



# Role of formal mentoring in protégés' work-to-family conflict: A double-edged sword

Cheng Chen<sup>a</sup>, Peng Wen<sup>b,\*</sup>, Changya Hu<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> College of Public Administration, Central China Normal University, China

<sup>b</sup> School of Economic and Business Management, Central China Normal University, China

<sup>c</sup> Department of Business Administration, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, we investigated how formal mentoring influences protégés' work-to-family conflict (WFC). With a sample of 193 protégés' in ongoing formal mentoring programs, we found that the extent of formal mentoring functions received was associated with protégés' WFC in two ways. On the one hand, the extent of formal mentoring functions received was positively related to job resources, which in turn negatively related to protégés' WFC. On the other hand, the extent of formal mentoring functions received positively predicted job demands (i.e., workload), which subsequently had a positive association with protégés' WFC. Furthermore, protégés' work-family centrality moderated the above dual paths such that the indirect effect of the extent of formal mentoring received on protégés' WFC via job resources was stronger for protégés' who value work more important than family, whereas the indirect effect of the extent of formal mentoring received on protégés' WFC via workload was stronger for protégés' who value family more important than work. Implications for research and managerial practices are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Mentoring has become a prevalent practice in human resource management because of its benefits to protégés' in various work domains (e.g., performance and career satisfaction) (Liu, Wang, & Wayne, 2015; Underhill, 2006). Recently, scholars have attempted to examine whether mentoring benefits can be extended from work domains to non-work domains (e.g., work-to-family conflict, WFC) as the demographics of employees change rapidly, with escalating numbers of dual-earner couples, single parents, and female employees (Greenhaus & Singh, 2007). Several studies based mostly on informal mentoring provided preliminary evidence that mentoring relationships may reduce protégés' WFC (de Janasz, Behson, Jonsen, & Lankau, 2013; Underhill, 2006). However, scholars have called for more research to examine the role of mentorship formality in protégés' work-family interference because it is well known that there are differences between formal and informal mentoring, and formal mentoring functions have been overlooked in previous studies (Greenhaus & Singh, 2007; Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011; Nielson, Carlson, & Lankau, 2001).

Unlike informal mentoring relationships which are developed through mutual attraction (Kram, 1985), formal mentoring relationships are established with some involvement from organizations (e.g., the organization creates the pairing or provides

\* Corresponding author at: 152 Luoyu Road, School of Economic and Business Management, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, Hubei Province 430079, China.

E-mail address: [pengwen@mail.ccnu.edu.cn](mailto:pengwen@mail.ccnu.edu.cn) (P. Wen).

some organizational resources to support the mentoring relationship). Although mentoring functions are resources for protégés' (de Janasz et al., 2013; Nielson et al., 2001), protégés' may also perceive them as work demands as this formal relationship was initiated with organizational effort to assist them to better adjust to the organization (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This may raise an interesting paradox for protégés' in formal mentoring relationships when they perceive support from mentors not only as a resource but also a demand from their organizations. That is, support from mentors may be a double-edged sword for protégés' in formal mentoring relationships.

In order to better reconcile these inconsistencies, we use the job demands-resources (JD-R) model as an overarching framework for developing our hypotheses (Bakker, Demerouti, & Dollard, 2008; Bakker, van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulou, 2010). Specifically, we propose that formal mentoring support may impact protégés' WFC through two paradoxical mediation mechanisms. On the one hand, formal mentoring functions may translate into increased job resources including skills, perspectives, psychological resources and social capital, which can reduce the possibility of WFC. On the other hand, protégés' may perceive that support from formal mentors increases their job demands (i.e., workload) (Bakker et al., 2008) and subsequently feel more WFC.

Additionally, considering the significance of the individual differences of work and family role values in the formation of WFC (Carr, Boyar, & Gregory, 2008; Shockley & Allen, 2015), we argue that the mixed effects of formal mentoring functions on WFC may depend on protégés' work-family centrality, which refers to a value judgment about the relative importance of work and family domains (Carr et al., 2008). Specifically, we propose that the impact of formal mentoring functions received on protégés' WFC via job resources will be stronger when protégés' value their work relatively more than family, while the influence of formal mentoring functions received on protégés' WFC via workload will be stronger among protégés' who value their family relatively more than work. By investigating this dual-path model with the moderating role of work-family centrality, our study attempts to broaden our understanding of two faces of formal mentoring, as well as the dynamic process through which formal mentoring exerts its effect on protégés' WFC.

### 1.1. Job demands-resources (JD-R) model

According to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, work conditions of every occupation can be classified into two broad categories, including job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job demands refer to "those physical, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs", such as workload. Job resources refer to "those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development" (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501), for instance, psychological resources and social capital. The JD-R model has been widely applied to studies of employees' stress, well-being and work-family issues (Bakker et al., 2008; Bakker et al., 2010; Hall, Dollard, Tuckey, Winefield, & Thompson, 2010).

Previous research has suggested that specific job demands and job resources depend on the context under study (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). In the present study, we focused on four types of specific job resources (i.e., skills, perspectives, psychological resources and social capital) and one job demand (i.e., workload) that align well with the mentoring context (Greenhaus & Singh, 2007).

### 1.2. Formal mentoring functions, job resources and protégés' WFC

Mentoring is a developmental relationship between a senior, more-experienced employee (mentor) and a junior, less-experienced individual (protégé) whereby the mentor provides many functions, such as vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modeling, to help the protégé's career development (Scandura & Ragins, 1993). Compared to informal mentoring based on mutual attraction, formal mentoring is typically matched and developed by organizations (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006). Although mentors in formal mentoring programs tend to provide fewer functions than those in informal mentoring relationships, it still has considerable benefits for protégés' career outcomes and has been increasingly popular within various organizations in recent years (Chen, Liao, & Wen, 2014; Liu et al., 2015).

Previous research has indicated that skill-based learning, cognitive learning, affective learning and social networks are the four proximal outcomes of mentoring (Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). Accordingly, Greenhaus and Singh (2007) proposed four specific resources that are the most likely to be enhanced by mentors to reduce protégés' WFC, including skills, perspectives, psychological resources, and social capital. Skills involve a series of work-related abilities such as task-cognitive and interpersonal skills (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). A great deal of previous research has proved that formal mentors can facilitate protégés' skill development through personal learning (Allen & O'Brien, 2006). Perspectives refer to the ways of perceiving and handling situations (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). Formal mentors are able to help protégés' hold holistic, broad and positive perspectives on themselves and the world because these selected mentors usually have rich work and life experiences. Psychological resources relate to positive psychological capital such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). Formal mentoring is perceived as an effective approach for developing employees' positive psychological capital because it provides an environment for individuals to enhance self-confidence and to address difficulties (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Previously, scholars indicated a positive relationship between formal mentoring and protégés' self-esteem (Waters, McCabe, Kiellerup, & Kiellerup, 2002). Additionally, Greenhaus and Singh (2007) proposed that mentoring relationships enable protégés' to acquire two important social capital resources, including information and influence. In line with the above statement,

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