The Importance of Perceived Similarity Within Faculty-Faculty Mentoring Dyads

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This study investigated the effects of gender similarity, perceived similarity, and relationship type (formal vs. informal) within faculty-faculty mentoring dyads on various mentoring outcomes from the protégé’s perspective. Perceived similarity was expected to be a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction, affective commitment, and job satisfaction than gender similarity. Perceived similarity was also examined as a potential mediator of relationship type and relationship satisfaction. Tenure-track faculty who reported having mentors ($N = 45$) answered questions regarding their primary career mentor and other workplace attitudes. Results indicated that perceived similarity had a positive, greater effect than gender similarity on relationship satisfaction, affective commitment, and job satisfaction. Perceived similarity did not mediate the relationship of informal mentoring and relationship satisfaction.
Mentoring

- Origins in Greek mythology
- A mentor is a senior person who offers friendship, guidance, and counseling (DeBolt, 1992)
- Primary functions of a career mentor (Portner, 1998)
  - Relates with their protégé (one who receives mentoring) by maintaining a relationship based on mutual trust and professionalism
  - Assesses their protégé’s career progress
  - Coaches their protégé by serving as a role model
  - Guides their protégé toward a state of independence
Outcomes of Mentoring

Protégé outcomes (Chao, 1997)
- Greater job & career satisfaction
- More promotions & higher incomes
- Increased job involvement & affective commitment

Mentor outcomes (Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000)
- Personal growth & sense of reward
- Increased learning & job performance
- Organizational recognition

Organizational outcomes (Ragins & Scandura, 1999)
- Lowered turnover intentions
- Improved productivity
- Greater organizational socialization
- More instances of organizational citizenship behavior
Faculty career mentoring

- Recent trend of formal mentoring programs for new faculty (Strong, 2009)
- Call for more research in the university setting (Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991)
- Formal mentoring programs require extensive planning (Strong, 2009)
- Several areas of faculty mentoring (University of Michigan STRIDE, 2002)
  - e.g., role modeling, advice about networking & advancement
Dyadic Fit

- **Dyad**: a pair of individuals
- Poor *dyadic fit* is a leading reason for negative mentoring experiences (Eby & Allen, 2002)
  - Demographic mismatch
  - Low perceived similarity
Demographic similarity

- Used in formal program matching
- Matching typically based on gender, race, rank, etc.
- Inconsistent results on same-gender/mixed-gender outcomes (e.g., Burke & McKeen, 1997; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000)
Perceived similarity
  – Perceptions of similar attitudes, work styles, career aspirations, etc.

Leads to:
  – Greater satisfaction with mentor
  – Higher ratings of mentor effectiveness
    (Armstrong, Allinson, & Hayes, 2002)

Attraction-similarity paradigm (Byrne, 1971)
  – Greater perceived (attitudinal) similarity $\rightarrow$ greater liking
  – Liking is a key component of relationship development
## Mentoring Relationship Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Naturally occurring</td>
<td>– Arranged by 3rd party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Mutual attraction &amp; liking</td>
<td>– Matching based on demographic or job characteristic information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Approx. 5 year duration</td>
<td>– Approx. 6 months to 1 year duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Freely progressing</td>
<td>– Structured checkpoints &amp; goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Informal superior to formal

- Those with informal mentors report fewer interpersonal issues, higher salaries, and more support than those with formal mentors (Scandura & Williams, 2001)

Challenges of formal mentoring

- Mismatched values, personalities, or work approaches (Ragins & Cotton, 1999)
- Discrepancies in communication styles (Kram, 1985)
- Lower trust and less resiliency to problems (Eby & Allen, 2002)
Hypothesis 1

A: Perceived Similarity $\rightarrow$ Protégé Relationship Satisfaction $>$ Gender Similarity $\rightarrow$ Protégé Relationship Satisfaction

B: Perceived Similarity $\rightarrow$ Affective Commitment $>$ Gender Similarity $\rightarrow$ Affective Commitment

C: Perceived Similarity $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction $>$ Gender Similarity $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction
Hypothesis 2

A:

Perceived Similarity → Protégé Relationship Satisfaction → Affective Commitment

B:

Perceived Similarity → Protégé Relationship Satisfaction → Job Satisfaction
Affective commitment and job satisfaction are exogenous predictors of turnover intent (e.g., Brooke, Russell, & Price, 1988)
Hypothesis 4

Relationship Type (Informal vs. formal) → Perceived Similarity → Protégé Relationship Satisfaction
Participants

- 573 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and Social Science tenure-track faculty from four institutions were invited
- 252 participants (44% response rate)
- 45 participants with career mentors
  - 26 men (58%), 17 women (38%)
  - 16 assistant (36%), 14 associate (31%), 13 full (29%)
  - 36 were White (80%), 4 were Asian (9%), 3 other (7%)
  - 10 Air Force Institute of Technology, 5 Central State University, 11 University of Dayton, 19 Wright State University
Participants Cont’d

– Dyad characteristics
  – 28 same-gender dyads, 16 mixed-gender dyads
  – 15 formal dyads, 30 informal dyads
Measures

– **Perceived similarity** (Turban, Dougherty, & Lee, 2002)
  • 5 items, $\alpha = .86$

– **Protégé relationship satisfaction** (Ragins & Cotton, 1999)
  • 4 items, $\alpha = .89$

– **Relationship type** (Allen & Eby, 2003)
  • Formal - “assignment made by someone else in the organization” or
  • Informal - “mutual attraction/spontaneously developed”
Measures Cont’d

– **Affective commitment** (Allen & Meyer, 1990)
  
  • 3 items, $\alpha = .86$

– **Job satisfaction** (Dolbier, Webster, McCalister, Mallon, & Steinhardt, 2005)
  
  • “All things considered, I am satisfied with my current position”

– **Turnover intent** (University of Michigan STRIDE, 2002)
  
  • “I have seriously considered leaving this institution”
  
  • Reverse-scored
Procedure

- Invitation email to all invited faculty sent from deans of each respective college
- Anonymous and confidential online work climate survey
  - SNAP survey software
  - Gift card incentive (excluding AFIT for restrictions against incentive-driven research)
- Bi-weekly email and postcard reminders sent out to faculty who had not already participated
  - Total of 6 follow-ups (ending Feb. 2010)
## Results: Hypotheses 1A-1C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived similarity</td>
<td>3.80 (.85)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2. Protégé relationship satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4. Affective commitment</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>4.00 (1.20)</td>
<td>.54**</td>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Turnover intent</td>
<td>3.21 (1.57)</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Relationship type</td>
<td>1.67 (.48)</td>
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<td>.35*</td>
<td>.21</td>
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<td>.24</td>
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*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01. Gender similarity 1=same, 2=mixed. Relationship type 1=formal, 2=informal.*

**Supported**
Results: Hypothesis 2A

Perceived Similarity → Affective Commitment

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<tr>
<td>.56**</td>
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<td>.61**</td>
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<tr>
<td>.51**</td>
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<tr>
<td>.27†</td>
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Protégé Relationship Satisfaction

Note. † p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01. Betas from mediation outside parenthesis.

Not supported
Results: Hypothesis 2B

Perceived Similarity

(0.61**) 0.29†

Protégé Relationship Satisfaction

(0.54**) 0.41**

Job satisfaction

Note. † p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01. Betas from mediation outside parenthesis.

Supported
Results: Hypotheses 3A and 3B

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Supported
Results: Hypothesis 4

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<th>Perceived Similarity</th>
<th>Protégé relationship satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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Note. † p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01. Relationship type 1=formal, 2=informal.

Not supported
Discussion

- Perceived similarity is a predictor of protégé relationship satisfaction, job satisfaction, and affective commitment, while gender similarity is not (Ensher & Murphy, 1997)
- Perceived similarity works through protégé relationship satisfaction to affect job satisfaction
- Higher affective commitment and job satisfaction predict lower turnover intent (Brooke, Russell, & Price, 1988)
- Protégés in informal relationships are more satisfied with their mentor
Implications

Universities should:

• Focus on protégé’s relationship satisfaction
  – Contributes to overall job satisfaction

• Emphasize perceptions of similarity during matching process
  – Allow more protégé & mentor input

• Encourage and foster an environment for informal mentoring relationships
Limitations & Future Research

• Low power
• Cross-sectional study

Future research
• Design true experiments
• Uncover factors underlying informal mentoring success
• Examine other potentially key variables and outcomes
  – e.g., satisfaction with communication, duration of relationship, amount of contact
Presence of a Mentor
Do you have a career-related mentor?
• Yes
• No

Perceived Similarity Scale Items
Thinking of your primary mentor (the one with whom you have the most regular contact):
My mentor and I see things in much the same way.
My mentor and I are alike in a number of areas.
My mentor and I have similar working styles.
My mentor and I have similar career aspirations.
My mentor and I have similar values and attitudes.

Protégé Relationship Satisfaction Scale Items
Thinking of your primary mentor (the one with whom you have the most regular contact):
My mentor is someone I am satisfied with.
My mentor disappoints me. (R)
My mentor has been effective in his/her role.
My mentor fails to meet my needs. (R)

Gender Similarity Scale Item
Thinking of your primary mentor (the one with whom you have the most regular contact, is he or she):
• Same gender as you
• Different gender than you

Affective Commitment Scale Items
I do not feel ‘emotionally attached’ to this organization. (R)
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization. (R)