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PASSION IN EXECUTIVE MENTORING INFLUENCES ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATIVENESS

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Mentoring is a popular resource for individual and organizational improvement. In this study we examined for the first time passion in executive mentoring as a potential approach to developing organizational innovativeness. In most previous studies the executives, for example, chief executive officers, were the mentors, but we took the opposite view, namely, the executives were the mentees. Results confirmed the hypotheses that the executive's perception of the mentor's passion was positively related to the executive's perception of organizational innovativeness, through the quality of mentoring and cognitive adaptability. Confirmatory factor analysis and regression analysis confirmed the validity of the results. Results demonstrated the value of passion in executive mentoring and the subsequent link to organizational innovativeness via the quality of mentoring and cognitive adaptability. Theoretical and managerial implications and directions for further research are discussed.

Keywords: passion, executive mentoring, organizational innovativeness, cognitive adaptability, leadership, entrepreneurship.

As innovation is at the heart of sustained advantage for organizations (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998), individuals and enterprises alike are always searching for ways to become more innovative. Many researchers have identified various leadership techniques that promote innovativeness (Müceldili, Turan, & Erdil, 2013; Pučėtaitė, 2014; Yıldız, Baştürk, & Boz, 2014). In this study, however, we considered the previously unexamined factor of passion in executive mentoring

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as a potential approach to developing *organizational innovativeness*, which is the capacity to introduce new products, ideas, and processes in an organization (Damanpour, 1991; Hurley & Hult, 1998).

Passion is an important bridge to innovativeness: First, passion is at the heart of innovation because it can "fuel motivation, enhance mental activity, and provide meaning to everyday work" (Brännback, Carsrud, Elfving, & Krueger, 2006, p. 3). Second, passion aids in developing creativity and the recognition of new information vital to uncovering and taking advantage of opportunities (Baron, 2008; Sundararajan & Peters, 2007). However, in this study, we went beyond this basic relationship and examined how the mentor's passion affected both mentoring executives or higher-level leaders, such as chief executive officers (CEOs) or entrepreneurs, and organizational innovativeness. Ezzat and Maly (2012) asserted that a mentor's passion can build passion in a mentee, but, to our knowledge, this assertion has not been confirmed. Nor has the link between the mentee's perception of the mentor's passion and organizational innovativeness been explored.

We proposed a significant way in which passionate mentors can influence executive leaders and organizational innovativeness through the quality of mentoring, for two reasons: First, passion relates to mentoring because passion relates to enriched learning (Maiers & Sandvold, 2014; Noble & Childers, 2008), and mentoring is a learning opportunity (Bova & Phillips, 1984). Therefore, we proposed that passion in executive mentoring would be positively related to the quality of mentoring. Second, mentoring relates to innovativeness because it is considered a successful approach to developing tacit traits such as innovativeness (Agbim, Owutuamor, & Oriarewo, 2013; Moore & Wang, 2017; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015; Wilbanks, 2013). Thus, we postulated that mentors with passion for the business or even for the mentoring relationship would be related to higher quality mentoring, thereby positively affecting the mentee's perception of organizational innovativeness.

In addition, as *cognitive adaptability*, namely, the ability to be self-regulating, dynamic, and flexible (Haynie & Shepherd, 2009), plays a role in this unique relationship, we chose it as another mediator for three reasons: First, despite previous debates that emotion and cognition oppose each other as competing systems, researchers now recognize that cognition (e.g., cognitive adaptability) and emotion (e.g., passion) work collectively as connected systems to regulate human behavior toward desired goals (Damasio, 2001; Pham, 2004). Further, Cardon, Wincent, Singh, and Drnovsek (2009) stated that passion and cognition work together during goal pursuit and that passion influences the level of challenge inherent in the goal, which, in turn, can enhance creative problem solving and persistence. Second, cognition is strongly associated with the innovative process (Martins, Rindova, & Greenbaum, 2015; Wu, Parker, & de

Jong, 2014). Therefore, more research is needed on cognitive mediators such as cognitive adaptability, because cognitive adaptability leads to thinking out loud, reflecting, planning, strategizing, and self-regulating (Guterman, 2002), all of which are crucial to innovating (Johnston & Bate, 2013). Third, to our knowledge, the relationship between passion in executive mentoring and any outcomes has not been examined with cognitive adaptability as a mediator. We thus explored the value of passion in executive mentoring and its positive relationship with organizational innovativeness, and how this relationship could be mediated by the quality of mentoring and by cognitive adaptability. The conceptual model that we proposed is shown in Figure 1.

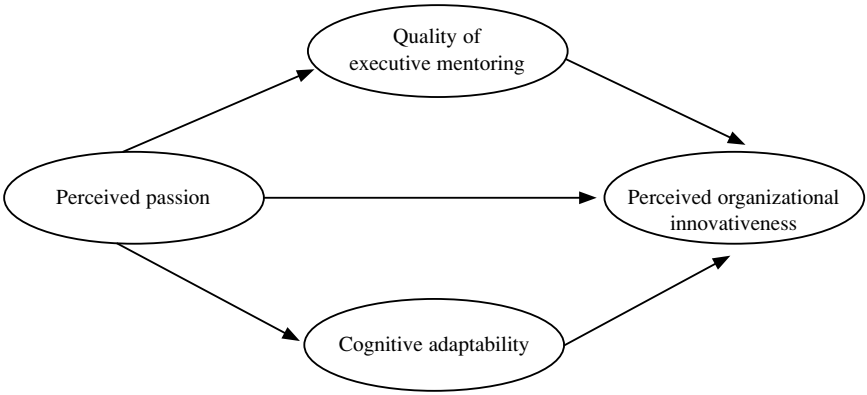

Figure 1. *Conceptual model.*

Literature Review

Passion

In this study, *passion* is defined as an "intense affective state accompanied by cognitive and behavioral manifestations of high personal value" (Chen, Yao, & Kotha, 2009, p. 201). According to Chen and colleagues (2009), this passion construct is composed of two dimensions: *perceived preparedness*, which is revealed in the verbal content and substance of communication, and *perceived passion*, which is manifested via tone of voice, facial expression, and other unspoken cues via body language. In this study, we focused on the mentee's perception of how engaged and prepared the mentor was, thus indicating the mentor's passion for mentoring or even for the business itself, and how that, in turn, affected the quality of mentoring, cognitive adaptability, and, consequently, innovativeness.

We posited that the mentee's perception of the mentor's passion would positively promote his or her perception of organizational innovativeness for

two reasons: First, as passion is possibly the most observed phenomenon while creating and innovating (Smilor, 1997), this is perhaps part of the reason why passion is contagious (Cardon, 2008; Ezzat & Maly, 2012). Second, passion enables individuals to identify distinctive patterns and relationships from information in the environment and thereby engage in creative problem solving (Amabile, 1997), and to follow new and creative paths of action (Cardon, Sudek, & Mitteness, 2009; Liu, Chen, & Yao, 2011). Thus, we postulated that passion would be both observable and transferrable in executive mentoring and would be positively related to innovativeness. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The executive's perception of the mentor's passion will be related to the executive's perception of organizational innovativeness.

Quality of Executive Mentoring

In this study we examined the value of passion in mentoring executives, instead of the differences between higher- and lower-level mentoring. Therefore, we adapted Bozeman and Feeney's (2007) definition of *mentoring* as a social process for formal or informal learning "between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and [an executive] who is perceived to have less (the protégé)" (p. 731). The quality of this mentoring can be measured by evaluating its three functions: vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Scandura & Ragins, 1993).

The quality of executive mentoring has a central mediating role in the relationship between the mentee's perception of the mentor's passion and of organizational innovativeness for two reasons: First, the mentor's passion is linked to the quality of mentoring because the passion of one individual can be observed by, and contagious to, another individual, thereby increasing overall passion and engagement (Cardon, 2008). Second, the quality of mentoring is linked to organizational innovativeness not only because mentoring encourages innovation (Cutler, 2003; Ligon, Wallace, & Osburn, 2011; Moore & Wang, 2017), but also because mentoring and innovating are both social in nature (Anthony, 2012; Dorner, 2012). In addition, in Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986, 2004), which informs this study, it is demonstrated that individuals' behavior can function as social prompts (e.g., mentoring) that stimulate and sustain modeled attributes or behaviors (e.g., innovativeness). Thus, we posited that when the mentee perceives passion in the mentor, the quality of mentoring will be positively affected, which, in turn, affects organizational innovativeness. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The quality of executive mentoring will mediate the relationship between the mentee's perception of the mentor's passion and the mentee's perception of organizational innovativeness.

Cognitive Adaptability

The relationship between perceived passion in executive mentoring and perceived organizational innovativeness can also be mediated through *cognitive adaptability*, defined as the ability to be flexible, self-regulating, and dynamic in cognitions (Haynie & Shepherd, 2009), for at least two reasons. First, cognitive adaptability involves cognitive strategy being changed, which is crucial when the challenge of innovating is being faced. Researchers have suggested that to be able to innovate, "successful future strategists will [need to] exploit an entrepreneurial mindset [which is] the ability to rapidly sense, act, and mobilize, even under uncertain conditions" (Ireland, Hitt, & Sirmon, 2003, p. 967). Cognitive adaptability is seen as part of the entrepreneurial mindset and is therefore an essential component in overcoming innovation challenges (Haynie, Shepherd, Mosakowski, & Earley, 2010; Haynie, Shepherd, & Patzelt, 2012).

Second, although increased passion can be positive during innovating, Vallerand and colleagues (2003) stated that it can result in an obsessive response, which is indicated by a rigid rather than a flexible manner of engagement in activities, which could hinder innovation (Ries, 2011). Thus, we selected the additional mediator of cognitive adaptability. We suggested that perceived passion may work through cognitive adaptability to better influence perceived organizational innovativeness because cognition (e.g., cognitive adaptability) and emotion (e.g., passion) work collectively as connected systems to regulate human behavior toward desired goals (Damasio, 2001; Pham, 2004). Building on this idea, Cardon, Wincent, et al. (2009) stated that passion can enhance cognition as they work together during goal pursuit, and that passion can influence the level of challenge inherent in the goal, which, in turn, can enhance creative problem solving and persistence (e.g., innovativeness). Thus, we postulated that the mentee's perception of the mentor's passion would impact on the mentee's perception of organizational innovativeness through cognitive adaptability. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The cognitive adaptability of the mentee (the executive) will mediate the relationship between the mentee's perception of the mentor's passion and the mentee's perception of organizational innovativeness.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In this study we focused on executive-level leaders, such as CEO-level equivalents, or entrepreneurs who identify and exploit business opportunities individually, rather than as part of a group (Baron, 2008). In addition, because we conducted this study on an individual level of analysis, participants needed to be in a position that allowed them to recognize innovativeness accurately in their

organization. Further, these leaders needed to have a sufficiently strong potential influence on the innovativeness of the organization to be considered relevant in this study.

With the help of organizations' and individuals' executive networks, we identified and contacted 653 potential candidates via email or phone, or in person. After we had screened them according to those who had (a) received mentoring, (b) had a top title (e.g., CEO/general manager, president, founder), and (c) fitted Baron's (2008) criteria for those who personally identify and exploit business opportunities, approximately 327 candidates qualified for this study. Of the 215 who completed the questionnaire (65.8% response rate), men represented 78.1% and women 21.9%. The mean age of participants was 38.13 years (SD = 10.76), and their average tenure in their organization was 5.72 years (SD = 7.10). Participants were from 15 countries, with 49% from Asia and 51% from Western countries. Of the organizations represented, 65% had fewer than 100 employees and 35% had more than 100. The organizations represented over 40 different industries ranging from consulting to healthcare. These organizations had been established for an average of 29.4 years (SD = 25.80). The participants' mentors ranged from outside experts to individuals on the board of directors.

Measures

English and Chinese versions of the questionnaire were both used in the data collection. The questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese with the standard back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). The Chinese version was used by 94 participants. A Likert-type scale was used in each measure.

Passion. Passion was measured using a six-item scale adapted from Chen et al. (2009). Sample items for the perceived passion dimension are "Mentor had rich communication" and "Mentor was energetic." Sample items for the perceived preparedness dimension are "Mentor's teaching was thoughtful and in depth" and "Mentor's teaching was coherent and logical." Cronbach's α was .90.

Quality of mentoring. The quality of mentoring was measured using a seven-item scale previously adapted by Moore and Wang (2017; see also Noe, 1988; Scandura & Ragins, 1993; Tharenou, 2001). Mentoring was explained to participants using the definitions of Scandura and Ragins (1993) and Bozeman and Feeney (2007), as meaning a recent one-on-one interaction with someone whom they considered to be their mentor and who provided support, encouragement, coaching, training, and so forth. Two items were used to measure the role modeling function of mentoring. A sample item is "I agree with my mentor's attitudes and values." Three items were used to measure the mentoring's vocational support function. A sample item is "My mentor provided me with challenges to improve." Two items were used to measure the psychosocial support function. A sample item is "I exchange confidences with my mentor." Cronbach's α was .82.

Organizational innovativeness. Organizational innovativeness was measured using a five-item scale (Hurley & Hult, 1998). Sample items are "Technical innovation, based on research results, is readily accepted in our organization" and "Innovation in our company is encouraged." Cronbach's α was .91.

Cognitive adaptability. Cognitive adaptability was measured using a shortened version of a cognitive adaptability scale (Haynie & Shepherd, 2009), which was developed by Moore and Wang (2017). Sample items are "I think of several ways to solve a problem and choose the best one" and "I ask myself if I have considered all the options after I solve a problem." Cronbach's α was .89.

Data Analysis

We tested the model fit using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We adopted the following recommended indices: chi-squared/degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) less than 3.00, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI) greater than .90, and less than .08 for both root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2010). We tested the mediating effects via the bootstrapping method, using the PROCESS macro (version 2.15) developed by Hayes (2013).

Results

Summary statistics and bivariate correlations for the variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations of Variables*

			Pearson correlations						
	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	38.13	10.76							
2. Gender	0.19	0.39	.02						
3. Tenure	5.72	7.10	.61**	.06					
4. Passion	3.69	0.71	.18**	-.10**	.06	**.90**			
5. Quality of mentoring	3.43	0.66	.16*	-.15*	.20**	.65**	**.82**		
6. Cognitive adaptability	7.39	1.36	.29**	.02	.24**	.48**	.44**	**.89**	
7. Organizational innovativeness	3.80	0.80	.32**	-.11*	.17*	.50**	.45**	.46**	**.91**

Note. $N = 215$. Internal consistency coefficients are reported in bold on the diagonal. Gender was recorded as male = 0 and female = 1. The control variables were not significant. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Using Amos 22.0, we performed CFA and the results confirmed that the hypothesized model captured distinct constructs. The hypothesized four-factor model had an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(84, n = 215) = 178.18$, CFI = .95, TLI = .93,

RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .05. All the observed items loaded on their respective latent factors, and the factor loadings were all significant, with a mean of 0.76 indicating that the latent variables had accredited convergent validity. Furthermore, we compared the measurement model to three alternatives and the hypothesized model was a better fit than all of these, indicating that the four constructs captured distinctiveness as we expected.

Quality of Mentoring as a Mediator

The regression analysis results for the mediating effect of quality of mentoring are shown in Table 2 (coefficients are unstandardized). The total effect of perceived passion on perceived organizational innovativeness was significant as shown in Table 2. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 2. *Regression Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Quality of Mentoring*

Effect	Variable	*B*	*SE*
Direct effect of X on M_1	Quality of mentoring	0.62^{***}	0.05
Direct effect of M_1 on Y	Organizational innovativeness	0.27^{***}	0.09
Total effect of X on Y	Organizational innovativeness	0.57^{***}	0.07
Direct effect of X on Y	Organizational innovativeness	0.40^{***}	0.09

Note. N = 215. X = independent variable (passion), Y = dependent variable (organizational innovativeness), M_1 = mediator (quality of mentoring). ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The indirect effect of perceived passion on perceived organizational innovativeness through the quality of mentoring was 0.17, which showed that the 95% confidence interval (CI) excludes zero [0.034, 0.299]. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Cognitive Adaptability as a Mediator

The results of the regression analysis for the mediating effect of cognitive adaptability are shown in Table 3 (coefficients are unstandardized).

Table 3. *Regression Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Cognitive Adaptability*

Effect	Variable	*B*	*SE*
Direct effect of X on M_2	Cognitive adaptability	0.92^{***}	0.12
Direct effect of M_2 on Y	Organizational innovativeness	0.17^{***}	0.04
Total effect of X on Y	Organizational innovativeness	0.57^{***}	0.07
Direct effect of X on Y	Organizational innovativeness	0.41^{***}	0.07

Note. N = 215. X = independent variable (passion), Y = dependent variable (organizational innovativeness), M_2 = mediator (cognitive adaptability). ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The indirect effect of perceived passion on perceived organizational innovativeness through cognitive adaptability was 0.16, which showed that the 95% CI excludes zero [0.088, 0.245]. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Discussion

Our findings confirm the hypotheses that the executive's perception of the mentor's passion would be positively related to the executive's perception of organizational innovativeness and that the relationship would be mediated by the quality of mentoring and cognitive adaptability.

Theoretical Implications

We designed this study, in part, to answer the call for more research on improving mentoring among higher-level leaders, who are arguably the most influential in today's organizations (de Janasz & Peiperl, 2015; Moore & Wang, 2017). In addition, despite passion being an essential component of innovativeness, to our knowledge, passion in executive mentoring and its subsequent effects on innovativeness have not been examined. We have thus answered the call for more research on passion and its outcomes (Cardon, Gregoire, Stevens, & Patel, 2013; Chen et al., 2009). Moreover, that the quality of executive mentoring and cognitive adaptability have not, to our knowledge, been studied as mediators, is significant for this relationship because our results show that passionate and prepared mentors can positively affect the quality of the mentoring experience and the mentee's cognitive adaptability, and, thereby, organizational innovativeness.

Managerial Implications

Organizations need to search for ways to enhance the executive mentoring experience and our findings suggest that using passionate and prepared mentors is one such way. Executives need to experience passion in mentoring for several reasons: First, although passion seems to be intangible and somewhat hard to measure, it "can be powerful and critical in many endeavors focusing on creating something new" (Chen et al., 2009, p. 199). Second, our results support the concept that passionate and prepared mentors can be contagious examples of new possibilities (Cardon, 2008). Third, experiencing passion for something (e.g., innovating) is likely to encourage individuals to undertake it more often which then helps develop their competency for innovativeness. This not only adds to their ability to perform, but also increases self-efficacy (Cardon, Wincent, et al., 2009). Finally, in conjunction with the popular statement attributed to Thomas Edison, that innovation is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration (Baas, Nijstad, & De Dreu, 2015), the journey to becoming more innovative is tough and subject

to setbacks. Steve Jobs said "…it's so hard (to build a company) that if you don't have a passion, you'll give up" (Chen et al., 2009, p. 199). Thus, another important reason for improving mentoring experiences and innovativeness is that passion drives persistence and tenacity, which builds the sustained optimism needed for achieving breakthroughs (Bird, 1989; Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2006; Smilor, 1997). Our results have made it clear that the level of perceived passion that the mentor exhibits and brings to the table is significant.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are limitations in this study. For example, in addition to our use of self-report data and a cross-sectional rather than a longitudinal design, we focused only on the communication of the internal experience of preparedness and passion via verbal and nonverbal cues. The perceived passion and preparedness scale captures only what the mentee thinks are the cues of the preparedness and passion of the mentor, but in reality, passion goes beyond perceived and expressed emotion (Chen et al., 2009). Future researchers can explore a more comprehensive measure for the perceived passion of both the mentor and the mentee.

In this study, three findings were confirmed. First, the passion emanating from the mentor can influence the mentee and potentially the whole organization. Second, the passion in executive mentoring enhances mentoring and consequently organizational innovativeness. Third, the passion and preparedness of the mentor can positively affect the cognitive adaptability of the mentee, which can positively affect organizational innovativeness. Thus, our findings validate the value of passion in mentoring executives. Furthermore we encourage organizations to select and develop passionate and prepared mentors for executives to foster innovativeness through the quality of mentoring and cognitive adaptability.

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