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# Protégé–mentor agreement about the provision of psychosocial support: The mentoring relationship, personality, and workload

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## Abstract

Protégé–mentor agreement (PMA) about the provision of psychosocial support was examined in relation to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work self-esteem. One-hundred and sixty-six junior administrative and information technology (IT) staff at an Australian university and their matched mentors completed a questionnaire that assessed three antecedents to PMA: (1) structural and experience aspects of the mentorship (type and length of relationship, frequency of meetings, previous experience with mentoring, and gender-mix); (2) protégé and mentor personality (agreeableness, openness, extroversion, neuroticism, and conscientiousness); and (3) protégé and mentor workload. Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares revealed that PMA was predicted by structural and experience aspects of the mentorship (type of mentorship, frequency of meetings, and experience of the mentor), protégé personality (agreeableness, openness, extroversion, and conscientiousness), mentor personality (agreeableness, openness, and extroversion), and mentor workload. Protégé–mentor agreement was positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment for protégés and mentors.

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*Keywords:* Mentoring; Psychosocial support; Personality; Workload; Job satisfaction; Organizational commitment

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## 1. Introduction

Mentoring may be defined as “an intense work relationship between senior (mentor) and junior (protégé) organizational members.” (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992, p. 622). This paper investigates three sets of factors that influence protégé–mentor agreement (PMA) in relation to psychosocial mentoring: (1) structural and experience aspects of the mentorship, (2) personality, and (3) workload. The predictive ability of PMA is then tested in relation to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work self-esteem.

This paper makes a number of important contributions. Theoretically, the framework allows a detailed examination of the PMA in relation to psychosocial support. It is also the first in the mentoring literature to apply the Big Five framework (Costa & McCrae, 1992) as a way of systematically analyzing the role of personality in PMA. Methodologically, the use of dyadic data allows this paper to examine the processes of exchange that occur *within* a mentoring relationship (Chao, 1998) and to consider how the “micro-level behaviors enacted by one partner are evaluated by the other” (Young & Perrewe, 2000, p. 628). The use of dyadic data also means that this paper is able to investigate work outcomes for both protégés and mentors. This is an important contribution given that comparatively little research has examined the outcomes of mentoring for mentors themselves (Allen, Poteet, Russell, & Dobbins, 1997a; Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997b; Young & Perrewe, 2000).

### 1.1. Protégé–mentor agreement in relation to psychosocial support

Protégé–mentor agreement is defined in this paper as the degree to which protégés and mentors hold a shared view of the mentorship. Protégés and mentors who hold a shared view of the relationship may be more likely to understand the needs of the other, be more open to receiving and understanding feedback from the other, and be more likely to make the attitudinal and behavioral adjustments required to ensure a continued relationship (Baird & Kram, 1983; Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Yammarino & Atwaters, 1997).

Certainly, Kram and Bragar (1992) stated that high-quality psychosocial support is only achieved when understanding between the protégé and the mentor is reached. Following this claim, the current study will examine PMA with respect to the provision of psychosocial support which comes through role modeling, counseling, friendship, and conveying positive regard/acceptance towards the protégé (Kram, 1985a; Noe, 1988).

Most investigations of psychosocial support have used ratings given only by the protégé (e.g., Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Koberg, Boss, & Goodman, 1998). Those researchers who have included protégé’s and mentor’s ratings run separate analyses on aggregated data for the two groups (e.g., Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Mullen, 1998; Mullen & Noe, 1999; Young & Perrewe, 2000). As such, these studies do not consider the dynamics that occur within each protégé–mentor pair and have been unable to assess whether protégé–mentor pairs agree about the provision of support that is given.

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