

# College mentoring: Alumni views on programme efficacy in shaping leadership ability

Ervin Christie Jr., Christie Consulting, Columbus, USA.

Timothy Baghurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, USA.

Email: [tbaghurst@live.com](mailto:tbaghurst@live.com)

## Abstract

This qualitative exploratory case study investigated the perceived role of mentoring in assisting African American males achieve leadership positions. Twenty African American male alumni of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), a college-based mentoring programme, were interviewed. Emerging themes were: 1) educational success, 2) mentoring attitudes, 3) college and professional mentoring, 4) professional success, 5) leadership style and identity, 6) mentoring and the glass ceiling phenomenon, 7) mentoring and making leaders, and 8) satisfaction with mentoring and mentoring programmes. Participants attributed most of their professional success to their SAAB experiences. Findings provide suggestions on how mentoring programmes can shape leadership ability.

**Keywords:** glass ceiling, African American males, mentorship, leader, leadership programme

## Introduction

African American (AA) males have made significant contributions to businesses and organisations as leaders throughout history. Unfortunately, AA males' leadership success comes despite limited opportunities as leaders of companies and organisations (Wallace, 2015). Mentoring is connected to leadership (Lestere, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio, 2011; Olson & Jackson, 2009), and has the potential to create more and more diverse leaders (Olson & Jackson, 2009). However, most studies have focused on the social plight of the AA male (Carswell, Hanlon, O'Grady, Watts, & Pothong, 2009; Diehl, Howse, & Trivette, 2011; Johnson, Pryce, & Martinovich, 2011). These types of studies are important; however, they do not paint a full picture of the experiences of all AA males. Therefore, it becomes important to better understand how AA males can develop leadership skills through mentoring in order to overcome challenges as a minority.

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (FGCC) was formed to identify barriers involved with employment and leadership opportunities for women and minorities (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The glass ceiling points to an invisible yet impenetrable barrier for minorities that prevent them from achieving the highest levels of leadership in companies and organisations (FGCC, 1995). According to the FGCC (1995), 97% of the senior leadership of Fortune 1000 and 500 companies were Caucasian and 95% were male. Twenty years later

the issue remains, as AA males account for less than 1% of the senior leadership of fortune 500 companies (Isidore, 2012). The Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2009) reported that Caucasians still occupy 88% of the senior-executive positions in U.S. private industry organisations.

Leadership has many definitions and variations. For the present study, Burns' transformational leadership was utilised (1978). According to Couto (1993):

The transforming leader shapes, alters, and elevates the motives, values, and goals of followers. The transforming leader achieves significant change. There is a special power entailed in transforming leadership. Leaders armed with principles and rising above self-interest narrowly conceived are invested with powers that may ultimately transform both leaders and followers into persons who jointly adhere to model values and end-values (as cited in Wren, 1995, p. 103).

The study has a meaningful contribution to leadership, as there is a historical relationship between the mentoring and leadership process. Mentoring is strongly tied to leadership (Lester et al., 2011; Olson & Jackson, 2009), and mentoring has the potential to create more and diverse leaders (Olson & Jackson, 2009). There is a link between transformational leadership and mentoring. Mentoring aids in leadership development by encouraging role socialisation, career development, and leadership skills that help mentees in adapting to professional situations (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). Transformational leadership and mentoring have a leader-follower and mentor-mentee connection. One of the reasons for this personal connection between participants is the act of personal development and mutual warm regard between all parties involved in the process.

Organisations may have varying definitions of senior leadership. This study explored how closely the participants identified with a more comprehensive definition of leadership. The job roles of the participants were difficult to compare without having a shared operational definition of leadership, which takes in to account these differences. The style and structure of transformational leadership benefit some AA males, and some AA males prefer transformational leadership (Andreescu & Vito 2010; Love, Trammell & Cartner, 2010). Therefore, it was important to understand participants' leadership identity more than specific job role. It would have been problematic to compare each individual job role as opposed to their specific leadership identity.

Diversity benefits organisations as it relates to their bottom line and productivity (Aberson, 2007; White, 2009). Mentoring is a method used by organisations to improve its senior leadership diversity (FGCC, 1995). It is important to understand if mentoring organisations are contributing to the placement of leaders in the public and private sector. The recommendation of the FGCC (1995) in relation to mentoring calls for organisations to encourage mentoring within their organisations; however, this study examined a formal mentoring organisation that has a goal of cultivating mentees early in the development process.

### **Importance of leadership training for minorities**

To date, a lack of minorities in leadership positions remains even after the FGCC findings (Wallace, 2015). A possible solution to address this problem may be effective mentoring of minorities (FGCC, 1995). According to Olson and Jackson (2009), many organisations must develop programmes to help attract and retain talented workers. For those individuals who desire to obtain a leadership role, the opportunity to engage in a mentoring relationship is essential. Unfortunately, as mentoring is a personal process, the mentors and protégés tend to be of similar race, gender, and cultural background (Olson, & Jackson, 2009). Therefore, as the majority of senior leadership in most of the large organisations is comprised of primarily Caucasian males, this poses a problem for those who seek a mentoring opportunity and do not fit this demographic mold. According to Clutterbuck and Ragins (2002), diversity mentoring, which addresses the aforementioned issue, allows both parties in the mentoring relationship to have a productive relationship despite possibly having different backgrounds (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002).

Due to their authoritative role, leaders of organisations should embody a style of leadership that has positive outcomes for their organisation. According to Oreg and Berson (2011), organisations continually face challenges and need to adapt to changing environments; however, the degree to which they change varies. In a global economy, diversity and organisation's response to diversity matters (Babin, Briggs, & Nicholson, 2011), and the organisation that seeks leadership diversity exhibits a form of transformational leadership. The transformational leader attempts to elevate their follower to a greater level of being. This selflessness is indicative of someone who will look to the follower to improve and aspire to senior leadership regardless of race. Transformational leadership and diversity mentoring are linked in this way: the transformational leader elevates the follower as the mentor elevates the mentee because of mutual warm regard. This mutual warm regard is possible when both parties agree that the goal of the partnership is to grow. Therefore, even when the two parties exist in different cultural backgrounds the curiosity and desire to mutually grow cultivates the relationship (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002).

The leader has a significant influence on the process of change within organisations in part because of transformational leadership (Oreg & Berson, 2011). Therefore, the issue of leadership inequality is problematic. Diversity mentoring can bring greater social change (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002). Not only do both the mentor and mentee benefit but the entire organisation can also gain from this leadership development (Kennett, & Lomas, 2015). The quality organisation is one in which it seeks the full potential of its workers (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2010), and perhaps with greater diversity mentoring efforts organisations can discover the full range of talent that exists within their own ranks.

Recognising the challenges of AA males in diversity management, some organisations have developed leadership programmes which specifically assist minorities who aspire to leadership positions. For example, organisations such as the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), 100 Black Men incorporated, and The Men of Merit Programme, seek to develop leadership among AA males. In the present study SAAB was the target organisation, as it models a transformational approach. In its key programme components and core elements

SAAB seeks to address the issues facing minority males through leadership, mentoring, advocacy, and action (SAAB, 2009). The organisation uses the personal, life, and educational lessons gained on collegiate campuses to establish a foundation that helps Black and Latino males in future life and professional endeavors. However, whether SAAB or other similar leadership programmes for minorities are effective in developing leadership skills is not well understood.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a leadership-mentoring programme for AA males. Specifically, this study sought to gain an understanding of what role college level mentoring programmes have in the process. Harper (2009) stated that the collegiate environment and experience plays an important role in the later professional development of AA males. Therefore, this study sought to gain an understanding of the perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of AA males who are alumni of a leadership mentoring programme, and to determine their understanding of what role, if any, the organisation had in aiding their current position of leadership.

## **Methodology**

Participants were 20 AA males who are alumni of the SAAB mentoring programme. According to its corporate website, SAAB is involved with enrolled AA males in more than 200 colleges and universities, as well as middle and high schools in 39 states in the United States (SAAB, 2016). SAAB provides a diverse and culturally sensitive environment for all ethnic minorities. SAAB has mentored thousands of males since 1990 and currently mentors over 7,000 minority men through its many chapters. The goal of SAAB is to cultivate a cycle of mentoring with men of color and hope to prepare members to enter the workforce as professionals who can compete with a meaningful role in society. (SAAB, 2016).

### ***Participants***

Potential participants were selected based on SAAB's alumni criteria along with specific study expectations. Participants were required to be a) active members of SAAB during the two or four-years of college, b) successfully graduated and members of the mentoring programme, c) AA males, d) graduated between 5 to 23 years prior the study. This age range was selected because SAAB graduates are expected to develop a five-year plan, and the programme has been in existence for 25 years. Participants resided in California, Georgia, South Carolina, Arizona, Alabama, Ohio, New York, Maryland, and Washington D.C.

### ***Instruments***

Data were collected using qualitative interviews as part of a case study design. Yin (2009) identified six sources of case study evidence in interviews including documents, archival records, direct observation, physical artifacts, and participation observation. In the present study, open-ended interview questions were used to allow participants to give a broader context of the phenomenon. These questions served as a guide for the discussion. However, prior to the formal, pre-designated questions, a series of questions were used to establish rapport and to gather historical context of participants' experiences with SAAB.

Interview questions were developed using the extant literature on leadership and adult mentoring programmes (e.g., Clutterbuck et al., 2012; Garvey, Stokes, & Megginson, 2014; Ragins, Clutterbuck, & Matthewman, 2012). From this review, eight core questions were asked of participants. Each question was designed to gather their perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs about their time with SAAB. These included:

1. What were your experiences while you were a member of SAAB?
2. What are your thoughts towards mentoring and the mentoring process while you were a member of SAAB?
3. What type of mentoring or leadership development training have you received since you have left SAAB?
4. What influence if any SAAB had in your professional development?
5. The modern Transformational Leader is one who places the needs of the follower and the organisation above their own. The Transformational leader seeks to shape, elevate, and up lift their followers to greater levels of performing. To what degree do you align your leadership style with Transformational leadership? What type of leader are you? Have you obtained a leadership position since you left SAAB?
6. The Glass Ceiling is a metaphor that describes the phenomenon of an invisible but impenetrable barrier for women and ethnic minorities in organisations. This ceiling prevents women and minorities from assuming the highest levels of leadership within organisations. Were there any barriers or obstacles that you faced while obtaining positions of leadership? Please explain.
7. If you have obtained a leadership position, to what degree do you attribute your time in SAAB to helping you achieve this position? (dependent on question 5)
8. Is there any other information you would like to add?

### ***Procedure***

Following institutional review board approval, participants were recruited to participate in an interview. The Director of SAAB posted an introductory solicitation to the organisation's webpage. From this initial solicitation, approximately 40 participants showed interest in participating in the study. An introductory statement requesting participation in the study as well as a brief introduction to the study and its purpose was emailed to these prospective participants. The emailed letter requested participants to answer four demographic questions including name, contact information, time spent with the organisation, and potential availability for the interview. Each participant was asked to sign a pre-approved consent form before being interviewed. Twenty agreed to participate, and interviews were scheduled based on their availability and convenience. All interviews were conducted by telephone. The annual SAAB conference was being held during the period of data collection and many participants in the study also attended the conference. This event provided an environment where study participants were able to communally reflect about their experiences with SAAB. Although this was independent of the study it did allow for a grouping of some of the study participants.

Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim. The goal of the data collection process was to obtain thematic saturation. During the interview process, participants were encouraged to be open and honest. Interviews averaged 20 minutes

depending on the verbosity of the respondent, and data collection occurred over a 30-day period.

### ***Data analysis***

Participants were given aliases based on their coded information that was kept separate from their identifying information. The completed transcripts were checked and verified for accuracy by comparing the transcripts to the recorded interviews and verification from participants. Once the interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes. Yin (2003) identified this process as content analysis, a process that involves the analysis of written documents, text, or graphics for patterns that are coded and analyzed. According to Creswell (2009), content analysis consists of random sampling, accurate measurement, and definitions for theoretical constructs. Gathered data were coded into the seven listed themes. NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software was used to evaluate the transcribed interviews. NVivo 10 software aids in providing a systematic analysis and data trail of the collected information gathered from participants.

The qualitative interviewing process allows the researcher to reduce the participant's statements or experiences to the specific essence as they experience them (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011). Efforts were made to reduce personal bias by temporal bracketing the research. This helps to ensure that the researched topic is the primary focus (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). Epoche was also used during the study. Epoche requires a disciplined effort to set aside prejudgments of the phenomenon being investigated, to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to research participants describe their experience (Moustakas, 1994). Open-ended questions were provided for internal credibility and dependability by standardising what the researcher presented to each participant.

### **Findings**

Although specific demographics were not obtained regarding their perceived success in leadership, 12 of 20 participants had completed graduate school, and one had completed his doctorate. Only four participants reported not obtaining what they perceived as a position of leadership. During the course of the thematic analysis the following themes emerged: 1) Education Success, 2) Mentoring Attitudes, 3) Difference between Collegiate and Professional Mentoring, 4) Professional Success, 5) Leadership Style and Identity, 6) Mentoring Implications for the Glass Ceiling, and 7) Perceived Influence in Making Leaders. Themes and their supporting material are presented in this section.

#### ***Theme 1: education success***

Participants indicated that engagement in a college-based mentoring programme such as SAAB could enhance their academic achievement. The programme fostered accountability and hard work. For example, Carl stated that his experiences were really rewarding calling them “phenomenal.” According to Carl, SAAB “gave me an opportunity to interact with other brothers who had similar opinions and beliefs about success, life, persistence, and really brotherhood.”



Carl defined brotherhood in a way that there were no barriers to entry into the organisation, but they were “held accountable” by peers and mentors on campus. Dan, attributed his educational success to his participation in SAAB: “Upon graduation I was able to transition to Graduate School. I was then able to transition to an advisor for SAAB. I was able to work with the students in a different setting and in a different role.” All of the alumni interviewed attributed at least some of their academic success to SAAB.

### ***Theme 2: mentoring attitudes***

Participants indicated that participation in the SAAB programme helped them to develop relationships and understand the mentoring process. All of the alumni reported they had continued to foster mentoring relationships after they left SAAB. Alumni Albert shared that the mentoring process within SAAB was “profound” and that mentoring was “highly pushed.” Mention of the SAAB affirmation was also referenced for its mentoring aspects: According to Albert, “I remember the SAAB affirmation. In order to empower ourselves, and to promote brotherhood, accountability, self-discipline, and intellectual development we must be accountable.” For some alumni SAAB was their first opportunity to be mentored, Elias stated “I think it is interesting because in high school I did not have necessarily a mentor.”

Albert’s views were supported by Carl, who stated that “Mentoring has been a huge, huge piece of my little success that I have had.” According to Carl, AA males cannot be successful if they do not have appropriate mentoring in place, but due to the SAAB peer mentorship model, he was able to better break down barriers and attitudes. Carl added that the peer mentorship model of SAAB “... really shaped my understanding of the word mentorship and by being involved in SAAB. I was able to mentor others and others were able to mentor me.”

### ***Theme 3: differences between collegiate and professional mentoring***

All participants noted the differences experienced between SAAB mentoring and those in their professional careers. All participants shared that they preferred the collegiate-based mentoring to the professional level mentoring or leadership development. Indeed, some participants shared that they had not received any mentoring or leadership development post-SAAB. Some members did have some level of mentoring and leadership development post-SAAB. Frank was such an example: “My Fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, we have a lot of leadership development at the district, regional and national level when we go to conferences.”

Sam stated that he had received lots of leadership development training post-SAAB such as leadership courses, seminars, and retreats. However, he reported that while attaining some professional-level mentors since college, they did not reach the same level of support as his experiences in SAAB. Sam shared, “I have had one or two professional level mentors after I left school; however, they did not reach the level of what SAAB provided. Professional mentoring tended to be work related... but with SAAB it was more personal and spiritual.”

### ***Theme 4: professional success***

The fourth theme of Professional Success identified the impact that this mentorship programme had on their professional careers. Each participant shared their experiences advancing in their professional careers, and shared that it was their participation in SAAB that

gave them a foundation to be successful. Miles noted that he had received an internship with a charitable community support organisation after college which he attributed to the experiences and training he received from SAAB. “I had opportunities to participate in leadership training and even conducted my own training through organisations linked to college students.”

Some of the alumni had to rely on some of the innate skills developed through SAAB to achieve professional success such as alumni Greg who shared that his “... CEO saw something in me and placed me in a management trainee programme and gave me a great opportunity to work for a great company to have an impact on the community.” Alumni Robert was able to build on some of the qualities gained from SAAB in his role with a national child advocacy organisation. Robert stated, “I have done many different things but SAAB showed me what my main interests were... the importance of mentorship and helping out younger people. After graduation that is what I pursued.”

### ***Theme 5: leadership style and identity***

Leadership style and identity was partially influenced by their career field. Most self-identified as situational leaders, but both transformational and servant leadership were also represented by several participants. Participants in general viewed the development of their leadership style as organic, but it was grounded in their religious beliefs as well as helping others and their race. For example, Sam stated, “I identify with the transformational leader.” According to Sam who identified “with the transformational leader,” a leader and a manager/supervisor are two different concepts, but that a manager is not necessarily a leader. However, in his view a leader inspires others and he stated that many of his followers have gone on to become leaders.

Alumni Jacob shared that his “... leadership style is based on accountability and strategic planning. That was something I learned in SAAB. Being taught strategic planning was helpful for our career.” Leadership identity was important to Kevin as well. “My participation in SAAB allowed me to develop as a leader. It was more of a support system and it allowed the members of the chapter, 50 strong of us to shine.”

### ***Theme 6: mentoring implications for the glass ceiling***

All participants were aware of the Glass Ceiling or other forms of racial/social barriers; however, they each rejected the phenomenon as a hindrance to their professional success. It was a topic that was discussed in great detail by participants, and all cited their experience with SAAB as a primary reason why they did not believe that the Glass Ceiling had an effect on their professional growth. This is supported by Ulysses, who stated that “... of course, I had to work hard to get where I am at today, but I will say that SAAB and other decisions like my education has made those barriers less formidable to me.”

Dan attributed SAAB to helping him overcome barriers. According to Dan, I would have to say that if it was not for my experience with SAAB there would have been barriers. For me, being in SAAB I remember having those teachable moment sessions of learning not to let those obstacles in front of you prevent you from reaching your goals. The metaphor we had or the symbol was like this chair, you are trying to get pass this chair



to get to your degree or whatever. Don't let this chair keep you from reaching all of these other aspects.

***Theme 7: perceived influence in making leaders***

All participants credited their participation in SAAB as to the reason for their leadership success above other areas such as personal fortitude, family support, or even Affirmative Action. For example, Tom stated that his decision to return to school to get his Master's degree was "... driven by me wanting to break through any obstacle before me, because I knew I can achieve anything. That was one of the principles I learned in SAAB." Alumni Sam shared that leadership development was about the SAAB relationships. "Like I said SAAB was established towards the end of my collegiate career and I had been involved in Campus activities before that. However, my relationship with the programme director is a direct correlation to all of the success I have achieved."

These statements were supported by Ian, who shared that he... attributed a great deal of it to SAAB. It gave me the encouragement to be a go-getter and push for those things I am interested in. I was able to get a graduate degree. I have a Masters in Marketing and a Masters in Journalism. I really did not think about going to graduate school, but many of the guys in SAAB were going to graduate school. These guys were mentors to me.

***Theme 8: satisfaction with mentoring and mentoring programmes***

All participants viewed the SAAB mentoring programme favorably. Participants gave detailed descriptions on how mentoring and the mentoring programme SAAB contributed to their professional success. Albert stated, "I will like to say SAAB is amazing," and "Just from my background besides from my father my uncles were drug dealers, drug users and alcoholics, I had a different view of what it meant to be a black male." Albert stated that if it wasn't for his father and SAAB he would not have known that his life mattered. SAAB taught him to be proud of his heritage.

Bob loved "All of it." Bob stated that it was the programme director's influence that allowed him to receive his first job in student affairs. "First I have to give credit to God he gave me the ability but certainly the director and SAAB experience is right up there as to why I achieved the success that I have achieved in my professional career."

Elias also found the programme highly satisfying.

I did not like to speak in front of people before SAAB. When it came time for meetings or sessions when it was time for questions and you are in front of people. I was the one who always had a question and never asked. I would just sit there. Some of that had to do with confidence and fear of public speaking. SAAB gave me confidence and taught me how to properly address people when speaking in front of large audience and that helped me a great deal. Just as effective as toastmasters or any of these other organisations. Gave me the extra leverage to be able to come into my job with different people and voice my opinion with confidence.

## Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to discover what role collegiate mentoring has in assisting AA males achieve high-level leadership positions. This research examined the alumni of SAAB, a college-based mentoring programme, to discover the extent to which members attributed their experience with SAAB to their leadership success. All participants responded that in their view and their experience, college-based mentoring helped them become leaders. The participants of this study shared that the Glass Ceiling, while recognising that it exists, had little to no effect on their professional success because of their willingness to view the problematic phenomenon as an opportunity. Specific themes are discussed further in light of current research.

### *Theme 1: education success*

SAAB is a school-based mentoring programme. As part of its core values and principles, the organisation is designed to aid in the retention and success of AA males on college campuses (SAAB, 2016). According to SAAB (2014), to improve retention the organisation structure creates an environment that gives its members ability to succeed on college campuses and later in life. Creating programmes to facilitate education and future success is important (Harper, 2009). In the present study, members pointed to the camaraderie and brotherhood they shared as essential to the development of their young selves. Peters (2010) noted that formal and informal mentoring is common in the African-American community. This is supported within the findings of this study, as SAAB was noted as being there for these men at a vulnerable time in their lives according to most of the participants in the study.

According to Williams (2011), social mentoring programmes require the mentor to understand the perspectives of those that are being mentored. SAAB acted in the role of a surrogate family for some of the alumni. The direction, guidance, and general warm regard SAAB provided these alumni served as a person-centered foundation for real noticeable educational success. The majority of the alumni in the study had obtained their Masters or PhD degrees. Several gave credit to SAAB for assistance in applying and being recommended for graduate or doctoral programmes.

### *Theme 2: mentoring attitudes*

Mentoring is a process that requires an individual with experience, expertise, and wisdom using a specific set of skills to teach, aid, and develop another person (Offstein, Shah, & Gnyawali, 2011). Repeatedly the themes of accountability and self-discipline were touted by the alumni as having a significant role in the achievement of the success they have. When asked about this, the programme director stated:

Accountability is taught as a critical value from day one of their SAAB experience. Accountability is one of the biggest challenges for most brothers; however, it is one of the most important values for them to learn to embrace if they are going to be authentically successful and expect to yield the balance or order in life they must have. The four core values are embedded within the SAAB Affirmation, which says that in order to empower ourselves and promote Brotherhood, we the Brothers of Student African American

Brotherhood embrace the principles of Accountability, Proactive Leadership, Self-Discipline and Intellectual Development. Through our beliefs and convictions, we uphold this mission at all times (personal communication, 2015).

Being mentored helped to change participants' lives: in return the alumni would feel a need to continue the process in their personal and professional lives after college. Mentoring is important, as many organisations that have mentoring processes use them to develop leaders (McCauley, 2007). If the corporate world would adopt an attitude of diversity similar to SAAB's emphasis on diversity mentoring and it could promote corporate social responsibility that may create a mentoring cycle much like SAAB as an organisation.

### ***Theme 3: difference between collegiate and professional mentoring***

When asked to speak to their post-collegiate and professional mentoring, many former members stated that it was not on the same level or non-existent after SAAB. Research by Robinson and Reio (2012) emphasised the benefit of mentoring AA males in a professional setting. The researchers discovered a positive return on investment when companies invest in AA males. The study findings indicated a positive relationship between mentoring and job satisfaction with commitment to the organisation (Robinson & Reio 2012). According to their study this can reduce costly underperformance and reduce turnover rates.

Some members did have leadership development and mentoring after college because companies and organisations have a specific goal and mission, and it usually focuses on areas that drive to accomplish the organisation's objectives. SAAB and other mentoring programmes goals are all related to the success of the members of the programme (Olson & Jackson, 2009). Therefore, everything related to the mentoring programme should focus on the benefit and positive outcomes for its members. Doing so would provide members with a better understanding of the mentoring and leadership development process.

Some alumni have continued to be affiliated with SAAB through the general board and other ongoing initiatives of SAAB. Some of these activities mirror what membership of a general board of many Fortune 500 and 1000 companies perform such as fundraising, strategic planning, coordinating conferences, logistics, and grant writing (Rose, & Bielby, 2011). Therefore, acquiring experiences in these areas prior to professional opportunities are invaluable for the professional who has a goal of reaching the highest levels of leadership within organisations.

### ***Theme 4: professional success***

Participants of the study have various degrees of socio-economic backgrounds and family dynamics, but all could be considered successful in their chosen career paths. However, SAAB and mentoring was able to meet a need for them. In describing their professional careers since graduating, almost all alumni pointed a direct connection with SAAB and its networking in helping their professional success through direct hire, references, or training.

Professional organisations that had an established mentoring programme saw benefits of those programmes by the mentor, mentee, and the organisation (Willems, & Smet, 2007).

Moran (2007) described intersubjectivity in college-based and professional level mentoring where both levels should desire to cultivate leaders but also share the goal of leadership development. Two systems with similar objectives should not have competing goals. The college based mentoring programme should exist in relation to the companies and organisations that desire successful graduates. Based on the findings of this study, it would appear that SAAB is developing leaders that can and do become successful.

#### ***Theme 5: leadership style and identity***

The leadership identity data were surprising. Almost all of the participants were able to identify specific leadership styles they identified with. Approximately half of the participants identified with the servant and transformational leadership styles while the other half identified with the situational leadership style. The number of situational leaders could be a result of the individual industries and job roles the participants have. All of the participants described some traits of the transformational leadership style.

Transformational leadership is most closely linked to mentoring, as it focuses on the common good for all (Carter & Baghurst, 2013; Groves & LaRocca, 2012). In the statements by the alumni, each member discussed a style of leadership that was focused on placing the needs of the followers above all else. Leadership practices are not a static process but are more fluid (Wren, 1995). Leaders can adapt and use elements of one style or another to accomplish organisational objectives (Avolio, & Yammarino, 2002). Further, transformational leadership represents a new style of leadership where the leader gives of him or herself almost unconditionally (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002). This unconditional giving is congruent with the SAAB programme structure and the leadership of its director. Many of the alumni interviewed discussed the gratitude they had for their college based mentors helping them achieve career success. The SAAB system of *being my brother's keeper* works against the corporate model described by Rose and Bielby (2011) in which corporate boards are comprised of the same people, in essence, keeping out those who are not an established part of the corporate system.

#### ***Theme 6: mentoring implications for the Glass Ceiling***

The Glass Ceiling is a metaphor for an invisible but impenetrable barrier for AA males (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Less than .06% of the senior leadership in Fortune 500 and 1000 companies are AA men, and while the causes vary, one identified solution for this problem is lack of mentoring (United States Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1999). However, participants' responses in the present study suggest that for them, the Glass Ceiling was not a barrier. Of particular interest was that it was perceived as something positive or a challenge, where current literature only perceives it as harmful (Carnes, Radojevic-Kelly, 2011; Dimovski, Skerlavaj, & Mandy, 2010; Hewlett & Rashid, 2010).

The majority of the participants did not have a direct experience with the Glass Ceiling phenomenon, and while aware of it, appeared to almost resist ownership of the issue. For example, the college attrition rate for AA males is at approximately 33% (Harper, 2009), yet all participants had obtained a bachelor's degree and the majority had obtained a masters or doctoral degree. How the participants were able to view the Glass Ceiling as a positive challenge is unclear, but it may be due to the development of plans that SAAB encourages its

members to make. Members are expected to develop five-year plans and create shorter-term goals to help them achieve this plan (SAAB, 2010). Further, participants may have developed networking alliances that exist within SAAB on the local and national levels, which may have aided them in achieving their ascension towards levels of higher leadership within organisations.

#### ***Theme 7: perceived influence in making leaders***

The perceived influence of SAAB to participants obtaining a position of leadership was at the center of the study, and all participants had achieved a position of leadership. Important for the study, all participants attributed SAAB's help in achieving their respective positions. Based on the data presented from the study, these interactions with other AA males and other leaders may have provided the personal one-on-one relationships and mentorships that are needed to become successful leaders (Olson, & Jackson, 2009). Professional organisations that have an established mentoring programme benefit the mentor, mentee, and the organisation (Willems & Smet, 2007). However, as noted by participants, not all of them had this mentoring programme in their workplace, and SAAB appeared to fill this needed role to become successful.

#### ***Theme 8: satisfaction with mentoring and mentoring programmes***

Participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive in their view of SAAB and the mentoring process. The literature supports these findings: according to Madlock and Kennedy-Lightsey (2010), mentoring leads to positive outcomes for both the mentor and the mentee. When the goal of the relationship is promoting a positive outcome, if both parties work towards this goal then it should be attainable. Of significance is the positive role that SAAB had in participants' lives. Therefore, such mentoring programmes should be considered both in the workplace (Holmes, Baghurst, & Chapman, 2013), but also in collegiate programmes, where mentoring can be essential to retaining and recruiting students (Nwenyi & Baghurst, 2013).

### **Conclusions**

Although the findings of this study are promising, they should be considered in light of its limitations, which also provide opportunity for future research. For example, data were limited to a small group of participants from one mentoring organisation, and these findings may differ across other collegiate programmes. Further, future research should consider whether such programmes are effective with other demographics in college such as women, international students, or individuals with different socioeconomic status. Future research should also consider how collegiate programmes might liaise with professional organisations or companies to bridge the gap between the college and work experiences. Such collaborations may assist students by serving as a gateway to a new job market that values those who have been mentored.

Although limitations do exist, the findings of this study show that AA males who participated in SAAB created for themselves a unique view regarding the Glass Ceiling and produced an effective means to overcome the phenomenon. The themes of this study are consistent with the issue of underrepresentation of minorities in senior leadership positions (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009), but have implications for mentoring, the



mentoring process, and mentoring programmes. This study demonstrates that mentoring and mentoring programmes like SAAB can work against the Glass Ceiling by providing a social-network that counters the homo-social networks that exist within many companies and organisations. The networking and skill-building developed works against the lack of social opportunities within some organisations by providing those opportunities before individuals enter the workforce.

SAAB and programmes similar can provide a vehicle for the training and development of AA males in positions of leadership within companies and organisations. Many of the participants believed that SAAB served as a compliment to other organisations that they were affiliated with in college. Therefore, institutions of higher learning should consider implementing SAAB chapters or similar mentoring programmes to complement their campus life system. Professional organisations should consider recruiting from those campuses that have mentoring programmes for minorities, as these programmes may develop a better-trained and prepared candidate than non-mentored candidates.

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Dr. Ervin Christie Jr. is the owner of Christie Consulting & Staff Development/Training LLC, which provides staff training and leadership consulting for organisations that have a focus on youth and their families.

Dr. Timothy Baghurst is an associate professor in the School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University.