



The Mentoring Relationship Challenges Scale: The impact of mentoring stage, type, and gender

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the role of relational challenges as reported by 309 protégés in various stages and types of mentoring relationships. The Mentoring Relationship Challenges Scale (MRCS) was newly constructed using the results of an earlier qualitative study (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). The scale measured three factors of relational challenges which were: Demonstrating Commitment and Resilience, Measuring Up to a Mentor's Standards, and Career Goal and Risk Orientation. The results demonstrated that with respect to mentoring stages, those protégés in the beginning stages of their relationships reported experiencing significantly fewer challenges related to Demonstrating Commitment and Resilience than those in the mature or ending stages of the relationship. Also, it was found that the type of mentoring relationship (traditional, step-ahead, or peer) affected the prevalence of the three types of challenges. Protégés in peer relationships reported significantly fewer of all three types of challenges than those in step-ahead or traditional relationships. However, contrary to predictions, there were no significant differences found between those in informal versus those in formal mentoring relationships. As expected, protégé and mentor gender interacted significantly. Female protégés reported experiencing significantly fewer challenges related to the factor of Measuring Up to a Mentor's Standards, than did male protégés. Also, female protégés reported experiencing a significantly higher degree of relational challenges related to Career Goal and Risk Orientation from their male mentors than from their female mentors. Finally, after controlling for perceptions of career and psychosocial support for protégés in traditional mentoring relationships, two of the three relational challenges factors remained significant and explained a significant amount of variance in overall satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. This suggests that relational challenges, at least for traditional mentoring relationships, serve as an important mechanism to impact overall relationship satisfaction.

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Introduction

"Hilda began by asking me: "What's your budget? She said, "I need you to raise this much money by this date." That was my test. She said, "You come back, and when you tell me you have raised \$10,000 then we'll talk again." And she told me exactly how you do it. She said, "You call all your friends. You make a list of 100 people who may give you \$100. You make another list of another 50 people who may give you \$200. And come back, and when you've done that and you've got your \$10,000, then let's talk again" (as cited in Ensher & Murphy, 2005, pg. 129).

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The above quote depicts a mentoring relational challenge given by Hilda Solis, the current United States Secretary of Labor to her protégé, Sharon Martinez, (formerly Mayor of Monterey Park in Southern California). At the time of the interview in 2005, Solis (D-CA) was serving as a member of the United States House of Representatives and Sharon Martinez was an up and coming politician. Past research has found that relational challenges are common in interpersonal relationships such as those between intimate partners (Gottman, 1993; Tannen, 1995), friends (Gains, 1994), and even coworkers (Fletcher, 1999). However, more recently, researchers have begun to examine the impact of relational challenges on mentoring relationships as well (Eby, 2007; Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Kalbfleisch, 2007). A mentoring relational challenge can be defined as a unique test or a series of challenges posed to assess a mentoring partner, and can be used as a means to determine further investment into the relationship (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). This study provides a unique empirical examination of mentoring relational challenges leading to a better understanding of mentoring processes and practices.

A mentor is defined as one of a network of helping relationships who provides emotional and career support and can serve as a role model (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). There has been an increased wealth of research from academics (Noe, Greenberger, & Wang, 2002; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003) and a great deal of attention paid to mentoring in the popular press (Higgins & Kram, 2008). Mentoring as a practice and program has increased in popularity not only in the United States but also globally (Clutterbuck, 2007). Moreover, formal mentoring programs have become an integral part of many organizations' approach to human resource development (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007).

Mentoring prevalence and benefits

Why has the practice and study of mentoring proliferated so rapidly and in such a far reaching manner? It is likely because the benefits related to mentoring are substantial, not only for individual protégés and mentors, but also for their organizations (Noe et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2003). Protégés with effective mentors earn greater compensation, are promoted more rapidly, and have greater career mobility than those with ineffective mentors or no mentoring at all (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Dreher & Cox, 1996; Hezlett & Gibson, 2005). Not only do protégés benefit from mentoring relationships, but mentors derive important benefits from the relationship. Mentors report a renewed sense of commitment and excitement to their professions and organization as well as a sense of satisfaction at being part of the development and growth of their protégé (Allen et al., 2004; Allen, Lentz, & Day, 2006; Noe et al., 2002).

Organizations benefit as employees communicate more effectively, increasing their sense of loyalty and organizational commitment, and turnover is reduced (Butyn, 2003; Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Hegstad & Wentling, 2004; Perrone, 2003). Mentoring has also been acknowledged as a highly useful tool for the attraction of new employees and their subsequent socialization (Benabou & Benabou, 2000; Singh, Bains, & Vinnicombe, 2002) and as an aid in the development and retention of high potential talent (Hegstad & Wentling, 2004; Payne & Huffman, 2005).

Although mentoring is proven to be highly useful it is not always beneficial for all individuals. In fact, there has been a burgeoning focus on the negative aspects or "the dark side" of the mentoring relationship. The quality of mentoring relationships can vary dramatically and a bad mentor may indeed be worse than none at all (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). Researchers have investigated the negative aspects and have identified specific toxic mentoring behaviors including bullying, jealousy, abuse, neglect, and credit-stealing (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2008). Protégés can also be responsible for relationship problems by betraying trust, damaging the mentor's reputation or simply ignoring the mentor or being ungrateful (Eby & Allen, 2002). It would be simplistic to assume that mentoring relationships are either completely good or completely bad. Instead, like other types of close relationships, most mentoring relationships have both positive and negative aspects. Mentoring relationships may flow through times that vary in the satisfaction they provide and their effectiveness (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007).

Mentoring theories relevant to relational challenges

Researchers have begun to probe more deeply into the intricacies of relationship dynamics to determine how and when a mentoring relationship deteriorates or thrives and what can be done to increase mentoring relationship effectiveness (Eby, 2007; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Kalbfleisch, 2007). Previous research in mentoring (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001; Ugrin, Odom, & Pearson, 2008) has suggested that social exchange theory (Foa & Foa, 1974; Homans, 1961) and the norm of reciprocity provides a reasonable explanation for understanding mentoring processes. According to previous research, social exchange theory suggests that mentors provide certain resources to a protégé which might include their connections, their skills, feedback or any number of instrumental or psychosocial dimensions. In return mentors expect reciprocity from their protégés whether that might be appreciation, a new skill, or a fresh perspective (Ragins, 1997; Ragins & Scandura, 1994). In sum, what mentors and protégés give and receive might be very different but must be seen as valuable by both parties.

Eby (2007) extends the ideas of social exchange and provides a comprehensive review of relational problems in mentoring. Eby provides an investment model of mentoring. The Eby mentoring investment model suggests that both mentors and protégés evaluate their perceived costs and benefits of being in the relationship with each other. When the perceived benefits (i.e., learning new skills) outweigh the costs (i.e., investment of time) of being in the relationship, then the relationship will flourish. In turn these perceptions of costs and benefits will continue to impact their episodic interactions and subsequent satisfaction with the relationship as well as their desire to commit to the relationship long term. Eby also suggests that the ability of both mentors and protégés to access other relationship alternatives (i.e., another mentor in the organization) has an important influence on the

relationship dynamics as well. The investment model of mentoring emphasizes the importance of mentors determining that their investment into the relationship is worth the effort.

Another relevant theory derived from the close relationship and communication literatures is mentoring enactment theory (Kalbfleisch, 2007). This theory suggests that mentors and protégés engage in an ongoing series of relational challenges in the form of communication strategies and conversational goals that impact their relationships. This theory is particularly useful as it provides recommendations for the initiation as well as ongoing maintenance and repair of the mentoring relationship. For example, mentoring enactment theory suggests that it is more effective to request help from a mentor on a specific task initially rather than ask them to commit up front to being a mentor. Mentors can get to know protégés and then as rapport and trust build, the relationship will develop into mentoring over time. Taken together, both mentoring investment and mentoring enactment theories suggest that mentors may not commit to a protégé relationship immediately. Instead, mentors may pose a series of relational challenges to protégés to determine how well they perform initially and as the relationship moves forward. Assuming the protégés meet the relational challenges appropriately, then the mentor will be more likely to invest more deeply into the relationship and provide greater benefits to the protégé resulting in greater mutual satisfaction and relationship effectiveness. Although relational challenges can be posed by the mentor, or the protégé, the types of challenges posed are different (Ensher & Murphy, 2005) and in this study we focus specifically on the relational challenges posed by mentors to their protégés.

Mentoring stages

Kram (1985) provided groundbreaking qualitative research in mentoring which suggested that mentoring relationships evolve over a period of sequential phases: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Initiation takes place over the first 6 to 12 months and involves mentors and protégés formulating expectations and getting to know one another. Cultivation, which may last from two to five years, is the second phase in which the relationship matures and psychosocial and instrumental support are at their highest levels. Separation involves a transition period where the protégé establishes more independence from the mentor, both geographically (Ragins, 1997) and emotionally (Chao, 1997). Redefinition is the final phase in which mentors and protégés develop a different relationship more akin to that of friends and peers.

Kram's original conceptualization is still widely accepted and frequently cited more than 20 years later (Bozeman & Feeny, 2007).

Subsequent quantitative work on Kram's mentoring phases has found differences among the type of support provided by mentors to their protégés in the various phases (Chao, 1997; Pollcok, 1995). Bouquillon, Sosik, and Lee (2005) examined Kram's mentoring stages among 88 working professionals in education and industry. Consistent with previous research they found that protégés in the separation phase reported receiving the lowest levels of instrumental, psychosocial, or role modeling support. One important departure from previous work (Chao, 1997; Kram, 1985) was the pace of the mentoring relationship as the mentors and protégés in Bouquillon et al., seemed to progress through the various phases at an accelerated rate. These authors suggest that this may be due to the varying expectations of mentors and protégés in different organizational contexts.

In fact, McGowan, Stone, and Kegan (2007) suggest that protégés have different needs and expectations from their mentors at various stages of their personal and career development. Mentors and protégés form expectations about each other based on their own needs and then subsequently make determinations of their satisfaction of the relationship. Considering the variety of expectations and support found by research in the different mentoring phases, it seems likely that mentors will pose distinct relational challenges to their protégés during the different phases therefore the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 1. The types of relational challenges found in the beginning stage of the mentoring relationship differ as compared with those in the later stages.

Types of mentoring relationships

Mentoring was traditionally seen as a dyadic process between a senior person and a less experienced protégé (Levinson, 1978; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). However, in the past 20 years, the approaches to mentoring have evolved and expanded to include a network of developmental relationships (Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Thomas & Higgins, 1996). Mentoring relationships come in a variety of forms such as group mentoring (Dansky, 1996) e-mentoring (Ensher, Heun, & Blanchard, 2003), peer mentoring, (Kram & Isabella, 1985) and step-ahead mentoring (Ensher et al., 2001). Peer and step-ahead mentors are related but distinct types of relationships. A peer mentor is typically at the same organizational level or holds equivalent professional status to their protégé whereas a step-ahead mentor is an individual who is one level above the protégé in the organizational hierarchy or holds a position that is the next logical step in the protégés career progression (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). In particular, there is a growing body of research on peer mentoring that provides important insights into its similarities and differences to traditional mentoring (Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997; Bozionelos, 2004; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001) More recently, researchers have begun to examine the innovative benefits of peer mentoring in a variety of settings including software firms (Bryant, 2005), libraries (Level & Mach, 2005), and higher education (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Authors Eddy, Tannenbaum, Lorenzet, and Smith-Jentsch (2005) found that organizations that offer a continuous learning environment are more likely to foster the development of peer mentoring.

McManus and Russell (2007) suggest that peer mentors may be beneficial for organizational members as peers can be easier to locate and connect with. However, while peer mentors may be easier to obtain, they may lack the connections and status of traditional mentors. In particular, researchers have found that peers may offer a high degree of psychosocial support (Allen et al.,

1997) and reciprocity (Ensher et al., 2001). However, peer mentors may not offer the same degree or type of career support that traditional mentors provide (Allen, McManus, & Russell, 1999). Based on this research, it is likely that there will be differences between peer mentors and traditional and step-ahead mentors on their likelihood of posing relational challenges to their protégés. The following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 2. The various relational challenges differ by type of mentor, such that peer mentors are less likely than traditional or step-ahead mentors to provide relational challenges to their protégés.

Mentoring context

Although the type of mentoring relationship (such as traditional or peer) is very important, the literature suggests significant differences in the mentoring experiences of protégés in formal, sponsored programs and those in informal, or spontaneously developed relationships (Finkelstein & Poteet, 2007; Ragins, 2007). Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) found that protégés in informal mentoring relationship experienced greater career support and higher salaries than those in formal relationships, however having a formal mentor is still better than none at all. Interestingly, Underhill (2005) conducted a meta-analysis to assess the effectiveness of formal mentoring programs in corporate settings and found strong statistical support for Chao et al.'s (1992) original research in that individuals with mentors fared better than those without mentors, and that informal mentoring had more positive outcomes than formal mentoring.

Two recent comprehensive reviews of the literature provide research embodying the question of whether formal or informal mentoring relationships yielded more outcomes for protégés, mentors, and their organizations (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007). Recent research has seen a shift towards looking closely at not only the outcomes but the specific variables that impact the experiences of protégés in formal versus informal relationships. For example, Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, and Marchese (2006) provided an empirical examination of a year-long formal mentoring program and found that mentor pro-activeness and protégé perceptions of similarity had an important impact on positive mentoring outcomes. Egan and Song (2008) conducted a randomized experimental study and found that protégés in highly facilitated formal mentoring programs reported greater job performance and organizational fit than those in low-level facilitated programs. Based on this research, it seems likely that protégés will perceive significant differences in relational challenges posed by their mentors when comparing formal versus informal mentoring relationships. The following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 3. The prevalence and type of tests experienced by protégés in formal mentoring programs differ as compared to those in informal relationships.

Mentoring and gender

Past research has found that traditional mentors in high level positions, which are often held by white men, may be hesitant about becoming involved with female protégés for a variety of reasons (McKeen & Bujaki, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1996; Thomas, 2001; Young, Cady, & Foxon, 2006). However, this form of “protective hesitation” may be particularly harmful as it denies opportunities to women. There is a robust body of research in mentoring that has found that mentoring can be an important means for women to move ahead in organizations (Catalyst, 2002; Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2003; Ragins, 1997; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). McKeen and Bujaki (2007) categorize the major findings of the research on gender and mentoring and suggest that mentors can be particularly helpful to female protégés by: a) clarifying overt and subtle performance expectations, b) providing feedback on a style with which men are comfortable, c) enabling access to informal networks, d) providing challenging assignments, and e) debunking stereotypes.

The research on gender and mentoring has found that there are consistent differences in mentoring relationships between males and females. According to a recent meta-analysis examining gender differences in mentoring (O'Brien, Biga, Kessler, & Allen, 2010), female protégés consistently report more psychosocial support than male protégés. Allen and Eby (2004) also found that female mentors provided more psychosocial support to protégés and male mentors provide more career support overall. Authors Smith-Jentsch, Scielzo, Yarbrough, and Rosopa (2008) compared electronic and face-to-face peer mentoring among college freshmen. These authors found that protégés with female mentors received more psychosocial and instrumental support than those protégés with male mentors. This finding suggests that female mentors may be more adept at rapport building online than male mentors. In another recent study, Elliot, Leck, Orser, and Mossop (2006) examined the role of trust and gender differences in a qualitative study with 15 mentors. These authors found that male mentors were more likely to feel that trust had to be earned and that they were likely to test their female protégés as the relationship evolved. This implies that there may be important gender differences in the area of relational challenge suggesting:

Hypothesis 4. Relational challenges within mentoring relationships differ for male and female protégés. Specifically, male mentors are significantly more likely to pose relational challenges (as measured by the Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale) to their protégés than female mentors.

Mentoring relational challenges and satisfaction

Ensher and Murphy (2005) conducted a qualitative study composed of interviews with 50 successful mentor and protégé pairs and examined the relational challenges posed by these mentors to their protégés. In this study, the authors found that the mentors

often posed relational challenges that served as tests to determine the future direction of their relationship with their protégés. Moreover, there was a distinct set of relational challenges that occurred in the initial stages of the mentors and protégés getting to know one another and then another category of relational challenges that occurred as the relationship progressed. For example, in the opening quote, Sharon Martinez (formerly Mayor of Monterey Park in Southern California), reflected on her experience of being mentored by the current United States Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). Sharon respected Hilda for the initial relational challenge posed to her and Hilda was impressed that Sharon demonstrated her commitment to her. This pair went on to have a mutually satisfying and beneficial mentoring relationship. In fact, the results of Ensher and Murphy's (2005) qualitative research suggested that most protégés appreciated the experience of being tested by their mentors and felt that relational challenges contributed to their satisfaction with the relationship. Moreover, the experience of Martinez and Solis maps well to mentoring investment and enactment theories. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested by an integration of mentoring relationship theories (Eby, 2007; Kalbfleisch, 2007) and Ensher and Murphy's (2005) qualitative research:

Hypothesis 5. Protégés in satisfying mentoring relationships report experiencing a higher degree of relational challenges than those protégés in less satisfying relationships, after controlling for the support factors of career and psychosocial support.

In conclusion, mentoring relational challenges have been under-researched and yet hold great promise to increase our understanding of mentoring processes and practices. An integration of mentoring theories and past related research along with newer qualitative research (Elliot et al., 2006; Ensher & Murphy, 2005) suggests that relational challenges are important for successful mentoring relationships. Understanding relational challenges can be of immediate use to individual mentors, protégés, and organizations that support mentoring. Mentors and protégés who are aware of relational challenges can better understand how to effectively anticipate and respond to them as they arise. Likewise, organizations that support mentoring programs can provide training and coaching related to relational challenges. The Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale provided here can be useful to other academic researchers and those involved in mentoring program evaluation.

Method

Participants

Participants ($n = 312$) were part of a web-based survey panel established by Zoomerang. These respondent panels provide advantages of cost, data collection speed, control over attributes, and high generalizability due to large national databases (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Zoomerang has an extensive online participant pool (ZoomPanel) which can reach Zoomerang's 2.5 million existing pre-screened members that are representative of the U.S. population and can be filtered based on selected attributes. For the present study, potential respondents were filtered on the basis of age (25 years of age and older), location (United States), employment status (full-time or self-employed), and those involved in a mentoring relationship. Zoomerang members who met the criteria for the present survey (as described above) were invited via email to take part in the survey. We did not have access to the numbers of people invited to complete the survey compared to those who actually did, but for the survey panel we used it is typically about 12% (Couper, 2001). This email contained a web link with the title and a brief description of the survey. If participants agreed to participate, they were redirected to the online survey and asked to agree with the informed consent, stating that they read and understood the contents of the form and were 18 years of age or older. If participants did not agree with the informed consent, their survey was automatically ended.

The initial sample responding to this questionnaire consisted of 335 managers and professionals (61% male) from a variety of industries in the United States (final usable sample = 300). Forty percent of participants indicated that their age was in the range of 35 to 40. A large percentage of this group indicated Caucasian as their ethnicity (82%) with the next largest groups being Asian (5%) and African American. The sample represented fairly diverse professions, and was homogenous with respect to education level. A substantial percentage of the sample had completed a bachelor's degree (38%) and another sizable group had a graduate or professional degree (31%). Sixty seven percent were employed full-time, with another 21% indicating self-employed. Almost 40% of the sample earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in salary with another 20% earning between \$100,000 and \$150,000. These features appear to be characteristics of professionals. The respondents worked in a wide range of industry with no more than about 10% in any one industry (e.g., healthcare, finance, manufacturing, education, and retail most often reported industries). As far as job level, 17% reported themselves as executive management level.

Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale (MRCS) development

To develop a relational challenges scale, we used information from interviews with 50 individuals who were in or had been in mentoring relationships as protégés or as mentors in three specific industries: Media, Technology, or Politics. These interviews were part of a larger project (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). The participants ranged in age from approximately 30 to 70 years; the average age was 48, 34% of the participants were men, and 29% were people of color. In person interviews lasted approximately an hour. Almost all of the interviews were conducted by two interviewers, which was helpful to process the non-verbal aspects of the interview to aid in interpretation. Each interviewer took careful notes in addition to tape-recording the interview to ensure accuracy. We began each interview with a statement of the purpose of the study and gained permission from the participants to share their stories. General questions surrounded the individual's mentoring relationships in either the protégé or mentor role.

Issues around relational challenges arose in the interview responses early on, therefore in the last half of the interviews we asked specifically whether they had relational challenges posed to them as protégés or whether they posed these as mentors. An independent transcriptionist was retained to type the interviews and then those word documents were transferred into Atlas.ti v5.0 (a qualitative software tool).

For content analysis coding we followed two stages. Stage 1—Once all the interviews were completed, the preliminary data analysis efforts involved reading the transcript of each interview at least two times in its entirety and looking for passages citing tests and challenges in the relationship; Stage 2—Transcripts were electronically coded for each of various types of relational challenges uncovered in Step 1. Four coders were trained to recognize the types of interactions that could constitute relational challenges. They coded one transcript together as a group and then another two transcripts individually looking for agreement as to which passages would be coded as relational challenges. The coders coded the remaining transcripts on the computer using Atlas.ti v5.0. This coding consisted of highlighting the passages that were relational. The coding of the interviews resulted in approximately 40 instances of relational challenges (about 1.75 per interview transcript as some interviewees reported two, while others reported none). The electronic coding using the qualitative software tool, Atlas.ti v5.0, facilitated the summarizing and sorting of the challenges to identify common themes.

The common themes gathered from the content analysis were used to develop scale items that capture the many different types of tests and challenges reported by mentors and protégés. For the 24-items of the Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale (MRCs) participants were asked to rate each item with respect to their experience on a scale from (1) indicating “not at all true” to (4) “very true.” Specifically the instructions read: *In many mentoring relationships, mentors will pose a number of tests or challenges to the protégé. In other words if you do not pass the test, or accept the challenge, you may jeopardize your relationship. Thinking about the relationship with the mentor you are rating in this survey, please indicate how much you think the statement is true or not true in your relationship.*

Questionnaire measures

For all questionnaire measures referring to a mentor, respondents were asked to report on their current, or most recent mentoring relationship. Each questionnaire response then referred to that chosen mentor.

Mentor support and satisfaction

Thirteen items of Scandura and Katerberg's (Scandura, 1992) eighteen-item Mentor Functions Questionnaire (MFQ) was used to measure two of the three types of typical mentor support—instrumental, and psychosocial (role modeling was not included)—that was characteristic of the one influential mentor the participants chose to rate, however only instrumental and psychosocial were used. Career/instrumental support was measured with nine items and included items such as, “My mentor has taken a personal interest in my career.” The Cronbach's α for this subscale was .89. Psychosocial support included four items such as, “I have shared personal problems with my mentor” with a Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with these items on a 5-point scale with strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Each subscale was summed and divided by the number of items in the scale. Previous confirmatory factor analyses have shown results for the three-factor structure for the mentoring functions scale (Scandura & Williams, 2001).

Mentor relationship satisfaction

In addition, five items measured overall satisfaction with the mentoring relationship on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) (Allen & Eby, 2003, which modified an earlier version by Ensher et al., 2001). A sample item “I feel satisfied with my mentor” Cronbach's α was .92 for this subscale.

Mentor relationship variables

Participants were asked to indicate the stage at which they considered their relationship with their mentors. These stages included: Beginning, Middle, Mature, and Ending. Each stage included a short definition:

Beginning: You are just beginning to get to know your mentor and are starting to establish expectations for the relationship. *Middle:* You feel like you know your mentor fairly well. At this point you are familiar with his or her general approach to work and expectations for the relationship. *Mature:* You feel comfortable in your relationship and your roles are clear. *Ending:* Your relationship is ending.

This is a technique suggested by previous research as a way to ensure some equivalency for relationship stage in data analysis (e.g., Chao, 1997). A large percentage of the respondents in this study reported ($n = 138$) a mature relationship state. Analysis of stage by number of years in the relationship revealed that those in the beginning had been in the relationship at an average of 2.24 years, in the middle at an average of 3.19 years, in a mature relationship for 6.1 years, and in a relationship that was now ending for 5.1 years on average.

For the purpose of making mentor relationship ratings, participants were asked to categorize their most influential mentor and for the full sample, 53% ($n = 170$) reported that their most influential mentor was a traditional mentoring relationship; 29% indicated that a step-ahead mentor ($n = 95$) characterized their relationship; only 15% indicated peer mentoring ($n = 49$).

We also asked participants to indicate whether their mentor was a formal mentor (where the mentor and protégé were assigned to each other) or an informal mentor, where the mentoring relationship developed spontaneously. A little more than 40% ($n = 130$) indicated current participation in a formal mentoring program.

Cross-tabulation revealed that protégé and mentor gender were not independent ($\Phi V (df = 300) = .396, p < .001$). Although overall 66% of the mentors were male, only 43% of female protégés were mentored by men and 57% were mentored by women. Conversely, 81% of men were mentored by other males, while only 19% were mentored by women.

Results

Initial analyses

An initial exploratory factor analysis using Oblimax rotation of the Mentoring Challenges Relationship Scale suggested three distinct factors. These are summarized in Table 1. The first factor consisted of 11 items (reliability of .91) that related to challenges of “Demonstrating Commitment and Resilience” and included items such as: “My mentor may give me critical feedback.” The second factor consisted of 7 items (reliability = .88) and contained items that focused challenges relating to “Measuring Up to Mentor’s Standards.” A sample item is, “My mentor strongly suggests I take his/her advice.” The third factor consisted of 5 items (reliability = .80) surrounding challenges related to “Career Goal and Risk Orientation” and included such items as: “My mentor expects me to know what I need to do in order to accomplish my career goals.” One item was dropped because it loaded above .50 on all three factors. The final scale consisted of three factors for a total of 23 items. All computed variable distributions were examined for outliers and all revealed relatively normal distributions. The intercorrelation matrix is presented in Table 2.

Test of main hypotheses

To test the first hypotheses (1, 2, and 3) regarding how differences in the relationship factors would be affected by mentoring relationship stage (beginning, middle, mature, ending), type (traditional, step-ahead, or peer), or context (those in formal or informal mentoring relationships), a $4 \times 3 \times 2$ MANOVA was conducted with each of the three relational challenge variables as dependent variables.

Table 1
Exploratory factor analysis results rotated factor loadings. ($n = 312$).*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<i>Factor 1—Requiring Commitment and Resilience 11 items ($\alpha = .91$)</i>			
Challenged me to reach a difficult, specific goal.	.685	.341	.480
Encourages me to improve certain aspects of my personality.	.702	.404	.444
Has challenged me to think clearly about my career aspirations.	.792	.308	.478
Made it clear that I needed to put in the work for my job, rather than just expecting to take the easy road to advance my career.	.740	.433	.479
Thinks it is important for me to be very dedicated to my job or my career.	.734	.452	.411
Challenges me to think in ways I have never thought of before.	.744	.197	.497
Expects that he or she can trust me.	.648	-.059	.548
May give me critical feedback.	.809	.194	.416
Expects me to take critical feedback without being defensive.	.798	.265	.391
Questions me and makes me justify the decisions I make.	.682	.535	.460
Will ask me to work in situations where I can expect my performance to be under scrutiny.	.623	.470	.440
<i>Factor 2—Measuring Up to Mentor’s Standards 7 items ($\alpha = .88$)</i>			
Seemed to expect that I would overcome particular hurdles before he or she would establish our mentoring relationship.	.306	.767	.402
Put me under initial scrutiny.	.280	.789	.283
Seemed to be interested in whether I was a competent individual before investing a great deal of time in developing our relationship.	.461	.680	.272
Strongly suggests I take his or her advice.	.378	.779	.368
Feels it is important for me to see the world similarly to the way he or she sees it.	.229	.771	.399
Tested me specifically on my skill level and I felt if I did not have those skills I might run afoul of my mentor.	.371	.810	.302
Pressures me in my performance by telling me not to mess up.	.191	.791	.260
<i>Factor 3—Career Goal and Risk Orientation 5 items ($\alpha = .80$)</i>			
Has suggested that I take risks in my career.	.402	.417	.667
Asks me to get involved in additional projects that I would not normally do.	.488	.369	.769
Waits for me to take the initiative to set up meetings.	.473	.431	.738
Expects me to know what I need to do to accomplish my career goals.	.468	.427	.738
Is willing to go out on a limb for me in exchange for my loyalty.	.490	.208	.747
Eigen values	9.94	2.83	1.01
Percent of variance	41.42%	11.80%	4.22%

* All Eigen values greater than 1.0 and the three factors combined accounted for 57.43% of variance.

Table 2
Intercorrelations among questionnaire measures.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
RCS commitment and resilience (Factor 1)	2.87	.62					
RCS measuring up (Factor 2)	2.22	.72	.52**				
RCS goal and risk orientation (Factor 3)	2.59	.64	.75**	.66**			
Career support	3.84	.63	.57**	.26**	.44**		
Psychosocial support	3.31	.83	.32**	.23**	.31**	.42**	
Mentor satisfaction	4.09	.68	.52**	.09	.29**	.63**	.34**

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed). Listwise $n = 309$.

With respect to **Hypothesis 1** and mentoring stage, follow-up univariate F s on mentoring challenges to a multivariate analysis that approached significance (Wilks' Lambda = .94, $F(3, 669.43) = 1.83$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .02$) showed a significant difference by mentoring relationship stage for only the first factor of relational challenges, $F(3, 277) = 3.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Those protégés in the beginning stages of the relationship reported less of factor one (*Demonstrating Commitment and Resilience*) than those in mature or ending stages of the relationship. Protégés in the beginning and middle did not differ significantly on this factor. The differences by mentor stage on factor three, *Career Goal and Risk Orientation* showed a similar pattern of results, that were not significant $F(3, 277) = 1.98$, $p = .11$. Mean scores on the middle factor did not differ among mentoring relationship stage. Therefore **Hypothesis 1** was partially supported given that the beginning stage did differ in relational challenges, but not for all factors.

With respect to **Hypothesis 2** on mentoring type, the overall multivariate analysis did show a main effect for mentor type (Wilks' Lambda = .92, $F(6, 550.00) = 3.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$), and follow-up univariate F s for mentor type showed significant differences for all three relational factors. Factor 1, *Demonstrating Commitment and Resilience*, $F(2, 277) = 10.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Factor 2, *Measuring Up to Mentor's Standards*, $F(2, 277) = 5.41$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Factor 3, *Career Goal and Risk Orientation*, $F(2, 277) = 9.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Post hoc analyses for each factor by mentor type revealed that protégés with peer mentors reported significantly lower levels of the three relational challenges than those with traditional mentors, therefore supporting **Hypothesis 2**. **Table 3** contains the means and standard deviations for mentor type and relationship stage and shows the results of the post hoc tests.

In testing **Hypothesis 3**, mentoring context, we found no significant differences found on the relational challenges between protégés in informal mentoring relationships and those in formal mentoring relationships. There were no significant interactions between relationship stage, mentor type, or mentoring context as indicated by the multivariate or univariate statistics.

Table 3
MANOVA means and standard deviations for three relational challenges scale (RCS) factors by mentor type and relationship stage.

Type of mentor	Relationship stage	RCS Commitment and resilience Factor 1			RCS Measuring up Factor 2			RCS Goal and risk orientation Factor 3		
		Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Traditional	Beginning	2.68	.76	22	2.34	.81	22	2.45	.76	22
	Middle	2.94	.52	29	2.34	.62	29	2.76	.57	29
	Mature	3.09	.51	83	2.30	.74	83	2.70	.63	83
	Ending	3.09	.71	35	2.44	.76	35	2.86	.61	35
	Total	3.01 _{ab}	.60	169	2.34 _a	.73	169	2.71 _c	.64	169
Step-ahead	Beginning	2.61	.40	10	2.00	.86	10	2.35	.56	10
	Middle	2.85	.56	38	2.40	.79	38	2.59	.57	38
	Mature	2.78	.62	35	2.00	.64	35	2.53	.68	35
	Ending	2.75	.61	11	2.05	.63	11	2.53	.62	11
	Total	2.79 _a	.57	94	2.17	.74	94	2.53	.61	94
Peer	Beginning	2.05	.72	6	1.97	.54	6	1.97	.54	6
	Middle	2.66	.70	11	1.96	.67	11	2.35	.63	11
	Mature	2.71	.47	18	1.84	.60	18	2.36	.50	18
	Ending	2.54	.62	14	1.95	.51	14	2.28	.72	14
	Total	2.57 _b	.62	49	1.91 _a	.57	49	2.29 _c	.60	49
Total	Beginning	2.56 _d	.70	38	2.19	.79	38	2.35	.69	38
	Middle	2.86	.57	78	2.32	.72	78	2.62	.59	78
	Mature	2.96 _d	.56	136	2.16	.71	136	2.61	.63	136
	Ending	2.90	.70	60	2.26	.71	60	2.66	.67	60
	Total	2.87	.62	312	2.22	.72	312	2.59	.64	312

Means with same subscripts within factors are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Overall $n = 312$.

Role of mentor and protégé gender

With respect to [Hypotheses 4](#) related to gender, we hypothesized that there would be gender differences in the types of challenges experienced by male and female protégés and this was supported. However, we also were cognizant that the mentor's gender may impact the likelihood of employing relational challenges. Therefore a separate MANOVA exclusively examining protégé and mentor gender were used with the three relational challenges factors as dependent variables. (Gender could not be included in the original MANOVA because of diminishing cell sizes). Results revealed a significant multivariate effect for protégé gender (Wilks' Lambda = .97, $F(3, 309) = 2.83, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$), and a multivariate statistic that approached significance for the two-way interaction between mentor gender and protégé gender (Wilks' Lambda = .98, $F(3, 309) = 2.28, p = .08, \eta^2 = .02$). Individual univariate F tests for each of the relational challenges scale factors showed that for Factor 2 (Measuring Up to a Mentor's Standards), female protégés were significantly less likely ($M = 2.07, SD = .72$) to experience those types of relational challenges than male protégés ($M = 2.30, SD = .74$), regardless of mentor gender ($F(1, 311) = 2.88, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$). There was also a significant two-way interaction between mentor gender and protégé gender for Factor 3 ($F(1, 311) = 5.48, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$). The pattern of means showed that males reported no difference in the amount of relational challenges surrounding Factor 3, Career Goal and Risk Orientation, regardless of mentor gender ($M = 2.65, SD = .61$, male mentor, male protégé versus $M = 2.64, SD = .64$, female mentor, male protégé). However, female protégés reported experiencing vastly different levels of Career Goal and Risk Orientation based on mentor gender. Male mentors provided significantly more relational challenges related to Career Goals and Risk Orientation (Factor 3) than did female mentors to their female protégés ($M = 2.75, SD = .68$) (see [Fig. 1](#)).

[Hypothesis 5](#) stated that individuals reporting high levels of mentoring satisfaction would also report high levels of relational challenges. To examine this hypothesis, we ran a hierarchical regression examining the relationship of the three types of challenges on mentor satisfaction, after controlling effects of two types of typical mentor support (career and psychosocial). Results revealed that relational challenges still predicted a significant amount of variance in mentor satisfaction across all three mentor types (traditional, step-ahead, and peer) after controlling for typical mentoring support factors (R^2 change = .08, $F(3, 305) = 16.17, p < .001$, overall regression model $F(5, 302) = 58.006, p < .001$). Regression results presented in [Table 4](#) show that Factor 1 (Requiring Commitment and Resilience) had a significant positive relationship with mentor satisfaction as suggested by [Hypothesis 5](#), while Factor 2 (Measuring Up to Mentor's Standards), was negatively related to mentor satisfaction.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that relational challenges provide an important and innovative new lens to understanding mentoring relationship dynamics and satisfaction. The findings suggest practical ideas for individuals involved in mentoring and for the many organizations that value mentoring and devote significant resources to successful mentoring relationships. This newly constructed Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale (MRCS) makes an important contribution to the field of mentoring by providing a tool to pursue a new stream of research and program evaluation in mentoring.

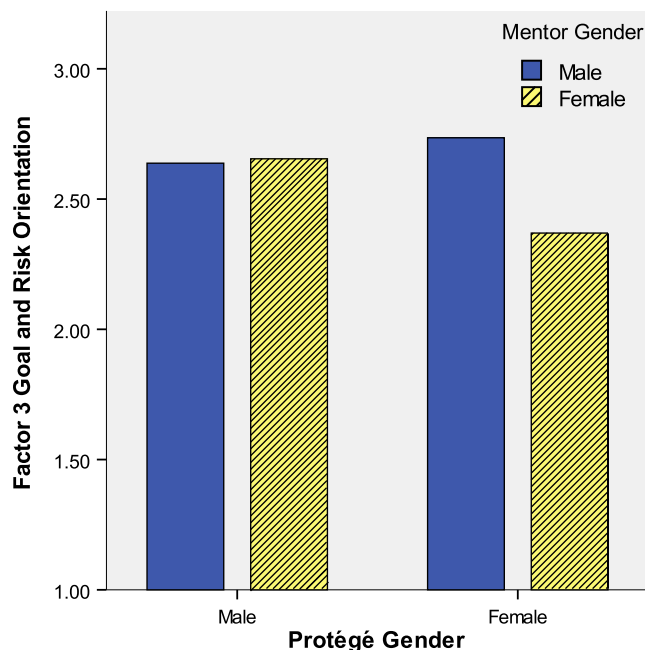


Fig. 1. Mean goal and risk orientation RCS factor by mentor and protégé gender.

Table 4

Regression results for mentor satisfaction with mentor support (career and psychosocial) and relational challenges scale (RCS) factors.

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.440	.187		7.699	.000
	Career support	.608	.050	.581	12.091	.000
	Psychosocial support	.099	.039	.122	2.533	.012
2	(Constant)	1.338	.179		7.740	.000
	Career support	.463	.055	.442	8.461	.000
	Psychosocial support	.099	.037	.122	2.694	.007
	RCS commitment and resilience (Factor1)	.472	.074	.436	6.381	.000
	RCS measuring up (Factor2)	-.168	.050	-.183	-3.327	.001
	RCS goal and risk orientation (Factor 3)	-.148	.074	-.142	-2.006	.056

n = 309.

Relational challenges: differences by mentoring stage, type, and context

The results of the study suggest that mentoring stage matters. Protégés in the beginning stages of their relationships with their mentors reported experiencing significantly fewer relational challenges of the factor Demonstrating Commitment and Resilience than those in the more mature stages of their relationships. In addition, a similar pattern of results that approached significance was also found for the factor of Career Goal and Risk Orientation. These findings are consistent with the exchange theory and well exemplified by the opening quote as mentors initially will be less likely to invest in their protégés in a variety of ways such as by providing critical feedback or encouraging risk until the protégé has proved to be worthy.

There are a number of implications for protégés. First, the findings indicate that mentors be initially hesitant to pose challenges related to Demonstrating Commitment and Resistance as these type of challenges may represent considerable time, effort, and risk on behalf of the mentor. Therefore, protégés would be well advised to be anticipatory of these types of challenges by demonstrating their commitment to their jobs, careers, and mentors and by seeking out new challenges on their own and communicating their success to their mentor so that the mentor can see they are ready for challenges. Protégés can demonstrate their resilience by being pro-active and asking for critical feedback and assignments from their mentors. Most importantly, protégés need to demonstrate their trustworthiness so that their mentors will see them as committed. Interestingly, there was no difference found in any of the stages on the factor related to Measuring Up to a Mentor's Standards which may have multiple meanings. It may be that Measuring Up to a Mentor's Standards is equally important in the beginning phases of the relationship as well as the later phases as the relationship progresses. Alternatively, future research could investigate whether these challenges are sequential in most relationships. Mentors and protégés would be well advised to discuss their expectations around the three types of challenges early on in their relationship.

The results of this study clearly suggest that mentoring type matters too. Specifically, the participants in this study experienced significantly fewer relational challenges from their peer mentors as compared to traditional mentors. This finding reflects past research in the sense that peer mentors typically provide more psychosocial than instrumental support as compared to traditional mentors (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Marelich, 2002). Overall, it seems likely that peer mentors are more accepting of their protégés and less likely to pose relational challenges. This finding suggests that peer mentors may be particularly useful for those just beginning to develop mentoring relationships, those who experience low self efficacy in their mentoring relationships, or for anyone particularly sensitive to relational challenges. On the other hand, individuals who utilize peer mentors exclusively may find it difficult to work within the confines of a more challenging traditional mentoring relationship. This finding relating to differences in relational challenges posed by different types of mentors illuminates the importance of maintaining a diverse network of mentors.

Contrary to expectations, relational challenges experienced by protégés in formal mentoring programs as compared to those in informal mentoring relationships did not significantly differ. Perhaps this may simply be a reflection of the fact that there is a wide degree of variability in how mentors and protégés connect and are supported in both formal mentoring programs and informally developed relationships. For example, some formal mentoring programs provide extensive pre-assessment, training, and ongoing coaching while others do not. Likewise, some informal mentoring relationships occur with a lineage of mentoring and thus there is a high degree of accountability for their success (Ensher & Murphy, 2005), whereas others are more isolated. Additional research that examines the variability present in the type of formal and informal relationships and the subsequent impact on relational challenges would certainly make a valuable contribution.

There were some interesting findings related to relational challenges and gender. First, it was found that female protégés were significantly less likely than male protégés to experience relational challenges related to Measuring Up to a Mentor's Standards. There are several explanations for this finding. First, it may be that female protégés are in fact experiencing fewer of these types of relational challenges due to lingering negative gender stereotypes resulting in protective hesitation (Thomas, 2001). Or, it may be that female protégés are less attuned to these challenges than their male counterparts for a variety of reasons. Recent research

indicates that although societal norms are changing, males tend to still be depicted in traditional masculine roles in the media leading to a belief that a typical man's role is to compete, provide, and protect (Gentry & Harrison, 2010) so male protégés may be more likely to assume that they are being challenged to measure up to a mentor's demands. New research on women's careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) also indicates that women's career patterns and motivations are different from men and that women may focus on authenticity, balance, or challenge at various points of their careers so may be less aware of challenges depending on where they are in their career. Future research can investigate the interesting question of whether female protégés actually experience fewer of these types of relational challenges or are simply less aware of them.

Interestingly however, we also found significant variations with respect to mentor gender and relational challenges. Specifically, we found that the protégé of both genders experienced greater challenges related to Career Goal and Risk Orientation from their male mentors as compared to their female mentors. This finding suggests that male mentors overall may have a very different set of expectations and style of interacting with their protégés around expecting protégés to exhibit clarity, purpose, and an orientation towards risk and initiative. The implications of these results suggest that mentors and protégés would be well advised to make these implicit operating assumptions explicit before entering their relationship and continue to revisit any existing differences as the relationship progresses.

In thinking about mentoring challenges we have posited that they are a good thing in a relationship, however, we wanted to ascertain that protégés shared our enthusiasm. We found mixed results. Specifically, we found that for one of the relational challenges (Demonstrating Commitment) protégés were more satisfied with mentors who posed more of these types of challenges than mentors who did not after taking into account the mentor's level of career and psychosocial support. However, mentors who posed challenges that focused on the protégé's Resilience and Measuring Up to Mentor's Standards, had protégés who were less satisfied than protégés who reported less of these challenges. These empirical findings are partially consistent with earlier qualitative research investigating the mentoring dynamics of mentoring pairs (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). However, there may be an alternative explanation for these findings as causality is difficult to parse out in this study. Is it that relational challenges result in greater satisfaction? Or, alternatively, is it that mentors who are satisfied and pleased with their protégés challenge them more? Or those who are not pleased also end up challenging their protégés more. Future research that examines the issue of causality would make an important contribution. Regardless of the directionality of relational challenges and satisfaction, this finding clearly suggests that mentors and protégés should discuss relational challenges and what they mean to each other.

Implications for practice

Approximately 70% of Fortune 500 companies offer formal mentoring programs (Gutner, 2009). Many other organizations work to provide environments where mentoring thrives organically (Zachary, 2005). Volumes have been written about how to design, administer, and evaluate a mentoring program, yet formal mentoring programs are not always successful and informal relationships may fail to meet their full potential (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Eby & Allen, 2002). New ideas to understand and improve upon mentoring relationships are vital. The results of this research have direct implications for the practice of Human Resource Management. For example, in this research, we found that there were significant differences in the frequency and types of relational challenges posed by mentors in the various stages of the mentoring relationship. It would be extremely helpful for HR professionals to inform protégés about the explicit type of challenges they are likely to encounter from mentors in the beginning and throughout the phases of the relationship. If protégés can be made aware of the specific challenges likely to be posed to them then they can be prepared to respond to them more effectively. Protégés could be educated to ask mentors for direction regarding specific relational challenges in terms of expectations of responding to advice, demonstrating advice, or confronting hurdles. Similarly, training curriculum could be developed and provided to mentors to enable them to become aware of the specific relational challenges they are likely to pose to their protégés and how to most effectively communicate them.

Implications for theory and research

Mentoring research has often sought to identify the “what” of mentoring. In other words, what is it that actually takes place during a mentoring relationship that improves the mentee's career or job performance? Many researchers have contributed to this knowledge and yet the exact interpersonal dynamics remain mysterious and elusive (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Relational challenges provide a new lens to understand the intricacies of relationship dynamics, which ultimately can have a positive impact on individuals' careers and on an organization's success. For example, recently, Sun Microsystems completed a longitudinal study on their mentoring program and reported a 1000% return on their investment into their mentoring program resulting in outcomes such as increased networks across the company for knowledge transfer and a diversity of ideas and innovation (Dickinson, Jankot, & Gracon, 2009).

Unfortunately, this type of study is the exception, rather than the rule, as typically organizations fail to adequately assess why mentoring does not work and its implications (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). Research related to relational challenges can provide a valuable tool to improve organizational assessment and program evaluation. For example, the Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale can be provided to mentors and protégés during the various phases of their relationship and used as a tool to assess the development of the relationship. The results could provide the basis for a fruitful discussion around initial expectations and what is working and what is not working in terms of meeting relational challenges. The tool could be also be used as part of an assessment at the end of a formal mentoring program as one lens to understand how and why some relationships were more effective than

others. Ideally, the results would loop back to suggest further refinements for training curriculum and coaching in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.

The MCRC provides an excellent starting place to understand the type of challenges that mentors pose to their protégés. A useful extension of this research would be to draw out aspects of the exchange theory and examine how mentors' and protégés' initial expectations related to relational challenges impacts their relationship. In addition, an investigation of other variables that might impact the frequency and type of challenges posed would be enlightening. For example, a more in-depth investigation of how relational demography, or computer-mediated communications impacts relational challenges would be valuable next steps in this research stream. Also, investigating how mentors and protégés are matched, such as by professional referral, a computer algorithm, or a social connection might also have an impact on the degree, frequency, and type of relational challenges posed. Future research can yield answers to these important questions.

In addition, a related scale that investigates the type of challenges that protégés pose to their mentors would be a helpful addition to our understanding of the protégés perspective. A protégé scale would also increase our understanding of the complex dyadic relationship dynamics that exist and be a source of innovative stream of mentoring research. Another valuable extension of this research that would present a more rounded perspective of mentoring relational challenges and dynamics is measuring the impact of generations. There is a burgeoning literature that indicates that various generations have different needs regarding how they are managed (Crampton & Hodge, 2009; Hewlett, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2009) as well as how they are mentored (Meister & Willyard, 2010; Munro, 2009). Therefore, it may be that various generations pose distinct relational challenges and that a protégés' reaction to these challenges may vary depending upon their generational viewpoint.

Full engagement of all generations in the workplace can be aided by effective mentoring (Munro, 2009), yet mentoring is not the only useful tool for employee development. A related, but distinct type of support is executive coaching, which may be more task specific and time-constrained than an organic mentoring relationship (Naficy & Isabella, 2008). Often executive coaches are retained to develop top talent and involve a process of feedback and improvement related to specific competencies or goals (Thach, 2002). An interesting extension of this research would be to investigate how relational challenges are similar and/or different in an executive coaching relationship. Although often executive coaches receive financial remuneration for their assistance, it is likely that they may still present relational challenges to the person they are coaching as they are investing their time and reputation. In general, more research that teases out the differences between executive coaching and mentoring would be informative.

Limitations

Although this research makes an important contribution to the literature on mentoring and careers, it is not without its limitations. First, the results of this study only reflect the perceptions and experience of the protégé presenting a biased perspective of the mentoring relationship dynamics. Future research that incorporates both mentors' and protégés' perspectives would present a more rounded picture of the truth of the relationship. The sample of protégés used in this study was relatively homogenous with respect to racial and generational demography. Previous research in leadership has suggested that diverse dyads may experience relational challenges very differently from homogenous dyads; therefore future research with more diverse samples would make an important contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon of relational challenges. Also, to address ethnocentric bias, future research should conduct research using a more global approach to sampling. The Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale (MRCS) is newly constructed so although it appears to have good face validity, a further refinement of the psychometric properties of the scale could be useful. Future researchers who use the MRCS may find it helpful to provide a more open-ended set of directions to survey participants to avoid the effect of priming or a negative bias against the idea of relational challenges. Finally, the use of internet survey panels is relatively new. However, there have been several recent high quality articles in the field of careers using internet survey panels for data collection (Gibney, 2009; McAlearney, 2005). While there are drawbacks for internet survey panels, one could argue that the same sort of problems plague other types of surveys, or web-based survey research. And therefore, internet survey panel data collection has comparable validity to other methods of data collection (Schonlau, van Soest, Kapteyn, & Couper, 2009). Future research in validating the relationship challenges scale will use additional forms of data collection and samples.

In conclusion, this research makes an important contribution to the mentoring literature by providing a newly developed scale which can be used to pursue an innovative stream of research. Practical implications of this research suggest that mentors and protégés would be well advised to be aware of these explicit relational challenges so they can better meet them. Likewise, organizations that support mentoring programs can provide training and coaching related to relational challenges. The Mentoring Relational Challenges Scale provided here can be a useful tool for academic research as well as those involved in mentoring program administration. In conclusion, relational challenges are an inherent part of interpersonal dynamics, and while these are often unconscious and unexplored, they can make or break a mentoring relationship.

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