

The impact of Implicit Person Theory on mentoring behaviors: A pilot study

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Background. Mentoring is an important part of training, advancement and knowledge sharing in retail careers. Young professionals are encouraged to find mentors, but finding mentors is difficult. Moreover, the transition to virtual working environments has exacerbated the problem of finding and connecting with mentors (Varagur, 2021). Industry focused organizations like the National Retail Federation (NRF) work to recruit and pair mentors with younger professionals and college students interested in retail careers to aid in their professional development and enhance career growth. This study is one of the first to examine the impact implicit person theory (IPT) has on mentoring behaviors in retail careers (i.e., career support and psychosocial support).

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework. Mentoring is a form of individualized learning or training and development pairing an experienced, often older, professional and a less experienced, younger employee (Kram, 1985). Transferring the knowledge and expertise from one workplace generation of employees to the next can be critical for organizations that rely on the expertise built up by employees, as is the case with many fashion-oriented retailers within the textiles and apparel industry. Outcomes of mentoring relationships have been found to provide a number of benefits including career and organizational commitment, reduced turnover, and increased sense of loyalty (Ghosh & Reio, 2013).

Mentoring behaviors in the current study include career support and psychosocial support. Career support focuses on mentee's career advancement, job skills, job coaching exposure within the organization, visibility, and challenging assignments. By providing career support, mentors help to position mentees for immediate and long-term career success. Psychosocial support functions include role modeling, confirmation, counseling, and friendship. These functions "enhance an individual's sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness" (Kram, 1985, p.32). Psychosocial support leads to increased mentee self-efficacy and professional development (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Implicit person theory (IPT) has been defined as beliefs about the malleability of abilities, intelligence and skills (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). According to Dweck and Leggett (1988), IPT "predicts whether individuals will be oriented towards developing their ability or toward documenting the adequacy of their ability". Beliefs about intelligence help explain how individuals approach learning situations, such as a new job or career. Researchers labeled two types of IPT: entity theory of oneself and incremental theory of oneself. Practitioners use the terms "fixed mindset" and "growth mindset." Entity IPT (fixed mindset) is defined as the belief

that one's abilities are fixed and do not change (Dweck, 2000; Heslin & VandeWalle, 2008). Incremental IPT (growth mindset) is the belief that personal characteristics and abilities are malleable (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Incremental IPT individuals are more likely to seek challenging tasks even if there is a risk of failure, believing failure to be part of the development process (Dweck, 2000). In the workplace, IPT explains how some professionals help with the development of others.

Methods: Data collection and Data Analysis. Pilot tests were conducted in two stages using an online Qualtrics survey. Scale items relevant to the current study included: IPT (4 items) career support and psychosocial support (3 items each), along with demographics (gender, age, race, etc.). Stage one involved sending a link to the online survey to four research experts within academia. Stage one participants were asked to provide feedback for content validity, face validity, wording clarity, grammar, etc. Stage one feedback included minor adjustments that improved clarity and was incorporated into the survey prior to distributing for the second stage of the pilot testing. Stage two involved a wider distribution of the adjusted survey. Stage two involved sending a link to the Qualtrics survey to retail industry professionals and graduates of an apparel program in a large Midwestern University. Additionally, a link to the Qualtrics survey was posted in a retail buying career focused professional group on LinkedIn. A total of thirty responses were collected and analyzed for reliability and completeness.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS to examine reliability, mean and standard deviation (Table 1). Further analysis utilized SmartPLS to assess the relationship between IPT and mentoring behaviors (Figure 1). PLS-SEM was selected due to its ability to handle smaller data sets. Scholars have indicated that for less complex models, sample size as low as 30 can be used (Hair et al., 2022; *Sample Size Formula*, n.d.). PLS-SEM also differs from covariance-based SEM in the types of fit and assessment indicators provided. The measurement model and structural model with path coefficients are displayed in Figure 1.

Results and Discussion. Evaluating PLS-SEM models involves assessing internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, convergent validity using average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha and AVE for each construct are reported in Table 1. The model met criteria for convergent validity ($AVE > .50$) and discriminant validity ($HTMT < .85$) [IPT \rightarrow Career support = .652; IPT \rightarrow Psychosocial support = .476]. The final model with outer loading for the measurement model and path coefficients and r^2 for the structural model is displayed in figure 1. The model shows large effect sizes for each path ((Hair et al., 2022). Results from the model show a moderate predictive relationship between IPT and career support, $r^2 = .368$ and a moderate relationship between IPT and psychosocial support $r^2 = .227$.

Table 1 Scale reliability, mean, standard deviation, AVE

	α	Mean	STD	AVE
Career support	0.71	6.17	0.61	0.836
Psychosocial support	0.67	4.98	1.24	0.832
IPT	0.92	4.13	1.37	0.873

Conclusions. Findings show that IPT plays a moderate role in predicting career support and psychosocial support behaviors in retail career mentoring relationships. The results show that having an incremental disposition (growth mindset) increases mentoring behaviors. Hence, providing support for academia and practitioners to develop mentoring programs that include a more growth-minded format when providing feedback to young professionals. A limitation of this pilot study was the small sample size. This exploratory study is one of the first to apply IPT to mentoring in retail careers and serves as a foundation for future studies to further examine the influence of IPT on mentoring behaviors, along with other constructs with a larger sample of retail professionals.

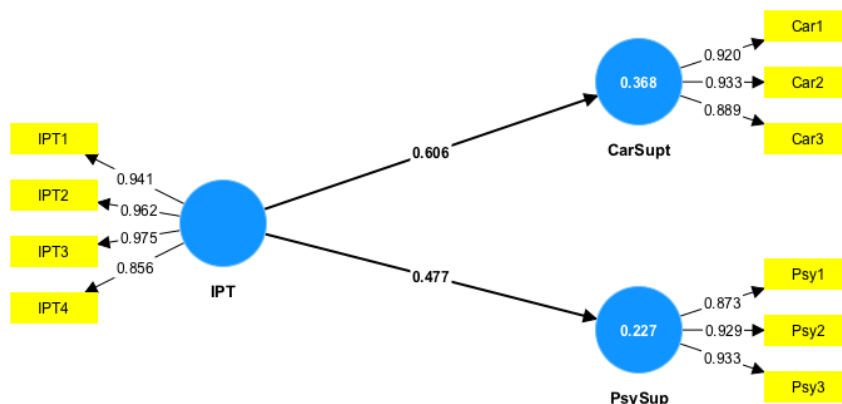


Figure 1 Structural model

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