

Benefits of Mentoring in Organizations

The Mentor's Perspective

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In recent years, popular and academic literature have drawn attention to the benefits that mentoring relationships can offer to protégés, mentors and organizations[1]. Having a mentor has been linked to career advancement[2-6]; higher pay[3,6] and greater career satisfaction[7,8]. Moreover, the mentoring relationship may be critical to the advancement of women in organizations[9-11]. For mentors, the relationship is an opportunity to make productive use of knowledge and expertise in middle age[12,13] and to learn in new ways[14]. The organization also benefits, as future leaders are prepared[15], and may also find that employees who are mentored are more satisfied and committed than those who are not[16]. An understanding of these developmental relationships becomes even more important given changes in demographic and labour market characteristics and competitive pressures.

Mentoring has been thought to be so effective as a career development and management training tool that many companies are investing in formal programmes with the intent of fostering such relationships among their employees[17-19]. The design of these programmes has been influenced by published empirical research and personal anecdotes of informal mentoring relationships in a variety of organizations. However, although research on mentor relationships continues to be reported[20-22], the body of research findings about mentoring is still rather limited.

As in any new field of inquiry, there are both disagreement and confusion in the use of the term

mentor[1]. A wide variety of conceptual and operational definitions of mentoring have been proposed[8,23]. In addition, research on mentoring has typically lacked an integrated research model or framework. Most research findings are merely listings of empirical results. These are useful in early research stages to broaden the range of variables one might include in future studies and to add to our understanding of the phenomenon itself. However, the development and use of more comprehensive and integrated research models are needed to provide more complete understanding of such a complex personal and organizational relationship, as well as serve as an organizing framework for the variety of findings produced to date.

Gender and Mentoring

Gender issues may become increasingly important as the instrumental role of mentoring in career development has been recognized[24]. Most mentors are men because most senior positions in organizations are occupied by men. Mentors have long been identified as an important factor in the career success of men, but may be even more critical to the career success of

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women[10]. Women, however, may have a more difficult time finding mentors[25].

In addition, cross-sex mentoring may raise additional issues that are absent in the typical male-male relationship[26]. Noe[25] has identified six potential barriers to the establishment of cross-sex relationships. Clawson and Kram[26] discuss the “developmental dilemma” existing in cross-sex relationships in which both internal and external relationships must be managed. The pair must manage the closeness/distance in the internal relationship as well as perceptions of the relationship by outsiders.

It may also be that women bring unique competences and needs to the mentor-protégé relationship[14,27,28]. Burke[7] studied male and female protégés and found that female protégés reported receiving more psychosocial functions from their mentors than did male protégés. Fitt and Newton[29] observed that women protégés were seen as needing more encouragement and having to be “sold” more actively than were their male colleagues. Reich[30] supported these findings when he reported that the affective, emotional aspects of the relationship were more vital for female protégés than for male protégés, and that women were more likely than men to stress caring, nurturing and teaching when describing the mentorship. Women also considered the mentor’s role which provided feedback about strengths and weaknesses to be more important than did men. Relationships involving a female protégé were also more likely to develop into a close friendship than were those involving only men. Noe[21] found, in a study of successful assigned mentoring relationships, that mentors matched with opposite-sex protégés reported that these protégés used the mentorship more effectively than same-sex protégés. However Kram[1] found that female protégés were more likely to experience greater social distance, discomfort and over-protectiveness from male mentors than male protégés.

This study had two major objectives. One was to examine the mentor relationship from the perspective of the mentor, since most of the research in this area has looked at this relationship from the vantage point of the protégé. A second objective, related to the first, was to test a model involving hypothesized antecedents and consequences of particular mentoring activities (see Figure 1). Most of the previous writing has not been guided by a well-developed research framework.

Two aspects of the mentor relationship were considered: descriptive characteristics (e.g. length

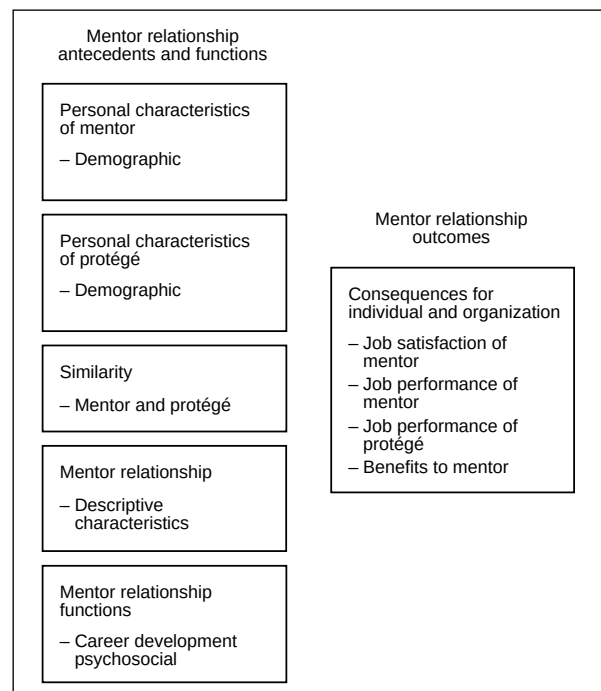


Figure 1.
Research Model

of relationship, organization level of mentor and protégé at outset) and mentor functions[1], both psychosocial (e.g. providing emotional support) and career development (e.g. providing feedback, engaging in career planning). Antecedents of the mentor relationship included personal and situational characteristics of the mentor, personal characteristics of the protégé, and a measure of perceived similarity of mentor and protégé. Important personal and organizational outcomes of the mentor relationship were also included (e.g. job performance of protégé and mentor, benefits to mentor).

Some aspects of this model have already been examined by others. For example, Noe[21] investigated the influence of protégés’ job and career attitudes, gender composition of the mentoring dyad, amount of time protégés spent with mentors, and quality of interactions with mentors on psychosocial and career functions that protégés gained from the mentorship. Data were collected from both mentors and protégés. Only the sex of protégés had significant and independent correlations with psychosocial functions. Females reported receiving significantly more psychosocial benefits from the mentoring relationship than did males.

Whitely *et al.*[23] examined several different kinds of correlates of career-oriented mentoring experiences among early career managers and professionals. Although relatively little agreement existed in the research literature, three classes of

predictors of mentoring (from the perspective of protégés) have received some attention. These were: protégé demographic characteristics such as age, sex and socio-economic origin; protégé work involvement; and protégé work situation including position and hierarchical level. Whitely and his colleagues reviewed the theoretical rationale for specific variables in each class. Their results indicated that younger, more work-involved respondents from higher socio-economic origins received more career-oriented mentoring. In addition, managers received more mentoring than professionals, as did those higher in the hierarchy.

Let us now consider some of the research results examining mentor functions to career benefits reported by protégés. Scandura[4] examined the link, from the protégés' perspective, between mentoring functions and career mobility outcomes of protégés. She collected data from a random sample of 244 manufacturing managers. Aspects of career development functions and psychosocial functions were found to be related to managers' salary leads and promotions.

Whitely *et al.*[6] investigated the relationship of career mentoring to the promotions and compensation received by 404 early career managers and professionals working in a variety of organizations. Their results indicated that, contracting for potentially exploratory demographic and situational variables, career mentoring was related to both promotion rate and total compensation.

Summary and Research Questions

This study considers a diverse set of personal, situational, and mentor function characteristics that have received some theoretical discussion as predictors of individual and organizational benefits of mentoring. Some of these predictors have been found to have positive relationships with mentoring outcomes, while others have had inconsistent effects. In addition, perhaps appropriately, almost every study examined mentoring from the perspective of protégés.

Given this state of knowledge, the variety of conceptualizations of mentoring, the diversity of samples involved, and the range of research designs used, general research questions seemed more appropriate than specific hypotheses at this time.

The general research question we addressed was:

To what degree do various person antecedents and characteristics of mentorships, including

levels of mentor functions predict a variety of mentoring outcomes, from the perspective of mentors?

Similarly, Burke[7] related a variety of mentor and protégé demographic characteristics and job and career attitudes to mentoring functions as perceived by protégés. In addition, he examined the relationship of these variables to a variety of mentor and protégé personal and career outcomes.

Method

Procedure

Contact was made with directors of Human Resources departments at seven high-technology companies. They were asked to identify managers and professionals in their organization who may have been or were currently mentors and assisted in distributing questionnaires to them.

Respondents

Respondents were managerial-level employees of seven high-technology companies. Telecommunications, computing systems, software development and aeronautics fields were represented. A total of 216 questionnaires were distributed, and 94 respondents returned completed questionnaires, giving a 43.3 per cent response rate. Demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table I. Thirteen were women (13.8 per cent). The mean age was 39. Respondents were, on average, four levels below the president of their company (range = 1 to 20) and had an average of 24 subordinates (mode = 4, range = 0 to 300). They had been with their respective companies for an average of 10.8 years and in their current position an average of 2.7 years.

Measures

Respondents were given the following instructions: "Consider all the people younger than yourself whose careers you have influenced in a positive way over the last few years, even those individuals who have not been your direct subordinates. Choose one individual with whom you have shared an especially close relationship and whose career you have influenced the most. Remember – this could be someone you manage at present, someone you have managed in the past, or even someone you have never managed directly. Please answer the following questions with this individual and relationship in mind. If you are not currently

	N	%		N	%
<i>Age (years)</i>			<i>Sex</i>		
26-30	6	6.4	Male	81	86.2
31-35	28	29.8	Female	13	13.8
36-40	22	23.4			
41-45	20	21.3	<i>Levels to president</i>		
46-50	9	9.5	1	2	2.2
51 or over	9	9.5	2	15	16.3
			3	28	30.4
<i>Education</i>			4	28	30.4
High school	5	5.3	5 or more	19	20.6
Community college	24	25.5			
Bachelor's	42	44.7	<i>Position</i>		
Master's	17	18.1	General management	7	7.4
PhD	6	6.4	Technical management	27	28.7
			Non-technical management	26	27.7
<i>Number of subordinates</i>			Staff engineer	24	25.5
0-5	33	35.5	Consultant	8	8.5
6-10	28	30.1	Non-engineers	1	1.1
11-15	12	12.9	Scientists	1	1.1
16-20	5	5.4			
20 or more	15	16.1	<i>Present job title</i>		
			Manager	55	63.2
<i>Undergraduate major</i>			Director	17	19.5
Engineering	54	58.1	Designer	9	5.7
Science	13	41.0	Assistant VP	3	3.4
Humanities	6	6.5	Controller	1	1.1
Social science			VP	3	3.4
Business	7	7.5	Project leader	1	1.1
Computer science	4	4.3	Consultant	2	2.3
Mathematics	1	1.1			
Other	9	9.6			
			<i>Tenure in present job (years)</i>		
<i>Tenure with organization (years)</i>			Less than 1	24	25.5
0-5	21	22.3	1-3	49	52.2
6-10	38	40.5	4-5	15	16.0
11-15	14	14.9	5-10	5	5.3
16-20	9	9.6	Over 10	1	1.1
20 or more	12	12.8			

Table I.
Demographic Characteristics of Mentors

active in this individual's career, describe the relationship you had with this person at that point in time when you were actively involved in his/her career."

Antecedents of Mentor Relationship Functions

Four areas of potential antecedents or mentor relationship functions were considered (see Figure 1).

Mentor Characteristics

The following single item measures were included: tenure with company, tenure in present position, age, sex, level of education,

number of subordinates, levels from the company president, and supervisory versus technical job responsibilities.

Protégé Characteristics

Three demographic characteristics of the protégé were considered: sex, age and educational level.

Mentor-Protégé Similarity

Mentors indicated how similar their protégés were to themselves on nine seven-point scales. Items included: intelligence, approach to procedures, personality, background, ambition, education, and activities outside work.

Mentor Relationship Characteristics

These included ten single-item descriptive measures: how long mentor had known protégé, whether mentor hired and placed protégé, frequency of communication, who initiated communication, proximity to protégé's office, whether protégé was under mentor's direct supervision, whether the mentor relationship was still ongoing, current organizational level of protégé relative to mentor, organizational level of protégé relative to mentor at the start of the relationship, and whether protégé was the same or opposite sex.

Mentor Relationship Functions

Career development and psychosocial functions were measured using an instrument developed by Lindholm[31]. Each measure had six items.

Career development functions included: How often do you give specific positive feedback on performance; How often do you discuss his/her next position?; How often do you discuss his/her long-range career plans? and How often do you act as a sounding-board for his/her new ideas? Psychosocial functions included: How often do you serve as a confidant to him/her about personal problems?; How often have you assured this person of your confidence in him/her? How often have you listened to problems or anxieties that interfered with this person's work?

Outcomes of Mentor Relationship

Four measures were included. These were: *job satisfaction* – three items[32], All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?; *own promotability* – four items, What is the probability of your being promoted at least one level in the next ten years?; *promotability of protégé* – four items, What is the probability that your protégé will be promoted at least one level in the next ten years?; *work benefits* – seven items, This person provides fresh ideas for projects.

Results

Descriptive Characteristics

Table II presents descriptive characteristics of relationships with protégés. Relationships with protégés tended to be fairly lengthy. About two-thirds of these relationships were between three and ten years long. Protégés were nominated for promotion once or twice (about 66 per cent). Protégés were also likely to be promoted once or twice (about 70 per cent). About one-quarter of the protégés were female. Protégés were between 26 and 35 (about 71 per cent) and were almost always younger than their mentors. About half the protégés were in a direct line of supervision of

their mentors. Most protégés were still at lower organizational levels in the hierarchy than their mentors (85 per cent). Almost all protégés were at lower organizational hierarchical levels than their mentors when the relationship began. About three-quarters of the mentor-protégé relationships were still ongoing. Ongoing relationships ranged between one and ten years in length (80 per cent), with roughly equal numbers between 1-3, 4-5, and 6-10 years. Finally, most of the mentor-protégé relationships which had ended lasted between 1-3 years (56 per cent). Sixty-five pairs were both male (69.1 per cent), seven were both female (7.4 per cent), 16 involved a male mentor and a female protégé (17.0 per cent), and six involved a female mentor and a male protégé (6.4 per cent).

Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, numbers of items, internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's α), and Pearson intercorrelations among the multiple item measures in the study are shown in Table III. All multi-item measures had internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's α) greater than 0.70, a level of reliability generally considered acceptable.

About half of these correlations were significantly different from zero ($p \leq 0.05$). Mentors reporting greater mentor-protégé similarity also provided more career development functions ($r = 0.23, p \leq 0.05$), more psychosocial functions ($r = 0.22, p \leq 0.05$), rated their protégés more promotable ($r = 0.35, p \leq 0.001$) and received more work benefits from this relationship ($r = 0.38, p \leq 0.001$). Mentors providing more career development functions also provided more psychosocial functions ($r = 0.66, p \leq 0.001$), rated their protégés more promotable ($r = 0.38, p \leq 0.001$). Mentors providing more career development functions also provided more psychosocial functions ($r = 0.66, p \leq 0.001$), rated their protégés more promotable ($r = 0.19, p \leq 0.05$) and received more work benefits from this relationship ($r = 0.20, p \leq 0.05$). Mentors providing more psychosocial functions received more work benefits from their protégés ($r = 0.22, p \leq 0.05$). Mentors who saw themselves more promotable also rated their protégés more promotable ($r = 0.45, p \leq 0.001$). Finally, mentors received more work benefits from protégés whom they rated more promotable ($r = 0.23, p \leq 0.01$).

Antecedents, Functions and Mentor Relationship Outcomes

Four separate hierarchical regression analyses were carried out using each mentor relationship

	N	%		N	%
<i>Length of relationship (years)</i>			<i>Direct line of supervision</i>		
Less than 1	7	7.5	Yes	50	53.2
1-3	20	21.5	No	44	46.8
3-5	24	25.8			
5-10	38	40.9	<i>Current hierarchical level</i>		
10 or more	4	4.3	Above mine	3	3.2
			Same as mine	10	10.6
<i>Times recommended for promotion</i>			One below mine	51	54.3
0	16	17.0	Two below mine	25	26.6
1	34	36.2	Three or more below mine	5	5.4
2	28	29.8			
3	12	12.8	<i>Level when relationships began</i>		
4	3	3.2	One level below mine	48	51.1
			Two levels below mine	23	24.5
<i>Successful promotion recommendations</i>			Three levels below mine	10	10.6
0	17	18.1	Other	13	13.8
1	40	42.6			
2	27	28.7	<i>Still have this relationship</i>		
3	8	8.5	Yes	69	73.4
4	2	2.1	No	25	26.6
<i>Gender</i>			<i>If still going, how long? (years)</i>		
Male	71	75.5	Less than 1	11	16.2
Female	23	24.5	1-3	21	30.9
			4-5	17	25.0
<i>Age (years)</i>			6-10	16	23.5
21-25	10	10.6	10 or more	3	4.4
26-30	30	32.0			
31-35	37	39.3	<i>If over, how long? (years)</i>		
36-40	13	13.8	1-3	14	56.0
41-45	2	2.2	3-5	6	24.0
46-50	2	2.2	6-10	5	20.0

Table II.
Descriptive Characteristics of Relationships with Protégés

outcome as a dependent variable. Antecedents and mentor functions were entered in blocks. Personal characteristics of mentors was entered on the first step, personal characteristics of protégés was entered on the second step, similarity of mentor and protégé was entered on the third step, mentor relationship characteristics was entered on the fourth step, and mentor functions was entered on the fifth (final) step. The results of these analyses are shown in Table IV.

Let us now consider specific findings. First, only characteristics of protégés showed a significant increment to explained variance for mentors' job satisfaction. Stepwise multiple regression analyses revealed four significant and independent correlates. Mentors closer in level to the president were more job satisfied ($\beta = 0.32$); mentors identifying relationships with male protégés were more satisfied ($\beta = 0.47$); mentors whose protégés initiated communication

reported more job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.30$); and mentors with greater frequency of communication with their protégés reported greater job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.20$).

Second, none of the entered blocks contributed significant increments to explained variance of mentors' self-rated promotability. Stepwise multiple regression analysis yielded two significant and independent correlates: younger mentors rated themselves more promotable ($\beta = -0.31$), and mentors with less frequent communication with protégés rated themselves more promotable ($\beta = -0.24$).

Third, mentor and protégé similarity showed a significant increment to explained variance on rated promotability of protégé. Stepwise multiple regression analysis indicated one significant and independent predictor: similarity of mentor and protégé ($\beta = 0.40$).

Variables	Mean	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Mentor-protégé similarity	38.1	8.88	9	(0.73)	0.23***	0.22***	-0.10	0.06	0.35*	0.38*
2. Career development functions	26.0	5.94	6		(0.87)	0.66*	-0.02	0.04	0.19***	0.20***
3. Psychosocial functions	23.8	6.94	6			(0.89)	-0.08	0.06	0.12	0.22***
4. Mentor's job satisfaction	4.8	1.76	3				(0.74)	-0.01	-0.02	0.14
5. Promotability of mentor	11.9	6.05	4					(0.85)	0.45*	-0.03
6. Promotability of protégé	13.9	5.79	4						(0.83)	0.23**
7. Benefits to mentor	28.9	6.28	7							(0.89)

Note: NS range from 94 to 66
Values in parentheses are reliability coefficients
* $p \leq 0.001$
** $p \leq 0.01$
*** $p \leq 0.05$

Table III.
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Intercorrelations of Multiple Item Measures

Fourth, both mentor-protégé similarity and mentor relationship functions showed significant increments to explained variance of work benefits to mentors from their relationships with their protégés. Stepwise multiple regression analysis indicated two significant and independent correlates: mentors received greater work benefits from protégés more similar to themselves

($\beta = 0.35$), and mentors who undertook more career development functions received greater work benefits from their protégés ($\beta = 0.29$).

Discussion

All managerial and professional respondents in our sample ($n = 94$) reported special

Independent variables	Job satisfaction of mentor		Promotability of mentor		Promotability of protégé		Benefits to mentor	
	R^2	ΔR^2	R^2	ΔR^2	R^2	ΔR^2	R^2	ΔR^2
Characteristics of mentors	0.15	0.15	0.22	0.22	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.08
Characteristics of protégés	0.37	0.22*	0.24	0.02	0.11	0.02	0.12	0.03
Mentor-protégé similarity	0.38	0.01	0.28	0.04	0.28	0.18*	0.23	0.12**
Mentor relationship characteristics	0.53	0.15	0.40	0.12	0.33	0.04	0.32	0.08
Mentor functions	0.54	0.01	0.40	0.00	0.41	0.08	0.42	0.11*

Note: NS range from 65 to 67
* $p < 0.001$
** $p < 0.01$
*** $p \leq 0.05$

Table IV.
Multiple Regression Analysis of Antecedents, Functions and Mentor Relationship Outcomes

developmental relationships with others during their working life. In about half the cases, protégés were in the direct line of supervision of the manager. Eighty-five per cent of protégés were of lower organizational rank than the responding manager. Three-quarters of these developmental relationships were ongoing and approximately 80 per cent had existed from one to ten years. Of the one-quarter that had ended, 60 per cent had lasted for only one to three years.

With the possible exception of the length of the ongoing mentor relationships, these descriptive data are consistent with the picture of mentor relationships one gets from the perspective of protégés[7,20]. More work such as Kram's[1] is needed in which data from protégés and mentors are collected simultaneously.

Usefulness of the Research Model

The research model (see Figure 1) served as a useful organizing framework. There was agreement with previously reported results based on the experiences of protégés[7,20].



Job satisfaction and promotability are complex processes



The nature of benefits reported by mentors from these relationships warrants further study. The receipt of benefits to the manager from such relationships could be considered as either an antecedent or an outcome. It is an antecedent when the mentor considers the investment of time, energy and enthusiasm in a more junior individual in terms of exchange, or cost-benefit. It is an outcome when mentors receive extra performance from their protégés as a result of providing both career and psychosocial functions. The application of social exchange theory[33] to mentoring relationships appears to be a fruitful initiative. This is particularly the case, given the theoretical nature of much of the previous research on the mentor relationship.

The results of this study must be considered to be tentative. The sample was small, few females were represented, and it is not clear whether high technology organizations are representative of organizations in general. Nevertheless, some important issues and observations were noted.

First, mentors and protégés may describe some things the same way (office proximity, length of relationship) but not others (benefits to protégés, benefits to mentors). Something as basic as the level of mentor functions provided may not be described at similar levels by individuals on the giving and receiving end. Some outcome variables are probably best described by protégés, others by mentors.

The focus on special developmental pairings may have restricted the range of obtained responses. Thus weak, or few, statistically significant relationships may be observed among variables given this restriction.

In hindsight, it was not surprising that few of the mentor relationship outcomes were related to mentor relationship antecedents and functions. Job satisfaction and promotability are complex processes, influenced by many variables. Mentorship phenomena may constitute only minor contributing factors of such overdetermined variables.

Mentor research must still come to grips with matters of definition. The present study side-stepped this concern by focusing on a special developmental relationship, defined in a way that is consistent with some definitions of mentors. Others propose a definition based on the level of mentor functions reported by protégés[8]. More attention must be given to definitional issues.

Future Research Directions

The findings obtained here suggest the following to be useful research directions:

- The role of similarity between mentor and protégé in the mentorship process needs greater understanding.
- The importance of sex and gender[25]. It appears that more psychosocial functions may be present when women are involved.
- Differences in the mentor relationship when the mentor is, or is not, the immediate supervisor. This addresses the question of mentoring on a daily basis with face-to-face contact versus mentoring at a distance.
- The importance of particular mentor characteristics (age, number of subordinates, sex) in determining the quality and character of mentor functions observed.
- The use of more complex and comprehensive models of the mentoring relationship which may require multi-variate analyses such as path analysis and LISREL to examine their validity.

Practical Implications

The findings obtained in the present study have implications for creating effective developmental relationships (e.g. mentoring) in organizations. First, organizations need to examine the span of control of managers. Mentors with more subordinates provided fewer mentoring functions to their protégés. Second, organizations can foster an interest in mentorships among managers and professionals by emphasizing the tangible benefits mentors may receive from such relationships. Third, managers interested in mentoring should have some choice in whom they will mentor. It appears that similarity between mentor and protégé (background and interests, workstyles) increases the level of specific mentoring functions. Organizations might consider issues of similarity in their placement of high potential early career professionals. Fourth, organizations need to pay particular attention to gender and cross-gender effects. Male professionals are more likely to be similar to more senior male managers than are female professionals. This becomes particularly important, given the increasingly diverse nature of the workforce (women, minorities, handicapped). Training interventions will serve a useful purpose with regard to this.

□

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