

# The Protege's Perspective Regarding Negative Mentoring Experiences: The Development of a Taxonomy

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A taxonomy of negative mentoring experiences was developed using descriptive accounts of negative mentoring experiences from the protege's perspective. Content analysis revealed 15 types of negative mentoring experiences, nested within five broad metathemes: Match Within the Dyad, Distancing Behavior, Manipulative Behavior, Lack of Mentor Expertise, and General Dysfunctionality. Quantitative analyses indicated that proteges were more likely to report that their mentor had dissimilar attitudes, values, and beliefs when describing their most negative mentoring relationship compared to their most positive mentoring relationship. Implications for theory-building, future research, and applied practice are discussed. © 2000 Academic Press

Obtaining a mentor is an important career development experience for individuals. Research indicates that mentored individuals perform better on the job, advance more rapidly within the organization (i.e., get promoted more quickly and earn higher salaries), report more job and career satisfaction, and express

The authors thank Tammy D. Allen, Mark Savickas, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1998 Southern Management Association meeting in New Orleans, LA.

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lower turnover intentions than their nonmentored counterparts (Chao, 1997; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1989; Scandura, 1992; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1992). Given these findings, it has been recommended that organizations encourage managers to become mentors, set up formal (assigned) mentoring programs, and link mentoring to other human resource management systems such as compensation and performance appraisal to increase mentoring in organizational settings (Burke & McKeen, 1989; Kram, 1985).

Notwithstanding these benefits it is important to recognize that mentoring is an intense interpersonal relationship (Kram, 1985). As such, while a mentor refers to someone who "... advises, counsels, or helps (younger) individuals ..." (Feldman, 1988, p. 129), this does not preclude the possibility that mentoring may have negative aspects (Scandura, 1998). While initially counterintuitive, social-psychological research on interpersonal relationships notes that unpleasant incidents are a common and often neglected aspect of all relationships, ranging from minor episodes, such as arguing, to serious incidents, such as physical or psychological abuse (Duck, 1982, 1994; Levinger, 1983; Marshall, 1994; Wood & Duck, 1995). Duck (1994) makes a strong case that it is naive to adopt "... a totally black-white way of thinking about 'positive' and 'negative' relationships ..." (p. 7) and that researchers should examine both aspects to adequately capture the totality of a relational experience.

Given this large body of social-psychological research, it is interesting that very little research has focused on the negative aspects of mentoring. One exception is Scandura's (1998) recent theoretical article which maps the negative aspects of mentoring relationships on to Duck's (1994) social-psychological typology of the "dark side" of close interpersonal relationships. While Scandura's (1998) work provides an organizing framework for the study of the negative aspects of mentoring, empirical research is needed. A first step toward understanding what Scandura terms "dysfunctional mentoring relationships" (p. 449) is to uncover the different types of negative mentoring experiences that exist, as well as the situations in which these experiences may be most likely to occur. Since no empirical research to date has examined the negative aspects of mentoring, in-depth qualitative accounts of proteges' perceptions of negative mentoring experiences were obtained and an inductively derived taxonomy of negative mentoring experiences was developed based on descriptive accounts of these relationships. Further, quantitative data were used to test some initial hypotheses about situations in which negative mentoring experiences may be most likely to occur.

While the focus of the present study is on negative mentoring experiences it is important to note that we are not suggesting that mentoring relationships can be easily classified as "positive" or "negative" or that the presence of negative events means that the relationship is doomed to fail. Even in healthy relationships negative events occur, and it is important to recognize that negative experiences can range in severity from somewhat minor (e.g., a fleeting disagreement) to quite serious (e.g., revenge, violence) (Duck, 1994; Marshall, 1994; Wood &

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