



Perceived support for mentoring: A multiple perspectives approach

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Abstract

Two studies were conducted to examine how perceptions of support for mentoring relate to mentoring attitudes and outcomes for both protégés and mentors, over and above established predictors. In study 1, protégés provided information on their perceptions of support for mentoring and mentoring received. As expected, perceived management support for mentoring was positively related to career-related and psychosocial support; and perceived mentor accountability for mentoring was negatively related to mentoring problems. In study 2, we examined mentors' perceptions of support for mentoring in relation to their willingness to mentor others in the future and the extent to which they viewed their current relationship as complementary. Mentors' perceptions of management support for mentoring were positively related to their belief that mentoring relationships were mutually beneficial. However, consistent with theories of self-determination, as mentors' perceptions of their own accountability in the relationship increased their willingness to mentor others in the future decreased. Implications for mentoring theory, future research, and applied practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship between a senior, more experienced individual (the mentor) and a junior, less experienced individual (the protégé) (Kram, 1985). Mentors provide various types of assistance to protégés, including career-related (e.g., coaching, sponsorship) and psychosocial (e.g., acceptance and confirmation, counseling) support. Mentoring is related to favorable work and career attitudes, lower intentions to leave the organization, higher pay, and faster promotion rates (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Given the links between mentoring and protégé outcomes, a substantial body of research exists on the predictors of career-related and psychosocial mentoring (for a review see, Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). While less extensively studied, some research has also focused on the mentor's perspective by identifying predictors of mentoring provided and willingness to mentor, as well as identifying the potential benefits of mentoring for mentors (see Wanberg et al., 2003).

Notably absent in mentoring research are protégés' and mentors' perceptions of workplace support for mentoring. This is surprising given Kram's (1985) discussion of the pivotal role that organizational agents, most notably managers, play in encouraging, shaping, and reinforcing values which support the development and sustenance of mentoring relationships. Moreover, the work environment can facilitate ineffective mentoring dynamics. For instance, managers may display competitive behavior and reinforce strict status differences among individuals, both of which may deter effective mentoring. Research exists on managerial and organizational support for learning and development as predictors of employee participation in developmental activities (e.g., Birdi, Allan, & Warr, 1997; Mauer & Tarulli, 1994) and employee use of skills learned in training (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanaugh, 1995). However, no research that we are aware of has examined perceived support for mentoring from the protégé's or mentor's perspective. Two studies were conducted to address these gaps in the literature.

Study 1 examined the relationship between protégés' perceptions of support for mentoring and their report of both positive (e.g., career-related and psychosocial mentoring) and negative (e.g., mentor distancing behavior, mentor manipulation) mentoring experiences. Examining both positive and negative aspects of mentoring is important given their conceptual and empirical distinctiveness (Eby, Butts, Lockwood, & Simon, 2004), as well as the increasing recognition that mentoring can provide both positive and negative experiences for protégés (Eby & Allen, 2002; Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell, 2000). In Study 2, data were collected from mentors. This allowed us to examine how mentors' reports of support for mentoring related to the extent to which they found the relationship to be beneficial as well as to their willingness to mentor others in the future.

1.1. Perceived support for mentoring

Several areas of research suggest that the construct of perceived support for mentoring may be an important omitted variable in existing mentoring research.

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