



Who should serve as my mentor? The effects of mentor's gender and supervisory status on resilience in mentoring relationships



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ABSTRACT

Limited research exists around how to effectively pair mentors and protégés in order to optimize employee well-being. The current study examines the relationship between mentoring functions and resilience and investigates the moderating roles of the gender composition of the mentoring relationship and supervisory mentoring on this relationship. With a field sample of 209 salesmen, it was found, consistent with expectations, that psychosocial mentoring was positively related to resilience. Results also showed that the linkage between career mentoring and resilience was more positive in cross-gender mentoring relationships than in same-gender mentoring relationships. In same-gender and supervisory mentoring relationships, the positive effect of psychosocial mentoring on resilience was stronger compared to cross-gender and non-supervisory mentoring relationships. The implications of these findings for the practice of creating and managing mentoring programs in organizational settings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

“Good mentors help...explore doubts and fears while providing the security to develop new ideas and take risks... Good mentors help to interpret and manage disappointments. They promote the value of resilience.”

[Humphrey (2010, p. 117)]

Mentoring, the dynamic process through which mentors provide advice or support to those who have limited experience or skills, is defined by a developmental relationship that enhances both protégés' growth and advancement (Kram, 1985). Associated with a wide array of positive work-related outcomes, meta-analytic evidence suggests that, compared to non-mentored individuals, mentored individuals are: (a) more satisfied with their careers, (b) more likely to expect career success, and (c) more satisfied with their jobs (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). In addition to these psychological benefits, there are material benefits to be gained by being mentored; salary, bonuses, and total compensation are more favorable among those who have mentors relative to those who are not mentored (Underhill, 2006). All in all, mentoring bears numerous associations with career achievement, job attitudes and financial success (Dougherty, Dreher, Arunachalam, & Wilbanks, 2013; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Lankau, Carlson, & Nielson, 2006).

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Despite the overwhelming empirical support found for the positive outcomes of mentoring in the workplace, including behavioral (e.g., job performance), attitudinal (e.g., career attitudes), relational (e.g., interpersonal relations), and career outcomes (e.g., skill development) (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008), there are significant gaps that still remain in the mentoring literature. First, to date, relatively little is known about the relationship between mentoring and its effects on an important well-being outcome: resilience. Defined as “the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of significant change, adversity, or risk” (Stewart, Reid, & Mangham, 1997, p. 22), resilience is a factor known to maintain well-being in demanding, high-pressure environments (Ferris, Sinclair, & Kline, 2005). Given resilience likely proves valuable for challenging roles, tasks, and situations, there has been examination of how mentoring produces resilience in children (Day, 2006), adolescent mothers (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010), and medical students (Dunn, Iglewicz, & Moutier, 2008). However, research exploring the relationship between mentoring and resilience within the context of work is limited. Thus, it is imperative to examine the relationship between mentoring and employee resilience to advance knowledge regarding how mentoring can also accompany benefits for employee well-being.

Second, because a mentoring relationship is a dyadic interaction, there is a need to consider the consequences of certain attributes the mentor and protégé may possess to maximize mentoring benefits for both individuals and organizations (Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005). Research on the characteristics of partners within the mentoring relationships suggests that demographic differences and whether the mentor is the supervisor are important factors to consider, given the potential of these characteristics to influence the effectiveness of a mentoring relationship (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000; 2005). However, limited understanding exists on how these features interact with the type of mentoring functions provided, as specified by Kram's (1985) landmark mentoring model. As such, the gender composition of mentoring relationships and supervisory status of mentors need consideration in exploring the mentoring–resilience relationship.

The present study attempts to theoretically and empirically extend our knowledge of mentoring to address these existing limitations in the management and applied psychology literatures. First, with conservation of resources theory (Hobföll, 1989) providing the conceptual framing, this study aims to examine how mentoring functions are related to employee resilience. Second, we investigate the moderating role of dyadic composition in relation to how mentoring functions shape resilience. As clear from recent meta-analyses (e.g., O'Brien, Biga, Kessler, & Allen, 2010), while empirical explorations of how gender relates to mentoring are quite extensive, limited knowledge exists on the effects of gender composition for well-being outcomes such as resilience. Hence, we examine the effects of gender composition (i.e., same-gender and cross-gender relationships) on the relationship between mentoring functions and resilience. Furthermore, since mentoring is more likely to occur across hierarchical relationships in an organization (Burke, McKeen, & McKenna, 1993; Spell, Eby, & Vandenberg, 2014), we explore the moderating effects of mentor's supervisory status on the relationships between mentoring functions and resilience.

1.1. The effects of mentoring on employee resilience

According to Kram's (1985) seminal qualitative study, effective mentoring within the work setting includes important behaviors that can be categorized into three major mentoring components: career, psychosocial, and role-modeling mentoring functions (Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Ragins, 1993). First, mentoring can be career-based wherein the mentor provides career-related sponsorship, exposure, visibility, and protection to enhance their protégés' advancement in organizations. Second, mentors can provide psychosocial mentoring which accompanies the goal of enhancing an individual's sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role. Psychosocial mentoring behaviors can include counseling the protégé about job anxieties, and providing social support (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008). Lastly, mentoring can be role modeling-based, with the mentors' attitudes, values, and behaviors serving as a template for protégés. For example, a young manager could learn how to manage a work group by observing how a senior manager performs the task.

Career, psychosocial and role-modeling functions of mentoring can produce numerous protégé benefits such as enhanced organizational citizenship behaviors, compensation, commitment, and job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2004; Lankau et al., 2006). In the current study, we propose that these mentoring functions can also positively affect well-being outcomes, namely resilience, based on the tenets of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobföll, 1989). COR theory suggests that individuals tend to conserve, protect, and acquire resources, so as to achieve their desired goals (Hobföll, 1989). They also avoid situations in which resources are threatened. However, when individuals lose resources, or encounter threats to existing resources, they enter into a state of disequilibrium, producing the experience of strain. In contrast, when individuals are presented with opportunities to accumulate resources, particularly resources that allow them to thrive in strain-inducing environments, they are likely to develop resilience. As a psychological competency possessed by individuals to “spring back” in the face of adversity, resilience allows one to function above the norm in spite of stressful conditions (Jacelon, 1997). We offer that mentoring could supply the resources to enhance resilience, because resilience, as an integral state, according to Tusaie and Dyer (2004), is influenced by an interaction of intrapersonal factors and, more importantly, environmental factors. Intrapersonal factors include cognitive factors (e.g., intelligence, creativity, and humor) and competencies (e.g., coping strategies and social skills). Environmental factors include perceived resources or other life events (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Keumpfer, 1990).

We offer that mentoring could serve as an environmental factor that positively impacts employee resilience. Specifically, career-based mentoring, psychosocial mentoring, and role-modeling could be associated with employee resilience due to the multiple resources (e.g., personal, intellectual, and emotional resources) that these functions supply (Kram, 1985; Scandura, 1992). In line with the basic ideas of COR theory, we argue that with additional resources provided via mentoring an employee will be better equipped to fend against strain-inducing environments. Further, with receipt of such mentoring functions, one will have a larger reservoir of resources than protégés who are not receiving such mentoring — they will be more resilient. Thus, threats that produce

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