



School-to-work transition: Mentor career support and student career planning, job search intentions, and self-defeating job search behavior



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ABSTRACT

We hypothesized and tested a model where mentor career support predicts college student career planning, job search intentions, and self-defeating job search behavior via student career self-efficacy. Using survey responses collected at two points in time from college students near graduation who were mentored by working business professionals for 8 months in a formal hybrid university-sponsored mentoring program, results showed that mentor career support was positively related to student career planning and job search intentions and negatively related to student self-defeating job search behavior. In addition, results indicated that student career self-efficacy fully mediated the relations between mentor career support and the outcomes. The findings have important implications for future mentoring and job search research. They also provide practical guidance for improving college students' career planning and job searches.

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College students near graduation typically seek new employment that allows them to apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge and launch new careers. However, if these students engage in poor career planning, do not invest enough time and effort in their job search, or engage in search behaviors that are self-defeating, they may enter dissatisfying careers or may not find employment by the time they graduate (Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Career planning includes setting goals, developing plans, and forming strategies for a career (Gould, 1979). Job search encompasses psychological and behavioral activities associated with the generation and pursuit of employment (Boswell et al., 2012; Liu, Huang, & Wang, in press). Since job seekers have to control and adjust their thoughts and actions in a vaguely defined and complex employment environment and often have to deal with rejection and disappointment, scholars suggest that these career and job search activities are self-regulated and affected by individual differences in traits and states (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Wanberg, Zhu, Kanfer, & Zhang, 2012).

Research found that counseled job seekers were more likely to gain employment and receive higher salaries (Liu et al., in press). This suggests that, in addition to individual differences, career support provided by mentors may also enhance student career planning and job search (Eby et al., 2013; Liu et al., in press). Mentoring is a process of an individual with more experience (the mentor) providing psychological and/or instrumental support to an individual with less experience (the protégé) with the aim of enhancing a protégé's personal and professional development (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Kram, 1985).

While many students are mentored by faculty, working business mentors likely have valuable timely insights into the job market and careers and may therefore provide valuable career related advice to students. Despite potential benefits of pairing working business mentors with college students near graduation on their career planning and job search, there is relatively little research on

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whether mentoring programs that blend aspects of workplace mentoring with academic mentoring improve these critical employment activities (Eby et al., 2013). The purpose of our study is to contribute to the student career development and mentoring literatures by investigating the relations between mentor career support provided by working business professionals and college student career planning, job search intentions, and self-defeating job search behaviors during an 8 month formal hybrid mentoring program. Self-defeating job search behaviors are behaviors that job seekers engage in that can sabotage or undermine a search for a desired job (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2012). Investigating self-defeating job search behaviors has the potential to explain why job seekers who have well intended job searches are unable to find a job or settle for jobs that do not take advantage of their fullest potential. Our research also answers the call for more longitudinal studies and studies that link mentoring to unexplored outcomes (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008; Eby et al., 2013).

We chose to investigate these outcomes because research indicates they are highly relevant to college students' employment and career success, are all self-regulated employment-related activities, occur at or around the same time during the job search process, and are expected to be linked to mentor career support by student career self-efficacy (Boswell et al., 2012; Liu et al., *in press*). Based on Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy construct, career self-efficacy is the belief in one's capability of managing his or her career successfully (Kossek, Roberts, Fisher, & Demarr, 1998). Although self-efficacy has been a central construct in mentoring, job search, and career theory and research for decades (Eby et al., 2013; Lent & Brown, 2006), there is still a need for more rigorous investigations of the self-efficacy construct, especially where its mediating role is concerned (Day & Allen, 2004; Liu et al., *in press*; Spurk & Abele, 2014).

1. Theory and model development

Fig. 1 depicts mentor career support as positively related to student career planning and job search intentions and negatively related to three self-defeating job search behaviors. The model also illustrates that student career self-efficacy mediates or explains why mentor career support is related to the student outcomes.

1.1. Mentor career support and student career planning via career self-efficacy

Academic and workplace mentoring enhances protégé behaviors, attitudes, motivation, health, and career outcomes (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008; Eby et al., 2013). Career support, a key function of academic and workplace mentoring, includes mentors providing protégés with guidance on setting and coordinating professional goals, coaching for career advancement, sponsoring a protégé with more senior managers, expressing interest in protégés' career, and assisting protégés with career-related tasks (Day & Allen, 2004; Kram, 1985; Scandura & Williams, 2004). Self-efficacy theory hypothesizes that verbal persuasion and observing models successfully perform a task increases one's beliefs in the capability to perform well on a specific task (Bandura, 1997). In mentoring programs, mentors typically have opportunities to display competence with tasks, model appropriate professional behaviors, and provide protégés with supportive coaching as the two interact over time (Eby et al., 2013). This suggests that mentors who assist students with setting career objectives and developing strategies to attain the objectives and show greater appreciation, concern, and consideration for students' career should enhance their sense of control over such activities and beliefs about succeeding with career objectives (Kram, 1988).

Students who believe they are capable of successfully managing their careers ought to engage in greater career planning than students who doubt their ability to manage their careers (Kossek et al., 1998). Bandura (1997) suggests that individuals who lack confidence in their judgments regarding career decisions have difficulty making career choices and sticking with career plans (p. 427). In addition, much research indicates that higher self-efficacy individuals put forth greater effort on a task, are more persistent, bounce back in the face of failure, and perform better than low self-efficacy individuals (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Research has also shown that self-efficacy positively relates to career growth, positive affect toward career development, and career self-management (Kossek et al., 1998). In addition, Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk (2010) argue that the quality of protégés' career planning depends in part on developing competencies that allow one to gain insight into the work environment and the individual's capabilities vis a vis career goals. We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. Mentor career support will be positively related to student career planning via student career self-efficacy. Specifically, mentor career support will be positively related to student career self-efficacy and student career self-efficacy will be positively related to student career planning.

1.2. Mentor career support and student job search intentions via career self-efficacy

As confidence in achieving career goals and plans rises with mentor career support over time, students should form stronger job search intentions. Job search intentions are rooted in the theory of planned behavior, which proposes that intentions play a central proximal role in predicting actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Scholars have applied this theory to the job search context and have found that job search intentions are related to faster reemployment, higher likelihood of employment, and higher job search intensity (e.g., Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005). Perceptions of personal control are an important antecedent of behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1985) and van Ryn and Vinokur (1992) argue that perceptions of personal control are conceptually similar to self-efficacy (p. 579; see also, Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham, 1990). In addition, Bandura (1977) reasoned that self-efficacy reduces anxiety

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