



Career benefits associated with mentoring for mentors: A meta-analysis



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ABSTRACT

Mentoring has been studied extensively as it is linked to protégé career development and growth. Recent mentoring research is beginning to acknowledge however that mentors also can accrue substantial benefits from mentoring. A meta-analysis was conducted where the provision of career, psychosocial and role modeling mentoring support were associated with five types of subjective career outcomes for mentors: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intent, job performance, and career success. The findings indicated that mentors versus non-mentors were more satisfied with their jobs and committed to the organization. Providing career mentoring was most associated with career success, psychosocial mentoring with organizational commitment, and role modeling mentoring with job performance. Turnover intent was not linked significantly with any of the subjective career outcome variables. The findings support mentoring theory in that mentoring is reciprocal and collaborative and not simply beneficial for protégés. Longitudinal research is needed however to determine the degree to which providing mentoring impacts a mentor's career over time. By alerting prospective mentors to the possible personal benefits of providing career, psychosocial, and role modeling mentoring support for protégés, HRD professionals can improve recruitment efforts for mentoring programs.

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1. Introduction and purpose

Mentoring has long been acclaimed to be a career management and development tool in organizations (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005; O'Reilly, 2001). The list of career benefits accrued from mentoring includes job performance, early career socialization, career advancement, retention of high potential talent, and leader development to name a few (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Scandura & Williams, 2004). However, most of extant research on mentoring benefits has focused on the protégés with the mentors' benefits receiving comparatively much less attention. Only recently, some studies have started exploring the benefits of being a mentor (Bozionelos, 2004; Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2006; Ghosh, Reio, & Haynes, 2012; Lentz & Allen, 2009; Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006). Although this recent shift in focus towards the mentor's perspective is commendable, the literature on mentor's benefits is currently scattered and needs to be systematically synthesized to derive a coherent understanding of how mentors are likely to gain from volunteering their time in supporting their junior colleagues.

This is even more important due to the widespread proliferation of formal mentoring programs in organizations and the difficulty that human resource development (HRD) professionals experience in recruiting motivated and committed mentors (Hegstad & Wentling, 2005; Weinberg & Lankau, 2011). While research to date has not determined the number of organizations using formal mentoring programs, the literature in recent years shows a pervasive and growing interest in mentoring programs in a wide array of organizations including educational institutions, several areas of the United States government, not-for-profit and professional associations, and numerous Fortune 500 companies such as IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Honeywell, AT&T, Sodexo, and Walmart to name a

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few (Hegstad & Wentling, 2004). Thus, it seems obvious that a quantitative summary of what we know to date about the benefits associated with being a mentor can be valuable. HRD professionals can use this information to better communicate the value of mentoring as a career development tool for not just protégés, but mentors as well and attract organizational leaders to benefit from imparting their knowledge and expertise to others as mentors.

Moreover, a quantitative review of mentor benefits can advance future theory-building and research on mentoring (Allen, 2007). As a mentoring relationship is inherently dyadic, the success of mentoring is contingent on the needs and perspectives of both mentors and protégés. Thus, overlooking the positive outcomes that mentors might experience leaves a critical gap in theoretical development of the mentoring field, specifically concerning the construct of motivation to mentor or willingness to mentor. While mentoring scholars have perceived mentoring to be an altruistic action and hence, mentors to be pro-social individuals (Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996), and age and stage based models of career development have shed some light on motivation to mentor (Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977; Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978), the literature is still lacking an adequate explanation of willingness to mentor others (Allen, 2003). A meta-analysis of the potential career benefits that mentors experience can inform this continuing dialogue on what might motivate individuals to engage in mentoring relationships as mentors. We address this gap by conducting a systematic and critical meta-analytic review of the studies exploring the benefits of mentoring for mentors.

2. Who are mentors and what are mentoring functions?

Mentors are typically defined as individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing support for the purpose of increasing career advancement of junior organizational members or their protégés (Kram, 1983, 1985). Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, and Wilbanks (2011) noted that there are more than 40 different definitions used since 1980 to describe individuals who act as mentors. Most of these definitions share the view that mentors are more senior individuals who provide various kinds of personal and career assistance or as explained by the seminal qualitative study by Kram (1985), psychosocial and career support to less senior or experienced person in the role of a protégé or a mentee.

Psychosocial support functions are “those aspects of a relationship that enhance an individual's sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role” (Kram, 1985, p. 32). These functions include acceptance and confirmation, counseling, friendship and role modeling (Kram, 1983). To accept and confirm the protégés, mentors are reported to convey feelings of respect, signal approval even in times of failure, convey unconditional positive regard, and accept their protégés as competent professionals (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fowler & O’Gorman, 2005; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Shen & Kram, 2011; Thomas, 1990). As counselors, mentors show empathy for protégés’ concerns, encourage protégés to talk openly about their anxiety, and act as sounding boards for the protégé to understand himself/herself (Levesque, O’Neill, Nelson, & Dumas, 2005; O’Neill, 2005; Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Viator, 1994; Shen & Kram, 2011). As friends, mentors are individuals with whom protégés can confide in, interact socially and spend leisure discussing a variety of non-work interests (Fowler & O’Gorman, 2005; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Shen & Kram, 2011). Lastly, as role models, mentors represent someone who the protégé might want to emulate, display appropriate attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors, and demonstrate ethical integrity as strong professionals (Kram, 1983; Levesque et al., 2005; Olian, Carroll, Giannantonio, & Feren, 1988; Shen & Kram, 2011).

Career support requires mentors to discuss protégés’ career options and dilemmas, and advance their careers in organizations through providing sponsorship, coaching, exposure and visibility, protection, and challenging work assignments (Kram, 1983). As sponsors, mentors actively nominate protégés for projects and promotions, publicly advocate for their protégés’ abilities and champion protégés’ behaviors (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Scandura & Viator, 1994; Thomas, 1990). As coaches, mentors provide access to information that is available only to higher-level members of the organization, share career histories, suggest specific strategies to achieve career goals, and provide assistance in job-related skills and knowledge (O’Neill, 2005; Scandura, 1992; Shen & Kram, 2011). For exposure and visibility, mentors create opportunities for their protégés to impress important people in the organization and introduce them to the “right” people (Olian et al., 1988; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Scandura & Viator, 1994). For protection, mentors reduce unnecessary risks that might threaten protégés’ reputation and shield them from controversial topics (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Levesque et al., 2005; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). Finally, for challenging assignments, mentors push protégés into situations that are out of their comfort zones and assign work or tasks that help to learn and develop new skills (Kram, 1983; Levesque et al., 2005; Shen & Kram, 2011).

Follow-up work by many scholars have confirmed psychosocial and career support functions provided by mentors to include the aforementioned factors (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Noe, 1988; Tepper, Shaffer, & Tepper, 1996), thereby lending a coherent framework for understanding who mentors are and what they primarily do. However, some scholars have found role modeling to be a distinct function loading on a separate factor instead of being included in the psycho-social dimension of mentor roles (Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Viator, 1994). In accordance, our analyses of mentor benefits focused on three facets of mentor roles, i.e., we conducted meta-analyses of the studies examining the benefits associated with provision of career support, psychosocial support, and role modeling. In addition, resembling the meta-analysis conducted on protégé benefits by Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, and Lima (2004), we compared positive outcomes of mentoring across mentors and non-mentors (Eby et al., 2006; Lentz & Allen, 2009; Ragins & Scandura, 1999).

3. Outcomes associated with mentoring relationships for mentors

Various mentor outcomes have been explored through empirical studies done by the scholars focusing on the mentor’s perspective. These outcomes can be classified into two broad categories namely objective career outcomes and subjective career outcomes. Objective career outcomes include compensation and promotion (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Eby et al., 2006; Gentry & Sosik, 2010). Subjective career outcomes include less tangible and more affective indicators of career success such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, career satisfaction, turnover intent, and subjective ratings of job performance (Chun, Sosik, & Yun, 2012; Lentz & Allen, 2009; Pullins & Fine, 2002).

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