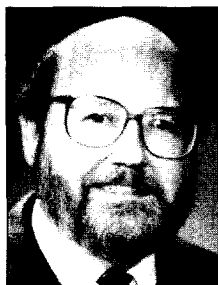


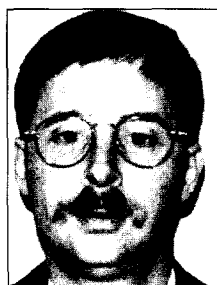
The Role of Personality and Work Values in Mentoring Programs



Felissa K. Lee



Thomas W. Dougherty



Daniel B. Turban

Mentor and protégé personality traits and work values in organizational mentoring programs are discussed. The authors argue that "mismatches" of both personality traits and values in mentor-protégé pairings can hamper the success of mentoring. Also, practical strategies for enhancing the matching of mentors and protégés are discussed.

Felissa K. Lee, Department of Management, University of Missouri-Columbia
Thomas W. Dougherty, Department of Management, University of Missouri-Columbia
Daniel B. Turban, Department of Management, University of Missouri-Columbia

Introduction

Jill was excited when she first learned that Sam, a higher level manager in her firm, had been assigned as her mentor. Shortly after meeting each other, the pair had decided to work together on some special projects for their Division. But after several weeks, Jill was becoming troubled that she and Sam's relationship was not working out. It just seemed impossible to improve the situation. The harder she worked to complete assignments in a thorough, high quality manner, the more impatient Sam seemed to become. His attention never seemed to stay with one project for long; Sam was always coming up with new ideas and expecting results more quickly than Jill could produce them. Even their planning meetings were difficult; their discussions often felt confusing and unproductive. Jill was also turned off by the way Sam treated people, including herself, when he wanted to accomplish something. He seemed far more concerned about achieving results than being considerate towards others. Jill now wondered if Sam even saw her as competent, or wanted to work with her at all. He never had much time to meet with her anyway. In any case, Jill knew that she had lost some respect for Sam, and was not sure that she wanted to follow his lead any more.

This example highlights some of the problems that may arise in mentoring relationships, especially in formal mentoring programs in which organizations assign mentors to protégés. Although Jill and Sam may both be talented and motivated professionals, they appear to be mismatched in terms of their personalities

and work values. These differences can be seen in the conflicting expectations and difficult communications that characterize Jill and Sam's interactions. The personality/values differences may also lead each party to unfavorable evaluations of the competence of the other. Further, one wonders if Sam became a mentor voluntarily, as he does not appear to have time to work with a junior person in a mentoring relationship.

In the rest of this article we explore these issues in more depth. Specifically, we address the importance of the "match" of both the personality traits and the work values of mentors and protégés. Our discussion extends to a variety of issues, focusing on the particular personality characteristics and values we believe are most important for mentors, for protégés, and for mentor-protégé dyads. We also discuss the practical implications of these personality/values issues, offering suggestions for making formal mentoring relationships more beneficial for both mentors and protégés. Finally, we offer some suggestions for how organizations, if choosing to avoid assigning formal mentors, can systematically promote informal mentoring relationships.

Formal and Informal Mentoring

Scholars have identified positive benefits for employees involved as protégés in informal mentoring relationships, including more frequent promotions, higher salaries, and greater career satisfaction [11,13]. Alternatively, many organizations have recently developed formal mentoring programs, in which junior employ-

ees are assigned to higher level managers for mentoring. Often, these programs are designed to provide women and other minorities with much-needed career assistance and access to powerful upper-level managers.

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Unfortunately, just as "arranged" marriages may not be as satisfactory as self-selected unions, *formal* mentoring programs do not seem to produce the same positive benefits as *informal* mentoring relationships. In their study of formal and informal mentoring, Chao, Waltz, & Gardner [3] discuss how these differences may come about. These authors suggest that to the extent that formal relationships resemble informal relationships, protégés might achieve the same benefits. For instance, in informal settings, mentors and protégés begin working together only after they have had a chance to interact and get to know each other. These pairs end up together because they find they have something in common, and they like each other. Mentors select protégés in whom they are willing to invest energy. Similarly, the protégés respect their mentors, and are open to their input. In contrast, in formal mentoring, mentors and protégés are often assigned to each other by the Human Resources Department or others in the organization. They may not share any similarities or even enjoy each other's company. The mentors may not know the protégés well and may be less willing to invest energy on behalf of the protégés' development. Protégés may be less committed to following the lead of their assigned mentors if they do not respect the individuals or if they feel unappreciated. If mentors or protégés are not participating voluntarily, they will be even less invested in the process. We argue that by considering personality characteristics and work values, matches made in formal settings can be made more successfully.

Kram's [8] widely-cited qualitative work provides a useful definition of "mentoring functions." These functions suggest qualities that are most important in considering mentor characteristics, protégé characteristics, and mentor-

protégé matches. Kram identified two broad categories of mentoring activities. *Career* functions include assigning challenging projects to the protégé, providing feedback on

work, promoting visibility within the company, helping to develop strategies for achieving work objectives, and providing protection from damaging risks and problems. *Psychosocial* functions include friendship, counseling, and role-modeling activities provided to the protégé. The broader the range of functions provided by the mentor, the more beneficial the relationship for the protégé.

Personality of Mentors and Protégés

An individual's *personality* is likely to be related to the success of one's experience as a mentor or a protégé. By personality we mean the preferences that people have for certain types of behavior and the regular patterns of behavior exhibited by people in various settings. One helpful personality framework for considering these issues is the Five Factor Model (FFM). This model has been well researched, is widely accepted, and has been used extensively to understand workplace behavior [5,9]. In this model a person's personality can be summarized using five dimensions: *emotional stability* (psychological adjustment, tendency to feel negative emotions), *extroversion* (warmth, assertion, gregariousness), *openness* (openness to new ideas, experiences, and values), *agreeableness* (altruism, tender-mindedness, compliance), and *conscientiousness* (self-control, discipline, achievement striving) [4]. We believe that effective mentors need to possess high agreeableness and at least moderate amounts of openness, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and extroversion. Protégés should benefit from

mentoring if their own pattern of characteristics includes high conscientiousness, high openness, and at least moderate amounts of agreeableness and emotional stability. We now discuss these traits in more depth. Later in the paper, we discuss what to do if a potential mentor or protégé does not have these profiles.

Mentor Personality. First, mentors should be high on *agreeableness*, as this indicates a tendency to be altruistic and empathetic. Research has shown that these qualities are strongly associated with those who are willing to mentor [1]. An individual with these qualities will be disposed to show concern for others' well being and be willing to exert effort in order to help others make progress. These tendencies form the foundation of a mentoring relationship. Agreeableness also incorporates the tendency to be pleasant and considerate in interactions with others — important qualities for interacting with and providing feedback to protégés.

Mentors should also possess at least a moderate degree of *openness*, indicating a willingness to entertain new ideas presented by another person. This process is likely very important for a protégé's development. Effective mentors cannot expect their protégés to become "clones" of themselves. Although it is important for protégés to grow by stretching their comfort zones, it is also essential that they feel that their perspectives and contributions are treated as valid. Further, openness on a mentor's part will allow for the protégé to make more substantive contributions to the working relationship, thus enhancing the sense of mutuality and the level of bonding.

A mentor's *emotional stability* is also important. Mentors with at least a moderate amount of emotional stability will be more calm and predictable, and thus more comfortable in working with protégés. Mentors who are low in emotional stability may have a tendency to become upset or angry easily, to be impulsive, or to take things too personally. Any of these behaviors may be confusing and frustrating for the protégé, especially one who is dependent upon the mentor for guidance and learning opportunities.

At least a moderate amount of mentor *conscientiousness* is also helpful to the relationship. A competent, organized, achievement-oriented mentor will provide effective role-modeling. This mentor possesses the kinds of skills that are essential for accomplishing quality work. Such a person is also able to manage his or her own work responsibilities in a way that allows for dealing effectively with another individual who also has time constraints and work responsibilities. Those who are low on conscientiousness, although perhaps able to accomplish their own work effectively, may not be the best choice for service as mentors.

Highly effective mentors would also be likely to possess at least a moderate amount of *extroversion*. Those who enjoy interacting with others are most likely to be interested in developing a relationship with a protégé, which requires time and effort. Those who are extremely introverted, although possibly being altruistic and open to others' ideas, may not have the energy or interest to take responsibility for a close relationship with another individual.

Protégé Personality. It is also likely that certain protégé personality characteristics inspire confidence and commitment in mentors. Research has shown that mentors prefer to work with protégés who are competent and willing to learn [2]. A protégé high in *conscientiousness* will tend to be self-disciplined, organized, and achievement oriented, thus having the basic skills and drive to handle new work tasks effectively. Such a protégé will behave in a competent manner, and be more likely to reflect well on the mentor. High *openness* will also benefit the protégé, as this characteristic reflects an openness to new ideas, to new ways of doing things, and thus to learning. It would also benefit protégés to possess at least moderate amounts of *agreeableness* and *emotional stability*, as these characteristics lead to productive social interactions. A moderate amount of agreeableness ensures that protégés will be pleasant and willing to compromise, yet not so compliant that they are not willing to assert their own ideas and gain clarification through discussion. As it is for mentors, emotional stability in protégés is important in that it is easier to work with people who are calm and predictable.

Similarity of Work Values

Research indicates that perceived similarity of values influences attraction and liking between individuals in the workplace. By "values" we mean beliefs about what is important, a conviction about how one *should* behave. The importance of value similarity has been documented in terms of supervisor-subordinate relations as well as mentor-protégé dyads [7,12]. Scholars have argued that values organize one's perceptions of the work environment, shape one's choices, and orient one's work behavior. Therefore, individuals with similar values may find themselves thinking and behaving in compatible ways, even if other differences such as skill type, work habits, interpersonal style, or background exist. Similarly, if a mentor and a protégé believe that they hold similar values, they will be more attracted to each other and like each other more. A more successful mentoring relationship should result. A close similarity in basic work values may even allow for development of a successful working relationship of individuals with contrasting personalities.

O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell [10] have identified a set of work values that are relevant for considering similarities between mentors and protégés. These values include *innovation* (desire to create, take risks, experiment); *attention to detail* (emphasis on precision, careful analysis); *outcome orientation* (achievement focused, demanding); *aggressiveness* (competitive, pursuing opportunities); *supportiveness* (concern for people, providing positive feedback); *team orientation* (appreciates collaboration rather than autonomy), and *decisiveness* (predictable and clear decision making). Because these values are linked to important work behaviors, they should be pertinent to considering congruence between mentors and protégés.

For example, individuals who value innovation may be intrigued by new ideas, seek

out novel solutions, gravitate toward ambiguous or unstructured tasks, and encourage creativity. In contrast, individuals who do not value innovation may prefer traditional ways of doing things, seek proven solutions, and seek tasks with a clear outcome. If two people with a different value for innovation work together on an unstructured task, they may proceed with different assumptions about what constitutes a good product, or how the work should be conducted. When operating from the same value assumptions, partners will likely find it easier to negotiate roles and complete work according to their expectations. Therefore, values should contribute to improved mentoring quality through perceived similarity and liking, as well as ease of producing work and establishing roles. When a mentor and a protégé are similar on many of these values, a harmonious working relationship is likely to result.

Personality, Values and Mentoring: Practical Implications

Consideration of personality and values leads to suggestion of a variety of practical strategies for helping mentors and protégés "make

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their relationship work." We should preface this discussion by emphasizing that few studies have examined formal mentoring programs, and few have directly examined any aspect of personality or values in mentoring (see [11]). But based on our previous discussion of scholarship in the areas of personality and work values and our views about how these constructs may play a role in mentoring, we put forth a number of suggestions related to practical implications.

First, simply being aware of the possibility of personality or values mismatches may aid in understanding why some mentoring relationships do not work. As a more systematic approach, measures of both personality and work values could be used within mentoring programs to increase the success rate of mentoring pairs. For example, mentors might be selected on the basis of a "preferred" person-

relationship. For instance, protégés who are low on agreeableness, emotional stability, or both may have difficulties functioning in the workplace in general, including difficulties in mentoring relationships. Such individuals should benefit from intervention prior to entering the mentoring program. Similarly, individuals who are very low on conscientiousness may benefit from training in general

management skills, before they seek mentoring relationships with higher level managers. Or, suppose a protégé is low in terms of the openness dimension. Clarifying this individual's expectations may be in order, to confirm that he or she is ready for a mentor-

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ality profile, as discussed earlier. If they significantly depart from the identified profile for a successful mentor, they might be offered training to enhance their preparedness for the mentoring role. Alternatively, this assessment of personality could simply provide an opportunity for discussion about expectations for mentors in the program, to make sure that potential mentors have thought through all pertinent issues. For example, if some individuals are low on openness, how do they view their role as a mentor, and how do they expect to go about providing learning experiences for protégés? What do they see as the goal of working with proteges — is it to educate them in the "correct" way of doing things, or is it to work with protégés to develop in their own unique ways? Such early discussion will ensure that mentors' expectations are aligned with the intended philosophies and purpose of the formal mentoring program.

Similarly, protégés could be given a personality assessment in order to determine areas for pre-mentorship training or counseling. If a protégé departs from the optimal profile, it is worth the time to determine specific issues warranting attention before the individual becomes involved in a mentoring

relationship with expectations for openness toward suggestions, feedback, and role modeling. Note that personality assessment would be used as an informational tool only, not as a screening device to keep people out of mentoring programs. This assessment tool could clarify expectations, generate discussion, and identify potential areas for individual training.

Assessment of values would enable companies to "match" mentors and protégés based upon similarity. This similarity should make it more likely that mentors and protégés will like and respect one another, be more trusting and willing to expend energy for the other person, and thus develop good working relationships. Such relationships should more closely resemble informally developed relationships and lead to increased benefits for both parties.

Both personality and values inventories could also be used as part of a pre-program orientation session designed to clarify expectations about the working relationship. For example, a general introduction to basic personality types and the implications for communication and work behavior would help sensitize individuals to potential sources of conflict. Mentor and protégé pairs could then

be given the opportunity to discuss with one another how their similarities and differences might be relevant to their expectations and working styles. Personality and values information could also be helpful in developing goals for protégé development. Career goals will be most effective when developed in terms of an individual's specific strengths, weaknesses, and preferences.

Finally, knowledge of personality types and values similarity could help managers to assess mentoring programs. This information would reveal if certain kinds of people are more or less satisfied, or have experienced more or less difficulty in their relationships. Future interventions could be developed to prevent any problems.

Additional Suggestions for Promoting Mentoring in Organizations

In this paper we have discussed the role of personality and values in mentoring, especially in formal mentoring programs in which mentors are assigned to protégés. Organizations often create formal mentoring programs and other systematic career management programs, to insure that all junior managers, including women and other minorities, receive career assistance (see [6]). But organizations can also implement strategies for creating a "developmental culture" in which widespread *informal* mentoring can thrive. We now offer a somewhat broader set of concrete suggestions for organizations that wish to promote these naturally-occurring mentoring relationships.

Do not simply "assign" protégés to mentors. Assigned mentoring programs are not likely to be as effective as naturally-occurring relationships. Anecdotal evidence suggests that often assigned mentoring partners are not well-suited to each other for a variety of reasons, including the kinds of personality/values mismatches discussed in this paper. It appears that in assigned mentoring relationships, the mentors and protégés often never develop strong personal bonds and may not even interact with any regularity. What begins as "great expectations," especially for the protégé, can easily result in disappointment

and dissatisfaction. Thus, the remaining suggestions focus on how organizations can promote the development of *voluntary, informal* mentoring relationships.

Educate protégés in the firm about the various mentoring functions and the personal and career benefits of mentoring.

This kind of information can enhance protégés' knowledge about how they might benefit from mentoring. Protégés may be informed about the psychosocial and career functions of mentoring (discussed earlier) as well as the longer-term career and personal benefits. This education may produce another positive result — protégés may become motivated to take the initiative to seek out suitable mentors who match their personal styles and their values. Further, protégés should be encouraged to be proactive in developing a network of supportive colleagues, both inside and outside the organization. The desirability (and sometimes the necessity) of protégés' taking the initiative is often overlooked in writing on mentoring (see [11]).

Educate potential mentors about the benefits of mentoring for them and for the organization. The benefits gained by *mentors* in these relationships are often overlooked. Kram [8] asserted that a major "misconception" is that the primary beneficiary in a mentoring relationship is the junior person. Mentors should be apprised of the benefits of mentoring for them, including gaining technical and psychological support from loyal protégés, receiving recognition from the organization for effectively developing talent, and gaining internal satisfaction from passing on their wisdom, thus having an effect on future generations of managers [8]. Managers who are aware of the benefits to be gained from mentoring are likely to take initiative to seek out protégés. A stronger overall "developmental culture" is the result.

Encourage protégés to identify multiple mentors for various mentoring functions.

Most of our discussion in this article has focussed on mentors who are "primary" mentors. Primary mentors provide both career and psychosocial functions, in mentoring

relationships that are fairly intense and exclusive. However, protégés should also seek out "secondary" mentors. These mentors are more readily available and provide more direct career assistance, exchanging benefits with protégés in a more "businesslike" fashion [8]. A protégé can easily have several secondary mentors at any particular point in a career.

Conclusion

With the increasing diversity of our workplace, mentoring relationships may become an even more desirable avenue for promoting employee growth and success. The benefits of these partnerships should be enhanced when organizations proactively support effective mentoring processes. In terms of formal programs, assessing personality and work values may be one means of generating productive mentor-protégé matches — by making them more like partnerships that form informally. This information could also inform pre-program training, during which individuals clarify expectations and learn to communicate effectively with one another. Companies may also promote effective informal relationships by educating employees about the benefits of developmental relationships and suggesting the characteristics to look for when targeting a partner. This education should make individuals more likely to seek out productive mentoring relationships. Through these approaches to assessment and education, organizations can better ensure the success of both formal and informal mentoring relationships between employees.

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