Career Success Outcomes Associated With Mentoring Others

A Comparison of Mentors and Nonmentors

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The present study examines the relationship between four career success variables—salary, promotions, subjective career success, and job satisfaction—with experience as an informal mentor among employees of a health care organization. Regression results indicate that individuals who serve as a mentor to others report greater salary, greater promotion rates, and stronger subjective career success than do individuals without any experience as a mentor to others. The results provide preliminary evidence supporting the notion that career benefits are associated with serving as a mentor to others.

Keywords: mentoring; mentor; career success; job satisfaction

Mentors serve as a vital human resource within organizations. They help ensure the transmission of knowledge to others, assist in the development of a competent workforce, and provide a mechanism for organizational learning (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997; Burke, 1984; Kram & Hall, 1996). However, effectively mentoring others requires a great deal of time and energy on the part of the mentor. Although it has been suggested that the investments made by mentors in aiding the careers of others may payoff in terms of career benefits to the mentor, little research has empirically examined this assumption. With these issues in mind, the purpose of the present study

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was to examine objective and subjective career success variables associated with mentoring others. Specifically, we compared the promotion rate, current salary, subjective career success, and job satisfaction of mentors and nonmentors.

Examining this unexplored issue makes a unique contribution to existing mentoring research, theory, and practice. Kram’s (1985) seminal research on mentoring relationships emphasizes mutuality, in other words, that both mentors and protégés stand to benefit from mentoring relationships. A great deal of research has documented the career benefits of mentoring for the protégé (e.g., see Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Noe, Greenberger, & Wang, 2002, for reviews); however, far less empirical attention has been given to investigating career benefits accrued by mentors. Thus, identifying the objective and subjective career outcomes associated with mentoring others will help address a critical gap in the existing literature and add to our overall understanding of the benefits of mentoring.

Review of the Research on Benefits Associated With Mentoring Others

A number of scholars have extolled the benefits that engaging in a mentoring relationship brings to the mentor. However, much of the research attention has been theoretical rather than empirical in nature. For example, Hunt and Michael (1983) suggested that mentors gain satisfaction, esteem among peers and superiors, and self-confirmation by mentoring others. Mullen (1994) proposed that mentoring serves primarily as an information exchange, such as an exchange where protégés serve as valuable sources of information for their mentors. Newby and Heide (1992) speculated about the extrinsic (monetary gains, assistance with job-related tasks, enhanced organizational reputation) and intrinsic (cooperation, challenge, increased competence) reinforcements that mentoring others would bring to the mentor. Case study or qualitative approaches to examining mentoring benefits have suggested that the benefits associated with mentoring others include the personal satisfaction that comes from passing knowledge and skills onto others, exhilaration from the fresh energy provided by protégés, improved job performance by receiving a new perspective on the organization from protégés, loyalty and support from protégés, and organizational recognition (Allen et al., 1997; Kram, 1985; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Zey, 1984).

The few quantitative studies that have been conducted examining benefits for mentors have yielded similar findings. In a study investigating federal employees in a formal mentoring program, the majority of mentors stated that they derived personal satisfaction from helping junior employees (Klauss,
In a survey study, Reich (1986) reported mentors stated that supervisory mentoring improved the performance of their work group. Moreover, mentors indicated that through mentoring others, they gained satisfaction from helping junior employees, felt that mentoring others improved their own managerial talents, and were stimulated by the ideas of protégés. Ragins and Scandura (1994, 1999) developed a measure of the expected benefits of being a mentor. Factor analysis identified five categories of expected benefits, including rewarding experience, improved job performance, loyal base of support, recognition by others, and generativity (Ragins & Scandura, 1999).

A review of the extant literature indicates that much of the previous research has been based on asking mentors what they believed were the benefits of mentoring (e.g., Allen et al., 1997) or data on the expected benefits of mentoring others (e.g., Ragins & Scandura, 1994, 1999). These studies have been informative, but it seems important to investigate actual career outcomes associated with mentoring others using a research design that allows comparisons between mentors and nonmentors.

**Mentoring Others as a Form of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**

In addition to the support from existing mentoring theory and research, the OCB literature also provides a basis for proposing a relationship between mentoring others and career success. Several authors have noted that mentoring others can be considered a specific form of prosocial behavior in organizations or OCB (Allen, 2003; Mullen, 1994; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). Recognizing the prosocial aspect of mentoring others is important in that research has linked citizenship behavior with organizational rewards. For example, studies have indicated that individuals who engage in OCB are more likely to be recommended for organizational rewards than those who are less likely to engage in OCB (Allen & Rush, 1998; Motowidlo & Kiker, 1999; Park & Sims, 1989, as cited in Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Hui, 1993). Moreover, recent research has associated engagement in OCB with actual organizational rewards. In a study of bank employees, Hui, Lam, and Law (2000) found that both self-ratings and supervisor ratings of OCB related to promotions. Likewise, Van Scotter, Motowidlo, and Cross (2000) reported that contextual performance contributed unique variance associated with informal rewards (e.g., letter of appreciation, special projects). In sum, individuals who serve as a mentor to others may be recognized for their prosocial efforts within the organization and be rewarded accordingly.

Taken together, existing research and theory suggests that mentoring others may relate to both tangible and intangible career outcomes. Consistent with
previous research on career outcomes (e.g., Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Turban & Dougherty, 1994), in the present study, both objective and subjective indicators of career success were investigated. First, to examine how mentoring others may relate to objective indicators of career success, we compared the promotion rates and salaries of mentors and nonmentors. Next, to assess the extent mentoring others relates to the psychic or intangible types of benefits often cited, we compared the overall subjective career success and job satisfaction of mentors and nonmentors. The following specific hypotheses were posed.

Hypothesis 1: Mentors will report greater compensation than will nonmentors.
Hypothesis 2: Mentors will report receiving a greater number of promotions than will nonmentors.
Hypothesis 3: Mentors will report greater perceived career success than will nonmentors.
Hypothesis 4: Mentors will report greater job satisfaction than will nonmentors.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants came from a health care organization located in the southeastern United States. A company representative distributed surveys and a cover letter to a randomly selected group of 500 employees. Because the intended focus of the study was on spontaneous, traditional mentoring relationships, surveys were purposely distributed to a random sample of employees who were not participants of any organizationally sanctioned formal mentoring program. Completed surveys were mailed directly to the researchers in business reply envelopes. A total of 164 employees responded, for a response rate of 32.8%. Participants held a variety of job titles across the organization such as resident nurse, facilities manager, unit manager, human resources analyst, and so forth.

Of the 164 participants, 7 did not respond to the question concerning mentoring experience and were therefore eliminated from further analyses. Of the remaining participants, 71 reported experience as mentors. The demographic data for those who reported it were as follows. Most participants were female ($n = 133$), 60 of which were in the mentor group. The average age of all participants was $42.49 \ (SD = 9.17)$. The majority of the participants were Caucasian or White ($n = 141$), and the median level of education obtained was a 4-year college degree.
Measures

Experience as a mentor. Participants responded yes or no to a question regarding whether they had been mentors to someone while working in their current organization. A definition of mentoring similar to that used in previous research was provided (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Nonmentors were coded 1 and mentors were coded 2. Participants were also asked to provide the year that their first experience as a mentor began.

Promotions. Participants were asked to report the number of promotions received while at their current company. Consistent with previous research (Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991), promotions were defined as a significant increase in responsibility or annual salary or a change in organizational rank. Participants were also asked to provide the year each of their last five promotions was awarded.

Current salary. Participants reported their current total annual salary including all forms of financial compensation, such as bonuses and profit sharing.

Subjective career success. Subjective career success was measured with four items used by Turban and Dougherty (1994; e.g., “My career has been very successful”; α = .72). A 5-point Likert-type response scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. Higher scores indicated a greater degree of subjective career success.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured using the three-item Overall Job Satisfaction scale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979; e.g., “All in all, I am satisfied with my job”). Coefficient alpha was .80. The items were rated on a 5-point response scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater degree of job satisfaction.

Control variables. Demographic and human capital variables associated with career success in previous research (e.g., Judge et al., 1995) were included as covariates. The variables were participant gender (male = 1; female = 2), race (nonminority = 0; minority = 1), age, education, organizational tenure (measured in years), and average number of hours worked per week.
Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are shown in Table 1. The regression results are shown in Table 2. Hierarchical regression was used to test the hypotheses. The control variables were entered in the first step of the equation. Experience as a mentor was entered in the second step to ascertain the amount of unique variance mentoring experience could explain in the dependent variables beyond the variance explained by known predictors of career success.

Hypothesis 1 suggested that mentors would report a greater salary than would nonmentors. The regression results supported this hypothesis ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), indicating that those with mentoring experience reported a higher current higher salary than did those without mentoring experience. Mentoring experience accounted for an additional 4% of the variance associated with salary beyond the demographic and human capital variables.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that mentors would report receiving a greater number of promotions than would nonmentors. This hypothesis was supported ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), indicating that those with mentoring experience reported more promotions than did those without mentoring experience. Mentoring experience accounted for an additional 5% of the variance associated with promotions beyond the demographic and human capital variables.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that mentors would report greater perceptions of career success than would nonmentors. This hypothesis was also supported by the data ($\beta = .32, p < .01$), indicating that those with mentoring experience were more likely to report that their career was successful than were those without mentoring experience. Mentoring experience accounted for an additional 9% of the variance associated with subjective career success beyond the demographic and human capital variables.

Hypothesis 4 stated that mentors would report greater job satisfaction than would nonmentors. This hypothesis was not supported ($\beta = .01, p = .93$), indicating no differences between those with mentoring experience from those without mentoring experience. Mentoring experience failed to capture any additional variance beyond that of the demographic and human capital variables.

Supplementary Analysis

One problem when interpreting the results of the study concerns the causal direction of the relationships observed. We contend this is less of a concern for
Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mentor experience</td>
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<td>2. Salary</td>
<td>.34**</td>
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<td>3. Promotion rate</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
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<td>4. Career success</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
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<td>5. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
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<td>6. Gender</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>—.22**</td>
<td>—.05</td>
<td>—.03</td>
<td>—.06</td>
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<td>7. Age</td>
<td>—.02</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>8. Race</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>—.05</td>
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<td>9. Education</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>—.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>10. Organizational tenure</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>—.01</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>11. Hours worked</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>—.27**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>—</td>
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</table>

*MNA 50,665 1.53 3.70 4.00 MNA 42.49 MNA MNA 8.98 42.87  
SD
|     | NA 16,902 2.28 .61 .64 NA 9.17 NA NA 7.22 11.09 |

Note: Pairwise N ranges from 127 to 157.  
*p < .05. **p < .01.
the dependent variables of salary, subjective career success, and job satisfaction because current levels of those variables were measured while the frame of reference for the mentorship experience variable was past experience as a mentor. The issue is more complex for promotion rates because it is a cumulative variable. Promotions could have occurred at any point during participants’ tenure within the organization. Of the individuals who reported experience as a mentor, 47 of them reported receiving at least one promotion. To try and ascertain an indication of the temporal distinction between experience as a mentor and promotion rates, we conducted the following additional analysis. Recall that we collected data from participants regarding the year that each of their last five promotions had occurred. We computed a variable that represented the average year of promotion for each participant. We subtracted that date from the date of the participant’s first experience as a mentor. The mean difference in years was 1.13. What this suggests is that the average date of promotion within the company followed approximately 1 year after the participant’s first experience as a mentor to others within the company. Although this is a rudimentary attempt to disentangle a complex causal chain, the results provide some tentative evidence that viewing promotions as a consequence of mentoring cannot be ruled out.

### Table 2

#### Regression Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Career Success</th>
<th>Job Satisfaction</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.23***</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2\Delta$</td>
<td>.62***</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor experience</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2\Delta$</td>
<td>.04***</td>
<td>.05**</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ total</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>$F$</td>
<td>31.87***</td>
<td>3.19**</td>
<td>2.32*</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Beta weights are from the final equation.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
Discussion

The results of the present study suggest that mentoring others is related to both objective and subjective indicators of career success. Experience as a mentor contributed uniquely to the variance associated with current salary, promotion rate, and subjective career success beyond the variance attributed by demographic and human capital factors often associated with career success. These findings should be encouraging to individuals who make time and effort investments in the career development of others.

The effect for subjective career success is consistent with previous research, such as that of Allen et al. (1997), who observed that when experienced mentors were asked what they thought were the positive benefits of mentoring others, they most frequently described psychological or intangible benefits. That is, mentoring others generated feelings of self-satisfaction and accomplishment. In contrast to the career success findings, the present study did not find any support for the conjecture that mentoring others relates to job satisfaction. Given the considerable evidence indicating that protégé experience is positively related to job satisfaction (e.g., Allen et al., 1997; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001; Fagenson, 1989; Seibert, 1999), the findings also underscore the importance of not assuming that the same benefits that relate to experience as a protégé also relate to experience as a mentor.

The positive results concerning salary and promotion are consistent with research from the OCB literature. Thus, it may be that individuals who serve as a mentor to others are rewarded because they are viewed as good citizens. Future research is needed to better understand the process by which mentoring others relates to career outcomes. For example, mentoring others is often suggested as a means for creating heightened visibility within the organization (Newby & Heide, 1992). Moreover, one motive or reason for mentoring others reported by those with mentoring experience is the self-enhancement of one’s own career (Allen, 2003; Allen et al., 1997). The extent that factors such as greater visibility explain how mentoring others aids one’s own career development versus factors such as the content of what the mentor learned during the course of the mentorship is an interesting issue for further research. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to investigate the ways that mentoring others expands the mentor’s own social capital and support network. For example, protégés can become the trusted allies of mentors, thus contributing to the mentor’s career success.

The purpose of the present study was to compare career outcomes of mentors with nonmentors. In future studies, it may be worthwhile to examine dif-
ferences in career outcomes across different types of mentoring experiences. Protégé research has indicated that some mentorships may offer more benefits than others as a function of characteristics, such as how the mentorship was formed and the demographic characteristics of the mentorship participants (e.g., Chao et al., 1992; Dreher & Cox, 1996, Ragins & Cotton, 1999). A similar line of research from the focal point of the mentor is needed. For example, promotion rates may differ for formal versus informal mentors. Because of the visibility of formal mentoring programs, formal mentors may receive more organizational recognition than do their informal counterparts (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Additionally, rewards may be used by organizations as a means to persuade individuals to participate as mentors in formal programs. These factors may translate into a greater number of promotions for formal than informal mentors. On the other hand, the pressure to develop and counsel protégés within the relatively short timeframe that is characteristic of formal programs (Ragins & Cotton) may divert attention away from a formal mentor’s own career development activities, resulting in a negative effect on promotion rates.

It would also be interesting to investigate the impact of negative mentoring experiences on mentor career success. As recently discussed in the literature, some mentorships may be more dysfunctional than functional in nature (Eby & Allen, 2002; Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell, 2000; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Scandura, 1998). Moreover, Feldman (1999) describes how mentors in particular may be hurt by destructive mentoring relationships and reluctant to enter into future mentorships. As Feldman aptly notes, the detrimental impact of having a poor protégé has been virtually unexplored and remains an important topic for future study.

Limitations

Several limitations to the present study warrant discussion. Because the data were based on self-report measures collected at a single point in time, issues such as respondent consistency motifs or response styles, transient mood states, and spurious results because of common method bias are of concern. However, the majority of the variables in the present study were objective measures (e.g., promotion, current salary) that are less susceptible to common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). For example, Judge et al. (1995) reported a difference of less than 1% between archival and self-reports of salary. Additionally, Crampton and Wagner (1994) demonstrated that common method variance is not a universal problem and that percept-percept inflation is less likely to occur when studying variables such as career advancement and
pay. Several factors potentially limit the generalizability of our results. Specifically, our response rate was low, thus it is uncertain the extent that our results generalize to the population sampled. Moreover, because our data were collected from one organization within the health care industry, it is also uncertain the extent that our results generalize to other organizations or industries. The final generalizability limitation is that most of our participants were female. In future research with larger samples, it would be interesting to test whether the benefits of mentoring are similar for both men and women.

Perhaps the most significant limitation is that because the data were cross-sectional, causal inferences cannot be made regarding the relationships observed. Although mentoring theory suggests that mentoring brings career benefits to the mentor, a valid argument can also be made that mentors are by definition senior, older members of the organization who have accumulated knowledge and wisdom that can be passed on to more junior members of the organization. Career success, at least objective success, is commonly associated with age and tenure (e.g., Judge et al., 1995). Therefore, it may be that career success is an antecedent of mentoring others rather than a benefit or outcome. However, it is interesting to note that our data do not show a significant relationship between mentoring experience with age, organizational tenure, or education level (see Table 1) despite the fact that these variables do relate to career success (primarily salary), as would be expected. Moreover, recall that mentoring experience added a significant amount of unique variance toward the prediction of salary, promotions, and subjective career success beyond the control variables commonly linked to career success. Together, the pattern of results lends credence to the notion that the differences observed in career success between mentors and nonmentors cannot be merely attributed to differences in demographic and/or human capital. This is not too surprising given that because of the changing nature of careers, such as multiple lifetime career paths and a protean approach to career development, opportunities for mentoring others extend beyond older, senior members of organizations (Finkelstein, Allen, & Rhoton, 2003; Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Thus, although the design of the present study does not allow us to rule out the possibility that career success is an antecedent of mentoring, we believe there is ample theoretical and empirical research to suggest that the reverse is entirely plausible. Clearly, longitudinal research is needed to better test the causal nature of these relationships. The results of the current study make a critical contribution to the mentoring literature in that they lay the groundwork and provide support for taking on the challenge of conducting such time-consuming and costly research by first demonstrating that significant correlational relationships among the variables of interest do indeed exist.
In conclusion, it seems important to continue to examine the relationship between career success and mentoring others. We hope the present results serve as a springboard for such research. By focusing on the mentor, the present study provides a more full-range understanding of the outcomes that might be associated with mentorships. This information may be useful to organizations that want to encourage individuals to assume the time-consuming and challenging task of mentoring others.

References


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Elizabeth Lentz is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida, where she also received her Master of Arts degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Her research interests include mentoring relationships, leadership development, organizational development, selection, and performance appraisal.

Rachel Day was awarded her PhD in 2005 from the University of South Florida. She is a research scientist for the American Institutes for Research’s Workforce Research and Analysis Program. Her research interests include mentoring, training, and career development.