

## Procedural voice and distributive justice: their influence on mentoring career help and other outcomes

Orlando C. Richard<sup>a,\*</sup>, Edward C. Taylor<sup>b</sup>, Tim Barnett<sup>c</sup>, Mary Frances A. Nesbit<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*School of Management, University of Texas at Dallas, Box 830688, Richardson, TX 75083-0688, USA*

<sup>b</sup>*Piedmont College, School of Business Administration, Demorest, Georgia 30535, USA*

<sup>c</sup>*Louisiana Tech University, Dept. of Management and Marketing, Ruston, Louisiana 71272, USA*

<sup>d</sup>*Atlanta Public Schools, USA*

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### Abstract

The theory on antecedents of mentoring benefits remains in its infancy. To build theory concerning predictors of protégés' career mentoring help, satisfaction with the mentoring relationship, perceived conflict with the mentor, and overall evaluation of the mentor's guidance ability, we recruited 140 employed college students to participate as protégés in a simulated mentoring relationship. We used structural equation modeling to investigate relationships among protégés' perceptions of procedural voice and distributive justice and how they affect all four outcomes. Results generally support our initial theoretical model and illustrate the importance of voice in facilitating positive perceptions of distributive justice as well as personal and organizational outcomes. Implications for future research and practice are offered. © 2002 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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Organizations in the last few years have used mentoring programs as a developmental tool for new organizational entrants (Heimann and Pittenger, 1996). Mentoring refers to developmental relationships between experienced, senior colleagues (i.e., mentors) and less experienced, junior colleagues (i.e., protégés) (Fagenson, 1989; Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985; Ornstein and Isabella, 1993). Overall, the literature shows that junior colleagues enter into mentoring relationships because they perceive that mentors provide valuable career help and psychosocial support (Chao, 1997; Halatin and Knotts, 1982; Turban and Dougherty, 1994). Career help available to protégés includes sponsorship, coaching, challenging assignments, and exposure/visibility; psychosocial support offered to protégés may include counseling, role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, and friendship (Dreher and Ash, 1990; Kram, 1983, 1985; Noe, 1988).

Research on the mentoring relationship has focused on the implications mentoring has for the career objectives of protégés (Hunt and Michael, 1983). It suggests that protégés experience greater career mobility, opportunity, compensation, recognition, satisfaction, commitment, and promotion rates than their nonmentored counterparts (Chao et al., 1992; Dansky, 1996; Dreher and Ash, 1990; Dreher and Cox, 1996; Fagenson, 1989; Kram, 1983; Roche, 1979; Ostroff and Kozolowski, 1993; Scandura, 1992; Whitely et al., 1991). Men and women both seem to experience positive outcomes of the mentoring process (Dreher and Ash, 1990; Scandura and Ragins, 1993).

Various characteristics of senior colleagues' power, race, gender, mentoring experience, and technical expertise affect the likelihood that junior colleagues will seek them out as a mentor (Ensher and Murphy, 1997; Ragins, 1989, 1995, 1997; Thomas, 1990). Conversely, the criteria employed by mentors to select protégés include the prospective protégés' gender, competence, relationship risks for mentors, and past performances (Kram, 1985; Olian et al., 1993, 1988; Ragins and Cotton, 1993). Even though the literature has identified an impressive array of benefits for protégés and has

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: pretty@utdallas.edu (O.C. Richard).

addressed mentor/protégé selection criteria, with the exception of Scandura (1997), empirical research has virtually ignored antecedents that determine whether protégés actually realize the potential benefits of mentoring relationships. Part of the problem may be the lack of an integrated, testable, theoretical model that can inform our understanding of junior colleagues' outcomes. We invoke the organizational justice literature to explore the role played by procedural justice (i.e., voice) and distributive justice on the level of mentoring career help and three other personal outcomes for protégés. We argue that protégés will be more likely to realize the benefits of mentoring when they are allowed to voice their opinions in the decision process and when their duties as part of the mentoring relationship are perceived as fairly distributed.

## 1. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Organizational justice theory concerns how rewards and punishments should be distributed and the procedures used for making distribution decisions (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). From the perspective of the social scientist, organizational justice is a subjective term, since individuals may differ in their perception of the fairness of outcomes and processes. Two components of organizational justice are distributive justice and procedural justice. Distributive justice can be defined as the perceived fairness of the outcomes or allocations that an individual receives (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). Generally, positive outcomes will result in higher levels of perceived fairness than will negative outcomes. Individuals' perceptions of distributive justice are associated with job performance (Pfeffer and Langton, 1993), withdrawal behaviors (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1992), and quality of work (Cowherd and Levine, 1992), among other outcomes. Procedural justice, conversely, is concerned with the perceived fairness of the process or system by which decisions are made (Greenberg, 1990). Procedural justice has been linked to organizational commitment, job performance, and organizational citizenship (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998).

Research has suggested two distinct ways in which procedural justice may influence organizational outcomes. The first characterizes distributive justice as a mediator of the effects of procedural justice on relevant outcomes (i.e., a mediation model). Individuals believe procedural fairness increases the likelihood that they will receive fair outcomes, a linkage referred to as the fair-process effect (Greenberg, 1990). Perceptions of distributive justice, in turn, influence both personal and organizational outcomes. The second possible effect, based on the group-value model of procedural justice (Lind and Tyler, 1988), characterizes procedural justice as having an independent effect, separate and apart from the fair-process effect. According to the group-value model, individuals respond favorably to procedural justice because fair procedures communicate that

the employee is a valued member of the organization. In this study, we take a holistic approach to allow a more integrative, in-depth analysis of proposed relationships. Accordingly, a theoretical assessment of organizational justice requires first, that the direct effects of procedural justice are considered; second, that independent direct effects of distributive justice are considered; and finally, that the mediating effect of distributive justice on the relationship between procedural justice and relevant outcomes is considered (Tyler, 1994).

### 1.1. Voice and procedural justice theory

Justice theorists have posited several aspects of procedures that lead to perceived fairness. Process control or voice is one of the most commonly studied procedural justice variables. Individuals have voice when they are given a sufficient opportunity to present information to the decision-maker (Lind and Tyler, 1988). Voice increases the chance that individuals will have some control of the process by which outcomes are decided. Procedural justice theory predicts that individuals will be more satisfied with outcomes and with a procedure that provides process control (Thibaut and Walker, 1975).

Lind and Tyler (1988) observe that the most reliable finding in procedural justice research is the role of voice: that people react more favorably to procedures that give them considerable freedom in communicating their views and arguments. Voice does not guarantee that individuals will have process control, because it refers only to the opportunity to offer information, opinions, and suggestions, but it does increase the likelihood that individuals will perceive processes as fair (Thibaut and Walker, 1975).

Mentoring relationships represent an ideal setting in which protégés' ability to voice opinions to the mentor can greatly vary. Voice in a mentoring context may be defined as a form of participation in which protégés perceive that they will be given a sufficient opportunity to present their ideas, opinions, and feelings to mentors. Voice in a mentoring relationship allow protégés to share with mentors their ideas and opinions as to how work assignments can best be accomplished, as well as their problems and anxieties about the job and organizational context.

Perhaps the primary benefit protégés can obtain from a mentoring relationship is career help from the mentor. Career help, as previously defined, refers to outcomes of the mentoring process that promote protégés' successful careers, such as mentor sponsorship, coaching, challenging assignments, and feedback on performance. We believe that protégés are more likely to perceive that their careers will be enhanced by a mentoring relationship when the relationship is characterized by a high level of procedural voice. Voice allows the protégés to "have their say" about career aspirations and concerns, which provides mentors with more information about protégés' career needs. If protégés believe that they will be able to share information about their careers

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