

LEVINSON'S DREAM THEORY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN AN ACADEMIC
EXECUTIVE MENTORING PROGRAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF
EXECUTIVE MENTORS' PRACTICE AND INDIVIDUATION

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ABSTRACT

LEVINSON'S DREAM THEORY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN AN ACADEMIC EXECUTIVE MENTORING PROGRAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EXECUTIVE MENTORS' PRACTICE AND INDIVIDUATION

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The purpose of this study was to explore the relevance that executive mentors' Dream journeys had for their mentoring practices. Dream journeys are the visions of where young adults see themselves in the future, and how they integrate themselves into the adult world over time. It was anticipated that a better understanding of executive mentors' Dream journeys would be of help to leaders and participants of executive mentoring initiatives. Levinson's (1978) work was used as the study's theoretical framework since it focuses on adult development in middle adulthood (ages 40 to 65) and speaks specifically about mentoring.

The research was conducted at an executive master's degree program that matches mentors from the executive realm with students. Study participants were current mentors in the program, 40 to 65 years old, who are or had been top tier executives. The

research used three methods of data collection starting with a set of nine elite interviews that were used to create questions for a survey questionnaire. Next, a focus group composed of a subset of the elites illuminated the survey findings. Elites met an additional criterion of having mentored at least one student to the program's completion.

The research shows that Levinson's work is relevant to current executive mentoring practice. Especially relevant for adult education and development specialists is the connection between individuals' development as a mentor and their learning through failure during early adulthood. The research is also consistent with Levinson's notion that individuals continue to define their line of work throughout early adulthood, but is inconsistent with his finding that a less defined line of work is associated with executive careers that culminate at mid-level management.

A key practice recommendation is that executive mentors should not be supervisors of their mentees and should not be compensated based on mentee's performance. Key recommendations for research include replicating this study with other executive mentor groups, and further exploring the role of gender and ethnicity in the Dream journeys of executives.