

AN EXAMINATION OF CAREER MENTORSHIP AMONG FACULTY IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the career mentorship of faculty members in higher education and their work-life conflict experiences. A sample of 213 faculty members were recruited using a Qualtrics survey link. Analytical approaches such as simple linear regression, mediation, t-test, and a one-way ANOVA were adopted to investigate this study's hypotheses. Findings revealed that career mentorship inversely effected work-life conflict. Career mentorship partially mediated the relationship between career commitment and job satisfaction. However, no sex or tenure status differences were found in career mentorship. The implications from this study are discussed along with future study recommendations regarding career mentorship programs for faculty in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Mentorship in higher education has led to positive effects for faculty including a sense of well-being, positivity and collegiality, which leads to job satisfaction (Perna, Lerner, & Yura, 1995; Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011). Career outcomes for mentees have also been linked to job compensation, professional development, and eventual promotion (Chen et al., 2016). Specifically, mentorship is defined as "a process in which one person, usually of superior rank and outstanding achievement, guides the development of an entry-level individual seen as the protégé or mentee" (Savage, Karp, & Logue, 2010, p. 22). Despite the benefits of mentorship in academia, mentorship is not always readily available to novice or mid-level career professionals. In particular, junior faculty who are not mentored by senior faculty members may experience "isolation, separation, fragmentation, loneliness, competition, and incivility" (Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000; p. 13). As a result, un-mentored faculty may search for social support and resources outside of their departmental and/or campus environment to feel supported as a faculty member.

To date, only a few studies have examined the correlation between mentorship and work-life balance in academia. Previous studies have confirmed the need to examine how the pressures and the responsibilities of work may interfere with the responsibilities of family life causing a work-life imbalance or conflict (Kahn et al., 1964; Jijena-Michel & Jijena Michel, 2012). Academics in higher education that have experienced a spillover of disproportionate demands from either their family or work may encounter negative effects such as job stress and burnout, which can lead to turnover and career dissatisfaction (Kahn et al., 1964; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). A recent study found that mentorship inversely reduced work-family imbalance for both the academic mentors and the mentees (Mao, Kwan, Chiu, & Zhang, 2016). Also, from a work-family enrichment

framework (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Greenhaus & Singh, 2007), faculty who are mentored were found to have reduced their work-life conflict experiences. Thus, this study examines whether career mentorship in higher education serves as a predictor of reduced work-life conflict experiences.

Previous studies have examined the relationships between career mentoring, commitment, and job satisfaction; however, academic studies have failed to investigate career mentorship as a mediated variable among these constructs. A study by Xu and Payne (2014) revealed the quality of career mentorship moderated the effect of turnover rates and job satisfaction. A similar study indicated that mentorship mediated the relationship between commitment and attitudes about work (Richard, Ismail, Bhuian, & Taylor, 2009). Also, Cetin, Kizil, & Zengin (2013) found that mentoring had a direct impact on both the organizational commitment and job satisfaction for Turkish faculty members. Since previous studies have found direct links between mentorship, commitment, and job satisfaction (Chao, Waltz, & Gardner, 1992; Cetin, Kizil, & Zengin, 2013), this study will address a gap in the literature by examining career mentorship as a potential mediator between career commitment and job satisfaction for academics. This study will emphasize four main objectives: First, to investigate whether career mentorship impacts the work-life conflict experiences of faculty members. Second, to examine whether career mentorship mediates the relationship between career commitment and job satisfaction. Third, to probe the differences in career mentorship among male and female faculty members. Fourth, to explore whether mentorship varied across different faculty positions and tenure status.

METHOD

Upon IRB approval, participants were recruited from higher education institutions. Faculty participants were recruited electronically through a Qualtrics survey link and the link was distributed through emails, newsletters, and listserv lists. The sample included 213 faculty participants with 75% females and 25% males. The sample's ethnicity included 79.30% Caucasian, 10.80% Hispanic, 0.04% African-American, 0.03% Asian-American, 0.04% Native-American, 0.02% Middle Easterner, and 9.77% Other/Mixed. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 73 ($M = 39$; $SD = 10.8$). The majority of the faculty were married (80.1%) and had at least one child (79.4%). The faculty rank of participants was comprised of 7.1% part-time instructor, 12.6% full-time instructor, 0.5% visiting professor, 35.4% assistant professor, 22.1% associate professor, 15.7% full professor, 0.5% professor emeritus, and 6.1% other. The tenure status of the participants was 25.9% non-tenure track, 37.6% tenured-track, and 36.5% tenured.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Several analytical approaches were run through SPSS 23.0 and Hayes' Process (Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017) to assess this study's four objectives. First, the results from a simple linear regression showed that career mentorship inversely impacted work-life conflict ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .05$). Second, the Sobel test of the mediation model found that career mentorship partially mediated the relationship between career commitment and job satisfaction. Third, the results from an independent t-test found no support for the differences in mentorship based on the sex indicated by faculty. Fourth, the results from the one-way ANOVAs found no support in differences for mentorship across faculty positions or tenure status.

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

Implications derived from this study can inform both faculty and administrators of higher education institutions the value of mentorship. First, this study found that career mentorship had an inverse effect on work-life conflict, which suggests that mentored faculty may experience reduced work-life conflict, while faculty who are not mentored may experience enhanced work-life conflict. Recommendations call for future studies involving the development of faculty mentorship programs to evaluate the role of mentorship and faculty work-life conflict to provide insight into work/life balance. Another recommendation is for administrators to also assess their current faculty mentorship programs and include a work-life balance component if it is not already a part of their program. Second, this study found evidence that career mentorship may play a role in enhancing the link between career commitment and job satisfaction in academia. Additionally, to sustain job satisfaction of faculty, administrators should ensure that faculty are receiving adequate career mentorship at all stages of their academic career. This could involve formal mentoring programs, cultivate a positive mentoring culture in each department, and provide incentives for senior faculty members to mentor junior faculty. Third, this study found that men and women did not differ in mentorship. Since both men and females indicate being mentored with equity, future studies should explore the quality of mentorship by sex using qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to determine the career mentorship themes among faculty men and women. Lastly, mentorship levels did not differ by position or by tenure status. While previous studies indicate mixed findings, this study did not find differences in mentorship. Future studies should examine the potential differences in frequency of mentorship and the length of the mentorship relationship across faculty ranks. Additionally, to ensure the continual equity in mentorship, administrators may continue to implement and/or maintain faculty-mentoring programs that mentor all faculty regardless of tenure status or ranking. Overall, this study can inform current educators and administrators of the value of faculty mentorship in higher education.

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