



Antecedents of mentoring support: a meta-analysis of individual, relational, and structural or organizational factors



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ABSTRACT

The value of mentoring is growing substantially as organizations take a renewed interest in employee development to better survive in the dynamic and competitive market today. In the wake of this renewed interest, this meta-analysis was conducted to quantitatively review the multi-level antecedents (e.g., individual, relational, and structural/organizational) of different kinds of mentoring support (e.g., career, psychosocial, role modeling) in organizational settings and to revisit the theoretical underpinnings of each antecedent. Results indicated some key antecedents of mentoring support at individual (e.g., protégé's proactivity, protégé's learning goal orientation, mentor's transformational leadership), relational (e.g., affect based trust, perceived similarity), and structural/organizational levels (e.g., organizational support for mentoring, supervisory mentoring). Recommendations for future research and organizational practice of mentoring are presented.

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1. Introduction and purpose

The value of mentoring has grown substantially in recent times as organizations have recognized the importance of relational resources in workplaces, especially in today's dynamic and somewhat chaotic work environments (Allen & O'Brien, 2006; Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010; Singh, Ragins, & Tharenou, 2009; Weinberg & Lankau, 2011). Given that the demographic makeup of the workforce and subsequent organizational needs are undergoing shifts of seismic proportions, there is a renewed interest in utilizing mentoring to capture organizational wisdom in the "corporate DNA" and diffuse the same among employees (Silverthorne, 2002). In the wake of this renewed interest, it is important to revisit and clarify our understanding of the different factors that can predict provision or receipt of mentoring in organizations. Doing so would enable Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals to support their employees in optimizing the relational resources needed to survive in a hypercompetitive work environment.

Traditionally, mentoring has been defined as an interpersonal relationship where senior and more experienced organizational members provide support to junior or lesser experienced organizational members (Kram, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985). Although this traditional understanding about mentoring has morphed a lot due to changes in the nature of work and careers in the past few decades, there still seems to be a wide consensus around the types of mentoring support received or provided in organizational settings. Kram (1983) first identified that mentors provide two different kinds of support, namely career development and psychosocial development. Since then, numerous studies (e.g., Dreher & Ash, 1990; Levesque, O'Neil, Nelson, & Dumas, 2005; Noe, 1988; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Williams, 2001; Thomas, 1990) have examined the different ways in which these two types of support manifest in mentoring relationships. For example, mentors can enact the roles of a sponsor, advocate, protector, or a coach to provide support related to career development. And, they can be a friend, role model, counselor, or even a parent to contribute to the protégé's

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psychosocial development. While these two kinds of mentoring support have been to some extent generalized across different settings and fields (Ghosh, 2013), a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of these mentoring supports in organizations is yet to emerge. Even though several scholars have attempted to identify different antecedents of mentoring support in organizations such as protégé's and mentor's personality traits, learning goal orientation, perceived similarity between mentor and protégé, and demographic variables to name a few (Allen & Eby, 2004; Armstrong, Allinson, & Hayes, 2002; Godshalk & Sosik, 2003; Liang & Gong, 2012) and few meta-analyses have been conducted on some antecedents such as mentor and protege gender, protege race, education, tenure, core self-evaluation broadly conceptualized to encompass self-esteem, locus of control and self-efficacy, human capital, and formality and similarity in mentoring dyads (e.g., Eby et al., 2013; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; O'Brien, Biga, Kessler, & Allen, 2010), to date the literature on antecedents of mentoring is scattered making it difficult to derive a clear insight on multi-level antecedents (e.g., individual, relational, and structural/organizational) of mentoring support.

The purpose of this meta-analysis is therefore to provide a quantitative review of what is known to date about the antecedents of mentoring supports in organizational settings. In doing so, this study explains in detail the theoretical underpinnings of the various antecedents examined so far in the extant mentoring literature and identifies which antecedents at each level are likely to be the strongest predictors of mentoring in organizational settings. This meta-analytic review of mentoring antecedents is timely given that organizations are struggling to cope with the fast paced changes in work environments and an improved understanding of the individual, relational, structural, and organizational factors predicting mentoring support can enable organizations to better utilize mentoring for their employees to develop and flourish amidst rapid changes.

2. Individual antecedents of mentoring support

Several studies have linked individual characteristics, mostly that of the protégés to mentoring receipt or provision in organizational settings. This meta-analysis includes 5 individual characteristics (e.g., proactivity, locus of control, emotional intelligence, learning goal orientation, self-monitoring) of protégés and 2 individual characteristics (e.g., learning goal orientation, transformational leadership) of mentors as previous meta-analyses (e.g., Eby et al., 2013; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2010) on mentoring antecedents focused mostly on demographics at the individual level without considering these variables and at least two studies providing effect sizes between these individual characteristics and mentoring support were available in extant research (e.g., Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Underhill, 2006). Although there were at least two studies reporting associations between Big Five personality factors and mentoring receipt (e.g., Bozionelos & Bozionelos, 2010; Bozionelos, Bozionelos, Polychroniou, & Kostopoulos, 2014), this meta-analysis did not include the Big Five factors at the individual level as Bozionelos et al. (2014) reported some of these personality factors to show a curvilinear relationship with mentoring receipt.

2.1. Protégé proactivity and mentoring support

A brief review of the literature on proactive behavior reveals that even though proactive behavior has been conceptualized and studied in different ways, "a common thread binding the various approaches to the study of proactivity and initiative is an action orientation toward organizational behaviors" (Crant, 2000, p. 436). According to this theoretical perspective, proactive individuals play an active role in initiating situations and conditions that would be favorable towards their careers unlike non-proactive people who exhibit passive and reactive behavior patterns towards seeking information and opportunities that can further their careers (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Thus, in the context of mentoring relationships, proactive protégés would be more likely to actively seek different kinds of mentoring support from their mentors instead of passively waiting for their mentors to take the initiative (Aryee, Lo, & Kang, 1999; Higgins, Chandler, & Kram, 2007; Turban & Dougherty, 1994; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003).

Hypothesis 1. Higher levels of protégé proactivity will be positively associated with mentoring support.

2.2. Protégé locus of control and mentoring support

The notion of perceived control has been examined in the psychology literature in various forms, mostly due to its association with different cognitive, behavioral, affective, and psychological outcomes (Abel & Hayslip, 2001; Spector, 1988; Spector & O'Connell, 1994). Although control beliefs can partly originate from social experiences, extant research indicates that the sense of control over external environment can be a dispositional tendency as well, explained by the construct of "locus of control" (Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006). Locus of control concerns the degree to which individuals attribute the cause or control of events either to the external environment or to themselves (Rotter, 1966). Individuals who attribute control of events to the external environment are considered to have "external locus of control" in contrast to those with "internal locus of control" who believe that events are contingent on their own behavior. Further, conceptualizations of locus of control may vary across situations so that beliefs about control at work may be different from one's control beliefs in personal relationships (Hahn, 2000). Thus, in the context of mentoring relationships, protégés with high internal locus of control at work might be more prone to believe that active engagement with their mentors would help towards improving abilities and skills needed for better performance at work (Noe, 1988; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Their belief of being able to control work outcomes through participating in mentoring might enable them to actively seek both career and psychosocial support from their mentors unlike the protégés with "external locus of control" who attribute work outcomes to luck or chance than their personal efforts.

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