



## Supervisory mentoring and newcomer innovation performance in the hospitality industry

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### ABSTRACT

In this study we argue that mentoring, as a “social learning process”, can assist employees to merge into the organization more rapidly. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between supervisory mentoring functions and newcomers’ innovation performance. To explore this relationship, the moderating effects of task autonomy and supervisor capability were tested. Data were collected from two sources, newcomers and supervisors employed in four and five star hotels in Taiwan. The findings reveal that supervisory mentoring functions have a significant positive impact on newcomer’s innovation. Furthermore, the study also finds that task autonomy and supervisor capability strengthen the relationship between supervisory mentoring functions and newcomer’s innovation performance. Our findings suggest that mentoring is a powerful strategy that can be used to encourage innovation and that innovation performance is enhanced when organizations develop mentoring processes and structures which facilitate the development of creativity, interaction, and communication between employees.

### 1. Introduction

It has been suggested that in the hotel industry staff turnover is regarded as part of the work group norm, and frequently, employees enter employment believing that development opportunities will be limited (Davidson et al., 2010). Several studies infer that the hospitality industry is labor intensive, with high levels of labor turnover (Davidson et al., 2010; Birdir, 2002; Brien, 2004). In their study of four and five star hotel workers, Davidson et al. (2010 p. 451) state that “employee turnover is a significant challenge for human resource management strategies and organizational performance”. Consequently, managers constantly need to evaluate whether the workforce has the skills to meet the immediate needs of the organization. High turnover is not only costly, in terms of employee selection, assessment, training and development, but there is good reason to think that regular changes in personnel could quite easily create an unstable and unpredictable working environment. It is therefore important for hospitality organizations to recruit effectively and ensure that employees are integrated effectively and supported in their role.

Yang et al.’s (2012) study of staff turnover and retention strategies in the Taiwanese hotel industry highlights the important role of

mentorship and supervision. Yang et al. (2012) found that over 80% of their sample had resigned from a job to pursue career development opportunities elsewhere. Furthermore, 70% had been ‘headhunted’ at some point in their career, receiving employment propositions from other hotels. To retain employees, Yang et al. (2012) highlights the importance for managers to understand more fully the needs of employees, especially when providing career advice. For example, Yang et al. (2012) suggest that by having a better understanding of employees, managers can provide more relevant training programs to enhance career opportunities. There are good theoretical and common sense reasons to think that higher standards of mentoring will enhance managers capacity to (a) better understand employees and manage expectations of what can be achieved (expectancy); (b) help employees understand how their actions can achieve identifiable outcomes (instrumentality); and (c) work with employees to ensure that their career progression and goals are valued by the employee (valence). The assumptions and components of expectancy (VIE) theory (Vroom, 1964) help to explain how mentoring can assist employees to feel motivated at work, develop career goals and feel integrated into the business. There are also good reasons to think that managers or supervisors (in their capacity as mentor) will be more aware of an employee’s expectations,

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and better able to monitor work-place attitudes and turnover intentions. This, as we will argue, is likely to convert into positive changes in employee performance.

In addition to helping newcomers develop the skills they need and feel integrated into the organization, previous studies show that mentoring can have a positive effect on employee performance (Lester et al., 2011; Scandura and Schriesheim, 1994). It has been suggested that mentoring leads to the development of micro-level knowledge-producing communities of practice. Within mentoring relationships and micro level communities, it is argued that the transfer of tacit knowledge enhances the skills and capabilities of groups and individuals (Singh et al., 2002; Swap et al., 2001). As hospitality businesses continuously need to adapt to demand-side changes (Weiermair, 2006) they need to be innovative in order to flexibly meet demands. The customization and effectiveness of customer service is a critical source of competitive advantage, and so innovation has become an important objective for hospitality organizations (Brooker et al., 2012; Martínez-Ros and Orfila-Sintes, 2012; Rodgers, 2008). In this study we propose that mentoring enhances employee innovation, a critical source of competitive advantage (Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle, 2011; Kyrgidou and Spyropoulou, 2013; Ngo and O’Cass, 2013).

As we discuss in the following literature review, research suggests that the management of innovation requires collaboration and mentoring (Schepers, 2015). Mentoring is a “social learning process” in which mentors (who may also occupy the role of supervisor or manager) become role models. According to social learning theory, role models share knowledge and facilitate the acquisition of moral and other types of behavior (Brown and Treviño, 2014). We propose that this includes innovative thinking and behaviors, and that through social interactions and mentoring, these are developed. Focusing on innovation performance, rather than job performance, contrasts with most other organizational socialization studies. Few studies specifically investigate how mentoring can influence the innovation performance of individuals. Whilst some research has addressed this issue in manufacturing industries (Gomezelj, 2016), far fewer have focused on service sectors such as hospitality. Furthermore, no known study focuses specifically on newcomers, and little is known about moderating factors affecting the impact of mentoring on innovative behavior. This study attempts to contribute knowledge of if and how this link exists, drawing closely on social capital theory to develop and test three hypotheses. In the results and discussion, we discuss the findings and their theoretical and practical implications.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1. Mentoring studies

Mentorship is defined as a work relationship between a mentor (e.g. who may also be a supervisor or manager) and a mentee (usually a younger or less experienced individual) that is formed to facilitate career and personal development (Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988). The term “mentoring” is interchangeably used with words such as “advising,” “counseling” or “coaching” (Scandura, 1992). However, it can be argued that mentoring has a distinct meaning. Rhodes et al. (2002) argue that mutuality, trust, and empathy should be established within the mentoring relationship. In mentoring, the interaction shapes mentees’ social-emotional, cognitive, and identity development, and thus, behavioral outcomes. Mentoring focuses on maintaining a long-term relationship, pursuing long-term goals, and developing personal careers and has been found to have many positive development outcomes (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Past research has suggested that mentoring supports newcomers in a variety of ways. The research literature distinguishes between two types of mentoring function. Some scholars measure the concept using a two-factor structure, namely career development and psychosocial support. In other words, mentoring can be interpreted as a process where the

supervisor assigns challenging tasks to the newcomer and purposefully helps build a positive impression of the organization. This is achieved by establishing horizontal and vertical networks in the organization. In this explanation of mentoring, the supervisor provides assistance in accomplishing tasks to support the subordinate’s learning (Kram, 1985; Nikos, 2004; Noe, 1988; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000, 2005; Tepper, 1995; Whitely et al., 1992). Others expand on this, suggesting that role modeling is a distinct third type of mentoring behavior. According to social learning theory, role models facilitate the acquisition of moral and other types of behavior (Brown and Treviño, 2014), and play an important role in linking the organization and the environment, generating proactivity which affects organization learning and innovation (García-Morales et al., 2006). These studies tend to interpret role modeling as a process of identifying, as well as a process of learning (Brown and Treviño, 2014; Weaver et al., 2005).

Mentoring can be viewed as a form of social exchange. As prior research suggests, the mentoring function creates reciprocal relationships between the mentor and mentee (Ghosh et al., 2012). Supervisors provide assistance to newcomers to perform organizational tasks, allowing supervisors to achieve goals and satisfy their social needs. Newcomers receive a career boost from their mentors, benefiting from useful informal social and professional networks and access to critical information (Kram and Hall, 1996). Although it may take some time to meet all expectations and for mentors and mentees to see tangible benefits, mentorship is an act which involves the sharing of knowledge, skills and emotions; enhancing individual networks and human capital. For this reason, it is argued that the management of innovation for sustainability requires both collaboration and mentoring (Schepers, 2015).

It has been widely accepted in the research literature that the mentoring function is most appropriately measured as a three-factor construct (Allen et al., 2006; Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2005; Horvath et al., 2008; Scandura and Ragins, 1993; Thomas and Lankau, 2009). We examine the impact of the mentoring function, including the following three factors: career support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2005). We assess mentoring as a tactic to aid newcomer’s socialization and as a way of supporting social learning.

### 2.2. Social capital

Social capital is an extension of social exchange theory and shares a number of similarities with neoclassical economics (Astone et al., 1999). In the laws of economics, products are sold and bought in the market, and people exchange goods based on self-interest. Personal interactions share similarities with economic mechanisms; individuals invest their idiosyncratic assets to establish and structure exchange relationships. These investments are required as a condition of the exchange, beyond effectiveness and efficiency reasons (Coleman, 1990). This implies that different outcome values result from various inputs, exchange relationships, and hierarchical structures.

Social capital theory has been applied in sociology and management to discuss the networks embedded in organizations and personnel relationships. Since the composition of social capital is concerned with divergent relationships and affiliations, the quality or quantity of organizational resources within the environment is likely to have an influence on the result (Baughn et al., 2011; Daud and Yusoff, 2010; Hadani et al., 2012). In other words, the social network of interactions between mentors and mentees leads to positive benefits during the mentoring process. Individuals receive the resources which they need, based on self-interest within the exchange. In this study we refer to social capital theory to consider the effect of mentoring and the environmental factors which moderate the influence.

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