

ARTICLE

Antecedents of mentors' interpersonal behaviors at work: A cross-sectional study

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Funding information

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

Abstract

Building on the self-determination theory and the work of Pelletier and their colleagues, we conducted a study to examine the antecedents of mentors' interpersonal behaviors. The purpose of this study was to determine how influence from above (administrative, practice, and colleagues' pressures) and influence from below (perception of mentees' level of self-determined motivation) were related to the mentors' motivations for their work and the mentoring relationship, and how the mentors' motivations were related to their interpersonal behaviors. In the present study ($N = 600$), the results of a cross-sectional design showed that mentors who perceived greater influence from above and lower influence from below were more non-self-determined toward their work and the mentoring relationship. In turn, the more non-self-determined they were, the more they were acting in a controlling manner with their mentees. Overall, our findings supported the independent and complementary role of influences from above and from below on mentors' motivations and interpersonal behaviors.

KEYWORDS

interpersonal behaviors, mentors, self-determination theory, social-contextual conditions, workplace

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INTRODUCTION

Mentoring relationships in the workplace are an effective way to help workers advance further in their career (Eby & Robertson, 2020). Mentors (broadly defined as more experienced individuals) play an important role in these relationships. In traditional mentoring, the mentors' roles are to facilitate career development and to provide psychological support to a mentee (a less experienced worker; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Kram, 1985).

Studies showed that the interpersonal behaviors of mentors can substantially impact the motivation of mentees for their work and for the mentoring relationship. Mentors also have an impact on the engagement and well-being of their mentee at work, as well as within the mentoring relationship itself (e.g., Firzly et al., 2022). Thus, mentors' behaviors and attitudes can positively or negatively influence the professional growth of mentees (Allen et al., 2004; Eby & Robertson, 2020; Tong & Kram, 2013). However, little is known regarding the experience of mentors and how their motivation affects their interactions with the mentees.

Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020) provides a comprehensive framework for examining the antecedents of mentors' interpersonal behaviors. More precisely, the causal sequence proposed by Pelletier et al. (2002) includes social-contextual conditions, which impact the motivation of individuals and their interpersonal behaviors' style. The social-contextual conditions are the influence from above (named pressure from above) and the influence from below (named pressure from below in Pelletier et al.'s [2002] paper). Influences from above and from below were found to directly affect teachers' motivation and to indirectly affect their interpersonal behaviors' styles (Pelletier et al., 2002). Building on SDT and the work of Pelletier et al. (2002), the objective of the present study was to determine how social-contextual conditions are related to mentors' motivation at work and within the mentoring relationship and how their motivations are related to their interpersonal behaviors.

Influences from above and from below

Researchers previously studied the antecedents (also called determinants) of interpersonal behaviors in the context of education (e.g., Pelletier et al., 2002; Reeve, 2009) and sports (Rocchi et al., 2013; Stebbings et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2009). These researchers found that both influence from above and influence from below predicted individuals' motivation, which, in turn, had significant effects on their behaviors.

Influence from above encompasses (a) colleague pressure, which involves comparisons in coaching styles and the drive to excel among mentors and teachers; (b) practice pressure, which reflects stress and expectations regarding how individuals manage practices and make team-related decisions; and (c) administrative pressure, which involves obligations set by club administrations regarding team management, selection, and mandatory requirements (Pelletier et al., 2002). Individuals who feel pressured to meet the demands of their work context may eventually experience a decrease in self-determined motivation (Pelletier et al., 2002; Reeve, 2009; Rocchi et al., 2013). In contrast, influence from below mainly refers to the supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' self-determined motivation. Specifically, influence from below includes the perception that subordinates are motivated to adhere to constraints willingly, rather than out of obligation. In the latter scenario, when subordinates feel obligated and act based on non-self-determined motivation, the individual in a position of authority may endorse a lower quality motivation themselves (Fernet et al., 2012; Nie et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This pattern was observed in classrooms where teachers exhibited less self-determined motivation when their students showed less self-determined motivation as well (Pelletier et al., 2002). Although this study was correlational, which makes it difficult to determine the direction of the effect, it highlighted how influences from both above and below both impact the motivation of individuals situated in between.

Within educational and sports contexts, previous researchers noted that teachers and coaches with less self-determined forms of motivation were also less autonomy supportive toward their students or athletes, respectively (Pelletier et al., 2002; Reeve, 2009; Rocchi et al., 2013). This indicates that these teachers and coaches were less likely to support the decisions of their subordinates, provide valuable feedback, or offer them alternative choices. In comparison, teachers and coaches with more self-determined motivation were more likely to engage in autonomy-supportive behaviors (Pelletier et al., 2002; Reeve, 2009; Rocchi et al., 2013). Researchers also found that self-determined motivation protects against autonomy-thwarting behaviors, whereas non-self-determined motivation predicts an increase in such behaviors (Pelletier et al., 2002; Reeve, 2009; Rocchi et al., 2013). There is a distinction between not helping someone and impeding them. Autonomy-thwarting behaviors involve limiting the choices and applying pressure to adopt certain behaviors. Both autonomy-supportive and autonomy-thwarting behaviors were predicted by motivational factors in Pelletier et al.'s (2002) study.

No study to date has examined social-contextual conditions, motivational processes, and interpersonal behaviors within the context of mentoring relationships. It is then important to better understand the sequence that leads mentors to act in certain ways toward their mentees. Studying mentor interpersonal behaviors and their antecedents is crucial, as it directly impacts professional development, workplace dynamics, and organizational success. Understanding how mentors interact and the factors that drive their behaviors not only enhances mentorship effectiveness, leading to better learning outcomes for mentees, but also influences the overall workplace culture and relationships between individuals. Moreover, such research contributes to the advancement of theoretical frameworks, enriching our understanding of mentor-mentee dynamics and their implications for broader organizational contexts. The relationship between a mentor and its mentee in a work environment shares many similarities with the relationships that have been investigated in previous studies (e.g., between a coach and an athlete). Hence, influences from above and from below were expected to impact mentors' motivation for their work and for the mentoring relationship, and their interpersonal behaviors.

Self-determination theory

The SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020) is a theory of human motivation and personality that offers a broad framework to study the reasons individuals choose to engage in different behaviors, participate in activities, and enjoy them. SDT assumes that individuals are prone toward psychological growth, new learning experiences, mastery, and connection with others. However, these human tendencies require supportive conditions and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Ryan et al., 2019). According to SDT, satisfying these three basic needs will foster self-determined motivation. Building on the work of Pelletier et al. (2002), we relied on this theory to assess the mentors' self-determined and non-self-determined motivations at work and in the mentoring relationship. Self-determined individuals engage in activities driven by personal interest or alignment with their goals and values (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008). Self-determined motivation has been associated with fostering need-supportive behaviors (Pelletier et al., 2002; Rocchi et al., 2013). In contrast, when motivation is non-self-determined, individuals operate under a sense of obligation, feeling pressure from both external and internal sources. This sense of having to engage in an activity or behavior characterizes non-self-determined motivation, which is considered suboptimal and leads to behaviors that thwart personal needs (Bartholomew et al., 2011).

Individuals can experience differently and simultaneously self-determined or non-self-determined motivation toward an activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For instance, an employee might feel a genuine interest and satisfaction for a project (self-determined motivation) because it aligns with their personal values or interests. Simultaneously, they might also be motivated by external factors such as the recognition, acknowledgment, or praise they anticipate receiving from their supervisor or colleagues upon successful completion of the project (non-self-determined motivation). This simultaneous experience of self-determined and non-self-determined motivations toward the same work task exemplifies how

individuals in the workplace can experience a blend of different motivational forces, according to SDT. Thus, both forms of motivation are important to understand their distinct functions in the workplace and in mentoring.

Motivational factors within the work context and the mentoring relationship uniquely contribute to mentees' functioning and their achievement of desirable work outcomes (Firzly et al., 2022). Of importance, mentorship motivation was revealed to be significantly related to work outcomes, over and above work motivation and interpersonal behaviors in the mentoring context. Therefore, contextual influences should more strongly relate to contextually matching outcomes (within-context; Vallerand, 1997). However, the findings of Firzly et al. (2022) provided support for the unique contribution of mentorship motivation to the prediction of work outcomes (cross-context). Overall, the results supported the impact of the mentor–mentee relationship on motivation for work and for the mentoring relationship. The results also supported the contribution of both motivation contexts on the positive functioning of employees in the workplace. Yet, little attention has been paid to the role of these types of motivation in relation to mentors' interpersonal behaviors.

Interpersonal behaviors

SDT posits that there are two broad interpersonal behavior styles, namely, need-supportive and need-thwarting, which interact with the three basic psychological needs identified by the theory (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Need-supportive interpersonal behaviors enhance others' autonomy, competence, and relatedness by offering choices, providing explanations, giving constructive feedback, acknowledging skill improvements, and nurturing meaningful relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Slemp et al., 2024). Conversely, need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors exert control over others' autonomy, competence, and relatedness by making unjustified requests, being excessively directive, emphasizing faults, discouraging complex tasks, doubting their capacity for improvement, and neglecting relationship maintenance (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Slemp et al., 2024). Similar to self-determined and non-self-determined motivations, need-supportive and need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors can co-occur within a context (e.g., Chua et al., 2014; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Moreover, the latter are not on opposite ends of a continuum. Thus, engaging in need-supportive behaviors, for example, does not entail the absence of need-thwarting behaviors (Bartholomew et al., 2011). Hence, individuals can have both interpersonal styles within a relationship (e.g., Chua et al., 2014; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Most studies in education and sport examined autonomy-supportive and autonomy-thwarting interpersonal behaviors (Rocchi et al., 2013; Stebbings et al., 2015). Few studies included the other interpersonal behaviors styles (i.e., supportive of competence and relatedness, as well as thwarting of competence and relatedness), especially in the context of mentoring. Including all six types of interpersonal behaviors is essential for understanding of mentors' interpersonal behaviors. Expanding and enhancing our comprehension of interpersonal behaviors encompassing both support and control involves delving deeper into the nuances of mentor–mentee interactions. This entails examining actions that offer guidance, assistance, and encouragement (supportive behaviors) while also acknowledging the possible influence or direction imposed by the mentor (controlling behaviors).

Present research

Using a cross-sectional design, we examined how influences from above and from below were related to mentor's self-determined and non-self-determined motivations at work and in the mentoring relationship. We also examined how these motivations, in turn, were related to mentors' need-supportive and need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors. The context of a mentoring relationship, as opposed to a general work context, suggested different effects of motivations specific to the work environment

and those specific to the mentoring relationship. Therefore, we investigated both types of motivation. This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How are influences from above and from below related to mentors' motivations at work and in the mentoring relationship? (2) How mentors' motivations at work and in the mentoring relationship are associated with their behaviors toward mentees? The directions of the hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 623 Canadian workers (mentors) were recruited. Of the 623 participants, one multivariate outlier was identified by Mahalanobis distance inspection ($df = 8$, $p < 0.001$) and was removed. Twenty-two participants were removed due to missing data on more than 50% of the items of the study. The participants in the final sample for our analyses ($N = 600$; 49.1% male) were 45 years or older ($M = 52.6$, $SD = 6.8$). Participants were all employed ($M_{\text{months}} = 76.8$, $SD = 90.5$), and 82.2% worked full-time. Mentors worked in several sectors such as education (10.7%) and information technology (12.7%), and most of them had either a bachelor's (42.8%) or a master's (18.5%) degree. Most mentors also identified themselves as Caucasians or White (78.5%). All participants had been part of a mentoring relationship at work for over a year ($M_{\text{months}} = 15.6$, $SD = 26.2$) and interacted with their mentee every week ($N = 391$; $M_{\text{weeks}} = 6.6$, $SD = 8.0$). Mentors were involved in a formal (47.3%) mentoring relationship, and most of the mentors were also their mentee's supervisor (60.4%). The average age of their mentee was 27.1 years ($SD = 4.7$; 57.6% female). In addition, most mentors reported English (81.9%) as their first language.

Procedure

The participants were recruited through Prolific Academic. Prolific Academic is an online platform that connects researchers with a diverse pool of participants for academic studies. It is owned by Prolific Ltd., founded by researchers Katia Damer and Phelim Bradley. Participants received monetary compensation for completing the online questionnaire. To be eligible for this study, the participants had to be actively working with a mentee in their workplace at the time of data collection and have proficiency in written English. The participants were provided with a definition of mentoring aligned with the current literature, emphasizing the mentors' dual responsibilities for career development and psychological support. Participants with more than one mentee were asked to answer all questions based on the mentee whose name comes first alphabetically to minimize biases. The study was approved by a university research ethics committee. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participating online.

Measures

Influence from above

The scale items of the Constraints at Work Scale (Pelletier et al., 2002) were adapted to assess mentors' perceptions of constraints in a mentoring context. This scale consists of nine items, divided into three subscales: pressure from co-workers (e.g., "You have to conform to the same mentoring methods used by your colleagues"), pressure from the administration (e.g., "As a mentor, you feel pressured by your organization to achieve unattainable standards"), and pressure from the mentoring context (e.g., "As part of mentoring, you feel overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do every day").

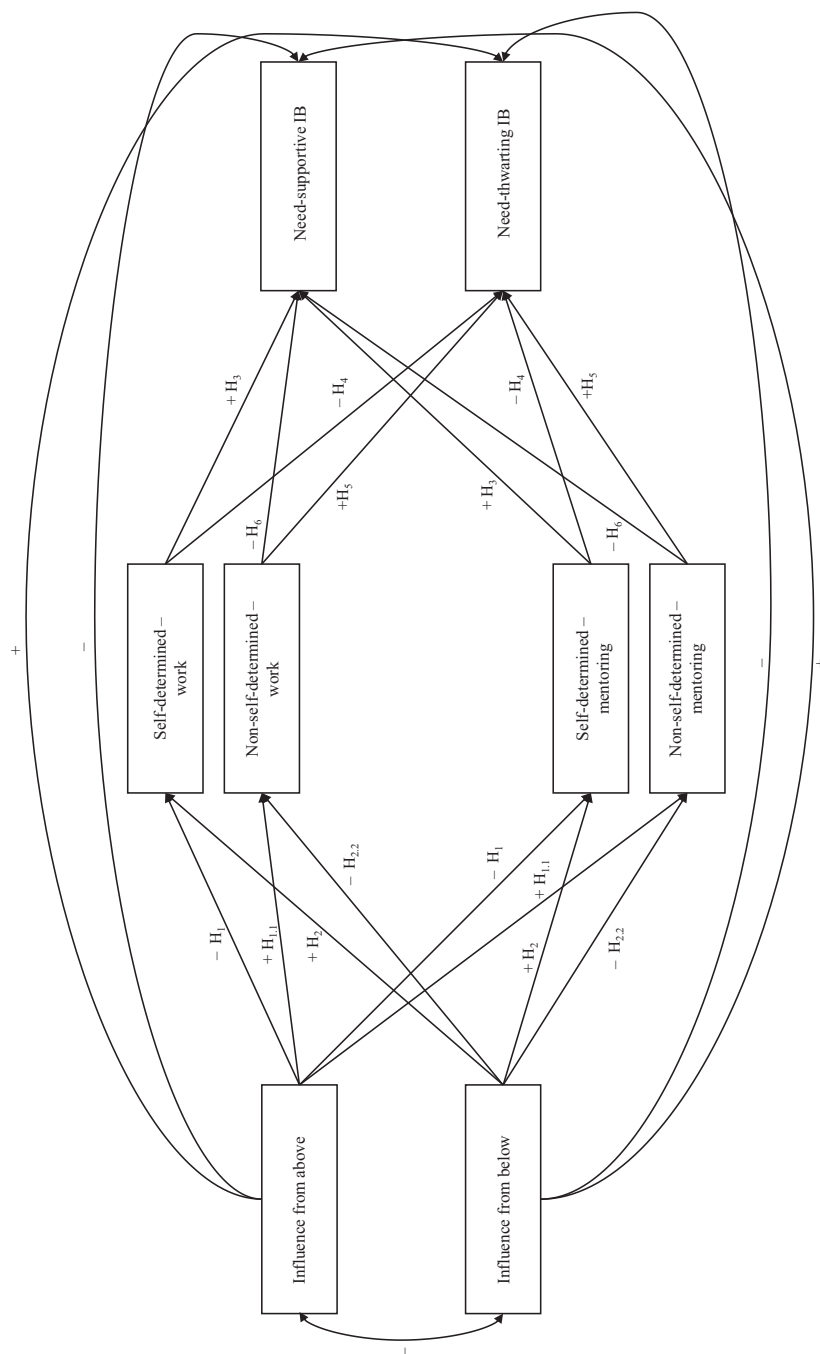


FIGURE 1 Model and hypotheses of the study. IB, interpersonal behaviors.

Participants responded to the statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Does not correspond at all*) to 7 (*Corresponds completely*). A composite score was created by averaging the three subscales ($\alpha = 0.73$). The factorial structure of the scale was examined by Pelletier et al. (2002), who found that the factors shared some common characteristics while remaining independent from one another. The acceptable reliability indices of the current study suggest that a composite score is a viable and parsimonious indicator of influence from above. The English version was compiled using Vallerand's (1989) parallel back translation.

Influence from below

The scale items of the Perception of Students' Motivation Scale (Pelletier et al., 2002) were adapted to fit the context of mentoring, and this scale was also inspired by the Motivation in Mentoring Relationships Scale (Firzly et al., 2022). Modifications included substituting "mentoring" for "school" as needed to ensure the scale better represented the context of mentoring. Mentors had to assess their mentees' reasons for engaging in the mentoring relationship on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Does not correspond at all*) to 7 (*Corresponds exactly*). This scale included six items, each measuring one form of motivation proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2008)—for instance, intrinsic motivation ("For the interest and enjoyment the mentee gets from this relationship"), external regulation ("Because people around the mentee would be upset if they were not involved"), and amotivation ("The mentee doesn't know; they can't see what they are getting out of it"). Studies that used a similar scale adapted to their respective contexts have shown good validity and reliability (Pelletier et al., 2013; Rocchi et al., 2013). The validation study (Pelletier et al., 2013) demonstrated a good fit to the six-factor model (root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.06, 90% confidence interval [CI] [0.04, 0.06]; comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.94; Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = 0.92). The item-factor loadings ranged from 0.57 to 0.94, and configural invariance between men and women was also supported. The internal reliability was calculated on all the items ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Work motivation

Participants completed the Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (Tremblay et al., 2009), which comprises 18 statements. Mentors responded to each statement on a Likert scale from 1 (*Does not correspond at all*) to 7 (*Corresponds exactly*). The six subtypes of motivation proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) were each represented by three items—for instance, intrinsic motivation (e.g., "For the satisfaction I experience when I am successful at doing difficult tasks"), external regulation (e.g., "Because this type of work provides me with security"), and amotivation (e.g., "I don't know why, we are provided with unrealistic working conditions"). Previous studies (e.g., Kotera et al., 2018; Tremblay et al., 2009) provided content, construct, and criterion validity for Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale, thus supporting its use for measuring motivation in the workplace.

Motivation in the mentoring relationship

Mentors' motivation in the mentoring relationship was measured with the Motivation in Mentoring Relationships Scale, which was developed by Firzly et al. (2022). Participants responded to six statements on a Likert scale from 1 (*Does not correspond at all*) to 7 (*Corresponds exactly*). The six subtypes of motivation proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) were each represented by one item—for instance, integrated regulation ("I feel that this is in line with my deepest values"), identified regulation ("Because I view this relationship as a mean to attain my objectives"), and introjected regulation ("Because I would feel bad if I didn't continue this relationship"). According to Firzly

et al. (2022), the measurement reliability demonstrated a good level for self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship ($\alpha = 0.81$) and was considered acceptable for non-self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship ($\alpha = 0.74$). The generated items drew inspiration from existing motivation scales (e.g., Pelletier et al., 2002), and their ecological relevance and content validity were verified by two experts in the field of SDT.

Need-supportive and need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors

Mentors completed the Interpersonal Behavior Questionnaire-Self (Rocchi et al., 2017) by rating the extent to which each item corresponded to their perception of their own need-supportive and need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors on a Likert scale from 1 (*Do not agree at all*) to 7 (*Completely agree*). The six types of interpersonal behaviors were each represented by four items—for instance, autonomy-supportive (e.g., “I support my mentee’s decisions”), competence-supportive (e.g., “I provide valuable feedback”), and relatedness-thwarting (e.g., “I am distant with my mentee when we spend time together”). A composite score was calculated for both interpersonal behavioral styles: need-supportive (mean of autonomy-supportive, competence-supportive, and relatedness-supportive) and need-thwarting (mean of autonomy-thwarting, competence-thwarting, and relatedness-thwarting) behaviors. Internal consistency estimates using Cronbach’s alpha were excellent for need-supportive ($\alpha = 0.92$) and need-thwarting ($\alpha = 0.97$) interpersonal behaviors. Moreover, beyond supporting the scale’s content validity, convergent validity, and divergent validity, previous studies (Rocchi & Pelletier, 2018; Rocchi et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2019) have demonstrated its applicability in assessing perceived interpersonal behaviors from others. These studies primarily focused on the sports domain and encompassed various cultural contexts (Chen et al., 2015).

Plan of analyses

Path analyses were performed in Mplus 8.5 with Robust Maximum Likelihood estimator (MLR). The model was fully saturated (all links estimated) and relied on manifest variables. Prior to analysis, various indices were computed. First, we computed the index of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) by giving a weight of 3, 2, and 1 to the intrinsic, integrated, and identified subscales, respectively, and a weight of -1 , -2 , and -3 to the introjected, external, and amotivated subscales, respectively (Blais et al., 1990). In other words, the perception of mentees’ motivation index scores was calculated using the self-determination index (Blais et al., 1990). One item from each of the six subscales was weighted according to their level of autonomy and control, both combined into one score. In agreement with prior studies, we computed the self-determination index such that the higher score on this index indicates more self-determined motivation (Blais et al., 1990; Ryan & Connell, 1989). This index is more parsimonious than computing multiple scores of self-determined and non-self-determined motivations. Second, to obtain more precise results, we separated self-determined and non-self-determined motivations. Thus, self-determined motivation at work was calculated using the mean of the intrinsic, integrated, and identified regulations ($\alpha = 0.91$). Non-self-determined motivation at work was calculated using the mean of the introjected and external regulations, and amotivation ($\alpha = 0.78$). Third, a composite score of self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship was calculated by averaging the intrinsic, integrated, and identified subscales ($\alpha = 0.71$), and a composite score of non-self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship was calculated by averaging the introjected and external regulations, and amotivation ($\alpha = 0.75$).

We examined a multivariate multiple regression model in which influence from above and influence from below were predictors of mentors’ self-determined and non-self-determined motivations at work and in the mentoring relationship, which, in turn, predicted need-supportive and need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors. Mediation analyses were performed to determine whether the motivations at work

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the main variables of the study.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Influence from above	2.93	1.01	–						
2. Influence from below	9.03	10.86	–0.45**	–					
3. Self-determined at work	5.47	1.11	–0.32**	0.16**	–				
4. Non-self-determined at work	5.46	1.13	0.22**	–0.37**	0.46**	–			
5. Self-determined in mentoring	5.04	1.25	–0.19**	0.21**	0.53**	0.33**	–		
6. Non-self-determined in mentoring	3.74	1.64	0.33**	–0.49**	0.16**	0.66**	0.27**	–	
7. Need-supportive IB	5.92	0.82	–0.43**	0.39**	0.51**	0.03	0.44*	–0.13**	–
8. Need-thwarting IB	2.97	1.82	0.36**	–0.51**	0.08	0.61**	0.14**	0.69**	–0.27**

Note: $N = 600$.

Abbreviations: IB, interpersonal behaviors; SD, standard deviation.

* $p < 0.05$;

** $p < 0.01$.

and in the mentoring relationship could explain why influence from above and influence from below would be associated with more or less need-supportive and need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors. CIs for the mediation coefficients were computed via bias-corrected bootstrap procedures with 10,000 resampling (Efron & Tibshirani, 1994; MacKinnon et al., 2004).

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

The percentage of missing values ranged from 0% to 12.5% (the latter percentage corresponds to influence from below). Missing values were probably missing at random (Little's MCAR test: $\chi^2(61) = 118.1$, $p < 0.001$; Little, 1988). Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimator handled missing values by estimating the model with all available information.

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the main variables are reported in Table 1. All variables have degrees of skewness below one, which is considered acceptable (Bulmer, 1979). The MLR estimator was employed to handle non-normality (Muthén & Muthén, 2012).

Main analyses

The regression results are presented in Figure 2, and the mediation results are reported in Table 2. We had hypothesized that $[H_1]$ influence from above would be negatively associated with self-determined motivation in both contexts (at work and in the mentoring relationship) and $[H_{1,1}]$ influence from above would be positively associated with non-self-determined motivation in both contexts. As shown in Figure 2, the results support $[H_1]$, while $[H_{1,1}]$ was not supported. Influence from above was negatively associated with self-determined motivation in both contexts: at work (standardized regression coefficient $\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$) and in the mentoring relationship ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.006$). However, influence from above was not significantly associated with non-self-determined motivation at work ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.22$), but it was significantly and positively associated with non-self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.01$).

We hypothesized that influence from below would be positively associated with a self-determined motivation in both contexts $[H_2]$ and that influence from below would be negatively associated with non-self-determined motivation in both contexts $[H_{2,2}]$. It is essential to note that higher scores on

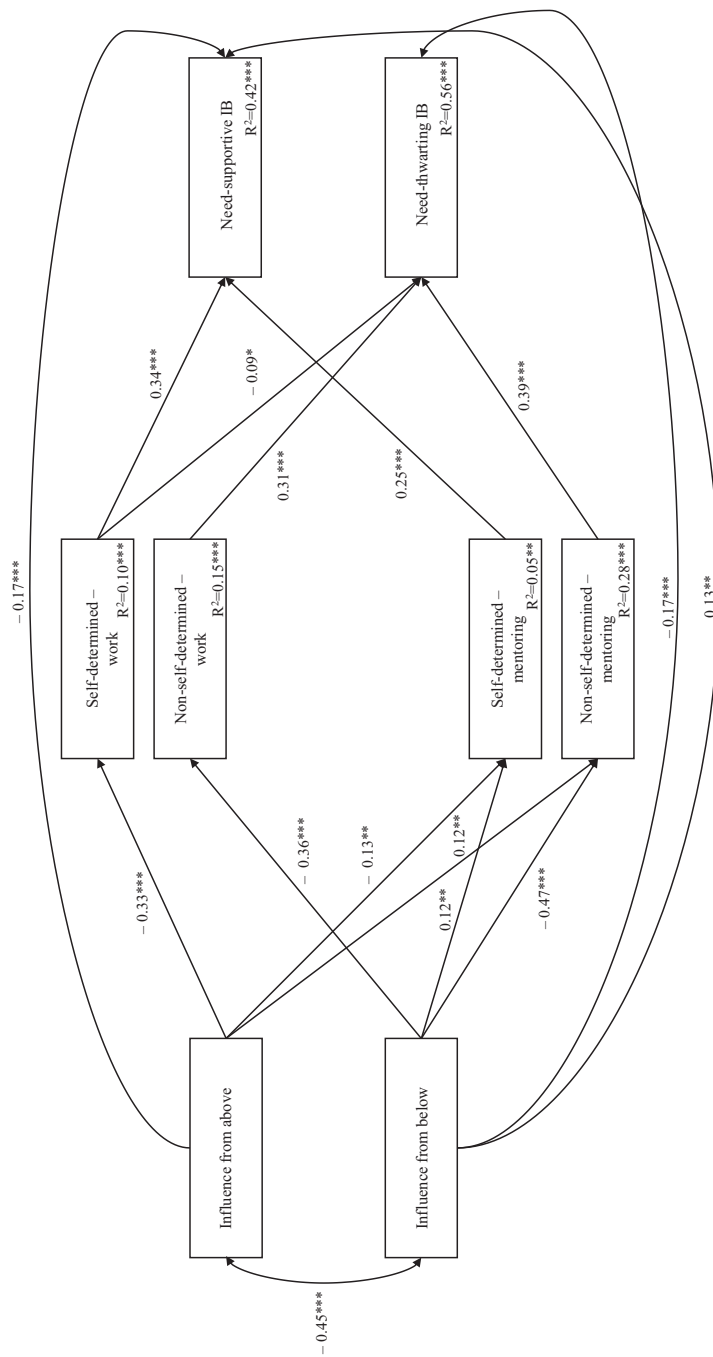


FIGURE 2 Model with standardized regression coefficients. Non-significant paths are omitted for clarity, as are the links between variables (mediation and dependent variables only) that are in the same hierarchical position. IB, interpersonal behaviors; R^2 = variance explained. $^*p < 0.05$. $^{**}p < 0.01$. $^{***}p < 0.001$.

TABLE 2 Standardized total, indirect, and direct effects from the mediation model.

	Need-supportive interpersonal behaviors	Need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors	Need-supportive interpersonal behaviors	Need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors
Total effect				
Influence from above	$\beta = -0.33 [-0.42, -0.24]^{***}$	$\beta = 0.15 [0.07, 0.23]^{**}$	$\beta = 0.23 [0.13, 0.31]^{***}$	$\beta = -0.46 [-0.52, -0.39]^{**}$
Indirect effects				
Self-determined at work	$\beta = -0.11 [-0.16, -0.07]^{**}$	$\beta = 0.03 [0.003, 0.06]^{*}$	$\beta = 0.00 [-0.04, 0.03]$	$\beta = 0.00 [-0.01, 0.01]$
Non-self-determined at work	$\beta = 0.00 [-0.01, 0.01]$	$\beta = 0.02 [-0.01, 0.05]$	$\beta = 0.02 [-0.01, 0.06]$	$\beta = -0.11 [-0.16, -0.07]^{**}$
Self-determined in mentoring	$\beta = -0.03 [-0.06, -0.004]^{*}$	$\beta = -0.00 [-0.01, 0.01]$	$\beta = 0.03 [0.01, 0.06]^{*}$	$\beta = 0.00 [-0.01, 0.01]$
Non-self-determined in mentoring	$\beta = -0.01 [-0.03, 0.001]$	$\beta = 0.05 [0.01, 0.08]^{*}$	$\beta = 0.05 [0.00, 0.09]$	$\beta = -0.18 [-0.24, -0.13]^{**}$
Direct effect	$\beta = -0.17 [-0.26, -0.08]^{***}$	$\beta = 0.06 [-0.01, 0.13]$	$\beta = 0.13 [0.04, 0.23]^{***}$	$\beta = -0.17 [-0.24, -0.09]^{**}$

Note: $N = 600$; 95% confidence intervals shown in brackets are estimated with bias-corrected bootstrap and 10,000 re-sampling.

* $p < 0.05$;

*** $p < 0.01$.

influence from below indicate a perception of mentees being more self-determined. Our findings highlight that although influence from below was not significantly associated with self-determined motivation at work ($\beta = -0.01, p = 0.80$), it did exhibit a small, yet significant, positive association with self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship ($\beta = 0.12, p = 0.007$). Likewise, influence from below was negatively associated with non-self-determined motivation in both contexts, namely, at work ($\beta = -0.36, p < 0.001$) and in the mentoring relationship ($\beta = -0.47, p < 0.001$). Hence, we conclude that [H₂] was not supported by the results, whereas [H_{2,2}] was supported.

These results suggested that influence from above was negatively associated with self-determined motivation in both contexts—particularly at work. Influence from below was negatively associated with non-self-determined motivation in both contexts.

We hypothesized that self-determined motivation in both contexts would be positively associated with need-supportive behaviors [H₃]. This hypothesis was supported by our results. We found that self-determined motivation in both contexts positively predicted need-supportive behaviors ($\beta = 0.34$ and $\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$, for self-determined motivation at work and in the mentoring relationship, respectively). Similarly, we hypothesized that self-determined motivation in both contexts would negatively relate to need-thwarting behaviors [H₄]. However, this hypothesis was not strongly supported by the data. We observed that self-determined motivation at work only weakly and negatively predicted need-thwarting behaviors ($\beta = -0.09, p = 0.02$). However, self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship was not a significant predictor of the latter ($\beta = 0.01, p = 0.75$).

We hypothesized that non-self-determined motivation in both contexts would be positively associated with need-thwarting behaviors [H₅]. We found support for this hypothesis. Specifically, non-self-determined motivation in both contexts positively predicted need-thwarting behaviors ($\beta = 0.31$ and $\beta = 0.39$, for non-self-determined motivation at work and in the mentoring relationship, respectively).

Lastly, we hypothesized that [H₆] non-self-determined motivation in both contexts would be negatively associated with need-supporting behaviors. We did not find support for this hypothesis. Non-self-determined motivation in both contexts was not significantly related to need-supportive behaviors at work and in the mentoring relationship.

Overall, the results suggested that influence from above was associated with less need-supportive behaviors, partly due to lower self-determined motivation at work and in the mentoring relationship (both indirect paths were significant). This mediation effect was significant ($\beta = -0.11, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.16, -0.07]$ and $\beta = -0.03 [-0.06, -0.004]$, respectively), as shown in Table 2. Moreover, influence from below was associated with more need-supportive behaviors, partly due to greater self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship ($\beta = 0.03 [0.01, 0.06]$). Lastly, influence from below was also associated with less need-thwarting behaviors, partly due to lower non-self-determined motivation at work and in the mentoring relationship ($\beta = -0.11 [-0.16, -0.07]$ and $\beta = -0.18 [-0.24, -0.13]$, respectively). The mediations were partial, and the model accounted for 42% of the variance in need-supportive behaviors and 56% of the variance in need-thwarting behaviors.

DISCUSSION

The SDT framework has been successful in organizing a wide array of results pertaining to the reasons people engage in certain behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Past studies in the education and sports contexts found that influence from above was associated with less self-determined motivation and more non-self-determined motivation (Pelletier et al., 2002; Reeve et al., 2014). Similarly, influence from below was associated with more self-determined and less non-self-determined motivation. Our study extended these findings to mentors in organizations. We explored influences from above and from below on motivations and interpersonal behaviors both at work and within the mentoring relationship.

Overall, our findings indicate that influence from above, influence from below, and both self-determined and non-self-determined motivations, within the workplace and mentoring relationships,

uniquely contribute to the interpersonal behaviors of mentors. On the one hand, greater influence from above was associated with less need-supportive interpersonal behaviors, through the effect of lower self-determined motivation at work and in the mentoring relationship. On the other hand, greater influence from below was associated with less need-thwarting interpersonal behaviors through the effect of lower non-self-determination at work and in the mentoring relationship.

In agreement with past research in education and sport (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Pelletier et al., 2002; Rocchi et al., 2013), our results suggested that when mentors felt pressured by their mentoring environment and their colleagues (influence from above), or when they perceived less quality of motivation from their mentees (influence from below), they were more likely to experience a decrease in their own quality of motivation at work and in the mentoring relationship. More precisely, self-determined motivation at work and in the mentoring relationship both uniquely contributed to more need-supportive behaviors. However, contrary to Pelletier et al. (2002), we did not find that self-determined motivation in the mentoring relationship was related to less need-thwarting behaviors. Nonetheless, we observed that non-self-determined motivation in both contexts was associated with more need-thwarting behaviors. Need-thwarting behaviors such as imposing deadlines, increasing surveillance, and giving directives may run the risk of undermining mentees' self-determined motivation. As a self-fulfilling prophecy, the perception that mentees are non-self-determined may initiate need-thwarting behaviors from the mentors, which in turn tend to promote a non-self-determined motivational response.

As argued by Raposo et al. (2020) and Reeve et al. (2014), strict management and restrictive policies might lead mentors to perceive these practices as effective, thus feeling compelled to adhere to them. Consequently, this could prompt mentors to exhibit less supportive behaviors with their mentees. Conversely, when mentors experienced fewer constraints within their mentoring environment and sensed higher motivation quality from their mentees, they, in turn, experienced higher motivation quality at work and within the mentoring relationship. As a result, mentors were more inclined to engage in supportive behaviors, such as demonstrating patience, providing explanations, and acknowledging their mentees' negative affect. These findings underscore how perceptions and preconceived beliefs about others can shape and guide interpersonal behaviors (Pelletier et al., 2002). Mentors' beliefs can lead them to demonstrate different behaviors, and in turn, these behaviors can influence the responses of mentees in ways which confirm their initial beliefs (Merton, 1984). According to the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), mentors may alter their behaviors to better align them with their beliefs, in an attempt to reduce the discomfort a mismatch would generate.

Our results indicate that the specificity of motivation should be considered when predicting behavioral outcomes (Vallerand, 1997, 2007). Each type of motivation played a role in predicting the interpersonal behaviors of mentors. Self-determined motivation had consistent patterns of associations with need-supportive behaviors, while non-self-determined motivations had consistent patterns of associations with need-thwarting behaviors. These findings are in line with previous research supporting the unique role of self-determined and non-determined motivations in predicting positive and negative interpersonal behaviors, respectively (Raposo et al., 2020; Rocchi et al., 2013).

Downward or upward spiral

Aligned with prior research (e.g., Ng et al., 2013; Rocchi et al., 2013), our findings indicate that when individuals felt pressured within the mentoring environment—such as conforming to colleagues' methods or feeling overwhelmed by the demands required—mentors might not only experience lower motivation quality but also extend this lack of support to their mentees. In our study, influence from above was associated with reduced levels of need-supportive interpersonal behaviors. More specifically, mentors provided less support to their mentees under higher perceived pressure. Consequently, mentors' lack of support toward their mentees may be attributed to mentors' own feelings

of insufficient support and self-determination in both work and the mentoring relationship (Raposo et al., 2020; Reeve et al., 2014).

In contrast to influence from above, mentors viewed their mentees' autonomous engagement in the mentoring relationship as a positive factor that fostered more need-supportive and less need-thwarting behaviors. Although this perception was not strongly linked to mentors' self-determined motivation, it did predict a lower endorsement of non-self-determined motivation in both work and the mentoring relationship. In practice, mentors were less likely to be focused on avoiding upsetting their superiors or avoiding their feelings of shame and guilt. These findings suggest that mentors' behaviors are influenced by their perception of mentees' motivations within the mentoring context. This perception affects not only mentors' motivations in the mentoring relationship but also their overall work motivation. Future studies could delve deeper into mentors' workplace beliefs and evaluate mentees' motivations to compare them with mentors' perceptions.

The role of specific motivations

In the context of organizational mentoring relationships, assessing employees' motivation for their work separate from their motivation for the mentoring relationship yields valuable insights (Firzly et al., 2022). Our results suggested that the perception of pressures within the mentoring relationship had an impact on the employees work motivation (cross-context). Moreover, employees' work motivation, in turn, impacted their behaviors toward mentees, over and above their motivation for the mentoring relationship itself. These results might not be unexpected given that the mentoring relationship becomes integrated into the employees' job (Allen et al., 2004; Eby & Robertson, 2020). This suggests that if a mentor perceives the mentoring relationship as burdensome, it could potentially impact their productivity in tasks unrelated to mentoring. Said otherwise, a mentoring relationship can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a mentoring relationship provides tangible help and support to mentees and can enhance mentors' sense of competent. On the other hand, a mentoring relationship may undermine mentors' basic needs, leading to non-self-determined motivations or a decrease in their self-determined motivation for their work.

Limitations and implications

Although the present study adds to the current literature by highlighting the antecedents of mentors' interpersonal behaviors, several limitations warrant discussion. First, the factors examined in the influence from above were not exhaustive. For example, the role of managers and their influence on the mentors' perceived pressures could be examined as a separate factor. Managers and superiors have themselves social and work cultural pressures, as well as pressures from their own superiors, which should be considered. In addition, as suggested by Stebbings et al. (2011, 2012), other environmental factors may affect workers' motivation and interpersonal behaviors, such as job security, work-life balance, and well-being. The factors of influences from above and from below examined in this study are therefore not sufficient to fully understand mentors' interpersonal behaviors. Influences from within (i.e., standards and personal goals from the mentors themselves) might also play an important role in the prediction of motivation and interpersonal behaviors. Second, the current study was limited to a single mentoring context. It would be important to replicate the model with mentors and mentees from other areas or types of mentoring such as reverse mentoring or peer-based mentoring, where contextual differences have been observed (Eby et al., 2008). Third, we relied exclusively on mentors' self-reports of their perceived pressures, motivations, and behaviors. Both one's own and others' perspectives offer unique insight into how a person typically behave (Vazire & Mehl, 2008). More research is needed to examine mentors' behaviors through various methods such as video sessions and logbook from mentors and mentees at each intervention or day (Vazire & Mehl, 2008). Finally,

a cross-sectional design was used. Thus, only correlations between variables can be established, and mediations are often highly misleading in correlational designs (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). It would be interesting for future research to replicate the results using a longitudinal design with a three-wave design in order to fully establish how the relationships between influences from above and below, the types of motivations, and the interpersonal behaviors unfold over time. As this line of research derives from a well empirically supported theory of human motivation, we encourage the use of experimental designs to show causal relationships in the future.

Contributions

First, this study applies a comprehensive framework to workplace mentoring, examining the pressures and motivational factors that influence both supportive and thwarting behaviors. Supportive behaviors—such as offering feedback, encouraging decision-making, active listening, guidance, and empathetic support—empower mentees by fostering their growth, ensuring they feel valued, and helping them address challenges effectively. However, a lack of recognition can undermine mentors' self-determined motivation, leading them to exhibit more need-thwarting behaviors toward their mentees.

Effective mentorship depends on mentors feeling supported. An atmosphere that values collaboration, open communication, knowledge sharing, and mutual respect, along with a focus on feedback and a growth mindset for mentors, enhances mentees' receptivity to guidance and constructive criticism. By fostering these values, institutions can empower mentees to maximize the benefits of mentoring relationships, contributing to their personal and professional development. In addition, mentor training alone may not suffice if the overall environment undermines their self-determined motivation. Therefore, institutions should not only focus on mentor training but also make administrative efforts to create need-supportive workplaces. Supporting mentors in this way enhances their resilience and enriches the mentoring experience for both mentors and mentees, ultimately contributing to the overall success of mentoring relationships.

Second, this study emphasizes the role of mentees in our model, as the quality of their motivation is part of the determinant of mentors' behaviors. Prior studies (Pelletier & Vallerand, 1996; Sarrazin et al., 2006) suggest a similar trend in supervisor–subordinate dynamics. Mentors perceiving mentees' non-self-determined motivation may show a similar controlled motivation to engage in the mentoring relationship, resulting in behaviors that hinder rather than support their mentees' needs. This dynamic can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, as mentors' interpersonal behaviors reinforce the outcomes they anticipated in their mentees. To counteract this cycle, career professionals are essential in guiding individuals to understand the process at play and encourage mentors to adopt need-supportive behaviors that foster mentee's self-determined motivation.

Universities and organizations can also prepare future mentees to engage in positive and supportive mentoring experiences by implementing training programs that emphasize the importance of self-determined motivation, effective communication, active listening, and constructive feedback. These programs can include workshops, role-playing scenarios, and mentorship best practices. In addition, universities and organizations can create a culture that values mentorship by promoting success stories, recognizing exemplary mentor–mentee relationships, and providing resources and support for both mentors and mentees. Encouraging students looking to enter the workforce to seek out and engage in mentorship opportunities, while providing continuous learning and development, ensures that future mentees are well-prepared to benefit from and contribute to positive mentoring experiences in the workplace.

In sum, on a practical level, this study may sensitize workplace managers to the contextual factors that strengthen or facilitate the adoption of certain types of interpersonal behaviors. Thus, managers should explicitly and implicitly facilitate the social–contextual factors while concurrently minimizing exposure to need-thwarting environmental cues. For instance, as part of their work, managers can

organize simulations to better guide mentors to adopt healthy behaviors toward their mentees. Training on the advantages and disadvantages could sensitize mentors to adopt supportive behaviors. In addition, regular follow-ups with mentors and mentees could be done to assess general well-being at work. Lastly, from an empirical point of view, this study is the first to examine mentors' interpersonal behaviors at work and from the mentors' perspective.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special acknowledgment is extended to Dr. Silvia Bonaccio, Dr. Patrick Gaudreau, and Dr. Veronika Huta.

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How to cite this article: Firzly, N., Goulet-Pelletier, J.-C., Pelletier, L., & Lagacé, M. (2024). Antecedents of mentors' interpersonal behaviors at work: A cross-sectional study. *The Career Development Quarterly, 1–18*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12364>