



Mentor and protégé predictors and outcomes of mentoring in a formal mentoring program [☆]

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Abstract

This study examines the predictors and outcomes of mentoring received by participants of a 12-month formal mentoring program. Based on relationship theory, we examined how the personality of the individuals in the mentoring dyad, their perceived similarity, and mentor perceived support for mentoring contributed to relationship outcomes. The study includes data from both mentors and protégés at the program launch, midway through the program, and at program close. Mentor proactivity was related to more career and psychosocial mentoring; protégé's perceptions of similarity to the mentor was related to more psychosocial mentoring. More mentoring was related to positive protégé and mentor outcomes, including improved protégé career clarity over the duration of the study.

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1. Introduction

Most mentoring relationships develop naturally through unstructured social interactions, and are known as “informal mentoring relationships.” In recent years, however,

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many organizations have established formal mentoring programs, involving assigned pairings of mentors with protégés. Despite this trend, there is a dearth of research available about the outcomes of formal mentoring, and the factors that make formalized relationships successful (Feldman, Folks, & Turnley, 1999). This study draws upon relationship theory to examine the extent to which individual characteristics of the formal mentor and protégé, as well as perceived similarity to one's formal mentoring partner and organizational support, contribute to the levels of mentoring received during a 12-month formal mentoring program. Contributing to a literature that has few studies on the outcomes of formal mentoring, this study also examines whether levels of formal mentoring relate to career development and satisfaction-related outcomes reported by both the protégé and mentor.

1.1. Mentoring in the context of formal mentoring programs

Formal mentoring relationships differ from informal mentoring in several fundamental ways. First, the relationships are initiated differently. Informal mentoring relationships develop because of mutual identification and interpersonal comfort (Ragins, 2002). In contrast, formal mentoring programs match individuals as part of an employee development process, and the two individuals must then strive to get to know one another. Formal and informal mentoring relationships also differ according to the timing and structure of the relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Informal relationships are not governed by a timeline or a third party; there are no external rules dictating whether something should be accomplished, or how long the relationship will last. In contrast, the formal mentoring relationship is part of an organized, facilitated employee development program. Formal mentoring relationships are arranged for a specified duration (e.g., nine months to a year), and protégés are generally prompted to have developmental goals in mind. Formal mentoring participants must initiate interaction and establish rapport within this context.

Likely because of the fundamental differences between informal and formal mentoring, research has suggested that on average, informal mentoring may be more effective than formal mentoring (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). A study by Ragins, Cotton, and Miller (2000), however, showed that formal mentoring relationships have the potential to reap the same benefits as informal mentoring relationships. In addition, organizations continue to see formal mentoring as an important employee development tool (Hegstad & Wentling, 2004). Such information suggests the usefulness of learning about what factors are associated with more versus less successful formal mentoring relationships.

1.2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Mentoring activities have been shown to provide both career (e.g., sponsorship, coaching, protection, challenging assignments, and exposure) and psychosocial (e.g., friendship, role modeling, counseling, and acceptance) functions for protégés (Kram, 1985). Career-oriented functions are aimed more toward the organization and the individual's career. Psychosocial functions are more personal, relying on an emotional bond between the mentor and protégé. Including both members of the formal mentoring dyad, this study used a relationships framework (Hinde, 1997) to examine protégé and mentor characteristics, dyad characteristics, and organizational support for mentoring as predictors of level of

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