Formal Mentors’ Distancing and Manipulative Behaviors: An Empirical Study on Their Antecedents and Consequences

Min Jeong Kim* and Kyoungjoo Choi**

This study empirically tests several hypotheses about the antecedents and consequences of formal mentors’ distancing and manipulative behaviors (i.e., negative behaviors) toward their protégés. This study suggests that formal mentors’ machiavellianism influences their distancing and manipulative behaviors and these negative behaviors increase their protégés’ job-related stress and turnover intentions. The data were collected in 2010 using a sample of 147 nurses participating as protégés in a formal mentoring program offered by a general hospital in Korea. The results indicate that formal mentors’ machiavellianism is positively related to their distancing and manipulative behaviors and that distancing behaviors are a significant predictor of protégés’ job-related stress, whereas manipulative behaviors are a significant predictor of protégés’ turnover intentions.

Keywords: Formal mentoring, Machiavellianism, Attitudes

Field of Research: Management, Organizational Behavior

1. Introduction

This study focuses on negative mentoring experiences in formal mentoring. The idea that social relationships can have negative affect extends back to the original social exchange theorists (Homans, 1950; Labianca, Brass & Gray, 1998; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Although early researchers considered both positive and negative aspects of social relationships, recent scholars, particularly those in the mentoring field, have focused mainly on the positive aspects. Previous mentoring research has underlined the benefits that protégés and mentors can derive through their mentoring relationships. However, some studies have noted that protégés and mentors may have relationship problems (Eby et al., 2000; Eby & Allen; 2002; Eby et al., 2008; Kim, Choi & Gim, 2011), which made lead to toxic and destructive mentoring experiences. This is not surprising because, like other social relationships, mentoring may entail

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1 This study was supported by the Korea Research Foundation Grant funded by the Korean Government (MOEHRD)(KRF-2007-321-B00056), and completed during the first author’s sabbatical at the Graduate School of Business Administration, Fordham University, New York. We are particularly grateful to David Gautschi, the Dean of the GSB, Fordham University, for his invaluable support. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Third Annual American Business Research Conference in New York in 2011 and won the Best Paper Award.

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disappointments, difficulties, and dysfunctional relationship patterns (Simon & Eby, 2003). Such negative aspects are more likely to be noticeable in formal than informal mentoring relationships because the formality and mode of contact required in formal mentoring can limit the development of trust and emotional closeness in the relationship (Chao, 2009; Karkoulian, Halawi & McCarthy, 2008; Kim & Choi, 2011; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Tourigny & Pulich, 2005). Understanding the dark side of formal mentoring is particularly important because it is very difficult to sever a negative formal relationship, whereas one can easily avoid unpleasant interactions in purely social settings (Labianca et al., 1998) such as informal mentoring relationships. Thus, the present study fills this gap in the mentoring literature by investigating protégés’ negative mentoring experiences in a constrained setting, namely a formal mentoring.

Unlike previous studies of negative mentoring, which have typically considered taxonomies to classify negative mentoring behaviors (Eby et al., 2000; Eby et al., 2008), the present study addresses the call for specific explanations to determine why certain negative incidents exist in formal mentoring and why understanding such experiences is important. Understanding the effects of mentors’ personality traits on negative mentoring should provide important theoretical insights into the program characteristics of formal mentoring, particularly for the selection of mentors. This study provides a rare empirical analysis of both the antecedents and consequences of negative mentoring experiences. Few studies have theoretically explored this issue (e.g., Kim & Choi, 2011). Assuming that an analysis of negative aspects of mentoring is just as important as that of positive aspects, this study develops several hypotheses about the effects of formal mentors’ machiavellianism on their distancing and manipulative behaviors and investigates the relationships between mentors’ negative behaviors and protégés’ job-related stress and turnover intentions.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Formal Mentoring and Mentors’ Negative Behaviors

Organizations have pursued benefits of informal mentoring by designing formal mentoring programs (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Chao, 2009). Previous studies have suggested that informally mentored protégés may be more likely than formally mentored ones to derive career and psychosocial benefits (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Chao, 2009; Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). How can we explain this phenomenon? In formal mentoring, organizations (typically HR managers) deliberately match individuals with many years of experience (mentors) with those with little experience (protégés), whereas informal mentoring relationships develop spontaneously based on the mutual identification between mentors and protégés (Kim & Choi, 2011; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Thus, formal mentoring relationships are distinct from informal ones in terms of their initiation, duration, structure, and process, among others (Karkoulian et al., 2008; Kim & Choi, 2011; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Tourigny & Pulich, 2005). The intensity of informal mentoring is considered to far exceed that of formal mentoring because both parties are intrinsically motivated in the relationships (Chao, 2009). In addition, informal mentoring lasts longer.
because it is unconstrained in terms of its length, frequency, and content. The duration of formal mentoring programs is predetermined, typically lasting six months to a year (Chao, 2009; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). As a result, negative mentoring experiences may be more likely in formal mentoring than in informal mentoring.

Eby et al. (2000) developed a taxonomy of negative mentoring experiences by using descriptive accounts of negative mentoring experiences from the perspective of protégés and found five broad metathemes: a mismatch within the dyad, distancing behaviors, manipulative behaviors, a lack of mentor expertise, and general dysfunctionality. Because distancing and manipulative behaviors reflect mentors’ intentions, they are distinct from other negative behaviors of mentors (Kim & Choi, 2011). Distancing behaviors can be defined as mentor actions reflecting a lack of interest in their protégés’ careers, such as neglecting their protégés, being self-absorbed in their own career, and excluding their protégés from important events and sources of information (Eby et al., 2000; Eby & Allen, 2002; Kim & Choi, 2011). Manipulative behaviors can be defined as intentional behaviors that are exploitative or politically motivated, including inappropriately delegating work, sabotaging their protégés, and taking credit for their protégés’ hard work, and displaying tyrannical power toward their protégés (Eby et al., 2000; Eby & Allen, 2002; Kim & Choi, 2011).

2.2 Mentors’ Machiavellianism and Negative Behaviors

Machiavellianism is a personality trait reflecting pragmatic, cynical, and immoral world views; strategic calculation and tactics for pursuing one’s own (agentic) goals; and cold-heartedness and a lack of empathy (Christie & Geis, 1970; Furtner, Rauthmann & Sachse, 2011). In addition, machiavellianism is related to the tendency to act in self-interest (Winter, Stylianou & Giacalone, 2004). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of this trait in understanding negative behaviors such as abusive supervision in leadership research because machiavellianism is also associated with deception (e.g., Kiazad et al., 2010). People who score high on the standard measures of machiavellianism (high Machs) are less willing than low Machs to provide others with assistance (Winter et al., 2004), and thus, they tend to concentrate only on the potential for negative outcomes in formal mentoring relationships, especially when they are paired with strangers. High Mach mentors dislike such situations because they may be forced into mentoring relationships that may not be in their favor (Kim & Choi, 2011; Winter et al., 2004). Kim and Choi (2011) suggested in their theoretical paper that personality traits interact with the characteristics of mentoring program to influence negative mentoring behaviors and that protégés matched with high Mach mentors are more likely to experience distancing behaviors because such mentors have little interest in establishing relationships based on trust. Singhapakdi and Vitell (1990) found that machiavellian managers are less likely to perceive the seriousness of ethical problems than other managers. Similarly, high Mach mentors are likely to consider their mentor roles as trivial and to avoid fulfilling their responsibility. As predicted in Hypothesis 1-1,
protégés paired with high Mach mentors are more likely to experience distancing behaviors in their formal mentoring relationship than those paired with low Mach ones.

In terms of the effects of machiavellianism on manipulative behaviors, previous studies have shown that high Mach managers are more likely to use deceptive interpersonal strategies than low Mach ones (Deluga, 2001; Shapiro, Lewicki & Devine, 1995). In addition, high Mach managers are more likely to economically opportunist and defect from groups, and less likely to show considerate attitudes toward others than low Mach ones (Kim & Choi, 2011; Winter et al., 2004). Further, high Mach individuals endeavor to control their interpersonal interactions and display a general lack of affect in their personal relationships (Bedell et al., 2006; Christie & Geis, 1970; Kiazad et al., 2010). Dahling, Whitaker and Levy (2009) have found that high Mach individuals are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors, including harmful interpersonal acts. Grams and Rogers (1990) examined the use of influence tactics and found that high Mach individuals are more likely to use non-rational tactics (particularly deceit) than rational ones. Similarly, high Mach mentors may not hesitate to manipulate their protégés. Based on the above discussion, we propose the following hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1-1.** In formal mentoring relationships, protégés paired with high Mach mentors are more likely to experience their mentors’ distancing behaviors than those paired with low Mach mentors.

**Hypothesis 1-2.** In formal mentoring relationships, protégés paired with high Mach mentors are more likely to experience their mentors’ manipulative behaviors than those paired with low Mach mentors.

### 2.3 Mentors’ Negative Behaviors and Protégés’ Attitudes

What are the consequences of protégés' negative experiences in formal mentoring? To address this question, this study focuses on two attitude variables related to individual and organizational effectiveness: job-related stress and turnover intentions. Stress refers to an emotional experience associated with nervousness, tension, and unfairly heavy workloads (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984). More specifically, job-related stress is defined as uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings experienced in the workplace (Parker & Decotiis, 1983). Stress can be reduced or prevented through social relationships, including positive mentoring experiences (Allen et al., 2009). On the other hand, individuals lacking supportive social relationships are vulnerable to the effects of stress (Russell, Altmaier & Van Velzen, 1987). Mentors’ distancing and manipulative behaviors can exacerbate job-related stress by straining interpersonal interactions in the course of protégés’ socialization (Kim & Choi, 2011). Stress appraisals depend on the evaluation of the situational demand in relation to available resources (Lyons & Schneider, 2009).

In many cases, mentors are likely to influence protégés’ stress appraisals through their support, encouragement, and emotional involvement, which characterize positive mentoring interactions. However, when protégés are experiencing negative formal mentoring, these experiences may augment the demand level without supplying additional resources such as career-related and psychosocial support. Therefore, stressor demand may outweigh available resources, resulting in increased stress levels.
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in workplace (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). In general, mentors can play an important role in protégés' coping behavior (Kram & Hall, 1989). However, mentors engaging in distancing behaviors can influence their protégés' job-related stress by preventing their protégés from taking advantage of opportunities for receiving feedback about ideas, perceptions, and performance in the workplace. In addition, manipulative mentors can serve as job-related stressors by forcing their protégés to shoulder the additional burden derived from formal mentors' exploitation. Thus, as suggested in Hypotheses 2-1 and 2-2, negative mentoring experiences such as distancing and manipulative behaviors may increase protégés' job-related stress.

Turnover intentions are defined as employees' awareness of and intentional willingness to leave the current organization (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Organizations place great emphasis on employee retention because of the strategic value of intellectual capital and the high cost of replacing valued employees (Holtom et al., 2005; Podsakoff, LePine & LePine, 2007). Most of the previous studies of mentoring have suggested a negative relationship between mentoring and turnover intentions (e.g., Payne & Huffman, 2005). However, employees occasionally leave their organizations to avoid uncomfortable situations associated with their relationships in the workplace, such as dysfunctional mentoring (Kim & Choi, 2011). When a mentor delegates too much work or intentionally hinders the protégé's career development or reputation, the protégé may wish to end that relationship. Moreover, protégés appraise their perception of their mentors' distancing and manipulative behaviors as potentially threatening to their personal growth and goal attainment in the organization (LePine, Podsakoff & LePine, 2005) and thus, show increased level of turnover intentions. Previous studies have found that employees perceiving a better person-organization fit are more willing to remain with the organization (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). However, distancing and manipulative behaviors, together with a lack of liking and similarity between the mentor and the protégé, may have negative effects on this P-O fit perception, resulting in increased turnover intentions. In sum, formal mentors' distancing and manipulative behaviors may increase their protégés' turnover intentions by hindering their protégés’ efforts to form an affective attachment to their organizations. Based on the above discussion, we propose the following hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 2-1.** In formal mentoring relationships, mentors' distancing behaviors are positively related to their protégés' job-related stress.

**Hypothesis 2-2.** In formal mentoring relationships, mentors' manipulative behaviors are positively related to their protégés' job-related stress.

**Hypothesis 3-1.** In formal mentoring relationships, mentors' distancing behaviors are positively related to their protégés' turnover intentions.

**Hypothesis 3-2.** In formal mentoring relationships, mentors' manipulative behaviors are positively related to their protégés' turnover intentions.
3. The Methodology

3.1 Samples and Procedures

The sample of the present study consisted of 147 nurses participating as protégés in a formal mentoring program at a general hospital in Korea. The data were collected in October 2010. In formal mentoring program of the site, junior nurses (i.e., formal protégés) were paired with senior nurses (i.e., formal mentors). Nurses are exposed to emotionally demanding interpersonal interactions (e.g., dealing with sick and dying patients) on a daily basis (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). Thus, junior nurses require psychosocial assistance from their mentor nurses. In terms of career support, nurses often encounter uncertainty and complexity (Hofmann, Lei & Grant, 2009) and rely on senior nurses for additional information, assistance, and advice (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2009). That is the reason why many medical institutions offer their formal mentoring programs. In addition, considering given the demands of the nursing profession and limited resources available for professional support, nurses are highly likely to experience occupational stress and turnover intentions (Fillion et al., 2007). Based on these characteristics of the profession, we selected protégé nurses as the respondents.

The questionnaire was designed to identify the participants’ negative experiences in their formal mentoring relationships and to obtain their perception of their mentors' machiavellianism level and attributes. One limitation of this study is that all the variables for mentors' machiavellianism and negative behaviors as well as protégés' attitudes were analyzed based only on protégés' ratings, although many studies of machiavellianism have used a single source for data collection (e.g., Hodson, Hogg & MacInnis, 2009). Common method bias can result from using the same source for predictor and criterion (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Thus, to control for this phenomenon, we followed one of the procedural remedies in Podsakoff et al. (2003) and designed the questionnaire such that the measures of predictor variables were psychologically separated from those of criterion variables. Specifically, we placed each of the variables of machiavellianism, negative behaviors, and attitudes on different pages of the questionnaire and compartmentalized them by using different covers, psychologically separating them.

Among the 147 nurses, 133 (90.4%) returned the questionnaire. After those with missing data were omitted, a total of 131 have been used for analysis. The demographic breakdown of the respondents was as follows: The average age was 27; the average tenure was 36 months; and 96 % were female. To test the hypotheses, we conducted multiple regression analyses. The present study is differentiated from most of the previous mentoring studies in that it provides an empirical analysis of the antecedents as well as consequences of mentors’ negative behaviors.
3.2 Measures

*Machiavellianism.* To measure the level of Machiavellianism, we used the 20-item machiavellianism scale from Gunnthorsdottir, McCabe and Smith (2002). Cronbach’s alpha was .725.

*Distancing and manipulative behaviors.* We used 7 items to measure distancing behaviors (α=.913) and 11 items to measure manipulative behaviors (α=.950) from Eby et al., (2004). The respondents (i.e., protégés) rated the extent to which they agreed with each item describing their formal mentor’s behaviors on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

*Job-related stress.* We measured job-related stress with 9 items from Parker and Decottis (1983). Cronbach’s alpha was .841.

*Turnover intentions.* We measured turnover intentions by using 3 items from Konovsky and Cropanzano (1991). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .874.

*Control variables.* We controlled for some demographic variables that may influence the hypothesized relationships (Finkelstein, Allen & Rhoton, 2003; Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000), including gender (0 = “female”; 1 = “male”), age, education level, tenure, and area of responsibility.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>27.03</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>-267**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Education level</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.184*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tenure</td>
<td>36.14</td>
<td>35.26</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.676**</td>
<td>.252**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Area</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>-.238**</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>-.272**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Machiavellianism</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Distancing</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>.197*</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.666**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Manipulation</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.562**</td>
<td>.736**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Job Stress</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.241**</td>
<td>.370**</td>
<td>.254**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Turnover</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>-.188*</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>.382**</td>
<td>.385**</td>
<td>.429**</td>
<td>.289**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a N = 131 * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

4. The Findings

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that, consistent with expectations, machiavellianism was positively and significantly correlated with distancing and manipulative behaviors (p < .01). In addition, distancing and manipulative behaviors were positively and significantly correlated with job-related stress and turnover intentions (p < .01). In terms of the control variables, the respondents' age was positively correlated with distancing behaviors, indicating that older protégés were more likely to experience distancing behaviors than younger ones.
4.1 Mentors’ Machiavellianism and Negative Behaviors

To determine the effects of machiavellianism on negative behaviors, we conducted multiple regression analyses. Machiavellianism was positively and significantly related to distancing (β = .654, p < .001) and manipulative behaviors (β = .558, p < .001), providing support for Hypotheses 1-1 and 1-2, respectively. These results are illustrated in Table 2. In sum, these results indicate that mentors’ machiavellianism was likely to influence their negative behaviors toward their protégés.

Table 2: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Negative Behaviors on Mentors’ Machiavellianism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Distancing behaviors</th>
<th>Manipulative behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>-.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.122</td>
<td>-.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>-.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>-.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machiavellianism</td>
<td>.654***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>1.433</td>
<td>17.930***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.410***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Entries are standardized regression coefficients (β).
*** p < .001

4.2 Mentors’ Negative Behaviors and Protégés’ Attitudes

The results for the effects of mentors’ negative behaviors on their protégés’ attitudes were mixed, as Table 3 presents. Mentors’ distancing behaviors were positively related to their protégés’ job-related stress, providing support for Hypothesis 2-1 (β = .445, p < .001). However, the expected relationship between manipulative behaviors and job-related stress was not found (β = -.072, n.s.). Hypothesis 2-2 was not supported. In addition, mentors’ distancing behaviors had no influence on their protégés’ turnover intentions, providing no support for Hypothesis 3-1 (β = .148, n.s.). However, mentors’ manipulative behaviors were positively and significantly related to their protégés’ turnover intentions, providing support for Hypothesis 3-2 (β = .303, p < .05). Table 3 shows these results.
Table 3: Results of Multiple Regression Analyses of Protégés’ Attitudes on Mentors’ Negative Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Job Stress</th>
<th></th>
<th>Turnover Intentions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.095</td>
<td>-.191</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.129</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>-.202*</td>
<td>-.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td>-.061</td>
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<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>-.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td></td>
<td>.445***</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulative</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.303*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>.752</td>
<td>3.777**</td>
<td>1.300</td>
<td>5.021***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.148***</td>
<td>.173***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Entries are standardized regression coefficients ($\beta$).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

5. Summary and Conclusions

Our hypotheses predicted that mentors’ machiavellianism would be positively related to their distancing and manipulative behaviors. The results provide support for these hypotheses. The hypotheses addressing the consequences of mentors’ negative mentoring behaviors predicted that distancing and manipulative behaviors would be positively related to their protégés’ job-related stress and turnover intentions. The results for these hypotheses are mixed. Distancing behaviors were a significant predictor of job-related stress, whereas manipulative behaviors were a significant predictor of turnover intentions. However, mentors’ distancing behaviors had no influence on their protégés’ turnover intentions, and there was no positive relationship between mentors’ manipulative behaviors and their protégés’ job-related stress. We infer that the respondents’ relatively young age and short tenure had influenced their responses. A majority of the respondents were nurses undergoing the process of initial socialization, learning the ropes in their profession. Thus, when they were faced with distancing behaviors such as negligence and exclusion, they had difficulty solving their job-related problems, which increased job-related stress. In particular, the measure of stress in this study was not a general stress scale but a job-related stress scale. On the other hand, the influences of manipulative behaviors may excel the simple job performance level, threatening the respondents’ identification with and membership in their organization and thus increasing their turnover intentions.

The results have important theoretical and practical implications. For example, previous studies’ almost exclusive focus on the positive aspects of mentoring relationships has provided a distorted and unrealistic understanding of the patterns of mentoring relationships (Labianca et al., 1998; Labianca & Brass, 2006). The present study
challenges this line of thinking by showing that an ordinary individual's personality traits may induce negative behaviors. By focusing on personality variables, this study stimulates further research and responds to the call for research on various antecedents of negative mentoring experiences (Eby et al., 2000). In addition, the results of this study have practical implications for organizations and managers wishing to reduce negative experiences during employees’ participation in formal mentoring programs. For example, managers should pay more attention to the formal mentoring process, and when necessary, they should intervene in the process to reduce or prevent negative mentoring experiences. In addition, organizations should focus on potential mentors’ characteristics such as machiavellianism when selecting mentors.

This study has some limitations. First, we considered only self-report data drawn from protégés to test the hypotheses. Although self-report data are common in mentoring research (Noe et al., 2002), future research should consider data from other sources to check the validity (Allen, Poteet & Russell, 2000). As discussed in the methodology section, one of this study’s limitations is that the variables for mentors’ machiavellianism and negative behaviors as well as their protégés’ attitudes were analyzed based only on protégés’ ratings, and thus, common method bias may result from the same source (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We attempted to control for it by designing the questionnaire reflecting procedural remedy to separate psychologically the measures of the predictor and criterion variables. However, future research should consider obtaining data from multiple sources. Second, we used a cross-sectional setting, and thus, the question of causality remains open. In an analysis of the antecedents of negative mentoring experiences, a longitudinal approach may provide better understanding of the causal relationship. In terms of the generalizability of the results, most of our respondents were female nurses, and thus, although mentoring relationships are salient in this profession (e.g., Tourigny & Purlich, 2005), the generalizability of the results should be verified in business settings and in mixed-gender situations. We did not consider the role of protégés’ personality traits in predicting negative experiences in formal mentoring relationships, and thus, future research should employ data on mentoring, personality traits, and attitudes through surveys considering multiple sources (e.g., formal mentors paired with their protégés and mentoring program coordinators) and multiple organizations with formal mentoring programs. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the literature by addressing some interesting research questions that have not received much empirical attention and thus, stimulates and facilitates future research efforts.

References


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