</u>	<u>Intermediate</u>	<u>Local</u>
<u>242</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>73</u>	<u>93</u>

Panel D: Number of Professionals by Gender, Firm Size, and Rank						
	----- Males -----			----- Females* -----		
	<u>Staff/ Senior</u>	<u>Manager</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>Staff/ Senior</u>	<u>Manager</u>	<u>Partner</u>
Big Six	4	12	9	26	24	1
Intermediate	8	7	14	24	14	6
Local	<u>15</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>10</u>
Total	<u>27</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>17</u>

*Total = 240. There were two females in a local firm classified as rank "other."

Survey Questionnaire

The survey contained a cover letter, a consent form, and a questionnaire addressing the individual's background followed by a series of questions about mentoring and peer relationships. The last section of the questionnaire assessed organizational outcomes. Background questions included demographic information such as gender, rank, amount of public accounting work experience, and employer's firm size.

Viator and Scandura's [1991] questionnaire was used to develop the questionnaire for this study. An expanded questionnaire was developed to be used for responses to functions related to mentoring and peer relationships. The questionnaire [Viator and Scandura 1991] contained 20 questions relating to the functions of coaching, social support, and role modeling. After responses to their questionnaire had been factor analyzed, five questions with low factor loadings were dropped from further analysis. Of these 15 questions, 11 were used exactly or with only slight modification in this study's questionnaire. Fifteen questions were added to cover aspects of internal sponsoring and external sponsoring, which are supported as mentoring functions in qualitative research on mentoring in public accounting reported by Burke and McKeen [1990] and Dirsmith and Covaleski [1985] and staff development materials by Geiger [1992]. The questions were randomly ordered.

In summary, the questionnaire developed for this study contained 26 questions that addressed five dimensions of mentor functions in public accounting: coaching, role modeling, social support, internal sponsorship, and external sponsorship. Responses to the 26 questions on mentoring functions were made using a Likert-type seven-point scale with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 7 indicating “strongly agree.”

The following question was used to determine whether participants have had a mentoring relationship: “Have you ever been involved in a working relationship with someone of a HIGHER position in your firm, which you believe HELPED YOUR CAREER AND AFFECTED YOUR MOBILITY IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTING (i.e., A MENTOR)?”¹ Participants responding “yes” were classified as having had a mentoring relationship while those responding “no” were classified as not having had a mentoring relationship. When answering yes, the survey directed the respondent to answer the series of Likert-type questions concerning the functions of mentoring.

In a similar manner, the following question was used to determine whether participants did have a peer relationship: “Have you ever been involved in a working relationship with someone of the SAME position as you in your firm which you believe HELPED

YOUR CAREER AND AFFECTED YOUR MOBILITY IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTING (i.e., A PEER)?” Again, participants responding “yes” were classified as having had a peer relationship while those responding “no” were classified as not having had a peer relationship. When answering yes, the survey directed respondents to answer a series of Likert-type questions concerning the functions of peers. This portion of the questionnaire was identical to that used for mentors with the obvious change from ‘mentor’ to ‘peer.’”

The last section of the questionnaire focused on organizational outcomes. Previous research by Viator and Scandura [1991] and Scandura and Viator [1994] addressed turnover intentions. The current study included a broader spectrum of organizational outcomes. Specifically, this portion of the questionnaire contained a set of Likert-like questions on turnover intentions, salary and promotion, client assignments, and job satisfaction.

RESULTS

The results from the analyses pertaining to the six research questions are presented in this section. The six research questions as developed above are:

1. *What is the frequency of peer relationships among public accountants and does it differ from the frequency of mentoring relationships?*
2. *Are peer relationships substitutes or supplements to mentoring relationships?*
3. *Is gender associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?*
4. *Is rank associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?*
5. *Is firm size associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?*
6. *Are perceptions of organizational outcomes associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships?*

Frequency of Mentoring and Peer Relationships

The first research question concerns the frequency of peer relationships and whether this frequency differs from the frequency of mentoring relationships. Table 2 presents information on the frequency of both peer and mentoring relationships and the experience of respondents with and without a mentor with their experience of having a peer.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCIES OF MENTORING AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

<u>Peer Relationship</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mentor Relationship</u>		
			<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>
Yes	101	42%	86	15	101
No	141	58%	105	36	141
Total	242	100%	191	51	242
Percent			79%	21%	100%

Chi-square indicates that the proportion of those with a peer is significantly less ($p < .05$) than those with a mentor.

Chi-square indicates that the involvement in either a mentoring or peer relationship is not independent from involvement in the other relationship at $p < .05$.

As shown in Table 2, 101 respondents, or approximately 42%, had a peer relationship, whereas 191 respondents, or approximately 79%, had a mentoring relationship. A chi-square test representing the significance of "change" is significant ($p < .05$), indicating that the proportion of respondents with a peer is significantly less than the proportion with a mentor.

Peers: Substitute for or Supplement to Mentoring Relationships

Research question #2 examines whether peer relationships are substitutes for or supplements to mentoring relationships. To address

this question, two forms of analysis are used. The first analysis explores whether involvement or non-involvement in one relationship is associated with involvement in the other relationship.

In Table 2, which summarizes the experience of respondents with and without a mentor with experience of having a peer, a chi-square test is significant ($p < .05$) indicating that involvement decisions are not independent of one another. A significant association does not directly support the position that peers substitute or supplement mentoring relationships. The pattern across the cells, however, indicates that peer relationships are used to supplement mentoring relationships more often than they are used to substitute for mentoring relationships. While approximately 42% of the entire sample had a peer relationship, among those with a mentoring relationship approximately 45% (i.e., 86/191) had a peer; thus, the peer relationship was used to supplement the mentoring relationship. Alternatively, among those without a mentor, only approximately 29% (i.e., 15/51) had a peer. Thus, the vast majority of respondents (i.e., 71%) among those without a mentor were also not involved in a peer relationship. This finding does not support the proposition that peers act as substitutes for mentors.

The second analysis involves comparisons of responses on the perceived functions of mentoring and peer relationships by individuals who are involved with both relationships. In this study,

to compare individuals' responses to each item on the mentoring functions questionnaire to their responses to the corresponding item on the peer functions questionnaire, a series of paired sample t-tests were conducted. The t-test determines whether the mean difference between the two responses is significantly different from zero. When performing a series of t-tests, the use of the standard significance level ($p < .05$) may be inappropriate if the comparisons are not independent. Therefore, the authors of this study have used a maximum family-wise error rate of $p = .05$, which after adjustment for the number of t-tests (26) results in a required p-value for significance of $p = .0019$. When the mean difference is significantly different from zero for a particular function, this indicates that mentoring and peer relationships are not perceived as substitutes for each other with respect to that particular function.

Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation for the mentoring relationship and the peer relationship for each of the 26 items comprising five dimensions of mentor functions. In Table 3, an asterisk is placed next to an item when the paired sample t-test is significant. The difference is significant for 9 of the 26 items; eight of those with significant differences are in two functions--internal sponsorship and social support.

TABLE 3

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Measuring Characteristics of Mentoring and Peer Relationships**N = 86 pairs**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mentor</u>		<u>Peer</u>	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
<i>Coaching:</i>				
1. My mentor (peer) provides me with useful positive and negative feedback	5.48	1.31	5.41	1.10
2. My mentor (peer) shows confidence in me	6.11	1.10	6.07	0.82
3. My mentor (peer) helps me develop my technical skills and abilities	5.45	1.40	5.36	1.25
4. My mentor (peer) provides me with useful information on firm politics and culture	5.72	1.21	5.53	1.01
5. My mentor (peer) helps me develop career strategies	5.30	1.43	4.97	1.45
6.** My mentor (peer) helps me clarify and develop mutually agreed upon goals	5.05	1.34	4.66	1.38
7. My mentor (peer) recommends opportunities for training	4.63	1.41	4.28	1.47
8. My mentor (peer) encourages me and motivates me to do my best	5.59	1.33	5.60	1.06

TABLE 3
(Continued)

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mentor</u>		<u>Peer</u>	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
<i>Role-Modeling:</i>				
9. I respect my mentor's (peer's) knowledge of the accounting profession	6.03	1.16	5.93	0.90
10. I respect my mentor's (peer's) ability to teach others	5.51	1.28	5.54	0.96
11. My mentor (peer) serves as a positive role model	5.80	1.20	5.63	1.06
12. I admire my mentor's (peer's) ability to motivate others	5.03	1.41	5.00	1.11
<i>Social Support</i>				
13.* I socialize with my mentor (peer) after work	3.75	1.77	5.18	1.68
14.* I share personal problems with my mentor (peer)	4.04	1.82	4.89	1.73
15. I exchange confidences with my mentor (peer)	4.41	1.88	4.61	1.16
16.* I often go to lunch with my mentor (peer)	4.12	1.78	5.45	1.46
17.* I consider my mentor (peer) to be a friend	5.34	1.51	6.05	1.03

TABLE 3 (Continued)

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mentor</u>		<u>Peer</u>	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
<i>Internal Sponsorship</i>				
18. My mentor (peer) actively protects me from potential negative publicity	4.31	1.59	4.30	1.60
19.* My mentor (peer) intervenes on my behalf, when necessary	5.23	1.50	4.55	1.38
20.* My mentor (peer) uses his or her power extensively in helping me advance my career	4.47	1.48	3.50	1.39
21.* My mentor (peer) represents my concerns on specific issues to higher level managers	4.91	1.60	4.38	1.42
22.* My mentor (peer) has helped place me on important assignments	5.52	1.33	4.35	1.60
23.* My mentor (peer) actively sponsors me within the firm by discussing my accomplishments with colleagues and vouching for my capabilities	5.31	1.34	4.87	1.42
<i>External Sponsorship</i>				
24. Mentor (peer) arranges for me to participate in highly visible activities outside of the firm	3.79	1.51	3.58	1.51
25. My mentor (peer) helps me expand my network of professional contacts	4.70	1.37	4.53	1.40
26.* My mentor (peer) has introduced me to important clients	5.15	1.46	4.24	1.44

* Significant at $p < .01$. ** Significant at $p < .05$. Based on a seven point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, "strongly disagree," to 7, "strongly agree."

First, significant differences were found for four of the six items concerning internal sponsorship. In each case, the item was rated higher for mentors than for peers. This indicates that relative to peers, mentors are better able to serve as internal sponsors. *Second*, significant differences were found for four of the five items concerning social support. For each of these, the item was rated higher for peers than for mentors. This indicates that relative to mentors, peers are perceived better able to offer *social support*. Generally, with the exception of one item, individuals did not perceive significant differences between mentoring and peer relationships regarding the functions of coaching, external sponsorship, and role modeling.²

Mentor/Peer Relationships and Gender, Rank, and Firm Size

Evidence on the extent to which certain individual attributes and certain organizational features are related to whether an individual is involved with either a mentoring or peer relationship or both relationships are provided by the findings for the next three research questions. Research question #3 addresses the role of gender on involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships.

Table 4, Panel A, presents a summary of the number of male and female respondents. Respondents were classified as belonging to one of four groups based upon their involvement in mentoring

and peer relationships. One group is comprised of those who have been involved in a mentoring relationship but not a peer relationship. A second group is comprised of those who have been involved in a peer relationship but not a mentoring relationship. A third group is comprised of those who have been involved in both a mentoring and peer relationship. Finally, the fourth group includes those who were not involved in any relationship. A chi-square test was used to determine whether involvement in either or both relationships is associated with gender. The chi-square test statistic was not significant ($\chi^2 = 1.4$, 3 degrees of freedom, $p > .7$). This result indicates that respondents' involvement in mentoring and peer relationships is not related to gender.

Research question #4 considers the role of rank on involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships. Respondents were asked to indicate their rank as: staff, senior, manager, and partner. Of the 242 respondents, 2 did not provide this information. Accordingly, this research question is based on 240 survey responses. Table 4, Panel B, presents a summary of the number of respondents by rank and involvement in either or both relationships.

TABLE 4

MENTOR/PEER RELATIONSHIPS BY GENDER, RANK, AND FIRM SIZE

Panel A: Involvement in Mentor and Peer Relationships by Gender

	-----Relationship-----				Total
	Mentor & Peer	Mentor Only	Peer Only	No	
Males	34	37	4	15	90
Females	<u>52</u>	<u>68</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>152</u>
Total	<u>86</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>242</u>

Chi-square test to determine if involvement in mentor, peer, or both relationships are associated with gender is not significant.

Panel B: Involvement in Mentor and Peer Relationships by Rank

	-----Relationship-----				Total
	Mentor & Peer	Mentor Only	Peer Only	No	
Staff	7	8	0	5	20
Senior	26	32	8	16	82
Manager	27	42	4	9	82
Partner	<u>26</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>56</u>
Total*	<u>86</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>240</u>

Chi-square test to determine if involvement in mentor, peer, or both relationships are associated with rank is not significant. *Two females were classified as rank "other."

Panel C: Involvement in Mentor and Peer Relationships by Firm Size

	-----Relationship-----				Total
	Mentor & Peer	Mentor Only	Peer Only	No	
Big-Five	27	45	1	3	76
Intermediate	29	28	5	11	73
Local	<u>30</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>93</u>
Total	<u>86</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>242</u>

Chi-square test to determine if involvement in mentor, peer, or both relationships are associated with firm size is highly significant ($p < .001$).

A chi-square test was used to determine whether involvement in either or both relationships is associated with rank. The chi-square test statistic was not significant ($\chi^2 = 12.1$, 9 degrees of freedom, $p > .15$). This result indicates that respondents' involvement in mentoring and peer relationships is not dependent of their rank.

The fifth research question focuses on firm size, and its potential relationship with individuals' decisions to involve themselves in mentoring and/or peer relationships. The study includes three levels of organizational size: Big-Five, intermediate size firms, and local size firms. Table 4, Panel C, presents a summary of the number of respondents employed by each size category and their involvement in either, both, or no relationships. To determine whether involvement in either or both relationships is associated with firm size, a chi-square test was conducted. The chi-square test statistic was highly significant ($\chi^2 = 22.9$, 6 degrees of freedom, $p < .001$). The proportion of respondents who are involved in mentoring and peer relationships is not the same across the three levels of organizational size. Firm size is most prominent in involvement in a mentoring only relationship and non-involvement in either relationship. Regarding involvement in a mentoring only relationship, the proportion for Big-Five, intermediate, and local respondents declined from approximately 59% to 38% to 34%, respectively. However, the proportion of Big-Five, intermediate,

and local respondents who were not involved in any relationship increased from 4% to 15% to 24%, respectively.

Mentor/Peer Relationships and Organizational Outcomes

Research question #6 addresses the extent to which perceptions of organizational outcomes are associated with involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationship. To assess this final question, exploratory principal component factor analysis was used as a means to reduce the relatively large number of individual organizational outcome items to a relatively small number of factors. Underlying each factor are a set of items whose response patterns are similar and presumed to be indicative of a construct. In applying factor analysis, factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 were retained. Exploratory factor analysis does not identify the construct. Instead, the construct must be identified by the researcher.

Two factors emerged from the exploratory principal components analysis. Table 5 presents the constructs that have been identified for these two factors along with the items underlying each factor.

TABLE 5
RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED SUCCESS
IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTING (INCLUDES PARTNERS)

<u>Items</u>	<u>Factor</u> <u>Loadings</u>	<u>Eigen-</u> <u>value</u>	<u>%Variance</u> <u>Explained</u>
<i>Factor 1: Intention To Remain At Firm</i>		<u>3.29</u>	<u>36.6</u>
I would like to remain in public accounting indefinitely	.87429		
In five years from now I hope to be employed in private industry	-.81286		
I will remain in my public accounting firm at least until I make partner	.77489		
In five years from now I hope to be at a higher rank with my current employer	.68278		
My job satisfaction	.64855		
<i>Factor 2: Advancement At Firm</i>		<u>2.05</u>	<u>22.8</u>
I believe the rate at which my salary has increased is as good or better than others at my level in my firm	.82368		
I believe my salary level is at least as good or better than others at my level in my firm	.81920		
I believe I have been promoted at a faster rate than others in my firm	.66018		
I believe my assignments are considered 'plum' and provide me with the visibility and experience I need to advance in my firm	.64734		

Based on a 7-point Likert type scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree," except for Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a 7-point measure adapted from Reed and Kratchman [1987], with 1 indicating low job satisfaction and 7 indicating high job satisfaction. Factor analysis with partners excluded does not change the factors. If partners are excluded, the percent of variance explained is 36.5% for Factor 1 and 25.1% for Factor 2.

The *first factor*, which is identified as intention to remain at the firm, contains five items. Four of the items directly concern future employment intentions and the other item concerns job satisfaction. The *second factor*, identified as advancement at the firm, contains four items concerning salary, promotion, and client assignments.

Given the last research question, the concern is whether the two factor scores varies systematically across involvement in mentoring and peer relationships. The independent variable used in the analysis is involvement in mentoring and/or peer relationships. As indicated earlier, there are four different mentoring and/or peer relationship categories, one of which included only fifteen respondents. Due to the small number of respondents in a peer only relationship, this category was dropped from this analysis. Also not included are nine subjects who did not respond to the questions on organizational outcomes, leaving the total number of respondents in this analysis at 218. Thus, the independent variable includes only the remaining three categories of mentoring and peer relationships.³

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether factor scores differed across the three categories of mentoring and peer relationships. Factor 1 and Factor 2 represented the dependent variable used in two separate ANOVA models. The results from ANOVA tests are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6
RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
OF ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

	<u>Mentor Only</u>	<u>Both Mentor and Peer</u>	<u>Neither Peer Nor Mentor</u>
<i>Factor 1:</i>			
<i>Intention to Remain at Firm</i>			
Mean	.008	-.014	-.037
Std. Dev.	(.093)	(1.00)	(1.10)
n	100	82	36
<u>F = .031, p=.97</u>			
<i>Factor 2:</i>			
<i>Advancement at Firm</i>			
Mean	.006	.225	-.362
Std. Dev.	(1.00)	(.950)	(.969)
n	100	82	36
<u>F = 4.560, p=.01</u>			

As shown in Table 6, the categories of mentoring and peer relationships were not associated with scores to Factor 1. That is, among those involved with mentors only, those involved in both mentor and peer relationships, and those that were not involved in either relationship, intentions to remain with the firm were not significantly different from one another. However, the category of both peer and mentoring relationships was significantly associated with scores to Factor 2. That is, perceptions related to firm

advancement were not the same across the three categories of peer and mentoring relationships. As shown, the mean scores for this factor were highest among those with both relationships and lowest among those without a mentor or peer.⁴ Ex post tests indicate that mean factor scores between these two groups (i.e., both relationships vs. neither relationship) were significantly different from each other (Scheffe, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results from the first two research questions provide two key findings. *First*, the study found that the proportion of auditors involved in peer relationships is significantly lower than the proportion of auditors involved in mentoring relationships. This finding indicates that a majority of auditors do not perceive the benefits of a peer relationship to exceed the cost. The study is unable to determine whether the relatively low incidence of peer relationships is indicative of relatively low benefits or relatively high costs. Auditors might perceive the benefits from peer relationships to be relatively low if their needs are satisfied through mentoring relationships or relationships outside the firm. Auditors come into contact with a large number of middle and high ranking managers outside of their own firms. These contacts may develop into

relationships that may play a role on auditors' work, their job satisfaction, or their intentions to remain with their firm. Further research is encouraged to consider other relationships by auditors with individuals outside the firm.

Alternatively, auditors might perceive the costs of peer relationships to be relatively high. Potentially, auditors may be concerned that, given their competitive work environment, being involved in a two-way exchange may provide more help to others than to themselves. Written comments by several respondents confirm negative aspects of peer relationships. Comments included: "Peer relationships are difficult due to jealousy among staff members of the same level." "A peer is not in the position to help my career or affect my mobility within the firm. I would view a peer more along the lines of the 'competition' who I would be measured against for promotion." "Competition can interfere with potential peer relationships." Regardless of the reason, it is important to note that relatively few respondents without a mentor utilized a peer as a substitute relationship.

Second, the study found that auditors engage in peer relationships more often to supplement than to substitute for mentoring relationships. This conclusion is supported by evidence, which indicates that compared to those without a mentoring relationship a substantially greater proportion of auditors with a

mentoring relationship were involved in a peer relationship. Additional insight into this issue was provided by considering the perceived functions of each relationship among those who have been involved in both relationships. These results indicate that mentors were better able at providing internal sponsorship whereas peers were better able at providing social support.

Several respondents commented that peers provide "personal help" but not help in career advancement or mobility. Plausibly, this pattern of results suggests that internal sponsorship is a key activity that auditors seek in developmental relationships. That is, the majority of auditors may decide not to be involved in a peer relationship because the relationship is unable to provide sufficient level of internal sponsorship activities. This position is bolstered, in part, by the evidence found that auditors perceived mentors and peers to provide similarly in terms of coaching, external sponsorship, and role modeling. Perhaps, the lack of consistent differences in terms of external sponsorship is somewhat unexpected. However, two of the external sponsorship items received relatively low scores when judged in terms of peers or mentors. This finding suggests that neither one of the developmental relationships does a very good job of satisfying auditors' external sponsorship needs.

Research questions three through five examined the extent to which involvement in one or both developmental relationships is

associated with gender, rank, or firm size. The findings indicate that neither gender nor rank is associated with involvement with either or both forms of developmental relationships. The findings for gender are consistent with Viator and Scandura [1991] who found that gender was not associated with involvement in a mentoring relationship. However, Viator and Scandura also found that involvement in mentoring relationships increased with rank. The findings in this study do not corroborate their findings related to rank.

The primary difference in the two studies relates to the relative incidence of lower ranking auditors to be involved with mentoring relationships. In the current study, 75% of staff were involved in a mentoring relationship whereas this percentage was only 60% for Viator and Scandura. In considering this difference it is important to note that the current study was conducted several years after Viator and Scandura [1991]. Changes in the profession may have led auditors to seek out mentors earlier in their career. However, some caution is needed in assessing the results for staff as the study received only twenty responses from staff.

This study did find that organizational size was significantly associated with involvement in developmental relationships. The results indicated that in mentoring-only relationships the proportions of auditors involved was greatest for Big-Five and smallest for local firms. The proportions of auditors not involved in either type of

relationship increased from the local firm, to intermediate-sized firms, to the Big-Five. Perhaps, these differences relate to the relative importance of internal sponsorship across firms of differing sizes.

Among the Big-Five, the competitive pressures may be the greatest and the need for protection and sponsorship may be the strongest. The Big-Five offices tend to be larger which may accentuate the need to be sponsored, thus the need for a mentor. Internal competition and pressures may not be nearly as strong within local firms, and the office size comparatively smaller, which in turn may lower the felt need to seek out a mentor for protection and sponsorship. Further research examining the differential work environments across firms of differing sizes is encouraged.

The last research question explored the extent of the association between involvement in one or both developmental relationships and organizational outcomes. Principal component factor analysis was used to produce two organizational outcome constructs that were identified as intention to remain at the firm and advancement at the firm. These factor scores were analyzed to determine if they systematically differed across groups comprised of respondents with mentors, mentors and peers, and those not involved in either relationship. No differences were found to exist with respect to the first factor, intention to remain at the firm. This finding is not consistent with Viator and Scandura's [1991] finding

that auditors with a mentor were less likely to leave the firm. It is not clear why the findings in the two studies are inconsistent.

The current study used multiple items to measure intentions to remain at the firm whereas Viator and Scandura [1991] used a single item. Also, the current study surveyed a comprehensive population whereas Viator and Scandura [1991] limited their survey to large firms. Again, it is possible that the results were influenced by the timing differences between the two studies. Factor 2 scores were significantly related to developmental relationships. Mean factor scores were highest among those involved with both mentor and peer relationships and lowest among those who were not involved in either relationship. This finding suggests that researchers need to consider a broad spectrum of organizational outcomes in order to understand the consequences of developmental relationships.

Many issues have been raised but left unresolved in the current paper. In this regard, future work should continue to explore why certain auditors are involved in certain kinds of developmental relationships.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One limitation of the study is the use of a mail survey for data collection. The study's results of the various analyses are based upon

responses from individuals who completed a mailed instrument. The response rate was relatively low and there is the potential that the responses from participants may differ in systematic ways from those who did not participate in the study. Thus, the results may not be generalizable to non-participants. Response rates to relatively long mail surveys are typically low. However, reliance on a mail survey represents an appropriate method of data collection, given an interest in soliciting the perceptions of auditors who differ in terms of gender, rank, and firm size. Even with a relatively low response rate, the results of the study are based on a relatively large number of participants. Further, to the extent that mentoring and peer relationships and organizational outcomes are considered a sensitive issue, the use of a mail survey may encourage more truthful reporting than a questionnaire distributed and collected by the firm.

Another limitation is that the survey instrument measured perceived functions and organizational outcomes, and not actual functions or organizational outcomes. That is, the method used in the current study elicited auditors' perceptions of the functions of mentoring and peer relationships and their perceptions of organizational outcomes. However, perceptions, as opposed to actual functions or outcomes, also will be the basis on which individuals rely in making their own assessments of the costs and benefits of involvement in developmental relationships.

Finally, the survey instrument is limited as it is not possible to establish cause and effect relationships. Instead, the results provide evidence on the extent of association between or among variables.

CONCLUSION

Prior research has documented that mentoring and peer relationships exist in public accounting firms, however no study has systematically examined both relationships in context. This paper has contributed by providing additional evidence on the role and consequences of two important developmental relationships: mentoring and peer relationships. Although this study has not addressed all the issues related to the existence and use of these relationships by public accountants, it represents an incremental step towards examining the full range of the developmental relationships that operate within public accounting firms.

The additional evidence on mentoring and peer relationships, which this study does provide, is important in the assessment of the relative contributions of each relationship to the employees as well as the public accounting firms who employ these individuals. Since public accounting firms, relative to other firms, have historically been characterized as being competitive and having high levels of turnover, an examination of these relationships among auditors is

appropriate given their relatively unique work environment. For example, audit teams are temporary and auditors work with different co-workers over time. While this condition may increase opportunities to meet potential mentors and peers, it may also inhibit the development of trust.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This question was adapted from Viator and Scandura [1991].
- ² Under the standard $p < .05$, two additional items were significant; i.e., #6 under coaching and #21 under internal sponsorship
- ³ Including the peer only category does not affect the results.
- ⁴ An additional question had subjects rate their perceived satisfaction with their mentors and their peers on a 7-point Likert scale. Perceived satisfaction with mentors and peers were both significantly correlated with Factor 2, with $r = .17$, $n = 180$, $p = .02$ and $r = .24$, $n = 97$, $p = .02$, respectively. This suggests that perceptions relating to firm advancement are positively related to satisfaction with the mentoring or peer relationship.

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Addendum

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