

[Research Note]

Mentoring Early Career Academics Towards Achieving Individual Career Resilience

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Abstract

At universities, business schools, research institutes along with schools of medicine, education and other institutes for professional development and qualification in Japan and elsewhere in the world, there remains a lack of systematically generated evidence about how students, researchers and early career academics gain relevant skills and competencies in research, teaching and service. This article highlights the case of early career academics (ECAs) in Japan. ECAs are categorised as individuals who bring between five to seven years of continuous experience to their roles and responsibilities as lecturers (instructors) in higher education and / or as academic researchers. This article explores the extent to which career mentoring might offer ECAs in Japan guidance towards improving their career planning skills, competencies and confidence and, as a result, potentially enhance their individual sense of career resilience. The article posits 'individual resilience' as a potential outcome to processes of 'career planning' when mediated through processes of individual mentoring. Overall, this article represents an attempt to inform further discussion about the potential career development benefits of offering formal mentoring support to ECAs at Kwansei Gakuin University and at other universities in Japan.

Keywords: Career; career planning; early career academic; mentoring; resilience

I Introduction

Graduate students who apply to join the *Institute of Business and Accounting* (henceforth, IBA) at Kwansei Gakuin University (henceforth, KGU) are routinely asked to complete a form entitled 'Survey of Future Career Plan'. At the top of the English language version of this form, students are referred to the services and career guidance offered by members of

KGU's *Center for Career Planning and Placement*. In this annually administered Survey of Future Career Plan, students are invited to submit details of their expected or hoped for 'career options' after graduation. The form is designed to elicit these individually perceived or assessed 'options' by means of a series of questions divided into three sections: 1. *What is your career plan after graduation?* 2. *Let us know your career interest* and 3. *The company where you will work*. In section 1, students are invited to respond to a series of alphabetically-listed items that appear in English and in Japanese language. These include: A: *I will seek for a new job opportunity*; B: *I will continue to work for a current company*; E: *I am planning to start my own business*. The assumption appears to be that students who enrol at KGU have an initial 'career plan' and that some of these students will be able and willing to use the standard survey template to structure, share and perhaps receive individual feedback about this plan.

As explained at the top of the form, staff at the *Center for Career Planning and Placement* use the data gathered by the survey "to better understand current job search situation and to improve our service in the future". The explanation continues by offering a detailed description of how survey data is used: e.g. in order to enable members of the *KG Alumni Association* to more effectively offer "career support of juniors". There then follows a detailed description of measures taken to protect individual respondent data, including a link to the University's policy regarding measures taken to protect individual student data²⁾.

A quick poll (March 2022) among doctoral students and graduates affiliated to IBA showed that one-in-five recalled receiving a copy of the 'Survey of Future Career Plan' form. None of those surveyed had used the services offered by the *Center for Career Planning and Placement*. At the time of the survey, none had had direct involvement with the *KG Alumni Association*. Two-of-five regularly read the *KG Alumni Association* newsletter and were thinking of seeking active membership.

Note: It is important at this stage to make clear at this point that this article does *not* set out to comment on this response. Rather, it seeks to explore whether working towards setting up a formal mentoring network might positively supplement existing formal and informal career planning and development support and guidance for ECAs at KGU. Specifically, this article explores the extent to which instituting formal mentoring support might serve towards developing individual career resilience among ECAs at KGU.

Internationally, ECAs are commonly identified as advanced research students and / or members of academic staff in higher education who are experiencing the first five to seven years of a professional academic career (Debowski, 2017, Sutherland, 2018). To illustrate,

several current PhD candidates along with recent PhD graduates affiliated to IBA can be identified as ECAs in that they combine an existing full-time professional career with the option of further developing their professional profiles (perhaps part-time) as academics³.

Correspondingly, this article is designed to address the following questions:

- How might the offering of formal mentoring supplement the career planning experience of ECAs?
- To what extent might the offering of formal mentoring contribute towards guiding ECAs to achieve enhanced levels of individual career resilience?

With these questions in mind, this article explores the extent to which offering formal and individual mentoring support to ECAs at KGU and at other universities in Japan and overseas might help them identify career 'options' that further their sense of career satisfaction and confidence. Correspondingly, this article explores the potential of offering career mentoring to ECAs an opportunity towards improving each mentee's individual professional and career development. Ambitiously, it explores the extent to which mentoring might serve towards improving each ECA's resilience. It considers also what effect the development of resilience in processes of individual career development might benefit supervisors and other stakeholders in programmes of doctoral studies at KGU and elsewhere. The article further highlights some of the potential institutional benefits that introducing formal mentoring support for ECAs might generate. These include reducing actual or potential failure rates of PhD candidates – a key measure used in global rankings comparing the research effectiveness and reputation of universities and research institutes. Not least, involving more current and potential PhD supervisors, including freshly graduated ECAs, into programmes of formal mentoring might serve to create a more richly experienced 'research culture' and, concomitantly, a more tightly co-ordinated alumni network with expertise in the career planning needs and expectations of doctoral students and graduates.

With these potential benefits in mind, the overarching purpose of this article is to explore and begin to establish a foundation for further research and discussion about these potential benefits to the universities and research centres hosting PhD candidates and to the students we at KGU collectively seek to support, guide and, for career planning purposes, advise.

II Literature review

This brief review of literature is designed to define the Keywords listed at the top of this article. In doing this, readers are guided towards fully appreciating the terms of reference in the first question presented above; namely:

- How might the offering of formal mentoring supplement the career planning experience of ECAs?

1. Career

The English language term ‘career’ derives from a combination of Latin and Old French words for ‘race course’ and (racing) ‘chariot’ or ‘carriage’ (Ayto, 2011). The term became adopted and internationalized by researchers and practitioners in ‘people-oriented’ fields of professional activity such as human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD). People routinely make subjective references to ‘your career’ or ‘my career’ or, increasingly, ‘careers’ in the plural. The term has become increasingly globalised. To illustrate, the international English ‘career’ appears as *Karriere* (German) and カヤリア (Japanese).

Researchers in the field of career development theory interpret ‘a career’ as a perceptible and recordable (often retrospectively) unfolding sequence of an individual’s work experiences over time: today I might be studying for an MBA while working part-time in a convenience store; at some future stage in my life, retrospectively, I might recognize that these investments of time and effort proved pivotal in determining my choice(s) of ‘career’. The findings from this research has attracted the interest of governments and education ministries worldwide. To illustrate, the UK government draws on research and practice of professional HRM / HRD qualifying agencies such as the *Chartered Institute of Professional Development* (CIPD) to offer both government employees (public servants) and citizens generally open access to a research-based and tried-and-tested ‘Career Development Plan’ (CDP)⁴.

At this stage in our discussion we can try to imagine the chariot races ‘careering’ along the race courses and around the amphitheatres of ancient Greece and Rome. We recognise that developing an individual career is likely to be dynamic, risk-laden, competitive, and in some professional contexts a ‘winner takes all’ experience. We can empathise with our PhD candidates and wonder what relay motivates them over years to invest in this race. We can speculate about what prizes of individual fulfilment and expectations of enhanced social

status and economic reward ‘keep them going’.

Accordingly, we can imagine how a PhD supervisor might recognise himself or herself as they observe and attempt to interpret their respective supervisees’ behaviours and achievements: the draft proposals that are read and remain unconvincing in terms of their apparent feasibility or unattractive in terms of their claimed-for ‘originality’. Conversely, we can imagine how supervisees might look to their supervisors and dream of a day in some imagined future where they will be tasked to supervise a new generation of supervisees. We might conclude that, in order to prepare themselves for the races to come, each of our supervisees needs a *plan*.

2. Career planning

Making an online search by combining the items ‘Kwansei Gakuin University’ + ‘career planning’, one of the first links to appear takes us to Australia and the University of Queensland, an international partner university of KGU⁵⁾. Their answer to the question *What is career planning?* appears as follows:

- Put simply, career planning is a process which unpacks your capabilities and skills, interests and values whilst also considering the career options that are available to you. It is vital to engage in career planning on an ongoing basis as, over time, your preferences, strengths, personal circumstances and professional goals may evolve⁶⁾.

Our colleagues at UQ recommend that each individual create a ‘Career Action Plan’ which they describe as:

- A dynamic, evolving document that is self-managed and intended to reflect your professional goals and areas for development over time. Commonly it serves the purpose of a roadmap, setting out how you plan to get from Point A (your starting point) to Point B (getting a job and excelling through your career) and highlights key tasks, actions and outcomes in order to achieve this⁷⁾.

It is noteworthy that the relevance of the Career Action Plan template provided via the UQ website addresses the needs of a broad range of travellers planning and negotiating their way along their respective ‘career journeys’. These include undergraduate and graduate students in the early stages of planning and developing a career. The guidance offered also and explicitly addresses the career planning needs of individuals seeking to advance an existing career and / or ‘start over and change career’⁸⁾. The profile of PhD students and graduates at IBA would appear to fit this description: i.e. in their status as ECAs, defined earlier as ad-

vanced research students and / or members of academic staff in higher education who are experiencing the first five to seven years of a professional academic career (Debowski, 2017, Sutherland, 2018; Jackson, 2021).

3. Mentoring

In our professional view and experience, the terms used to describe roles of ‘coach’ and ‘mentor’ are commonly used imprecisely, even interchangeably (Jackson, 2019). To avoid such confusion, it is useful to visualize a real-life example of mentoring and coaching practice. The international tennis star Osaka Naomi will have a coach or coaches whose task is to improve her performance: i.e. to ‘improve her game’ in the short- medium- long-terms that constitute a competitive tennis season. Among other professional and personal qualities, her coaches will understand, be able to communicate, devise and supervise training exercises designed to improve specific of Ms. Osaka’s skills, techniques, and mental attitudes relevant towards enabling her to both to perform and to perform under acute competitive pressure: here, we are again reminded of the aforementioned chariot races. At this point we can note that both professional and amateur tennis coaches should be able guide their *coachees* to perform at levels of competitiveness and success that they themselves might never have achieved during their own tennis or sporting career.

McCarthy defines mentoring mid-career professionals (*mentees*) as a process whereby “someone shares their knowledge or experience to help another person solve their own problems and / or choose their own goals” before reminding us that “the original conception of a mentor was the older advisor to a younger person” (2014: 92). Clearly ‘age’ linked to assumptions of longer and (perhaps) more relevant ‘experience’ appears to be expressed in the Japanese concepts such as *sensei* and in relationships such as those formed and negotiated between *senpai* and *kohai*. However, here we need to remember the advisor roles and status and professional responsibilities and expectations of Osaka Naomi’s tennis coaches.

When assessed independently of ‘age’, the variable of *experience* can serve as a predictor towards evaluating how and why formally mentoring ECAs might prove effective. One example is the potential to enhance an ECA’S research skills and, of more durable relevance, research *confidence* (Sutherland, 2018). As Hemmings (2012) notes, there remains a paucity of research into what types of interventions - managerial, supervisory, administrative – that might effectively serve to develop this confidence in early career researchers. In this respect, resourcing a *mentoring* intervention might prove more effective. To illustrate, a mentor may

have had more years of experience of success - and of *failure* - in submitting work for publication than a mentee. If the mentor has achieved the professional academic status of being invited to act as an editor and / or peer reviewer for journals, the *kohai* can learn from *senpai's* experiences of recovering and learning from such failures and, as a peer reviewer, of giving feedback to ECAs about to succeed. The *kohai* can learn more from the *senpai* about the skills and attitudes (including confidence) needed to 'play the game' of getting published in peer reviewed article. In short, the *kohai* as mentee can observe and learn from the mentor as *senpai* skills, competencies and attitudes (e.g. self-confidence) relevant towards developing individual career resilience.

In similar vein, Guccione and Hutchinson (2021) regard formal mentoring as an opportunity for ECAs to achieve what the authors terms a sense of 'Fellowship' status: i.e. by developing awareness of the opportunities, eligibility issues and professional / research ethical constraints entailed when working towards achieving such status; developing self-confidence relevant towards participating effectively in collaborative research projects; developing the skills and competencies that academic peers or 'fellows' can recognise as demonstrating 'self-leadership' and 'research independence'; developing individual resilience and maintaining career momentum (2021: 150–152).

These illustrations prompt a related set of questions that are central to our theme. To illustrate: How does a Post-Doc supervisor adjust their supervisory experiences and expectations towards developing an ECA who is clearly capable of achieving a level of research performance that the supervisor him-/her-self has never achieved? What does a manager / supervisor do with subordinates who perform routinely at levels that she/he could not achieve? With such questions in mind, I regularly refer in my own voluntary efforts as a career mentor to the work of Harry Tomlinson, who, in contexts for developing and demonstrating educational leadership, explains how:

- Coaching is about improving skills and knowledge for people who want to improve their game; mentoring is about the preparation for future change (2004: 98).

4. Career resilience

As a reminder, the second question driving the structure and flow of this discussion is:

- To what extent might the offering of formal mentoring contribute towards guiding ECAs to achieve enhanced levels of individual career resilience?

This question is formulated in a way that suggests how offering formal mentoring support

and guidance to ECAs might generate - as one possible outcome - 'enhanced levels of individual career resilience'. Later in this discussion, we explore and examine how this outcome might be achieved, step-by-step, in practice. For now, we should try to gain a clearer picture of what an 'enhanced level of individual resilience' might look and feel like.

According to McCarthy (2014: 67-8), coaching and mentoring for resilience "helps individuals cope with change, whether personal or organisational". Citing Baeijaert and Stellamans (2010), she defines 'resilience' as an individual's capacity to deal with challenges, to bounce back from difficulties, adapt to changes and to learn from these experiences. As we illustrate subsequently in this article, the mentoring encounters offer mentees a safe and neutral stage upon which to rehearse career changing decisions before identifying and then assessing the possible real-life consequences of these decisions.

Drawing again on the resources of the CIPD, resilience is described as an individual quality, attitude and competence that helps employees adapt, cope, gain resources, and respond positively to stressors in the workplace. These 'stressors' might include: recognising the limitations of one's own knowledge and ability relevant to completing an urgent task or working for a line-manager that underestimates an employee's ability and / or exploits the achievement of employees for their own status in the organisation⁹. Individual employees might feel 'stressed' by events outside of their place of employment. These might include an illness in the family, a spouse or partner out of work, a child preparing for university entrance examinations: i.e. sources of stress that might be expected to impact on the performance and motivation of part-time doctorate students at IBA and other areas of KGU.

Correspondingly, the CIPD open access resource defines 'resilience' as "an individual's psychological states and traits, including self-efficacy or confidence, positive affect or emotions, and sense of coherence"¹⁰. CIPD go on to explain how drawing on sources of individual resilience will not negate or divert potential sources of stress. Rather, managers and as we shall see, mentors should appreciate resilience as to some extent a semi-permanent psychological trait and partly a variable psychological state in individual employees / mentees. Some individuals will appear – and the emphasis must be on *appear* - naturally to be more resilient than others. However, professional and ethical practice should deter superiors / mentors from imploring subordinates / mentees to issue instructive advice along the lines of 'buck up' or 'be' resilient. Rather, the response among managers should be longer term and thus more strategic towards creating and nurturing a culture wherein individuals need never feel 'alone' with their stress and, correspondingly, benefit from a collective 'team

spirit' whereby team members might communicate and openly share their experiences of 'stress' and, constructively, share their own positive experiences of 'digging deep' and demonstrating resilience in response to the inevitable stresses of combining life, work and study. We offer a practical illustration of how this opportunity might be realised in **section IV** of this article.

The strategic dimension introduced in the above paragraph indicates some of the benefits of encouraging individual resilience in work-based relationships and, more broadly, at the level of work-based teams and other small- to medium-sized forms of organisation. To illustrate, the ISO defines 'organizational resilience' as:

- The ability of an organization to absorb and adapt in a changing environment to enable it to deliver its objectives and to survive and prosper. More resilient organizations can anticipate and respond to threats and opportunities, arising from sudden or gradual changes in their internal and external context. Enhancing resilience can be a strategic organizational goal, and is the outcome of good business practice and effectively managing risk. An organization's resilience is influenced by a unique interaction and combination of strategic and operational factors. Organizations can only be more or less resilient; there is no absolute measure or definitive goal¹¹.

The ISO further explains how there is no 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to developing organizational resilience – an insight that career mentors similarly recognise in respect of the individual mentees they work with. In this sense, 'individual resilience' can be interpreted as a process of negotiation leading to an experience of enhanced personal and professional development rather than as a 'thing' or 'objective' to be achieved and used.

Accordingly, ISO explains how 'organizational resilience' represents a cumulative result of the interaction of attributes and activities, and contributions made from other technical and scientific areas of expertise. These 'areas of expertise' can be demonstrably applied and observed in how 'uncertainty is addressed' (e.g. through statements of a coherent strategy), decisions are made and enacted (i.e. with the consequences of decisions being measured and recorded), and by how people can be observed to "work together"¹². Interpreted thus, 'resilience' can be observed, examined and explained as manifestations of an organisation's distinctive working culture.

As we later illustrate in **section IV** of this article, universities and research institutes competing in domestic and international markets for higher education provision in Japan, including doctoral degree programmes that extend over several years, the 'team spirit' referred to

above can be ‘managed’ and marketed as a ‘USP’ to attract high quality students in future. Accordingly, we can take note of what McKinsey, a global business consultancy, refer to as ‘reputational resilience’: “You are what you do. Resilient institutions align their values with their actions, with their words.”¹³⁾ In overtly strategic terms, McKinsey refer to a ‘resilience imperative’, which they describe as:

- Succeeding in uncertain times, a range of ways, spanning from their brand promise to their stance on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues. Resilience demands a strong sense of self—enshrined in mission, values, and purpose—which guides actions. It also requires flexibility and openness in listening to and communicating with stakeholders, anticipating and addressing societal expectations and responding to criticism of firm behaviour.¹⁴⁾

Table 1: A summary of key concepts appearing in this article

Keyword	Definition	Example (general)	Example (mentoring)	References
Career	Sequence of an individual’s work experiences	My past career(s)	My next career(s)	Tomlinson (2004)
Career planning	A process of working out what’s important to you as you assess future career options.	Learning from my past career(s)	Preparing for my future career(s) ¹⁵⁾	Morgan (2021)
Early career academic (ECA)	Individuals 5–7 years into an academic career	Part-time PhD student / full-time employee	Full-time academic and PhD supervisor	Debowski (2017), Sutherland (2018)
Resilience	Responding to uncertainty in a flexible, adaptive & purposeful way	Learning from one’s own and others’ career ‘failures’	Preparing for future career successes (‘wins’)	McCarthy (2014), Morgan (2021), Guccione & Hutchinson (2021)

5. Test your own career resilience

At this point in our discussion, we can pause. Please read the items assembled in **Table 1**. Then, and before we move on to explore how we might in practical step-by-step terms adopt roles as mentors towards guiding ECAs to achieve enhanced levels of individual career resilience, we invite readers to test their own ‘level’ or current sense of career resilience. Paraphrasing from Morgan (2021: 352), readers might reflect on their responses to the following questions that (as we shall see) a career mentor might ask them:

- Do you have a formal ‘career plan’? If yes, how ‘fixed’ or settled is it? (If no, why not?)
- How likely are you to give up when you encounter obstacles to your attempts to fulfil your career plan(s)?
- Do you have the determination to do what you believe you need to do towards developing a career on your own terms?
- To what extent do you aspire to ‘own’ your individual career development?
- How long do you believe you would remain in a job or position if you felt continually undervalued by your superiors, your line-managers, or your employer organisation generally?
- Are you searching actively for another career pathway while remaining in your current job or position?

With your answers to the above questions in mind, we now proceed towards illustrating and exploring contexts within which a mentor might ask you such questions.

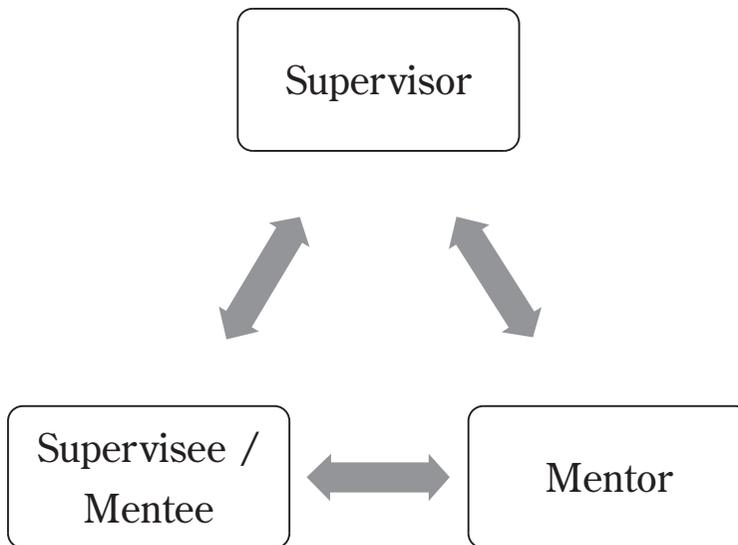
III Discussion: a proposed framework for mentoring ECAs

Being a mentor and / or a mentee describes an individual’s attempt to act out and fulfil a socially constructed role. The concept of ‘role’ derives from the study and practice of theatre, thereby echoing William Shakespeare’s lines that ‘All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players’¹⁶. Generalising from theatre to daily social life, role theory provides a descriptive, explanatory and – in terms of observable human behaviour - predictive framework for identifying, analysing and comparing the roles we each ‘play’ in society as we negotiate uncertainties and risks and seek connections to other people for the purpose of accessing resources, which in turn might promote feelings of individual security, status enhancement, and ego gratification. Relevant to our current discussion, the playing of roles generates directions for behaviour in otherwise uncertain situations: e.g. towards addressing questions rehearsed previously in **section II** (above) such as: *What is my individual career plan? What should my individual career plan be, and why?* As in theatre, when individuals repeatedly rehearse and play roles in concert with others, feelings of stress may be reduced and feelings of well-being and confidence (role resilience) might emerge.

Each day, we each play a variety of social roles, attempting to match our own and other people’s expectations of how these socially constructed roles should be played: e.g. as a fa-

ther or as a mother; as a professor and / or as a student; as a Japanese native or as a ‘foreigner’ in Japan; as a familiar friend or as a relative stranger. This is the essential and expressive nature of our respective and individual life – and *professional* – journeys (Finkelstein and Jones, 2019). Accordingly, in this section we highlight the potential roles that supervisors and their supervisees along with mentors and their mentees might play in context working (‘interacting’) with ECAs¹⁷. Accordingly, **Figure 1** illustrates how these latter roles of supervisor and supervisee along with mentor and mentee might interact and be distinguished from each other.

Figure 1: The interacting roles of supervisor-supervisee and mentor-mentee



One approach towards actively distinguishing between these four roles is to highlight the professional responsibilities that can be argued to inform the expression of each role in contexts for PhD supervision, noting that the responsibilities highlighted below are selective and designed to be illustrative only.

Supervisor

- Takes the lead in guiding the supervisee towards successful completion of their doctoral studies
- Takes the lead in advising the supervisee about how to avoid failing their PhD studies
- If the arrangement is for the supervisee to be guided by a panel of supervisors, the lead supervisor ensures that the boundaries of role and responsibility of each vice-

/ associate (etc.) supervisor remains clearly defined

- Similarly, if the arrangement is to include the formal support of a PhD mentor (as illustrated in **Figure 1**), the lead supervisor remains ultimately responsible for the supervisee's progress towards achieving a PhD qualification
- Correspondingly, the lead supervisor remembers that they, ultimately, are responsible to the institution (e.g. the university) and to the supervisee (as a client of the university) for the professional manner in which they fulfil their role as PhD supervisor

Supervisee

- Takes the lead in working towards the successful completion of their doctoral studies
- Seeks advice from their supervisor(s) about how to avoid failing their PhD studies
- If the arrangement is for the supervisee to be guided by a panel of supervisors, the supervisee ensures that the boundaries of role and responsibility of each vice- / associate (etc.) supervisor remains clearly defined
- Similarly, if the arrangement is to include the formal support of a PhD mentor (as illustrated in **Figure 1**), the supervisee remains ultimately responsible for distinguishing between and enacting their roles as both supervisee and mentee
- Correspondingly, the supervisee recognises that they, ultimately, are responsible to the institution (e.g. the university) and its policies and standards for doctoral study and – ultimately -for the award of a PhD qualification.

In their worldwide best-selling book *How to Get a PhD*⁽⁸⁾, Philips and Pugh (2015) list some of the behaviours that PhD supervisors should 'expect' their supervisees to demonstrate consistently. These include:

- Independence of thought balanced with conformity to academic standards and accepted methodologies specific to the academic discipline within which they are researching
- Producing written work that is more than just 'drafts' and sketches: i.e. the work submitted by supervisees to supervisors for discussion and feedback should be substantial and polished
- Attending meetings regularly, punctually, and with a clear discussion agenda shared in advance of each supervisory meeting
- Being honest when reporting their progress
- Following the advice given by the supervisory panel members and, if they choose to modify and / or diverge from this advice, giving clearly justifiable reasons for doing

so

- Being excited about their work, and sharing this excitement with their supervisory panel and with other members of the PhD research group or seminar
- Demonstrating the capacity to surprise supervisors and other research students with insights that are relevant, startling and / or original
- Demonstrating individual resilience, and especially during the inevitable ‘down periods’ along the PhD journey

Mentor

- Assuring the mentee that anything they discuss together remains confidential, unless the mentee gives permission for the mentor to share information with other parties
- Making explicit any other ‘ground rules’ governing the mentor-mentee interaction
- Listen actively and non-judgementally, allowing time and space for the mentee to create an agenda for exploration and discussion
- Allowing spaces for the mentee to rehearse, develop and demonstrate resilience: e.g. by drawing lessons from ‘failures’, learning constructively from feedback given by others, including the supervisor
- Offering practical guidance about working ‘healthily’ during times of pressure (physical and psychological resilience)
- Helping the mentee identify and celebrate both big and small ‘wins’ in the ‘chariot race’ of developing an academic career
- In order to make the gaining of these ‘wins’ a habit, instructing mentees to prepare and share in advance an agenda for each mentor-mentee meeting and before the end of each meeting agree a relevant developmental task that realistically can be completed before the next meeting
- Guiding the mentee towards distinguishing and working within clear and consistent boundaries between the roles and responsibilities of other people supporting the PhD process: e.g. supervisors, associate supervisors, programme administrators, career counsellors
- If asked, guiding the mentee towards identifying and formulating questions relevant to the process of designing an individual career plan

Mentee

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, it is the mentee who explicitly and predominantly is expected to manage relationships with both the supervisor and the mentor: as illustrated in the model,

the supervisee/mentee is pivotal to the dynamic of these relationships. Thus, it is the mentee who ultimately is responsible for mitigating threats of role ambiguity: i.e. their own role along with those of the supervisor and the mentor. By the same token, **Figure 1** illustrates how supervisors can be supported in their own attempts to avoid such role ambiguity by explicitly integrating the support of a specialist mentor with responsibilities that complement and yet differ from those of the supervisor: the arrow connecting the two suggests a channel for two-way communication as do the arrows connecting other elements in this model. It is the supervisee / mentee who is primarily tasked to negotiate both the triangulated relationships and the processes of person-to-person interaction that give the model its dynamic and relevance. If the mentee is effective in managing these negotiations and interactions, one outcome is likely to be an enhanced sense of research confidence and, as discussed earlier, ‘fellowship’ or academic collegiality.

In addition, and if organisational resources allow, it is the mentee who is tasked to approach and, if agreeable, select the person they perceive to be a suitable mentor. Commonly at universities in Japan, supervisees have little influence over decisions about who will be their PhD supervisor and, subsequently, who will examine and assess their research outputs. As a consequence, their relative vulnerability to having decisions made for them by more influential others can appear embedded in the mentee’s PhD experience. There is a risk that, over time, the mentee develops a mindset of passive expectation that is the antithesis of what we discussed earlier as ‘research confidence’. Given that the mentor-mentee relationship is designed expressly to be *non-judgemental*, the mentee is formally allowed more space for making independent decisions and thus, potentially, for developing role confidence and career resilience.

However, having more choice and space for independent decision-making is not the same as having the opportunity freely to express and enact such choices. For, again, there are resource restraints along with embedded and institutionalised biases giving real-life context to decisions about whom a mentee might choose as a mentor. To illustrate, Phillips and Pugh cite a woman PhD supervisee who perceived that:

- It’s different talking to a woman supervisor than a man. There’s more of a bond between women. If something personal was disturbing me I wouldn’t be able to talk to my male supervisor but I do to my female supervisor (2015: 124).

The comment by this female supervisee suggests an opportunity for integrating a mentoring element into PhD supervision process as illustrated in **Figure 1**: the woman in question

could arrange to have a male supervisor and a female mentor. However, in Japan as at universities elsewhere in the world, there are resource and institutional constraints to offering mentees such a choice. One is that in many academic research disciplines there are few female supervisors available. As a corollary effect, there are few female mentors who are available to play a formal mentoring role.

In addition, and again in Japan as elsewhere, there are few staff members (academic or administrative) who are trained or qualified to act as mentors to PhD candidates, and perhaps even fewer who are confident enough to play this role affectively, and especially (in Japan) in a triangulated relationship that includes a senior male supervisor. However, each long journey begins with a first step. By adopting a developmental mindset and, concomitantly, taking a developmental approach towards initiating formal mentoring programmes, groups of mentors can develop and learn from each other's mentoring successes and (relative) failures (cf. Boerena et al, 2015).

Consistent with our theme of developing individual resilience, it can be argued that current resource constraints and challenges might enhance the potential for individual supervisees to gain a stronger sense of career resilience if they are able to find and work with a suitable mentor (cf. Kao et al, 2014). As with the 'novice' mentors referred to earlier, the 'wins' might initially appear relatively small; nonetheless, they will be worthy of celebration. In short, applying as standard the type of supervision-mentoring arrangement illustrated in **Figure 1**, dynamic contexts can be created wherein all parties involved can aspire towards developing a 'strength through adversity' mindset. Adopting this developmental mindset echoes what we discussed earlier in this article as an *imperative* to develop individual resilience – an imperative, it can be argued, that already signposts the individual pathways of women who have forged successful careers in academic, professional and social life with or without mentoring support.

IV Implications for practice

We now offer readers some illustrative insights generated by our experiences of setting up and maintaining formal mentoring support for PhD students at Japan's prestigious *Tokyo Institute of Technology* and which we believe can offer practical guidance to other universities and research institutes in Japan that weighing up an investment in similar mentoring programmes. Consistent with the key themes developed in our discussion thus far in this article,

we organise our recommendations into the various sub-roles and responsibilities that mentors might play in their primary role as mentors on such support programmes.

- 1 **Facilitator.** In settings for education, a facilitator role describes the opportunity for mentors to create physical and psychological (including virtual) spaces within which ‘good things might happen’. At Tokyo Tech the facilitator role that mentors play can be most vividly observed in the room created for PhD students to freely enter and use. This represents more than a ‘student study room’. Individual students can add and share materials on the shelves: the furniture is casual, comfortable and designed to eschew and suggestions of hierarchy: e.g. seniority or privilege. The mentors have an open office space nearby. Students can make an appointment in advance for a formal mentoring meeting, which takes place in a dedicated and neutral private space: i.e. not in a mentor’s private office¹⁹⁾.
- 2 **Coach.** Mentors can adopt coaching roles in individual or group sessions whereby PhD students are guided towards improving skills relevant to vital areas of professional research performance. These range from industry and corporate analysis, resumé / CV writing and selection interview techniques, applying for independent research funding, technical data mining in English and in Japanese, and how to get published in English and in Japanese language journals.
- 3 **Counsellor,** regarding personal matters such as physical and mental health along with practical advice on negotiating living and working in Japan. **Note:** Mentees are advised to first consult official university channels and centres for advice on these matters. Mentors are available as a source for ‘second opinion’ counsel.
- 4 **Curator and instigator** of events that might further develop individual resilience in mentees. To illustrate, at Tokyo Tech the mentoring team arranged to host a bi-lingual *Global Summit for Women* with international participation. The team also created and hosted bi-lingual communities of mentees and of PhD programme alumni using social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.
- 5 **Diplomat.** Recognising the obstacles to ‘horizontal communication’ typically expressing the ‘silo thinking’ common to universities in Japan and elsewhere in the world, mentors have an opportunity to communicate across academic disciplines and departments. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, they also have an opportunity to liaise – *discreetly* - between individual supervisors and other key stakeholders in the university’s doctoral and post-doctoral research programmes.

Other distinguishing features of the efforts made by mentors at Tokyo Tech was to integrate researchers from the university's exchange partners, including ETH in Zürich (Switzerland) and Imperial College in London, using this as an opportunity to gain insights into the organisation and management of formal mentoring programmes available to PhD students at these and other partner universities²⁰⁾.

One overarching lesson from the Tokyo Tech example has been appreciating the importance of committed institutional leadership to support and, where necessary, defend the work and interests of the formal mentoring programme. In other words, securing the resilience of individual ECAs can be more effective where the programme itself is managed and led in a manner that achieves what we discussed earlier in this article as *organisational* and *reputational resilience*.

In an **Appendix** to this article, we share examples of feedback comments received from students and graduates who participated in Tokyo Tech's PhD mentoring programme.

V Conclusions

This article has explored the extent to which formal mentoring might serve to guide early career academics (ECAs) at KGU and at other universities in Japan and worldwide towards improving their career planning skills, research competencies and confidence. The article has posited 'individual resilience' as a potential outcome to processes of 'career planning' which, when mediated through processes of individual mentoring, might serve to enhance each ECA's individual sense of career and research resilience.

Overall, this article represents an attempt to inform further discussion about the potential career development benefits of offering formal mentoring support to ECAs at KGU and at other universities in Japan.

Appendix: Example feedback comments from students and graduates who participated in Tokyo Tech's PhD mentoring program.

- 笠井さんありがとうございました。今まで以上に質の高リフレクションをさせていただきました。いつもありがとうございます。次のステージに進んだ？冬の時期が少しずつ終わりにかけてきた気がしています。
- 的確な情報とアドバイスをありがとうございます！ベンチャーということで私もこの会社がいいのかわからなかったので、背中を押して頂き嬉しいです。
- 今日お話できてよかったです。ありがとうございました。メンター制度は、とてもありが

たいです。やはり、プログラム参加中はいろいろな大人に会って学びとることが多いですから、大学も柔軟に学びの形や教職員をマネジメントしてほしいと思います。

- 先日はキャンパス移動中の電車の中でお話を聞いてくださりありがとうございました。人に話すことで何か、自分の中で整理ができたような気がします。また、時間を作ってメンター室に伺います
- いつも気にかけていただきありがとうございます！いただいた情報をきっかけに インターン説明会に参加してみることにしました。
- グループアクティビティー苦勞していますが、すごく尖った良いサービスにしていけるよう頑張ります。ありがとうございます！熱い思いをもって引き続き頑張っていきたいと思います。
- お金の不安への解消としては、make money ですが、単純にお金がほしいというわけではなく、自分の新たな挑戦のための糧としてとらえています。単純に生きていけるだけのお金を今の段階でも就職すれば稼げると思うので、(D3で奨励金が切れるので、やや心配ではありますが)そこまで切羽詰まっていません。
- ただ聞いてくれる人ではなく、もう一歩先に進むためのアドバイスや自分では、気づいていない大事な考え方があることを諭してもらった。頻繁にメンター室に行けていたわけではないが、たまに会えるとしばらく考えたくなるような新しい気付きを与えていただき。なんとなくコンパス的存在でした。
- 話しているうちに自分の考えが整理され見えてくることが何回もありました。メンター室はメンターだけではなく人が偶発的に集まり話せる点も面白く重要であると思います。(偶発的にが、ポイントかと)
- 私はメンターにかなり助けていただきました。研究面でもいい影響をいただきました。メンター制度はプログラムの大きな利点です。ありがとうございました。気軽に相談できる、状況を的確に把握できる、多様な考え方を提示できる存在としてのメンターは、博士学生にとって必要だと思います。
- 表面的ではない、深い洞察を通して、自分と向き合う姿勢「～すべきである」と自分が思い込んでいただけだったと気がついたことが何度もあります。ありがとうございました。
- オフキャンパスや就活、課外活動などの相談をすることがありましたが、ただ聞くのではなく、深掘りをするような質問を頂き、自分が何をしたいのか冷静に見つめ直すことができ、その後の行動にうつすことができました。また、外部のイベントや制度の情報、機関など自身の今後の活動に繋がるような情報を提示して頂き、自分ひとりでは到達できなかったところにリーチできました。
- 研究室から外に出てメンター室に向かうだけで、リフレッシュする効果がありました。
- Thank you Kasai-san for just listening to me and being ready to advice. As always.
- I made very strong use of the mentor system and found the Kasai-san/mentor is extremely capable – she helped me in a number of different areas.
- Personal growth – helping me grow and understand myself in relation to various topics including mental health, gender, life as an immigrant, family life etc
- Career development – helping me to reflect about what I wanted to study, what kind of work

I wanted to do and how I wanted to continue my career. Helping me stay enthusiastic about my work

- leadership reflections – helping me decide on my goals and strategy for various work including the independent project.

Notes:

- 1) Author for correspondence about this article. I would like to thank Kwasei Gakuin University for providing me with the individual research subsidy that enabled me to research and write this article. I would also like to thank colleagues at KGU's Institute of Business and Accounting for their kind support and valuable input during the writing of the article.
- 2) <http://www.kwangaku.net/privacy/index.html>
- 3) It is relevant here to recall the etymological origins of these descriptors of distinct yet overlapping career paths. The term 'academic' goes back to the *Akadēmiā* of ancient Athens, where Plato taught philosophy (Ayto, 2011). The term 'professional' is etymologically related to the word 'professor' and derives from a Latin term for 'to declare publicly': e.g. current English 'profess'. Thus, both a 'professional' and a 'professor' can be described today as individuals who have something to say that the public are willing to listen to and / or pay for (Jackson, 2017). Correspondingly, the fact of an 'academic' (ECA) being employed full- or part-time at a teaching and research university is secondary to the impact that this 'professor' has across the employing university and in society generally.
- 4) See : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hr-career-frameworks/career-development-plan>. The original CIPD version is available under : <https://www.cipd.co.uk/careers/career-guidance>
- 5) See: <https://employability.uq.edu.au/host/kwasei-gakuin-university>
- 6) See: <https://employability.uq.edu.au/files/179264/SEED-Careers-Factsheet-CareerActionPlan%20-%20FINAL.pdf>
- 7) Ibid.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) I (Jackson) was working in London for under a line-manager who (I sensed) was unhappy at my studying parttime for an MBA degree. The manager's sense of insecurity (as I recognise it to have been now) became explicit during an annual performance review meeting. When I left the room of that meeting I recall that, in my head, I had already decided to quit. Six months later I was gone. When I started teaching on Executive MBA programmes in Europe, among the first questions I would ask a new class was: *Does your boss know you're studying for an MBA?* Each time, around 50% of the class students said 'no'. A truism among HRM practitioners in Europe is : "talented individuals join companies and, ultimately, quit incompetent line-managers".
- 10) See: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/evidence-resilience>
- 11) See: <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#iso:std:iso:22316:ed-1:v1:en>
- 12) Ibid.

- 13) See: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk-and-resilience/our-insights/the-resilience-imperative-succeeding-in-uncertain-times>
- 14) Ibid.
- 15) Here we can visualise walking across a heavily snowed plain. Behind you are traces of your footsteps, your progress to this place in time. In front of you is pure untrodden snow, waiting for your decision to create a new pathway.
- 16) From Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, in a monologue spoken by the character Jacques, who then goes on to describe the 'seven ages of [a] man' from 'the infant, Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms' to a final 'second childhood' where the man is 'Sans [without] teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.'
- 17) The term 'interacting' tends to be interpreted as 'communicating with'. Accordingly, the 'acting' element of this term highlights (again) its roots in theatre and of actors playing their respective roles coherently, convincingly and in concert with each other.
- 18) This book is regularly recommended to PhD candidates in the UK. It is also of great practical use to people who are thinking of starting a PhD and for academics who are new to supervising PhD students. A copy of the 6th Edition of this book is available in the IBA Library.
- 19) Some readers might recognise this mentoring 'space' as similar to the concept of 場 (*ba*) discussed by professors Takeuchi and Nonaka in their analysis of distinctive features of innovation and project management at Toyota Motor Corporation: e.g. in relation to the Toyota *Prius* project in their influential (2004) book *Hitotsubashi on Knowledge Management*.
- 20) For an example of the comprehensive mentoring support given to PhD students at one of these (globally) high ranking universities, see: <https://mim.ethz.ch/the-program/MentoringProgram.html>

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