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## HOW DO MENTORS AND PROTÉGÉS CHOOSE EACH OTHER? THE INFLUENCE OF BENEVOLENCE, OCB, AND POS ON THE INITIATION OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

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*Mentoring relationships play a critical role in career and organizational success yet little research has explored how mentors and protégés choose each other before beginning a productive mentoring relationship. We integrate the selection and trust literatures to describe a mentor's and a protégé's evaluation of each other before initiating a mentoring relationship. Our conceptual framework distinguishes between a mentor and a protégé in their assessments of the other's potential for organizational citizenship behaviors and perceived organizational support, respectively, and how those assessments are contingent upon perceptions of benevolence. We conclude by outlining the implications of this conceptual model for effective mentoring relationships in the workplace.*

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Mentoring relationships in the workplace are beneficial for both protégés and mentors. A meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals found that protégés reported greater job and career satisfaction, career commitment, compensation, and promotions (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Those who serve as mentors also report higher salaries and greater number of promotions as well as greater subjective career success (Allen, Lentz, & Day, 2006; Bozionelos, Bozionelos, Kostopoulos, & Polychroniou, 2011). The potential exists for mentors and protégés involved in productive mentoring relationships to realize significant personal and organizational gains.

The recognition that mutual learning and growth can occur in mentoring relationships has recently been characterized in the literature as relational mentoring. Relational mentoring is seen as a high quality mentoring relationship in which both the mentor and the protégé support each other in their career development (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). How, then, do mentors and protégés select each other to enhance the likelihood of achieving relational mentoring? What factors encourage and support the initiation and deepening of a mentoring relationship that will benefit protégés and mentors?

Previous research has found that mentors and protégés begin a mentoring relationship by using specific criteria (e.g., helpfulness; Bushardt, Fretwell, & Holdnak, 1991) to evaluate each other's characteristics (Allen, Finkelstein, & Poteet, 2009). Support has been found for factors such as personality characteristics (Hu, Thomas, & Lance, 2008; Turban & Dougherty, 1994), perceptions of protégés' abilities (Allen, Poteet, & Russell, 2000), and prior mentoring experience (Ragins & Cotton, 1993) as potential influences on the initiation of mentoring relationships. Given these findings, it is likely that some critical factors have yet to be investigated. We suggest that trust, and specifically benevolence (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995), is one such factor. Thus, through the explicit

inclusion of benevolence, our model expands on Kram's (1985) suggestion that trust is integral to the initiation and development of effective mentoring relationships.

The theoretical model that we propose incorporates each party's assessment of the other's benevolence as a critical component of the decision to initiate a mentoring relationship. Our model focuses on mentors' evaluations of protégés' potential to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) and protégés' assessments of mentors' potential to provide perceived organizational support (POS) before they choose to engage in a mentoring relationship. Furthermore, we propose that these evaluations are contingent upon assessments of mentors' and protégés' potential for exhibiting the trustworthiness factor of benevolence. Indeed, the assessments represented in our theoretical model are not meant to be comprehensive; rather, we wish to highlight a process not previously described in the research literature.

Our theoretical model contributes to mentoring research by addressing two significant gaps. First, no known research has explored how evaluations of a specific trustworthiness factor, i.e., benevolence, may influence the initiation of mentoring relationships despite research asserting that trust is integral to the quality of mentoring relationships (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007; Kram, 1985). Protégés who had higher levels of trust in their mentors, for example, were more likely to receive job-related information from their mentors that would support their career growth (Fleig-Palmer & Schoorman, 2011).

Second, there is a lack of theoretical models that explicitly examine the dyadic and bilateral nature of mentoring relationships. The existence of a relationship implies an interaction between two people; yet, mentoring research tends to focus on either the protégé or the mentor and not the dyad as an entity. Research is needed that explicitly incorporates both the mentor's and the protégé's perspective in the simultaneous assessment of the other's



potential for contributing to a quality mentoring relationship. Understanding how mentors and protégés evaluate each other before choosing to work together is important for the cultivation of mentoring relationships that are beneficial to both of the individuals involved and their organizations.

We begin our discussion by reviewing research on the initiation of mentoring relationships followed by an integration of selection research with mentoring research. Next, we support our theoretical model by examining the relevant OCB, POS, and benevolence literatures. Propositions are set forth and implications for research and practice are proposed.

## INITIATION OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Kram's (1983, 1985) work on the first phase of mentoring relationships, the initiation phase, provides some guidance as to the initial assessments made by mentors and protégés of each other. At the beginning of the initiation phase, the mentor assesses the protégé's potential for professional growth and performance. The mentor seeks a protégé whose growth and success will contribute to the organization and will reflect positively on the mentor. Concurrently, the protégé is looking for a mentor who will provide support and guidance. Initial assessments made by the mentor and protégé of each other are critical to establishing the foundation of a trusting mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985).

To date, the research that has addressed the selection process in mentoring relationships has focused on individual attributes. Individual characteristics of both mentors and protégés that influence the initiation of mentoring relationships include race, proactive personality, gender, locus of control, self-monitoring, and emotional stability (Aryee, Lo, & Kang, 1999; Hu et al., 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1993; Scandura & Williams, 2001; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Mentors appear to base their selection of protégés on factors such as competence, motivation, and learning orientation (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997). A mentor's perception of a protégé's ability was found to be more influential in deciding to work with a protégé than the mentor's perception of the protégé's need for help (Allen et al., 2000). Protégés appear to seek mentors who display competence (Olian, Carroll, Giannantonio, & Feren, 1988) through their job position, knowledge, and ability to share organizational knowledge (Gaskill, 1993). These results support Kram's (1983, 1985) suggestion that mentors and protégés assess each other's potential before deciding to work together.

The type of mentoring relationship can also influence the initiation phase. Some mentoring relationships are formally assigned, but many are entered into informally and volitionally. While mentoring research in general suggests that formal mentoring relationships are less beneficial than informal mentoring relationships, Ragins, Cotton, and Miller (2000) found that a protégé's level of satisfaction with a

mentor was a better predictor of mentoring outcomes than type of mentoring relationship. A protégé who is more satisfied with a mentoring relationship may feel a closer bond with his/her mentor that fosters a shared sense of commitment to each other's development. Additional research is needed to understand the process that facilitates the creation of high-quality mentoring relationships (Ragins & Verbos, 2007).

## THE SELECTION PROCESS IN MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Beginning with the earliest management researchers, emphasis has been placed on the importance of the selection process in establishing productive workplace relationships (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; Gilbreth & Gilbreth, 1915; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Roberts, Hulin, & Rousseau, 1978). Our aim with the proposed theoretical model is to highlight critical factors in the selection process in the context of mentoring relationships. We ground our model in Katz and Kahn's (1966) discussion of organizational selection processes to better understand the factors that may be considered by mentors and protégés when assessing the other prior to the initiation of a mentoring relationship.

Katz and Kahn's (1966) research considers the perspective of both parties involved in a selection process. Employers want employees who are willing to contribute above some minimum standard by engaging in spontaneous behavior (Katz & Kahn, 1966). During the selection process, employers seek to identify people who would be likely to engage in future OCB after being hired (Allen et al., 2004), and these assessments influence selection outcomes (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Mishra, 2011). Employers, therefore, want to select employees who demonstrate the potential for cooperative behavior.

The selection process must also be examined from the perspective of the potential employee (Katz & Kahn, 1966). During the selection process, an applicant is evaluating an employer as well (Palmer, Champion, & Green, 1999). Research suggests that applicants look to the employing organization and its managers to develop perceptions about future treatment (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). An organization's investment in its employees, e.g., providing growth opportunities, is related to perceptions of POS (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003). It is reasonable to conclude that applicants will consider an employer attractive if they develop positive expectations about the potential for future POS. Therefore, the selection process is a two-way information exchange in which each party is sharing information while simultaneously assessing the other party's potential for supportive workplace behaviors (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Palmer et al., 1999).

We relate the selection process in the workplace to that which a mentor and protégé undergo when deciding to work together. The Figure presents a theoretical model of a simultaneous, two-way information exchange between a

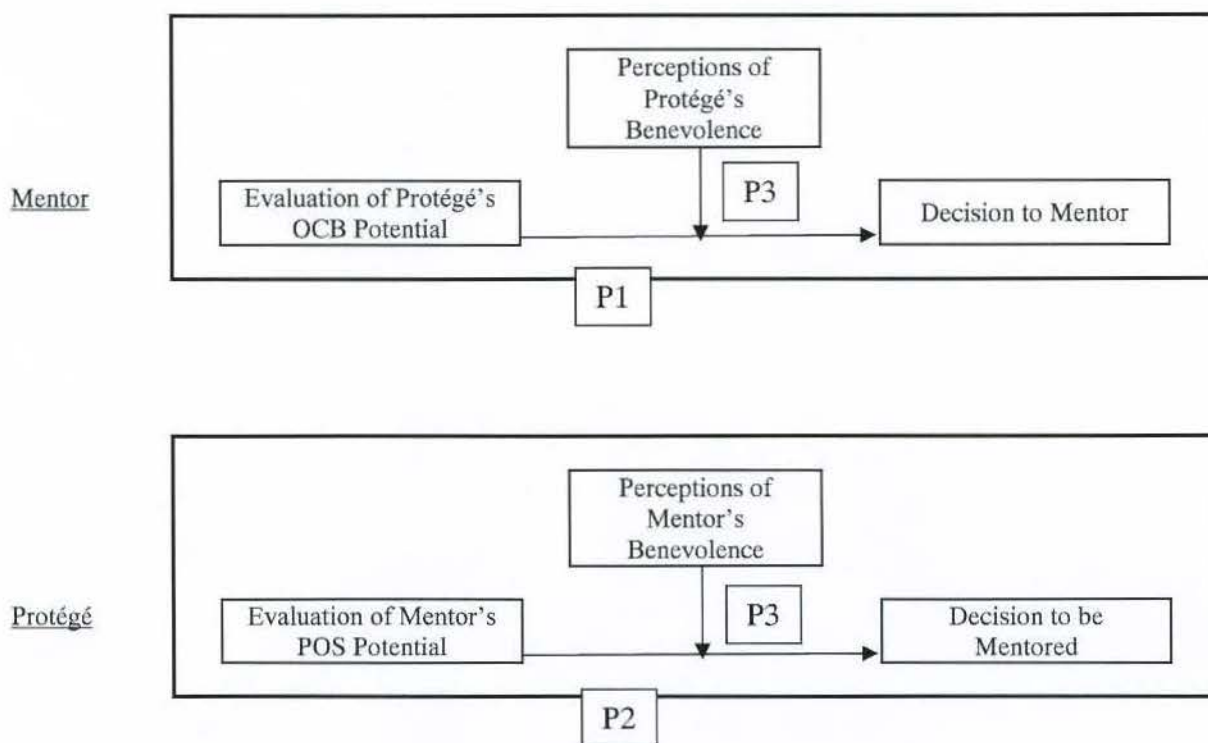


mentor and a protégé during which they assess each other prior to making a decision about working together. First, as an employer evaluates an applicant for the potential to engage in spontaneous behavior that extends beyond job requirements, so too will a mentor assess a protégé's potential for OCB. Second, we expand upon Katz and Kahn (1966) to suggest that, similar to job applicants, a protégé will evaluate a mentor's potential to exhibit POS in terms of professional and personal support. Lastly, we build upon the proposition that relational mentoring will occur when the

mentor and the protégé respond to each other's needs without thought of recompense (Ragins & Verbos, 2007) by introducing the trustworthiness factor of benevolence. As benevolence incorporates the notion of contributing to another's welfare without expecting anything in return (Mayer et al., 1995), the perceived level of a mentor's or protégé's benevolence may influence the strength of the relationship between the perceived potential for OCB/POS and the decision to mentor or to be mentored.

FIGURE

**Theoretical Model of the Influence of Perceptions of Benevolence on the Relationship between Perceived OCB/POS Potential and Initiation of Mentoring Relationship**



## ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIORS

Because of the increasing pace of technology, innovation, and globalization, an increasing number of today's jobs require collaborative decision making and problem solving (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Cascio & Aguinis, 2008). Employees who initiate offers of help to coworkers, try to create a favorable climate at work, or act to protect the organization are critical to organizational success (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006; Podsakoff et al., 2011). Behaviors such as these that are discretionary on the part of the employee are defined by Organ (1988) as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). Recognizing that an employer may choose to reward an employee for

engaging in OCB, Organ (1997) further clarified the definition by stating that OCB are not "... contractually guaranteed by the formal reward system" (p.89). OCB are discretionary in that employees exhibit these behaviors even though an employer cannot require an employee to do so (Organ, 1997; Organ et al., 2006).

The importance of OCB in contributing to organizational effectiveness has been suggested by several studies in the research literature. Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1997) found overall support for a positive relationship between OCB and organizational effectiveness with helping behaviors (altruism) significantly affecting outcomes such as performance quantity and quality. Likewise, in their meta-analysis, Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Blume (2009)



found that OCB are significantly related to individual outcomes such as performance and organizational outcomes such as customer satisfaction and turnover. These results suggest that employees who go beyond the call of duty reap benefits as well as their organizations.

Given that the performance of OCB appears to be an important contributor to individual and organizational effectiveness, it is logical to conclude that during the selection process employers would be interested in assessing applicants' potential to engage in future OCB. Allen, Fecteau, and Fecteau (2004) examined the effectiveness of different types of selection interviews in evaluating OCB potential and concluded that the propensity to engage in OCB could be assessed in a selection interview. Podsakoff et al. (2011) found that assessments of applicants' perceived OCB potential had an effect on raters' judgments such that applicants who rated higher on propensity for OCB were more likely to receive higher overall evaluations. In general, the results from the studies seem to indicate that the propensity for engaging in OCB can be predicted through a selection process.

We suggest that the selection process undertaken by employers to evaluate applicants' potential to demonstrate OCB is analogous to the selection process used by a mentor to evaluate a protégé before deciding to mentor him/her. Examining the selection process in a mentoring context, Allen et al. (2000) explored mentors' assessments of a potential protégé's ability. Allen (2004) expanded upon this study to find that protégé ability and willingness to learn were factors considered by mentors in the selection process. Moreover, even if a protégé is low on ability, a mentor may still select the protégé if he/she demonstrates a high level of willingness to learn. While these results have provided insight into protégé selection by mentors, there is still much that is unknown about the selection process in mentoring relationships.

Favorable evaluations of a potential protégé's ability and willingness to learn are not enough to guarantee a high quality mentoring relationship that benefits the protégé and the mentor as well as the organization. As employers need to select people who display a predisposition for helping and cooperative behaviors (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Casio & Aguinis, 2008) so do mentors need to select protégés who demonstrate the potential to exhibit OCB. Given the significant investment of expertise and time that mentors make in protégés, a protégé who is perceived to be willing to perform above and beyond required task performance would be attractive to a mentor. The mentor wants a return on his/her investment of knowledge and time in terms of reputation enhancement and contributions to the organization (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Scandura, 1999). A protégé who is helpful beyond required job duties, for example, may be more likely to give back to the organization in terms of desired work performance thus burnishing the mentor's reputation. Mentors are interested in how their protégés' success may benefit the organization

because such success reflects positively on a mentor's judgment in choosing to guide a particular protégé.

**Proposition 1** – The evaluation of a protégé's potential to demonstrate OCB will influence a mentor's decision to mentor the protégé.

## PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Perceived organizational support (POS) is defined as employees' beliefs regarding how much their organization values their work and demonstrates care for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceptions of POS are formed by employees' observations of actions by representatives of an organization such as managers (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Employees feel valued by an organization when managers offer discretionary rewards that are not required by organizational policies or reward systems (Tan & Tan, 2000).

Research on the antecedents and outcomes of POS suggest its applicability to the selection process. Antecedents of POS include supportive human resource (HR) practices (Allen et al., 2003), supervisor support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), and developmental experiences (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Sluss, Klimchak, and Holmes (2008) showed that subordinates who rated their supervisors higher on support were more likely to perceive that their organization cared for them. Employees who perceived that their organization cared about their well-being were more likely to report less emotional exhaustion (Jawahar, Stone, & Kisamore, 2007) and lower job search intentions (Dawley, Andrews, & Bucklew, 2008). Employees look to various sources, e.g., organizations and/or supervisors, to develop perceptions about the level of POS that they can expect in the future because POS influences outcomes meaningful to them. Selection research demonstrates that applicants undergo a similar process. Factors such as recruiter personableness or perceived training opportunities are viewed as signals of future support such as the commitment to employees' professional growth (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). Applicants may assess an employer's potential to provide POS before deciding to join that employer.

To the extent that we can assume the employer/employee relationship and the mentor/protégé relationship correspond, it is reasonable to posit that a protégé would be interested in a mentor's perceived level of POS. The risk to a protégé who invests effort in learning from a mentor is that the mentor may neglect the protégé or take credit for work performed by the protégé (Eby & Allen, 2002), and this risk may be greater when the mentor is the protégé's supervisor (Johnson, 2007). Protégés, thus, are vulnerable to a mentor's influence and may assess potential mentors' POS to predict if a mentor will evidence care for a protégé's professional and personal well-being.



Several empirical studies provide evidence that support our assertion. In examining the role of POS in the quality of a workplace relationship, Sluss et al. (2008) measured supervisor support by asking, for example, if an immediate supervisor would defend an employee's performance even if the supervisor lacked complete knowledge about the issue at hand. This is analogous to the protection function that mentors provide protégés. When a protégé is new to a workplace, he/she may make mistakes; thus, a mentor shields a protégé from undue blame until the protégé gains competence (Kram, 1985). POS has also been studied in relation to trust and risk-taking in a relationship. Ambrose and Schminke (2003) found a significant positive relationship between POS and trust in one's supervisor. Neves and Eisenberger (2010) reported that employees who rated their supervisors higher on POS indicated a greater willingness to take risks such as being honest about mistakes. Similarly, Mayer et al. (1995) suggested that in a mentoring relationship, a protégé will evaluate a potential mentor's capability to be supportive before deciding to trust the mentor and initiate a relationship with him/her.

Overall, a protégé may also be interested in a mentor's perceived ability to demonstrate POS because a mentor's POS may signal the access to resources necessary to productively invest in a protégé's growth. We believe that POS, rather than perceived supervisor support (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002) is the appropriate construct of interest because the mentor may not be a protégé's immediate supervisor but will still be seen by the protégé as a representative of the organization (Orpen, 1997). A mentor who can offer greater POS may be seen as having the time and energy as well as the personal and professional resources to invest in a protégé. A protégé may also view a mentor higher in POS as able to provide greater access to additional organizational resources such as developmental experiences or promotions. A mentor's perceived level of POS will signal to a protégé the level of concern for the protégé's well-being and will influence the protégé's decision to initiate a relationship with the mentor.

**Proposition 2** – The evaluation of a mentor's potential to demonstrate POS will influence a protégé's decision to enter into a mentoring relationship.

### THE TRUSTWORTHINESS FACTOR OF BENEVOLENCE

Trust is critical to fostering productive mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985; Hezlett & Gibson, 2007). An examination of mentoring dyads found a significant positive relationship between ratings of social support (e.g., personal interest in a person) and trust in a mentor or a protégé (Young & Perrewé, 2000). Similar results were found by a study conducted in China. The greater the trust in a protégé, the more likely a mentor will provide mentoring support

(Wang, Tomlinson, & Noe, 2010). Trust was also found to be key during the initiation phase of mentoring (Bakioglu, Hacifazlioglu, & Ozcan, 2010; Bouquillon, Sosik, & Lee, 2005). Together, these results point to the importance of trust in establishing and ensuring productive mentoring relationships.

In their model of the development of a trusting relationship, Mayer et al. (1995) propose that, before deciding to trust another, a trusting party evaluates three trustworthiness factors, one of which is benevolence. Benevolence is defined as wanting to do good for another without concern for remuneration (Mayer et al., 1995). Central to this definition is the notion that a benevolent individual acts without expecting anything in return. A benevolent person is concerned about the welfare of others, especially those with whom he/she interacts on a regular basis (Schwartz, 1992). According to Livnat (2004), one cannot be benevolent simply by possessing feelings of care and concern for another; one must also act upon such feelings; thus, a benevolent person actively seeks opportunities to do good. Factors such as helpfulness, caring, loyalty, and openness are subsumed under benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995; Schwartz, 1992).

Research in the area of trust has examined antecedents and outcomes of benevolence. When CEOs perceived lower levels of opportunistic behavior in their top management team, they were more likely to rate the team members higher on benevolence (Cruz, Gómez-Mejia, & Becerra, 2010). Managers were rated higher on benevolence when they implemented a new performance appraisal system, and employees were more willing to let the managers have control over employee well-being (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Higher levels of benevolence predicted greater closeness and interaction in a relationship (Law, 2008). Protégés who rated their mentors higher on benevolence were more likely to report receiving career support and knowledge from their mentors (Fleig-Palmer, 2009). Perceptions of benevolence influence the level of vulnerability in a relationship, i.e., the extent to which one will entrust his/her well-being to another (Mayer et al., 1995).

We suggest that mentors and protégés will evaluate each other's benevolence in addition to OCB/POS because benevolence is conceptually distinct from OCB/POS. OCB are discretionary workplace behaviors exhibited by an individual (Organ et al., 2006). POS is a belief about the value an organization places in an employee and is based on organizational or individual actions (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). While perceptions of POS and OCB are behaviorally based, benevolence is an attribution made about an individual's motivation underlying his/her helping behavior (Livnat, 2004). A person will be viewed as benevolent if the perceived motivation for acting is to promote another's welfare or to ease suffering (Livnat, 2004). A mentor or a protégé could provide support or help that is discretionary (POS or OCB, respectively) yet do so for reasons that are self-serving, e.g., as a career enhancer



(Eby & McManus, 2004). In such cases, neither the mentor nor the protégé would be viewed as benevolent because their motivation is to further their self-interest rather than to demonstrate genuine care. To insure a quality mentoring relationship, we suggest that mentors and protégés will evaluate each other's benevolence at the initiation of a mentoring relationship.

### THE MODERATING EFFECT OF BENEVOLENCE ON OCB/POS POTENTIAL AND THE DECISION TO INITIATE A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Although perceptions of OCB and POS are predicted to influence the initiation of mentoring relationships, the decision to engage in a mentoring relationship may depend on perceptions of benevolence. Although OCB and POS are viewed as discretionary actions, there may be a tangible reward for individuals who engage in OCB and POS repeatedly over time. An employee who performs tasks well and continuously takes the initiative to assist struggling coworkers may ultimately be rewarded with a pay raise or promotion because his/her work contributions are valued (Organ et al., 2006). While the enactment of a single OCB act is not explicitly recognized by an organization's formal reward system, the accumulation of such acts may benefit the employee demonstrating OCB (Organ et al., 2006). Similarly, POS may be enacted to increase the favorable feelings that employees have towards their organization (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Organizations may implement supportive HR practices such as participation in decision making and supervisor support as demonstrations of commitment to POS (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Yet, employees concerned about exploitation by their employer (Lynch, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 1999) may perceive the existence of such HR practices as window dressing (Allen et al., 2003), simply put in place to cynically enhance the organization's image. Recipients of OCB and POS may question the motives behind the behaviors.

We suggest that mentors and protégés undergo a similar calculus during the selection process before initiating a mentoring relationship. A mentor and a protégé will not simply rely on assessments of the other's potential for OCB and POS, respectively, to decide if they should work together. Their decision may also consider if each other appears to have a genuine interest in the other's welfare. Since benevolence incorporates the notion of actively identifying and demonstrating care and concern for another (Livnat, 2004) without expecting anything in return (Mayer et al., 1995), we expect that higher levels of perceived benevolence would more strongly influence the decision to initiate a mentoring relationship even if levels of OCB and POS were not high. Conversely, if a mentor and a protégé positively evaluate the other's potential for OCB or POS, they may still hesitate in deciding to initiate a mentoring relationship if they question the other's underlying motive for engaging in those behaviors. Thus, we suggest that the

effect of evaluations of mentors' and protégés' perceived potential for POS and OCB, respectively, on decisions to engage in mentoring relationships is contingent upon perceptions of benevolence.

**Proposition 3** – The relationship between a protégé's/mentor's perceived potential to engage in OCB/POS and the decision to work together in a mentoring relationship will be moderated by the perceived level of a protégé's /mentor's benevolence.

### IMPLICATIONS

#### Research Implications

A traditional model of mentoring in which a wise, all-knowing mentor imparts sage advice to a protégé (Kram, 1985) is less applicable in today's workplace that is characterized by the rapid development of new technologies. Such changes mean that organizational success is dependent upon the knowledge shared amongst employees (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008), and this requires mutual learning in mentoring relationships rather than the top-down learning that occurred in the traditional model.

Relational mentoring relationships promote interdependent learning such that the mentor and the protégé assist and guide each other in their development (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). In this paper, we identified potential key variables that provide explanatory power in how mentors and protégés select each other so as to encourage the development of relational mentoring. The importance of this selection process cannot be overstated since understanding how mentoring relationships get off to a good start is critical so as to foster the mutual learning and trust necessary for individual and organizational growth.

There are several contributions that this theoretical model makes to the existing literature. First, we explicitly incorporate the perspectives of both the mentor and the protégé in our model. Mentoring relationships are dyadic in nature. Empirical research shows that when interacting with others, people generally spend much of their time with one other person (Kelley et al., 2003). Even a protégé who is receiving support from a developmental network consisting of several mentors (Kram, 1985) would still probably interact with the mentors one at a time. Specifically identifying the processes for mentors and protégés as they select each other permits a more thorough and precise understanding of the patterns occurring at the initiation of mentoring relationships. This could be especially helpful for those mentors and protégés seeking a more relational type of mentoring relationship that is much more interdependent than a traditional type of mentoring relationship.

Second, our proposal that mentors and protégés evaluate the other party's benevolence as well as POS and OCB, respectively, before deciding to work together provides a



basis for the recognition of deep-level similarity that promotes mutual identification and learning. A sense of mutual liking and identification can be a catalyst for the initiation of a mentoring relationship (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Cotton, 1999); however, effective working relationships need to move beyond perceptions of surface-level perceived similarity as a basis for working together (Mayer et al., 1995). The potential to engage in benevolence, OCB and POS could be viewed as signals of the mentor's and/or the protégé's perceived intent to contribute to the mentoring relationship beyond the expected job requirements. Congruent expectations about the potential for supportive behavior could foster deep-level similarity that could lead to relational mentoring.

Third, the inclusion of benevolence in our model contributes to mentoring research as well as the OCB and POS literatures by highlighting the underlying motivation for engaging in OCB and POS. There can be instrumental aspects to OCB and POS. An employee engaging in OCB may be noticed and promoted (Organ et al., 2006), and POS may be offered to encourage improved job performance (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Yet, OCB and POS have a discretionary nature whereby both OCB and POS can be conceived of as activities engaged in without thought of recompense. Benevolence captures this underlying motivation of giving without expecting any reward and offers the possibility of conceiving of the initiation stage of mentoring in a context beyond simple instrumentality. In this light, the mentoring relationship is viewed as a complementary relationship that is mutually beneficial. The type of high-quality mentoring relationship that occurs in relational mentoring is possible when the mentor and the protégé share congruent expectations of unconditional support (Ragins & Verbos, 2007).

### Future Research

We suggest that the proposed theoretical model provides the foundation for some interesting directions for research on mentoring relationships in the workplace. First, to better understand the processes underlying relational mentoring, measurement issues must be considered. In addition to validated measures of OCB, POS, and benevolence that currently exist, a qualitative study may identify the types of data (e.g., behavioral, attitudinal, etc.) that mentors and protégés use as signals of OCB, POS, and benevolence. Future research could then develop and empirically test model-specific hypotheses. Second, Allen et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of understanding the influence of demographic variables on the matching process in mentoring relationships. Investigating the impact of generational differences may be particularly salient in the context of relational mentoring because of the emphasis on reciprocal learning. Future research could explore the impact of generational differences on the generation of high-

quality mentoring relationships to determine if such differences are indeed salient and predictive.

Third, workplace relationships now take place across time zones and continents due to rapid globalization. This suggests a need to investigate if the proposed model is generalizable across diverse cultures. For example, in collectivistic societies such as China, in-groups and out-groups play a more prominent role than in individualistic societies such as the United States (Hofstede, 2001). In-groups are defined by groups of individuals who share a strong sense of loyalty to one another (Osland, DeFranco, & Osland, 1999); they may consist of family, close friends, co-workers, or neighbors (Hofstede, 2001). Typically, only a trusted member, i.e., a member of one's in-group, would be considered for hire within an organization (Hofstede, 2001; Osland et al., 1999). This suggests that an initial criterion for the initiation of a mentoring relationship in a collectivist society may be membership in the appropriate in-group. However, once that initial criterion is met, the proposed model may still provide additional explanatory power for understanding the process by which mentors and protégés select each other, especially for relational mentoring. Research that examines the applicability of the proposed model in various cultural settings would assist mentoring researchers in better understanding the effect of situational contexts on mentoring process and, thus, benefit multinational organizations by encouraging mentoring relationships among diverse groups of employees.

### Practical Implications

The ideas set forth in this paper have important practical implications for managers seeking to foster effective mentoring relationships in the workplace. While managers have less control over the initiation of informal mentoring relationships, they can certainly structure and influence the initiation of formal mentoring relationships so as to better maximize outcomes (Allen et al., 2009). The process of matching mentor-protégé pairs is so important that, if not done well, it may lead to mentors and protégés experiencing significant dissatisfaction (Eby & Lockwood, 2005).

Allen et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of matching mentors and protégés on characteristics that will encourage the development of rapport between the mentor and protégé. We recommend that, in addition to matching mentors and protégés on characteristics such as skills, abilities, and personality (Allen et al., 2009), organizations implementing formal mentoring programs expand the selection process to include assessments of benevolence, OCB, and POS. Shared expectations about unconditional support between a mentor and protégé may facilitate a personal connection at a deeper level thereby increasing the likelihood that mutual learning will occur through honest and open feedback.

Our model also encourages managers to think carefully about the type of mentoring relationships needed in their



organizations. In some situations, a more traditional model of mentoring may be appropriate to address instrumental needs such as getting a protégé up to speed; thus, there may not be as great a need to assess the potential for benevolence, OCB, and POS. However, if the goal of the formal mentoring program is to encourage innovation in terms of process improvement or product development, then establishing a more relational type of mentoring relationship may be necessary so as to promote the mutual learning needed to meet such goals. In that case, managers are encouraged to include evaluations of the potential for benevolence, OCB, and POS in the selection process to increase the likelihood that mutual learning will occur in the mentoring relationship.

### CONCLUSION

The selection of a mentor/protégé as a potential partner in a mentoring relationship is a critical first step that influences the success of the working relationship. To better understand this process, we propose a theoretical model that considers variables not yet explored in the context of the initiation of mentoring relationships. By investigating the role of benevolence, OCB, and POS, we hope that new understanding will emerge of the dynamics underlying the process of information gathering and decision making as mentors and protégés evaluate each other during the initiation phase of a mentoring relationship.

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