

Self-initiated mentoring and career success: A predictive field study

Gerhard Blickle*, Alexander Witzki, Paula B. Schneider

Institut fuer Psychologie, University of Bonn, Kaiser-Karl-Ring 9, 53111 Bonn, NRW, Germany

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing recognition of the proactive role of individuals in the world of work. Therefore, the roles of self-initiated mentoring and networking behaviors at the work place were investigated in a longitudinal study over two years with 121 early career employees in administrative and managerial jobs. As expected, after controlling for age, gender, and general intelligence, self-initiated mentoring predicted mentoring received, income, and hierarchical position. The relationship between self-initiated mentoring and career ascendancy was not mediated by mentoring received but by networking behaviors at the work place. The receipt of mentoring can be a part of the early career success yet it is not its critical mediator. Implications and limitations are discussed.

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1. Introduction

There is a growing recognition of the proactive role of individuals in the world of work (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Numerous constructs such as proactive behaviors (Crant, 2000), personal initiative (Frese, Garst, & Fay, 2007), proactive personality (Thompson, 2005), and taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999) conceive of individuals as active agents who initiate improvement in their work situation. This view coincides with the growing recognition of the proactive role of individuals in the socialization (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), career attainment (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001), and mentoring literature (Dougherty, Turban, & Haggard, 2007).

The present research focused on the early career employees' proactivity in the mentoring and career process. Recent research on mentoring has demonstrated that we should not focus exclusively on mentoring dyads but on mentoring development networks (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Molloy, 2005). However, this research has looked primarily at the effects of the quality and quantity of employees' social relationships. The present research investigated the proactive *creation* of supportive relationships in the work place by early career employees. We examined the role of self-initiated mentoring (Turban & Dougherty, 1994) and work place networking (Ferris et al., 2007), which are two closely related constructs of career proactivity.

Traditional mentoring refers to a one-on-one relationship between a less experienced and a more experienced person, which is intended to advance the personal and professional growth of the less experienced individual (Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). As several meta-analyses have shown (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Underhill, 2006), mentoring is a good predictor of an individual's career satisfaction yet only a very modest predictor of an individual's career ascendancy. The construct of self-initiated mentoring was suggested by Turban and Dougherty (1994) as a predictor of traditional mentoring received and subsequent career attainment mediated by mentoring received. This view so far has been confirmed in cross-sectional studies (Aryee, Lo, & Kang, 1999; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Thus we expect that this will be also the case in a prospective study.

* Corresponding author. Fax: +49 228 734670.

E-mail address: gerhard.blickle@uni-bonn.de (G. Blickle).

Hypothesis 1. Self-initiated mentoring predicts the amount of mentoring support received by early career employees.

However, the traditional approach has not controlled for an important career variable, namely general intelligence (Wanberg et al., 2003), although it is one of the best predictors of work place performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004), training performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004), and career success (Ng et al., 2005). This is important because traditional mentors seek protégés based on their work performance (Olian, Carroll, & Giannantonio, 1993), willingness to learn, and ability (Allen, 2004). Thus, as long as general intelligence has not been controlled together with traditional mentoring as joint predictors of career ascendancy we cannot rule out the possibility that the positive career effects thus far attributed to mentoring received stem in fact from the effects of general intelligence on career ascendancy. In that case mentoring received should be the mediator between general intelligence and career ascendancy (Wanberg et al., 2003). However, it is also possible, that general intelligence has a positive effect on career ascendancy independent from mentoring support. Additionally, in line with previous findings (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008), it can be assumed that career satisfaction associates positively with the amount of mentoring received and also with the degree of employees' career ascendancy.

Developmental networks are defined as concurrent relationships that foster personal growth and career development (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Molloy, 2005). Career development occurs with multiple developers who take an active interest in and action to advance the early career employees' careers by providing developmental assistance. In the developmental network perspective on mentoring the traditional mentor is just one career supporter in a larger social network that at the same time also may comprise other career supports inside and outside the organization at which the protégé is employed. Such a developmental network can be viewed as one component of social capital (Lin, 2001), i.e. the quality and quantity of social relationships of a person (Ng et al., 2005). As empirical findings show the number of relationships and the overall amount of assistance received indeed account for individuals' satisfaction at work (Higgins, 2000) and long-run protégés career outcomes such as salary, organizational retention, and promotion (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Ng et al., 2005).

A closer inspection of items measuring self-initiated mentoring shows that self-initiated mentoring in fact is part of more general networking activities at the work place: Early career employees indicated the extend to which they had "(1) sought to become acquainted with higher level managers, (2) made efforts to have their work become visible to higher-level managers, (3) taken the initiative to seek counseling and advice from higher level managers, and (4) taken the initiative to find mentors in their organizations." (Turban & Dougherty, 1994, p. 692). In the Networking Behaviors Scale developed by Forret and Dougherty (2001) these behaviors can be subsumed under the dimensions of *Socializing*, *Increasing Internal Visibility*, and *Maintaining Contacts*. Thus, so called self-initiated mentoring should properly be considered as upward networking behaviors of early career employees aimed at increasing the number and quality of social contacts at their work place.

Network building behaviors improve availability of job related information, political knowledge at the work place, resources, support by others, and it stimulates personal initiative, i.e., behaviors that go beyond formal work requirements (Ferris et al., 2007; Morrison, 2002). As empirical research shows network building behaviors are also associated with higher job performance ratings by supervisors (Thompson, 2005). Additionally, Forret and Dougherty (2004) found that *Increasing Internal Visibility* as part of the network building behaviors associated positively with the number of promotions, the amount of the total compensation, and with perceived career success. However, both the study by Thompson (2005) and the study by Forret and Dougherty (2004) were cross-sectional thus permitting no clear temporal and causal ordering of the causes and the effects. We expect the following predictive effects in a longitudinal study (see Fig. 1).

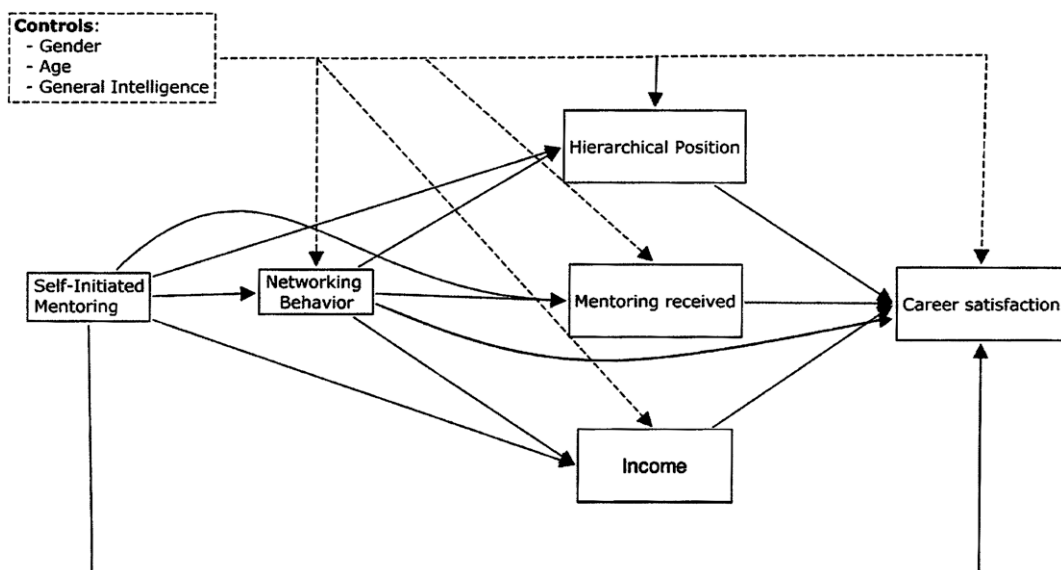


Fig. 1. Networking model and control variables.

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