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Mentoring and transformational leadership: The role of supervisory career mentoring

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Abstract

Leaders may need to serve as mentors to activate transformational leadership and promote positive work attitudes and career expectations of followers. To test this premise, incremental effects of transformational leadership and mentoring over each other were examined using $N = 275$ employed MBAs. Respondents with supervisory mentors reported receiving higher levels of career mentoring than respondents with non-supervisory mentors. Supervisory career mentoring (SCM) and transformational leadership had incremental effects over each other for job satisfaction. SCM had mediating effects over transformational leadership for organizational commitment and career expectations. Career mentoring by non-supervisory mentors was not associated with career expectations but there were incremental effects with idealized influence and inspirational motivation for job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Implications for the changing role of mentorship in organizations are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Transformational leadership is performance-oriented (Bass, 1985) while mentoring is development-oriented (Burke, McKenna, & McKeen, 1991). When a

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supervisor provides mentoring, the relationship affects the protégé's skill development and intentions to remain with the employer (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997). While supervisory mentors are often in the best position to have frequent interactions with protégés (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990), very little research on mentoring has examined supervisor's leadership style in relation to mentoring (McManus & Russell, 1997). The benefits that protégés report when they receive mentoring and transformational leadership may vary between supervisory and non-supervisory mentors. Research is needed that more closely examines how mentoring might complement leadership and the resulting effects on work attitudes.

Transformational leadership pursues organizational goals by focusing on follower motivation (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders reinforce the competencies and skills that keep the organization competitive. Through transformational leadership, supervisors communicate a vision that motivates employees to exert extra effort (Bass, 1990). Such leaders also show personalized attention that links individual and collective interests resulting in commitment to the vision (Hambrick, 1989). When the supervisor is seen as a mentor a transformational process may be present. Scandura and Schriesheim (1994, p. 1589) conceptualized supervisory career mentoring (SCM) as "...a transformational activity involving a mutual commitment by mentor and protégé to the latter's long-term development, as a personal, extraorganizational investment in the protégé by the mentor, and as the changing of the protégé by the mentor, accomplished by the sharing of values, knowledge, experience, and so forth." Thus, in the same way that organizational context influences the emergence of transformational leadership (Pawar & Eastman, 1997), the presence of transformational leadership might create a relational context in which a mentoring relationship can flourish. Bass (1985) suggests that "...some situations bring out the mentoring in superiors and their attention to the development of their protégés" (p. 94) and acknowledges that mentoring may be present in some superior-subordinate relationships.

The purpose of this paper is to extend previous research that examines how aspects of leadership and mentoring provide complementary approaches to the study of supervisor-subordinate relationships. Scandura and Schriesheim (1994) discussed the literature on transformational and transactional leadership as the basis for integrating the Leader-member exchange (LMX) approach with mentoring and found that LMX and mentoring accounted for meaningful variance over the other for career outcomes. McManus and Russell (1997) suggest that in-group status (attained in high quality LMX relationships) might be a prerequisite for subordinates to receive mentoring. They suggest that the discrimination between LMX and mentoring might depend on the perspective (subordinate or supervisor), whether the mentor is also the supervisor, and the dimensions of mentoring examined. We therefore examine (1) the incremental effects that SCM (the immediate supervisor is the mentor) and transformational leadership have over each other in predicting work attitudes and career expectations and (2) the incremental effects that non-supervisory career mentoring (the mentor is not the immediate supervisor) and transformational leadership might have over each other in predicting work attitudes and career expectations. This research addresses a gap in the mentoring literature by examining the role of

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