



Mentoring in supervisor–subordinate dyads: Antecedents, consequences, and test of a mediation model of mentorship [☆]

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ABSTRACT

We develop a framework to look at mentoring as a consequence of employees' values and beliefs, as well as to explore its role in determining the employees' attitudes towards their organizations. Based on social exchange theory, we hypothesize that employees' levels of individualism, collectivism, and trust in supervisor influence the level of supervisory mentoring received. Moreover, mentoring influences employees' affective commitment and intention to quit, as well as mediates the relationships between the proposed antecedents and outcomes. Using structural equation modeling to examine these relationships, we find that within supervisor–subordinate dyads, subordinates report more mentoring when they have collectivist personal values and trust their supervisor. Additionally, more mentoring is positively related to subordinates' affective commitment towards the organizations and negatively related to their intention to quit. We also find that mentoring mediates the relationship between both collectivism values and trust in supervisors and both organizational commitment and intention to quit.

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1. Introduction

Mentoring relationships are recognized by both academicians and practitioners as a valuable critical resource for employees in organizations. Organizational theorists and management scholars have identified mentoring as an exchange relationship whereby both mentor and protégé gain several benefits from each other (Ragins, 1997; Young and Perrewe, 2000; Young and Perrewe, 2004). For example, compared with non-mentored individuals, mentored employees demonstrate higher levels of objective and subjective positive outcomes such as career development, job satisfaction, socialization, organizational commitment, and career advancements (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008). Mentors, in return for the time and effort spent in providing support to the protégés, gain positive outcomes such as career rejuvenation, recognition, personal satisfaction, organizational reputation, and increase in knowledge and power (Noe et al., 2002).

While scholars have used various theoretical perspectives to explain mentoring relationships (e.g. leadership, justice, power, exchange, motivation; see Noe et al., 2002, for a detailed review),

the exchange process between a mentor and protégé lies at the heart of mentoring. Thus, management scholars have suggested that social exchange theory (Homans, 1961; Blau, 1964) is an appropriate theoretical lens for describing and studying the processes involved in mentoring relationships (Olian, et al., 1993; Ensher et al., 2001; Tepper and Taylor, 2003). Based on the social exchange perspective, we define mentoring as a reciprocal exchange relationship between a mentor and a protégé (Young and Perrewe, 2000, 2004). While workplace mentoring has been traditionally defined as a hierarchical relationship between a senior and influential organizational member (mentor) and a junior and less experienced organizational member (Kram, 1983), scholars have identified various forms of mentoring relationships, such as lateral or peer mentoring, supervisory mentoring, team mentoring, and mentoring by an external sponsor (see Eby, 1997; Allen and Eby, 2007; Eby, Rhodes and Allen, 2007; Scandura and Pellegreni, 2007). The focus of the current study is on supervisory mentoring. Our basis for drawing this boundary is the notion that employees tend to interact most frequently with their supervisors than with other agents of the organization, and therefore, supervisors are in the best position to serve as organizational representatives (Tepper and Taylor, 2003). Moreover, extant literature also suggests that supervisors are in the most natural position to, and have the responsibility to provide career and psychosocial support to the subordinates (Eby, 1997: pp. 135/6), and employees are likely to obtain mentoring from their immediate supervisors (Ragins and McFarlin, 1990; Tepper, 1995; Tepper and Taylor, 2003).

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According to social exchange theory, individuals' beliefs about the support they receive from their employing organizations play an important role in effecting their behaviors and attitudes towards their organizations. While individuals' personal values, as well as the quality of the inter-attitudinal relationships that they experience with their supervisors play an important role in effecting these beliefs, research has not systematically explored the roles of these variables in mentoring relationships. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to take insights from social exchange theory in order to study: (a) employees' personal values (i.e. individualism–collectivism) and employees' relationships with the supervisors (i.e. trust in supervisor) as the antecedents of supervisory mentoring antecedents, (b) employees' commitment to the organization and intention to quit as the outcomes of supervisory mentoring, and (c) the mediating role of supervisory mentoring in the relationships between its antecedents and outcomes. The theoretical model that is being proposed in the current study is shown in Fig. 1.

Therefore, this study makes the following contributions. First, based on the notions that mentoring is an exchange relationship between a mentor and a protégé, and that employees regard their supervisors as the representatives of their organizations, we provide a theoretical perspective to look at mentoring as a consequence of employees' personal attitudes, as well as to explore its role in determining the employees' attitudes towards their organizations. Second, we go beyond simple linear regression modeling to investigate more complex relationships as posited by extant theory. Specifically, we use structural equation modeling to examine the role of mentoring as a mediating variable in the relationship between individuals' values and relationships, and their performance outcomes.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Social exchange theory

The basic tenet of social exchange theory is that human interactions are based upon exchange of social and material resources and norms of reciprocity (Homans, 1961; Blau, 1964). The theory posits that people enter into relationships in which benefits and rewards (tangible or intangible) are greater than the costs. Unlike economic exchanges that are characterized by legally-sanctioned contractual arrangements, social exchanges are 'voluntary actions' (Blau, 1964) that are embedded in trust that the recipient of a benefit will eventually reciprocate with an equitable, but not necessarily similar, favor (Haas and Deseran, 1981; Gould-Williams and Davies, 2005).

While social exchange theory originally focused on explaining relationship between individuals, management scholars have established that the theory plays an important role in explaining the relationship between the organization and its employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Whitener, 2001). The 'voluntary' exchange relationship between an employee and the employing organization is governed by what management theorists have referred to as 'psychological contracts',

defined as an individual's beliefs about the terms of his or her reciprocal relationships with the employing organization (Robinson et al., 1994; Robinson, 1996). As we mentioned in the previous section, such beliefs are effected by individual's personal values, as well as the quality of relationship they experience with their co-workers and supervisors.

Based upon the insights offered by social exchange theory, each component of the theoretical model that has been proposed earlier is discussed below.

2.2. Mentoring and organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as the level of attachment and identification that an individual feels towards the organization in which he or she is employed (Mowday et al., 1982; Bartlett, 2001). A popular conceptualization of the construct has been offered by Meyer and Allen (1991), who have identified commitment as a multidimensional construct, consisting of three components: *affective commitment*, which refers to individuals' desire to be committed to the organization due to the emotional attachment felt towards the organization as a result of personal liking or preference, *continuance commitment*, which refers to individuals' need to remain in the organization due to the costs associated with leaving, and *normative commitment*, which refers to individuals' moral obligation to be committed to the organization due to their personal values (see also Meyer et al., 1993).

Using the social exchange perspective, management scholars have argued that the levels of employees' commitment to their organizations depend upon their beliefs regarding how committed their employing organizations are to them, and the support they receive from their employers (Wayne et al., 1997; Whitener, 2001; Gould-Williams and Davies, 2005). Research in the area has suggested that since supervisors are perceived by employees as agents of the organization, the behaviors of managers and supervisors play critical roles in effecting psychological contracts and signaling the level and nature of the organizations' commitment to the employees, and hence, shape the employees' behaviors and attitudes, or more specifically, their level of commitment, towards their organizations (e.g. Guzzo et al., 1994; Rousseau and Greller, 1994; Wayne et al., 1997; Bartlett, 2001; Whitener, 2001; Lee and Bruvold, 2003; Gould-Williams and Davies, 2005).

Past research has suggested that mentoring is an important determinant of an employee's affective and continuance commitment to the organization (Koberg et al., 1998; Allen et al., 2004; Payne and Huffman, 2005). This argument is based on the notion that a successful exchange relationships increases employees' commitment to their organizations (Flynn, 2005). We seek to confirm this proposition by exploring the relationship between mentoring and two dependent variables: affective commitment, and intention to quit.

Mentors offer different types of social and psychological support to their protégés (Scandura, 1992). The various types of support include social support, coaching and role modeling support, career support, and emotional support (Kram, 1985; Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Ensher et al., 2001). From a social exchange perspective, it can be argued that

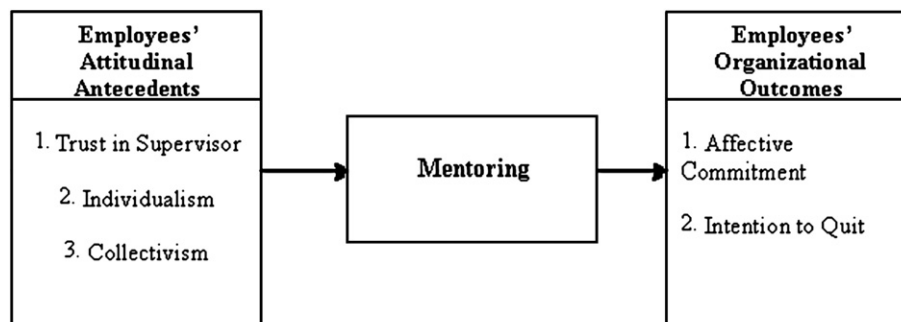


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

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