

Analysis of Influence of Sponsorship Career Function of Mentorship on Women's Leadership Advancement in Kenyan Universities

Wambeti Njagi Severina Dr. Paul Edabu Dr. Cecilia kimani
School of Education, Mount Kenya University, P.O Box 342-01000, Thika, Kenya

Abstract

Women working in Kenyan universities should be provided with the many benefits of sponsorship, a mentorship function. Mentors should for example give their mentees challenging assignments which prepare them for top leadership positions. But it is possible that women may not be getting this support from their mentors. Therefore, the researcher did this study for the purpose of establishing the influence of sponsorship on women's leadership advancement in Kenyan universities. A mixed methodology, using a triangulation design-convergence model was applied to achieve the objective. It was established that women receive limited sponsorship and only in some facets of this career mentoring function thus they are left to face many difficulties as they try to climb the career ladder. The conclusion was that women working in Kenyan universities should get holistic sponsorship within mentorship if they are to advance to top leadership positions in the universities. The recommendation was that structures be set up in universities so that women get not only informal but formal mentorship, inclusive of the career function of mentorship. These structures should as well be provided in other organizations in the country.

Keywords: Mentorship, Sponsorship, Women's leadership advancement.

1 Statement of the Problem

Mentors in universities in Kenya should nominate their mentees for moves of promotion, give them feedback on available promotions, endorse their authority publicly in addition to providing other sponsorship benefits. Unfortunately, this may not be happening and the women mentees may not be getting the nominations or any feedback on these promotions. Mentors may not be endorsing the mentees' authority publicly. Sponsorship, (a career function of mentorship) if provided, can go a long in helping women to advance in leadership.

2 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of sponsorship on women's leadership advancement in Kenyan universities.

3 Research Question

How does sponsorship influence women's leadership advancement in universities in Kenya?

4 Null and Alternative Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between sponsorship of mentees and women's leadership advancement in universities in Kenya.

H₃: There is significant relationship between sponsorship of mentees and women's leadership advancement in universities in Kenya.

5 Sponsorship and Women's Leadership Advancement

Several researchers point out the importance of sponsorship as one facet of the career function of mentorship. Ibarra (1992) stated that women have less access to sponsors and reap fewer returns from similar kinds of relationships and network positions relative to men. Sponsorship is more readily extended to male than female mentees (Ibarra, carter and Silva 2010). They said that for sponsorship to be effective, sponsors must "learn to manage their unconscious biases." Giscombe (2007) agreed with this report when he postulated that sponsorship is one facet of mentoring which women, as a marginalized and stereotyped group needs to break through the glass ceiling. Kanter (1977) further views sponsorship as extremely important to organizational success. Sponsors hold positions in organizations that enable them to stand up for the person being sponsored and to promote the person for promising opportunities. This is supported by Ragins and Scandura (1999) who referred to mentors as people with influence, experience and knowledge and committed enough to help mentees advance career wise. The Center for Talent and Innovation(2012) adds that the mentors should call in favours to be directed the mentees way and even go on to put their reputation and credibility at stake for the sake of the mentees.

6 Methodology

The researcher used the mixed methodology, specifically the triangulation design – convergence model. Qualitative data and quantitative data were collected and analysed separately then merged at the interpretation stage. The purpose of using it was to bring together the differing strengths and non overlapping weaknesses of the quantitative methods (large sample size, trends, generalization) with those of the qualitative methods (small sample, details, in depth) (Patton, 1990).

7 Research Findings

The researcher sought to describe sponsorship as an independent variable through the use of the mean and the standard deviation

Table 1: Sponsorship and women’s leadership advancement

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My mentor often nominated me for moves of promotion within the organization	180	1.00	5.00	2.6667	1.08828
My mentor often gave me feedback on available promotions	180	1.00	5.00	2.7222	1.17733
My mentor often took risks to advocate for me using his influence	180	1.00	5.00	2.3222	1.04457
My mentor often endorsed my authority publicly	180	1.00	5.00	2.2222	1.04403
My mentor often gave me challenging assignments in preparation for advancement	180	1.00	5.00	2.5889	1.18552
My mentor usually helped me to join formal sponsorship programmes for mentees	180	1.00	5.00	2.5556	1.21546
My mentor often helped me to get appointed to higher positions	180	1.00	5.00	2.2778	1.02513
Valid N (list wise)	180				

The respondents moderately agreed that their mentors often gave them feedback on available promotions, their mentors often nominate them for moves of promotion within the organization, their mentors often gave them challenging assignments in preparation for advancement and their mentors usually helped them to join formal sponsorship programmes for mentees. Each of the factors had a mean score of 2.7222, 2.6667, 2.5889 and 2.5556 respectively. The respondents disagreed that their mentors often took risks to advocate for them using their influence, their mentors often helped them to get appointed to higher positions and their mentors often endorsed their authority publicly. Each of the factors had a mean score of 2.3222, 2.2778 and 2.2222 respectively.

The study results infer that mentors do sponsor women so as to enhance their leadership advancement in universities in Kenya, but the sponsorship is limited to only some aspects. This inference is consistent with literature in that women explained how they struggled with their mentors in an attempt to convince them that they were ready for promotion (Ibarra, et al., 2010). (Ibarra 1992) further reports that women tend to have less access to sponsors and reap fewer returns from similar kinds of relationships and network positions relative to men. According to Kram (1983) sponsorship entails presenting an individual with desirable opportunities and promotions. A mentor highlights the mentees talents and competence, recommending him or her for career advancement. All facets of sponsorship should be provided in universities.

Preliminary tests were done to find out whether there was existence or non –existence of linear correlation between and among the quantitative variables of mentorship, sponsorship being one of them. Little evidence of multi- collineality was found since the correlations among the said variables were weak, hence they were incorporated into a regression analysis. A subsequent multi-variate regression model was used to show the importance of sponsorship with respect to women’s leadership advancement. After completing the SPSS procedure, the researcher found out that B_3 (sponsorship) = 0.032 which meant that one unit change in sponsorship results in 0.032 units increase in women’s leadership advancement. Hypothesis testing was then done to show the relationship between exposure and women’s leadership advancement. For X_3 (exposure): $H_0: B_3=0$, since $t=0.487$, $p=0.007$ is less than 0.5 the null hypothesis was rejected therefore X_3 (sponsorship) has significant influence on Y (women’s leadership advancement).

Further to this, a test was done to show the model significance in order to accept or reject the null hypothesis. The model significance had the equation: $Y = 0.697 + 0.022X_1 + 0.315X_2 + 0.032X_3 + 0.117X_4$. Under

hypothesis III: H_0 sponsorship does influence women's leadership advancement in Universities in Kenya. The hypothesis to test is $H_{03} : B_3=0$ Vs $H_{13} : B_3 \neq 0$. From Table 30, $t=-.487$, p -value $=.007$ thus we reject the null hypothesis that sponsorship does not influence women's leadership advancement in Universities in Kenya. Ibarra (2010), reports of a 2010 publication which spoke of men benefiting more from mentoring than women. This was because women received less sponsorship than men and the kind of mentoring they received contained less career benefits.

Sponsorship is one facet of mentoring that women as a marginalized and stereotyped group, need to break through the glass ceiling (Giscombe 2007). Kanter (1977) in support of this views sponsorship as extremely important to organizational success. Sponsors hold positions in organizations that enable them to stand up for the person being sponsored and to promote the person for promising opportunities. Raggins and Scandura (1999) affirmed this finding when they referred to mentors as "influential individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and support their protegees careers." This is the kind of sponsorship that women in universities in Kenya should receive so as to advance in leadership. However they are receiving this sponsorship only in some aspects and this too is of a limited nature.

Kram (1988) supports this when she reports that sponsorship entails presenting the individual with desirable opportunities and promotions. A mentor highlights the mentees' talents and competence, recommending him or her for career advancement. One reason women are slow to advance to leadership positions is that they do not always know leadership positions are available (Wellington et al., 2003). Women in universities in Kenya can benefit from mentorship which can be the source of such information.

Further research was based on the question: How does sponsorship influence women's leadership advancement in universities in Kenya? Table 2 demonstrates the themes, categories and concepts on sponsorship.

Table 2: Sponsorship and Women's Leadership Advancement-thematic

Theme	Categories	Concepts
Sponsorship	mentor gave feedback on available promotions	Sometimes, no
	mentor nominated mentee for moves of promotion	Hardly does
	mentor gave mentee challenging assignments in preparation for advancement	Not often, rarely
	helped mentee to join mentorship programmes	Does not, no
	took risks to advocate for mentee	Hardly does so
	Mentor endorsed mentee's authority publicly	Hardly, no

Some of the respondents felt that the mentor should have been more helpful in terms of influencing top leadership and recommending them for available positions, but this was not mostly the case. The most common concepts in this category of influencing top leadership and recommending mentees for available positions were; "none," "has not done so," "did not provide." The Centre for Talent Innovation, (2012) found out that to overcome obstacles and advance to the top, women need sponsors. Yet only a few felt that they had been lucky to have mentors who put in a good word for them. The respondents felt that if mentors had been willing to spread the word about the new person and their skills, this might have opened up the road for leadership advancement.

Some of the respondents felt that the mentor should have been more helpful in terms of their own particular job performance and in helping them to advance, that there would be situations, when their mentors would be in a position to be influential and recommend them. This would have gone a long way in helping them to secure a position. Unfortunately in most of the cases, negative responses from the mentors were recorded. There was one exception though. "She encouraged me to really go for deanship." I honestly don't think I'd be here without her push. She encouraged me to travel within and outside Africa and thus expanded my social networks, also profiled me in my career." This was the report from one of the participants.

One interviewee indicated that she was not helped by her mentor to attain any positions and her mentors never used any influence to help her in advancement. She was not provided with any opportunities to support her professional development. "I faced the challenges all alone", she said. Supporting this finding, Earnst and Young (2011) reported that women have neither been known to seek many sponsors, nor are they well equipped in skills to search, initiate or develop such relationships.

Another interviewee reported that she was helped to advance by her mentor. She had started as a senior counselor. The mentor helped her to advance to the position of head of department. The mentor made recommendations for her appointment to this position. However she now feared any further advancement. Any attempt at promotion could have lead to separation from the family and she did not want to risk this. She was now thinking of venturing into business quite unrelated to her lecturing job. This at least would keep the family together. This explanation is consistent with literature in that Morley (2012) has identified gendered divisions of labour as one of the five analytical frameworks that could determine improved or decreased women's career visions. Women who want to give more time to their families forego the type of mentorship which is likely to lead to advancement (and transfer) and take them away from their families.

Some of the respondents felt that they were able to move up the career ladder more quickly with the help of a mentor, but there were very few who did it in universities in Kenya. They felt that it was by great luck if ever one had a mentor to help in leadership advancement in the universities in Kenya. They reported that in most cases it was a lonely path, there were many hurdles to overcome and it required great determination.

Few mentors were willing to spread the word about the new person and their skills. This is supported by Ibarra (2010) who reported that women receive less sponsorship than men and can therefore not advance as fast if at all. For advancement, women need active support by mentors placed in very high level positions. They then need the sponsors to open doors for them and propel them forward. Only when this happens, will women move up to the highest ranks in the organizations in greater numbers.

The researcher established that sponsorship of women is limited to some aspects only. This limited sponsorship included giving feedback on available promotions. Mentors too, in most cases did not nominate women for moves of promotion. Furthermore the mentees were mostly not given challenging assignments in preparation for advancement. In addition, they were not helped to join formal sponsorship programmes. For some of them none of the sponsorship facets were provided. For example, quantitative data showed that the sponsorship provided by mentors did not include taking risks to advocate for women using their influence, helping them get appointed to higher positions and endorsing their authority publicly. Qualitative data corroborates these findings and gives examples of participants who received sponsorship only in some aspects.

The findings are in agreement with the research done by Ibarra, (2010) whose results revealed that women receive less sponsorship than men and that the kind of mentoring they received contained less career benefits. Research has further established that powerful, high status men tend to support and channel career development opportunities to male subordinates, whom they judge as more likely to succeed than women (Mcguire, 2002). Ibarra, Carter and Silva (2010) in their research conclude that for sponsorship to be effective, sponsors must “learn to manage their unconscious biases”

8 Summary of the Result Findings

On sponsorship and based on the third objective of the study, the results were that mentors do sponsor women so as to enhance their leadership advancement but sponsorship was limited to some aspects only. Most women had no one to propel them forward or put in a word for them. Few women got promotions due to their mentors' initiative.

9 Conclusions

Objective three sought to establish the influence of sponsorship as a mentoring career function on women's leadership advancement in universities in Kenya. The study concludes that mentors should sponsor women so as to enhance their leadership advancement in universities in Kenya. The sponsorship should be holistic but not in some aspects only. Further, mentors should frequently give mentees feedback on available promotions thus giving them a chance to apply for available positions in good time. Moreover, they should nominate mentees for moves of promotion within the organization thus taking part in their advancement other than leaving it to chance. In addition, they should give them challenging assignments in preparation for advancement. This not only gives them the necessary experience but also demonstrates to those in authority that they can actually do those assignments on a regular basis.

Additionally and for this mentoring career function, they should regularly help them to join formal sponsorship programmes for mentees. Taking risks to advocate for women using their influence is another worthwhile undertaking for a good mentor. It shows that the mentor cares for the mentee and is a sign of a good deep and caring relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Mentors should go a step further and help mentees get appointed to higher positions. This is indeed a good sign of successful sponsorship. They should endorse the mentees' authority publicly which is an indication that they not only want to expose the mentees' qualities to all but they are as well proud of their mentees' achievements.

10 Recommendations

As far as sponsorship which is a career function of mentorship is concerned, universities should have checks and balances to make sure that women get feedback on available promotions from their mentors who should then encourage them to apply for these available positions. In addition and through mentors, universities should make sure that challenging assignments are passed on to women since such challenges prepare them for leadership advancement. Universities should look out for mentors who advocate for women mentees and help them get appointed to higher positions. Such mentors should be rewarded.

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