TITLE: Mentors' Perceptions of Stressful Mentoring Relationships: A Preliminary Report on Scale Development

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ABSTRACT:

In an increasingly globalized and dynamic work environment, implementation of effective mentoring programs is critical in attracting, developing, and engaging talent. Organizational mentoring programs which are structured to protect mentors from stressful experiences may play significant roles in outcomes of mentoring effectiveness. However, for too long, a rather one-sided focus on the protégé perspective may have limited our understanding of the full spectrum of experiences in mentoring relationships. In the current study, interviews (*N*=24) were conducted to develop a theoretically sound multidimensional measure of stressors for mentors (*SMQ*; Stressors for Mentors Questionnaire). Based on these interviews, items were developed and five preliminary dimensions (stressful protégé behaviors, poor dyadic fit, mentor's personal issues, structural constraints, and lack of organizational support) were established. Our findings are significant for integrating the mentors' perspective with the current state of research on negative experiences in mentoring relationships. Further, current findings have relevance within the broader context of cross-cultural mentoring relationships given the pervasiveness of "cultural gap" being mentioned as a stressor by mentors during our interviews.

CONTENT:

Despite three decades of research since Kram's seminal work (1985); there has yet to be sufficient mentor-centric research that explores mentors' experiences (Eby, 2009; Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). Since one of the costs of being a mentor is increased stress, Feldman (1999) urges researchers to examine drivers of stress in mentoring relationships. The primary focus of the current study is the examination of the effects of mentoring dynamics on mentor's stress. Because stress is positively related to burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), we propose that gaining a more thorough understanding of stressors for mentors may have significant implications for mentoring theory and practice.

While organizational cultural expectations for mentoring may affect mentor's stress, organization's policies may significantly mitigate such effects. Specifically, perceived organizational support (POS) for mentoring is an important consideration because POS has been shown to be related to numerous outcomes of interest to organizations, such as job satisfaction, affective commitment, job performance, and withdrawal behaviors (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS may be an important consideration specifically in protecting mentors from stressful mentoring experiences. However there has been little research on the topic and much of this research has been conducted with a protégé-centric focus (Finkelstein & Poteet, 2010).

The overall objectives of this research are (a) to explore major stressors for mentors in mentoring relationships via interviews with mentors and (b) to develop a multidimensional construct of mentoring stressors for mentors. The focus of the current manuscript is to develop the Stressors for Mentors Questionnaire (*SMQ*). This was accomplished through interviews with mentors to explore stressful mentoring relationships and to develop an initial pool of items.

Content validity of the initial pool of items was then reviewed by an expert panel to reduce the number of items for a comprehensive yet parsimonious scale.

Study 1: Interviews

The purpose of Study 1 was to gain a thorough and in-depth understanding of mentors' feelings, perceptions and opinions related to mentoring stressors. Interviews were conducted (*N*=24) with mentors who reported being involved in a mentoring relationship at the time of the interview. A critical consideration of the current's study's methodology was the operational definition of a mentor since mentors were self-identified. Following Haggard et al's. (2011) recommendations and building on Kram's (1985) definition, the definition of a mentor presented to participants was: "*A mentor is a more experienced person who takes an interest in your professional (and sometimes personal) development through interaction and two-way communication It is possible for a mentor to be a supervisor, but not necessarily required.*" Interviews lasted for about 40 minutes. The average age of interviewees was 49.3 years and the sample was split evenly across genders (12 female and 12 male mentors). The majority of the mentors were Caucasian (83%) followed by African-American (13%) and Asian (4%). Mentors reported mentoring an average of 2.3 formal protégés and 3.2 informal protégés at the time of the interview. Over the course of their careers, mentors reported having mentored an average of 14.5 formal protégés and 21 informal protégés.

Based on these in-depth interviews, five preliminary dimensions of stressors for mentors (i.e., stressful protégé behaviors, poor dyadic fit, mentor's personal issues, structural constraints, and lack of organizational support) were established. Table 1 lists an illustrative quote for each dimension.

----Insert Table 1 about here----

First, we compiled an initial pool of 101 items to tap the five dimensions of stressors for mentors construct. We then conducted judge analysis to select items from the initial pool to identify a subset of items for a thorough and parsimonious scale. Three academic and two practitioner experts reviewed content validity and made suggestions to improve clarity. At the end of the judge analysis, we selected items with 40% or higher selection rate. This process resulted in 46 items (see Table 2).

----Insert Table 2 about here----

Next, in Study 2, we will collect survey data from graduate business students to determine the factor structure of the *SMQ* and perform subsequent item reduction analyses based on exploratory factor analysis. In Study 3, we will collect survey data from practitioners to confirm the factor structure of the *SMQ* and to establish discriminant and predictive validity via a series of confirmatory factor analyses.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the current study, we offer a five-dimensional conceptualization of *stressors for mentors* construct as identified by mentors. This conceptualization have significant implications for organizational practice as well as theoretical development of research on perceived organizational support for mentoring, negative mentoring, e-mentoring, cross-cultural mentoring, multiple mentoring, and network mentoring.

Table 1: Illustrative Interview Quotes for Stressors for Mentors Questionnaire (SMQ)

Stressful protégé behaviors	"I just have one person I'm mentoring, where it feels like there's a lot of repetitiveness that goes into it. It's just repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat. So, that's stressful. That goes back to that being teachable. And if you're open and teachable, then you learn it and you get to move on."
Poor dyadic fit	"For instance, in China if you are not the manager, it's good to stay quiet. Respect for elders or others in power or a place of prestige. […] If you're the mentee and one of your objectives is to be in a management path, it can be difficult. They're very quiet in meetings, and they're very quiet in the mentoring relationship. So, you're fighting an uphill battle against culture here in America."
Mentor's personal issues	"I think that most definitely I might be oversharing, but when I was going through my divorce, I definitely cut back on the amount of people I was in contact. Especially with those people who depended on me, wanting answers, or to talk about things. I mean, my mental capacity just wasn't in a place […] to take on other people's problems […] I was in a place where I was trying to work through my problems."
Structural constraints	"When there's conflicting guidance. They do say that most people should find one or two mentors to help you with your career. […] There are times when I feel that another mentor has been giving advice that will be in direct conflict with my suggestions. I feel that's unfortunate because the poor mentee is in the middle trying to make a decision about whose advice they're going to take. That's stressful for me because occasionally, I sort of want to beat up on the other mentor. I just get frustrated… Maybe it's even jealousy. Protective of the relationship. I want to know that I'm the primary mentor, and the other people are just helping them along."
Organizational support	"Oh, I can tell you, my organization does nothing to support. They recommend mentoring. But, there is nothing that supports a mentor in our organization. They don't support time. They don't support materials or development. That makes it really challenging for me. I have to invest that time—and sometimes my personal time, not my work time. Above and beyond my work load […]. It almost seems like that's a benefit—the mentoring program—but it lacks structure. And, I've been told during review processes, that that's part of my responsibility—to mentor in the organization—and then the expectation is there, but no support."

Table 2: Items Developed Based on Interview Data (46 items; Study 1)

Stressful protégé behaviors	1. My protégé repeatedly seeks my advice on similar issues. 2. My protégé is not interested in learning better ways of doing things.[*] 3. My protégé seems uninterested. 4. My protégé is not living up to his/her potential. 5. My protégé passes up developmental opportunities. 6. My protégé does not deliver high quality work.[*] 7. My protégé has performance issues on the job.[*] 8. My protégé is too casual with me. 9. My protégé needs too much of my support. 10. I suspect my protégé may badmouth me to others.
Poor dyadic fit	11. My protégé and I are from different generations. 12. My protégé does not respect authority. 13. My protégé seems to expect quick advancement. 14. My protégé and I are from different genders. 15. I am nervous about offending my protégé. 16. My protégé and I have different cultural backgrounds. 17. My protégé is too quiet. 18. My protégé is too passive about advancing his/her career. 19. My protégé goes along with my advice without questioning it. 20. I feel that I have to use detailed communication with my protégé. 21. My protégé downplays his/her abilities. 22. My protégé and I struggle to interact. [*]
Mentor's personal issues	23. My protégé has limited opportunities for advancement in our organization. 24. I feel inadequate as a mentor to my protégé. 25. I feel unsure about the effectiveness of the advice I give my protégé. 26. I feel I have not given my protégé enough personalized challenges unique to his/her strengths. 27. I feel that I give my protégé preferential treatment. 28. I feel that advice to my protégé could result in me being involved in workplace politics. 29. I feel that my protégé's career success could reflect on my reputation. 30. My personal problems outside of work make it difficult for me to focus on mentoring my protégé. 31. My personal work-related problems make it difficult to focus on mentoring my protégé.

Table 2 cont.d: Items Developed Based on Interview Data (46 items; Study 1)

Structural constraints	32. I feel that my protégé's other mentor(s) may be giving my protégé conflicting advice. 33. My protégé and I must frequently meet remotely. 34. I have trouble gauging my protégé's engagement during our remote mentoring sessions. 35. My organization's mentoring program lacks structure. 36. My organization's mentoring program is voluntary. 37. My organization gives mentors input into protégé selection. 38. My organization gives protégés input into mentor selection.
Organizational support	39. My organization doesn't provide feedback about my mentoring effectiveness. 40. I don't know how I'm doing as a mentor. 41. My organization doesn't emphasize mentoring in its performance management. 42. I received adequate training to be a mentor.[**] 43. My organization gives me too many protégés to manage. 44. My organization doesn't give me enough time to mentor my protégé. 45. My organization does not provide sufficient financial support for my protégé's training and development needs. 46. My organization emphasizes the importance of mentoring.

[*] Adapted from Eby et al.(2008)

[**]Adapted from Parise and Forret (2008)

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