Strengthening Network Ties through Mentoring of Alienated Personnel*

Sangyub Ryu** and Soo-Young Lee***

Abstract: This study examines the social network aspects of mentoring in order to suggest ways to manage alienated public employees. It also explores the impact of mentoring that requires closer relationships between mentors and mentees to develop network ties. Networks of trust, respect, and friendship among soldiers in four barracks of the Republic of Korea Army (two experimental groups and two control groups) were measured using a social network survey. Alienated soldiers in the experimental groups were mentored by fellow soldiers with stronger ties, while no such mentoring was conducted in the control groups. After three months of mentoring, changes in network strengths were found among alienated soldiers in the experimental groups, while no significant changes were found among alienated soldiers in the control groups. This study is expected to contribute to human resource management by suggesting ways to strengthen the network ties of alienated personnel through mentoring.

Keywords: mentoring, social network, experiment, Korean Army

INTRODUCTION

Since Kram (1980) first paid attention to mentoring studies (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), researchers have investigated the significance of mentoring in the field of management. Research has found a positive impact of mentoring on mentees’ out-
comes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, job performance, and retention rates (Bass, 1990; Bozeman & Feeney, 2009a; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Klingner & Nalbandian, 1998; Kram, 1985; Orpen, 1997; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Scandura & Williams, 2004; Riccucci, 2006). The literature has expanded on various mentoring issues, and the focus has shifted from mentoring by experienced seniors to mentoring between peers (Bozionelos, 2004). Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) identified formal and informal mentoring, while negative mentoring was explored by Eby, McManus, Simon, and Russell (2000).

Some researchers have attempted to link mentoring to networking. Orpen (1997) emphasized closer physical proximity and interaction for mentoring, while Blau (1977) considered time as another critical factor for increasing network ties. Scandura, Tejeda, Werther, and Lankau (1996) found improved networks and productivity to be organizational benefits of mentoring. More recently, Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) emphasized mentorship and network resources as elements of social capital. Bozionelos (2003) noted that mentees can build network resources through mentoring, which leads them to career success. Despite the growing body of literature on the link between mentoring and network ties, the social network aspects of mentoring are relatively unexplored (Feeney & Bozeman, 2008).

The anticipated contribution of research on mentoring and social networks is significant, especially in the public sector: unlike employees in private organizations, public employees are protected by rules and regulations that make it relatively hard for them to be removed. These civil service protections help employees maintain political neutrality and protect them from external influences, but may prove to be problematic when public organizations deal with employees who perform poorly, because firing poor performers is not an option. This research suggests that social networking aspects of mentoring can help alleviate this problem.

**MENTORING IN THE ORGANIZATION**

**Defining Mentoring**

Generally, mentoring in the organization is understood as a process in which seniors or existing employees help subordinates engage in their organizations. However, few researchers have paid attention to conceptualizing and theorizing mentoring (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Bozeman and Feeney (2007) considered Kram’s dissertation (1980) and her article (1983) as among the initial studies on mentoring.

Kram (1985) defined mentoring as follows: the mentor, who is a senior or more