

# A quantitative review of mentoring research: Test of a model

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## Abstract

Over the past 25 years, numerous researchers have studied the effects of mentoring on work outcomes. However, several reviewers have noted that many of the observed relationships between mentoring and its outcomes are potentially spurious. To summarize this widely dispersed literature, a quantitative research synthesis was conducted focused on estimating multivariate analytical paths between mentoring and several career outcomes, while holding constant correlates of mentoring including demographics, human capital, and core self-evaluations. The results demonstrate that mentoring does have substantial effects on job and career satisfaction after holding these covariates constant; yet factors such as core self-evaluations, tenure, and education have stronger effects on objective career outcomes. Potential future directions to enrich the study of mentoring and career success are described.

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## 1. Introduction

Although the concept of mentoring dates back to the earliest stages of human civilization, the pioneering qualitative work of Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) and Kram (1983) suggested that mentoring is a powerful influence on success in organizational environments. Despite promising theoretical propositions, several recent qualitative reviews of the literature note that there is considerable ambiguity regarding the outcomes of mentoring, with some studies reporting strong relationships between mentoring and career outcomes, while others find far less support (Noe, 1988a; Ragins, 1999a; Russell & Adams, 1997; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). In response to these concerns, a meta-analysis demonstrated that after aggregating across a variety of studies, there are reliable, but small, effects of mentoring on several career outcomes (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004).

However, as Shadish (1996) has argued, although meta-analysis is a valuable statistical technique, a limitation of univariate meta-analysis is that “the statistical models used in most meta-analyses have probably been very poor approximations to any reasonable theoretical models about the causal structures that give rise

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to meta-analytic data” (p. 50). To remedy this substantive limitation, the use of causal modeling techniques based on meta-analytic data has been advocated (Viswesvaran & Ones, 1995). Such models are especially useful in fields where there is a question of the contribution of several related variables to a common outcome like performance or success, as demonstrated in the literatures on staffing (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), self-efficacy (Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott, & Rich, 2007) and training (e.g., Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000). The current study provides a quantitative synthesis of the mentoring literature in hopes of resolving issues related to: (a) the definition and functions of mentoring, (b) assessment of the effects of mentoring in multivariate models, and (c) an examination of the influence of mentoring on markers of career success relative to other related constructs. The structural model used in the study appears in Fig. 1.

### 1.1. Definition and dimensions

Consistent with previous meta-analytic work, we compare how various measures of mentoring might relate to career outcomes (Allen et al., 2004). Researchers often provide research participants with a definition of mentoring and then ask a single question about whether respondents have such a relationship. As an example, Allen, Potteet, Russell, and Dobbins (1997) told respondents that, “Mentors are persons usually considered as more experienced, who support, train, ‘teach the ropes to’ or sponsor others as they pursue their career goals. Although your boss, manager, and/or supervisor can be a mentor, usually a mentor does not have to involve a day-to-day formal supervisory relationship” (p. 9). Similar definitions for mentoring can be found in numerous other studies (e.g., Chao, 1997; Dreher & Cox, 1996; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). This measurement strategy allows for an examination of the effect of having a mentor, yet treats all mentors as equally effective.

To deal with the quality of mentoring, researchers also have employed continuous indices of mentoring quality. These indices answer a completely different research question involving whether different mentors are differentially effective—in other words, all participants have mentors, and the question for researchers involves which types of mentors are most effective. One of the most direct methods for achieving this end is the use of aggregated scales of mentoring quality (e.g., Dreher & Ash, 1990; \*Feldman, Folks, & Turnley, 1999; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 1999; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Kahn, 2001; Mullen, 1998). Mentoring relationships have also been described in terms of two broad categories of functions supposedly provided by mentors based on both qualitative and quantitative data (Kram, 1983; Noe, 1988a; \*Tepper, Shaffer, & Tepper, 1996). *Career functions* include actions such as providing the protégés with human capital enhancement opportunities and links to powerful individuals in the organization. *Psychosocial functions* include counseling the protégé about anxieties and uncertainty, providing friendship and acceptance, and role modeling. Previous meta-analytic work showed differential relationships between mentoring functions and outcomes,

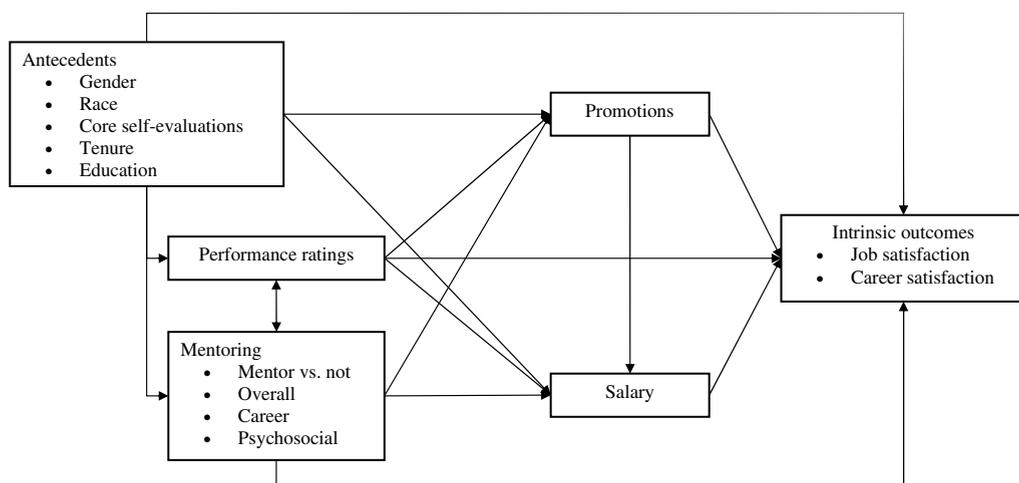


Fig. 1. Structural model of the relationship between mentoring and outcomes.

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