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THE INITIAL ASSIGNMENT EFFECT:

LOCAL EMPLOYER PRACTICES AND POSITIVE CAREER OUTCOMES FOR WORK-FAMILY PROGRAM USERS

ABSTRACT

One of the great paradoxes of inequality in organizations is that even when organizations introduce new programs such as work-family programs designed to help employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups succeed, employees who use the programs often suffer negative career consequences. This study helps to fill a significant gap in the literature by investigating how local employer practices can enable employees to successfully use programs designed to benefit them. Using a research approach that controls for regulatory environment and program design, we analyze unique longitudinal personnel data from a large law firm to demonstrate that assignment to powerful supervisors upon organization entry improves career outcomes of later users of a reduced-hours program. Additionally, we find that initial assignment to powerful supervisors is more important to positive career outcomes—employee retention and performance-based pay—than are such factors as supervisor assignment at the time of program use. Initial assignment affects career outcomes for later program users through the mechanism of improved access to reputation-building work opportunities. These findings have implications for research on work-family programs and other employee-rights programs and for the role of social capital in careers.

Across many professions, employers are modifying their traditional career and promotion systems by implementing work-family programs. Reduced hours with prorated pay are now widely available to employees who have family responsibilities. Virtually all (98%) large and medium-sized U.S. law firms have adopted such programs (National Association of Law Placement, 2007). Reduced hours programs are catching on in academia, too. State systems (notably California) are moving towards longer tenure clocks and part-time status for faculty (Mason, Stacy, Gouldner, Hoffman, & Frasch, 2005). The introduction of these programs is driven by organizations' need for legitimacy (e.g. Kelly & Dobbin, 1999) and by their attempts to address the formidable challenges of attracting and retaining women (e.g. Gorman, 1999). However, employees often choose not to use work-family programs because they suspect such programs actually hinder rather than advance their careers (e.g. Bailyn, 2006 [1993]; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, 2004). At leading law firms, for instance, employees relate that reduced-hours programs are perceived as "mommy track" options and they are concerned that their superiors will think them uncommitted or even incompetent if they take advantage of the programs. And they are right to be concerned. Although programs designed to assist traditionally disadvantaged groups do sometimes help vulnerable employees succeed (e.g. Kalev & Dobbin, 2006; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006), across sectors, employees who use these programs are at risk of fewer promotions (Kalleberg & Reskin, 1995), lower wages (Kalleberg, 1996), and lower wage growth (Glass, 2004) than those who do not.

To our knowledge, no prior studies have identified employer practices associated with *positive* career outcomes for work-family program users. This is due, in part, to the difficulty of obtaining longitudinal data tracking how employees fare over time when they use the programs (Kelly et al., 2009). Our unique, time-varying career data allows us to follow a sample of employees over a number of years to determine the impact of exposure to particular employer practices on the career outcomes of program users and non-users.

While the current literature on work-family programs gives us little sense of the levers that might be used to mitigate negative career outcomes for program users, two related bodies of research contribute to our understanding of this issue. The first body of research explains the conditions under which employees

are likely to use work-family programs (but not the conditions under which they can successfully use them). This research suggests that the support of proximate supervisors is critical to employees' use of work-family programs (e.g. Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). The second body of research explains conditions that lead to effective implementation, for the organization overall, of such programs (but not the conditions that mitigate negative career outcomes for individual program users). This research suggests that a supportive regulatory environment and particular program designs are critical to the organization-level effectiveness of these programs (e.g. Kalev & Dobbin, 2006; Kalev et al., 2006).

Both bodies of research point to the importance of protecting employees from negative evaluation *at the time of program use*. In contrast, we propose that such protection can begin much earlier. Without denying that conditions at the time of program use may protect career outcomes, we suggest that conditions at the time of employees' *entry* into the organization can be no less decisive, exerting an enduring influence on how their careers evolve (e.g. Sorensen, 2004). In particular, we expect that employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups who are assigned to powerful supervisors when they enter the organization and who later become program users will have better career outcomes than similar later users who are not initially assigned to powerful supervisors. There are three possible reasons for this. First, early exposure to powerful supervisors can provide later program users with better skill development and relevant knowledge (Cross & Cummings, 2004). Second, such exposure can allow for dissemination of positive opinions about them for use in performance evaluation (Lin, 2001). Third, such exposure can provide them with access to subsequent reputation-building project assignments because powerful supervisors may have connections to other powerful supervisors and influence others involved in the assignment process (Epstein, 1981). In these three ways, initial assignment to powerful supervisors can protect future users of work-family programs from supervisors' potential negative evaluations at the time of program use.

In this paper, we analyze unique longitudinal data on associates from a large U.S. law firm to test whether assignment to powerful supervisors upon entry has a positive effect on the career outcomes of later users of a work-family program that allows employees to work reduced hours for reduced pay while

remaining on the track to partnership. We also assess which of the three postulated mechanisms can best explain this effect. We control for regulatory environment, program design, selection into program use, power of proximate supervisors at the time of program use, and coworker relationships at time of program use. We demonstrate that initial assignment to powerful supervisors predicts positive career outcomes among later program users, and we find that it is access to reputation-building projects that most influences their success.

Our findings both contribute to the work-family and social capital literatures and build on key ideas from the literature on inequality remediation in organizations. Many organizations have adopted work-family programs and other equal opportunity initiatives such as disability, sexual harassment, diversity, and dispute resolution programs designed to promote equal treatment for women, minorities, and employees with disabilities (e.g. Dobbin, 2009; Dobbin, Edelman, Meyer, Scott, & Swidler, 1988; Dobbin & Sutton, 1998; Edelman, 1990; Kalev et al., 2006). Yet, while such programs are designed to help traditionally disadvantaged employees, employees whom these programs intend to benefit often choose not to use them because they are concerned about potential negative career consequences. We end the paper by discussing the implications of the practice of initial assignment for enabling successful career outcomes for users of work-family and other employee-rights programs.

WORK-FAMILY PROGRAM USERS

OVERALL NEGATIVE CAREER OUTCOMES FOR WORK-FAMILY PROGRAM USERS

In response to changing labor force and family demographics, many organizations have adopted work-family programs to improve employee recruitment, commitment, and retention and to comply with coercive or normative institutional pressure (e.g. Davis & Kalleberg, 2006; Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Kelly & Dobbin, 1999; Osterman, 1995). Employees often choose not to use these programs because they fear retaliation (e.g. Bailyn, 2006 [1993]; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, 2004; Eaton, 2003; Hochschild, 1997; Perlow, 1997; Williams, 2000) and, in fact, using such programs has been demonstrated to be associated with negative career outcomes. Users of reduced hours programs, for example, have suffered from fewer promotions (Dau-Schmidt, Galanter, Mukhopadhay, & Hull, 2009; Kalleberg & Reskin,

1995), lower wages (Kalleberg, 1996), and lower wage growth (Glass, 2004). Similarly, users of Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) programs have suffered from future lower wages (Jacobsen & Levin, 1995), fewer promotions (Hagan & Kay, 1995; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999), and less retention (Lyness & Judiesch, 2001).

The literature suggests that employees who use the programs are evaluated negatively. Indeed, these employees are doubly vulnerable. Even before they become program users, because they are women, mothers, or male primary caregivers, they are often rated as less competent (e.g. Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997), seen as less capable of assuming positions of authority (e.g. Ridgeway, 2001), and awarded lower wages (e.g. Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007) than other employees even after controlling for factors related to skill and productivity (Anderson, Binder, & Krause, 2003; Budig & England, 2001). And then, once they begin to use work-family programs, they may suffer even further because by simply using the programs they highlight their membership in traditionally disadvantaged groups and thus may invite supervisors to question their commitment, abilities, and marketability (e.g. Albiston, 2007; Blair-Loy, 2003; Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 1999; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Despite documented negative outcomes, these kinds of programs do sometimes help individuals in traditionally disadvantaged groups succeed (Kalev & Dobbin, 2006; Kalev et al., 2006). This variation in career outcomes raises the question: Under what conditions can employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups successfully use the work-family programs that have been established for their benefit?

TRADITIONAL APPROACH: CONDITIONS AT THE TIME OF PROGRAM USE

Two bodies of research shed light on this issue. The first explains the conditions under which employees are likely to use such programs. "Good" employees—no matter how that "goodness" is achieved—report having greater latitude when it comes to doing things, like using reduced hours programs, that are outside the norm (Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Kelly & Moen, 2007). Too, proximate supervisors at the time of decisions about program use play an important role in whether or not employees use work-family programs (e.g. Briscoe, 2006; Hochschild, 1997; Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Perlow, 1998).

Employees are more likely to use these programs if they work with powerful proximate supervisors, who may be able to buffer them from possible negative career outcomes (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002).

The second body of research explains conditions that lead to effective organizational implementation of employee rights programs that are designed to assist traditionally disadvantaged groups in organizations. A supportive regulatory environment is critical to the effectiveness of these programs because it creates disincentives for organizations to discriminate (Kalev & Dobbin, 2006; Skaggs, 2008). In addition, particular program designs facilitate the effectiveness of programs in law firms by requiring relatively low billable hours (Gorman, 2006) and by allowing longer partnership tracks (Chambliss, 1997). In other kinds of organizations, program designs facilitate effectiveness by assigning accountability for diversity outcomes (Kalev et al., 2006), increasing employees' schedule control (Kelly & Moen, 2007), and combining the evaluation step of performance review with the payment step (Castilla, 2008).

PROGRAM USER VULNERABILITY TO NEGATIVE EVALUATION

Both of these bodies of research suggest that career outcomes may be affected by the degree to which employees are protected from potential negative evaluation at the time they use work-family programs. Indeed, employees who choose to use these kinds of programs have been shown to be vulnerable to negative evaluation of their commitment, abilities, and marketability to clients (e.g. Kellogg, 2009). Supervisors may question the commitment of employees using reduced-hours programs, for example, penalizing them for not acting like "ideal workers" who are willing to work long hours because they have no responsibilities outside of work (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977). Also, supervisors have been shown to question the abilities of employees who choose to use similar kinds of employee rights programs, believing that women and minorities who use affirmative action and diversity programs have achieved their positions on the basis of reverse discrimination (Heilman, Block, & Stathatos, 1997) or thinking that employees who use disability programs are incompetent (Harlan & Robert, 1998). Finally, supervisors may question whether such employees, especially those who use reduced-hours and FMLA programs are marketable to clients or customers, worrying that employees will not be available when a

client wants them (Epstein, 1992; Epstein et al., 1999) or that they will not develop productive, in-depth relationships with key clients (e.g. Thornton & Bagust, 2007).

Supervisors who question the commitment, abilities, and marketability of employees can damage their careers because they have the power to award wages and promotions, provide access to workplace opportunities, fire at will, and invoke formal organizational programs to discriminate against particular groups (e.g. Bisom-Rapp, 1999; Mong & Roscigno, 2009; Roscigno, 2007). Thus, factors that protect program users from negative evaluation based on program use are critical.

THE INITIAL ASSIGNMENT EFFECT: CONDITIONS AT THE TIME OF ENTRY

While these traditional approaches highlight how conditions at the time of employee program use shape career outcomes for program users, we propose that the seeds of success may be planted much earlier. Evidence connects success later in one's career with conditions in the early years of one's organizational tenure (e.g. DiPrete & Eirich, 2006; Sorensen, 2004). Furthermore, individuals' advancement and success in organizations have been shown to depend on their access to powerful supervisors or mentors (e.g. Thomas & Kram, 1988) who can provide positive social capital (Burt, 2000). Thus, powerful initial supervisors could protect program users from negative evaluations in three ways: by training them in new skills, by disseminating positive opinions about them for use in performance evaluations, and by giving others in the organization reasons to extend to the employee reputation-building work opportunities because the supervisors' own powerful resources are visibly associated with those employees.

Regarding the providing of superior skills, a primary route for employees to accumulate human capital is through on-the-job training (e.g. Doeringer & Piore, 1971). In our research setting, at entry most employees arrive from law school without any relevant work experience; hence, their first exposure to the practical aspects of work in their profession may be especially formative. Galanter and Palay (1991) argue that associates advance in their law firms based on the lawyering skills they gain as they work on projects assigned them by supervisors. In general, they are likely to be more receptive to learning from supervisors early in their careers (Katz, 1980), and career socialization to work routines and practices is strongly

influenced by initial supervisors (Burton & Beckman, 2007; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Since employees with greater exposure to powerful supervisors may gain access to better learning opportunities, these employees may develop superior skills that can protect them from negative evaluation once they become program users.

Regarding the dissemination of positive opinions, supervisors who are positioned more centrally in the network structure of relationships at their workplace are likely to control more resources in an organization (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993) and therefore have greater influence and control over information (Burt, 1992). The most commonly cited benefit of a relationship in the social capital literature is the transfer of more and better information (Lin 2001). Powerful supervisors can effectively disseminate opinions about employees, contributing to performance evaluations and promotion decisions for those they develop an interest in and counteracting negative evaluations of their commitment, abilities, or marketability once they become program users.

Regarding the providing of access to reputation-building work opportunities, if powerful supervisors have ties to others who control valuable projects, they can generate opportunities for their subordinates. In social capital terms, these supervisors can lend their social capital to subordinates to facilitate their access to reputation-building projects (Burt, 2000). For all associate lawyers, the portfolio of projects they build up over time becomes a visible track record by which they are evaluated as potential partners (Beckman & Phillips, 2005; Epstein et al., 1999), and so the quality of projects is a crucial factor for employees as they accrue the reputation and relationships that make them attractive candidates for senior positions in the organization. For members of traditionally disadvantaged groups in particular, projects that provide opportunities for exposure have been shown to reduce their career disadvantage (Kalev, 2009).

While such career advantages may benefit all employees who are initially exposed to powerful supervisors, the process we theorize is not simply a case of the generalized rule that "the rich get richer"—that is, that early experiences set the stage for later career advances *for all employees*. Instead, we argue, program use leads employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups to signal their membership in these groups and to become vulnerable to negative evaluation. Thus, we expect that while later

program users and later non-users will both benefit from early assignment to powerful supervisors (the rich will get richer in all cases), those who become program users will benefit more from this early assignment (since they are at risk of negative evaluation) than will those who do not become users. Provision of superior skills and dissemination of positive opinions can help them counteract negative evaluations, and provision of access to reputation-building projects can ensure that a wide range of powerful supervisors and clients have already had direct experience with their commitment, abilities, and marketability by the time they become program users.

Finally, it is important to rule out a competing explanation for the relationship between initial assignment and career outcomes. If initial assignment was not random, then powerful supervisors could select superior protégés from the start and protect those who later use reduced hours programs. This could also result in positive career outcomes for program users who were initially assigned to powerful supervisors. However, our data suggest that such sorting is not the mechanism by which initial assignment affects career outcomes at this firm. We find that initial assignment is not correlated with observable characteristics in any way that could be consistent with sorting. We will address this competing explanation below.

In what follows, we examine the career outcomes of employee retention and performance-based pay following the use of a reduced-hours program. We expect that employees who are assigned to powerful supervisors when they enter an organization and who later become program users will experience better career outcomes than those who are not so assigned. We posit that the effect of that initial assignment will be greater for program users than non-users and we hypothesize that initial assignment to powerful supervisors will affect career outcomes for later program users through three mechanisms—provision of superior skills, dissemination of positive opinions, and provision of access to future reputation-building projects.

METHOD

RESEARCH SITE AND REDUCED-HOURS PROGRAM

Our unique longitudinal data come from a full-service law firm with offices in several U.S. cities. The firm has a long history and an established reputation with clients in a range of industries. Near the end of our study period, it employed approximately 1000 attorneys and reported several hundred million dollars in annual revenues.[1] The firm generally recruits entry-level associates from top law schools nationally. The associate career consists of an up-or-out path to partnership. Fewer than one in four associates achieve partnership. On entry, associates are assigned to a range of projects, partners, and clients based largely on the ebb and flow of work demands. As they gain experience in their first few years, assignments become more substantive and the process of matching employees to projects becomes more meaningful.

Throughout the study period, the firm had a policy authorizing associates to participate in a reduced-hours program. Under normal circumstances, any associate could be eligible for the program after at least two years of tenure. Associates in our dataset who participated in the reduced-hours program enrolled on average during the beginning of their fourth year of tenure in the firm (mean=4.12, SD=1.62).

Once associates enrolled in the program, they were assigned specific Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) statuses—for example 80% FTE status or 60% FTE status. According to the firm's policy guidelines, work conducted by reduced-time associates was "evaluated in accordance with the firm's review process for full time lawyers." Compensation was prorated, and the year-end bonus for reduced-hours associates was "subject to the same considerations as are applicable to associates working on a full-time basis." Once enrolled in the program, associates could remain in it for a short or long period of time, with the expectation that if they exited the program to return to full-time associate status, they would still remain on the track to partnership.

DATA

The data encompass 958 associates who entered the firm between the years 1997 and 2005. For most analyses in this study, we focus on the 71 program users during those years. Personnel data include pre-hire characteristics of associates used for recruitment and hiring purposes as well as records of career

events, life events, and pay throughout the associates' tenure in the firm. We compiled information on working relationships among associates, partners, and clients using annual billing records through the end of 2007. Data were complete, with the exception of compensation data, which were available for the years 2001-2007. In addition to these quantitative data, we conducted 24 interviews with partners, staffing managers, and associates. We also reviewed interview transcripts conducted by an internal task force assessing the reduced hours program.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Because program use involves a selection process among employees, we begin our analysis by examining which associates are more likely to use the program in the first place. We then consider the possibility that upon entry employees are selected rather than randomly assigned to particular supervisors; we find workers assigned to powerful supervisors do not differ from other workers on a wide range of pre-hire individual characteristics.

Next, we turn to our primary interest—modeling the success of program users. Our analytic strategy is to include independent variables reflecting the organizational context for employees at the time of program enrollment as well as variables reflecting this organizational context at an earlier time, during their first year of tenure in the firm. To model outcomes, we run a series of regressions predicting performance pay and attrition outcomes, adjusting for selection effects. We provide more details on each model, including the selection and treatment methods, as we describe the corresponding results below. The final step in our analysis is to report on the results of a supplemental investigation of the possible mechanisms that lie behind the initial assignment effect. To do this we enter three different mechanism variables into the outcomes models and consider whether the results provide evidence that the mechanism variables moderate the effect of initial assignment.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

We use two variables of successful career outcomes: performance-based pay relative to cohort and associate retention along the path to partnership.

PERFORMANCE-BASED PAY. Associate pay has two components, a base salary and a year-end bonus. Base salary is constant across associates from the same class year, increasing in lock-step by year of tenure. Bonus is assigned according to individual performance, evaluated by the practice group leader with input from the partners who work most closely with the associate.

Reduced hours associates are awarded a bonus percentage based on their full-FTE (full-time equivalent) pay, and their entire pay is prorated to their particular FTE level. This payment practice allows for comparison across reduced-hours and full-time associates in terms of their relative performance and contributions. Because bonuses are assigned to reduced hours associates prior to their total pay being prorated, in principle, a full-time associate who transitions to reduced hours and continues to perform at the same level should receive the same percentage bonus, and hence the same non-prorated total pay.

The variable we use in our analyses is each associate's annual bonus, net of his or her class cohort average that year. This variable directly reflects differences in the bonus assigned to an associate relative to what the firm considers to be his or her appropriate peers. This approach also dampens any variance related to yearly fluctuation in funds allocated for the associate bonus pool; a significant amount was allocated in every year of the study period.[2]

RETENTION ON THE PATH TO PARTNERSHIP. Fewer than one in four associates becomes a partner. During the study period, associates either exited after a certain number of fixed years or were awarded partnership. Toward the end of the study period, the firm also developed other options for associates who wanted to stay in the firm without becoming partners. Only a few individuals in our analysis took advantage of this option, and we considered the moment of their transition to be equivalent to firm exit in terms of representing attrition from the path toward partnership.

We have precise data on each associate's date of hire and exit (if any), taken from the firm's human resource databases. In analyses conducted on all associates, individuals are allowed to be at risk of attrition during their entire tenure in the organization, from date of hire until they exit the firm (or to the end of 2007, whichever comes first). In analyses of attrition among program users, individuals are at risk

from the day marking the onset of program use until they leave (or to the end of 2007, whichever comes first).[3]

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: EXPOSURE TO POWERFUL SUPERVISORS

Our primary independent variable reflects the associate's exposure to powerful supervisors (partners) at various points in his or her tenure at the firm. There are three factors that were taken into account in constructing this variable: (1) defining powerful supervisors, (2) operationalizing exposure of associates to those supervisors, and (3) capturing that exposure at different times in the associate's tenure in the firm.

DEFINING POWERFUL SUPERVISORS. A law firm's revenues are almost entirely a function of hours billed to clients. Interviews suggested that the most powerful supervisors (partners) were those who had the highest client billings. Thus, we defined a supervisor's power as a function of the client billings for which he or she could claim responsibility in a given year, based on whether he or she was designated to be the Responsible Lawyer for that client.

For each partner, we added up the number of annual billable hours. This total number of billable hours became the partner's supervisor-power value for that year. Partners varied widely in their power values, and power changed over time. To simplify matters for the next step, we defined power supervisors in each year to be those whose power-supervisor values exceeded a threshold (withheld to preserve anonymity). Different thresholds and a continuous weighting alternative yielded only minor differences.

OPERATIONALIZING EXPOSURE. We assume that associates are exposed to partners primarily by being assigned to client projects for which those partners are responsible. Rather than focusing on specific associate-partner links, our variable captures the total exposure of an associate through client projects to partners with particular attributes such as being power supervisors. To accomplish this, we calculate the portion of all billable hours an associate reported in a given year to projects led by power supervisors. The resulting variable ranges from 0 to 1.0 and varies for each associate in each year.

TIMING OF EXPOSURE**.** We include exposure variables in our models in several different ways. The first variable captures exposure during the year prior to the associate's transition to program use. The second variable captures exposure at the time of the associate's entry into the firm.

OTHER INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND CONTROLS

FACTORS AT THE TIME OF PROGRAM ENROLLMENT. First, since prior research suggests that coworker support may play an important role in use of work-family programs (e.g. Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004), we control for the strength of associate's working relationships with proximal coworkers at the time of enrollment using a variable that measures the portion of coworkers from the associate's projects in the year prior to enrollment that he or she had been working with to any degree two years earlier (e.g. 20% of coworkers worked with 2 years earlier). Second, since researchers have suggested that employee tenure may shape program usage, we included a variable for the employee's tenure in the firm at enrollment in the reduced-hours program. Finally, since larger projects may make it easier for program users to share work with others (Briscoe, 2007), we control for project size at the time of enrollment with a variable reflecting exposure to large projects—client projects on which at least twenty other lawyers had reported at least 100 hours in that year. Other variables capturing exposure to large projects yielded only minor differences in the results.

OTHER CONTROL VARIABLES. We control for sex, minority status, parental status (time varying), human capital in the form of law school rank and undergraduate grade-point average, department (base case was corporate), city locations, a dummy for hires entering via smaller law firm acquisition, and size of the associate's incoming cohort (additional details in Appendix A). An additional control for varying Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) levels of program users had no discernable effect on outcomes and was omitted from the final models.

MECHANISM VARIABLES

SUPERIOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT. On a four-point scale, each partner was given a point for each of (1) uniformly positive upward feedback responses from subordinates; (2) high marks (4 out of 5) for

"training & development" from subordinates; (3) partner chosen by firm to interview prospective associate hires; and (4) all subordinates retained by the firm in the following year.

SUPERIOR INFORMATION PROVISION. A supervisor social capital variable consists of the partner's Eigenvector centrality score in a network among the firm's partners with ties defined by billings from one partner to another's clients.

SUPERIOR ACCESS TO FUTURE REPUTATION-BUILDING QUALITY PROJECTS. A project portfolio quality variable was created based on factors that interviewees perceived to be important for career success. We characterized projects on four dimensions: (1) billings to the firm's major clients; (2) number of different partners with whom the associate has been substantially involved; (3) number of different clients with whom the associate has been substantially involved; and (4) portion of the associate's billings to projects whose lead partners are located outside of the associate's department and/or office. Each associate then was assigned a time varying project-portfolio quality index for each year of tenure in the firm (additional details in Appendix A).

RESULTS

Our findings support the importance of the initial assignment effect in the career outcomes of reduced hours program users. Initial assignment to powerful supervisors is associated with positive career outcomes for program users in the form of higher performance pay and lower attrition. Initial assignment appears to trump factors at the time of program use, including exposure to powerful proximate supervisors at that time. Further, this initial assignment effect is magnified for program users relative to non-users; as a result, upon program use those employees with high initial exposure do not suffer the decline in career outcomes which other employees experience upon program use. This finding is robust to a range of modeling choices. We also find support for one particular mechanism underlying the initial assignment effect: exposure to powerful initial supervisors helps employees gain access to reputation-building project opportunities, which in turn allows them to build a significant track record with a wide range of supervisors and clients by the time they use the reduced hours program later on in their careers. We discuss our findings in detail below.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PROGRAM USERS

We begin by examining program users and the initial assignment process before turning to our main focus, success among program users. Table 1 provides a summary of descriptive statistics for the variables used in our analyses. Table 2 presents results from a model predicting program use; corresponding hazard ratios for each covariate are provided in the right-hand column. Female employees are three times more likely to become program users (p<.001), and employees who become parents are more than four times more likely to become users (p<.001). The likelihood of program use also rises with organizational tenure (p<.001). Associates from better-ranked law schools are more likely to participate (p<.001). Our other key human capital variable, undergraduate grades, was not significant. An alternative model specification including all the covariates from our main analyses (e.g. from Tables 4 and 5) did not produce any other significant coefficients. Because we find several significant factors in these models predicting program use, we infer that it is important to address selection into use in our main analyses of outcomes among program users.

A RANDOM INITIAL ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

Our arguments related to initial assignment to powerful supervisors above lead naturally to the question of what factors influence this initial assignment (e.g. Rivera 2008). Both qualitative and quantitative evidence indicate that the assignment process at this firm is random. The firm's staffing system matches partner requests for associates, based on general project requirements, to associate availability. For associates in their first two years, work experience or work type is not part of the calculation (additional details in Appendix B).

To investigate this issue further, we use pre-hire characteristics to compare employees who varied in their assignment to powerful supervisors on entry. Instead of regressing initial assignment on a panel of covariates (which could obscure associations through collinearity), we present basic mean and frequency comparisons for a series of these pre-hire human capital and demographic variables, comparing pre-hire characteristics of employees who have no exposure to powerful supervisors in their first year versus those

who have between 50% to 100% exposure in the first year (based on their total billable hours).[4] We include key variables from our main analyses, as well as some additional variables which were only available for sub-sets of employees and therefore not included in the main analyses.

Results are provided in Table 3. Overall, there are few significant differences in pre-hire characteristics between employees with no exposure and employees with high exposure to powerful supervisors. On two variables — the ranking of the associate's law school and whether he or she completed a court clerkship — employees who were assigned to powerful supervisors actually scored significantly *lower* than those not assigned to powerful supervisors. Associates with more exposure to powerful supervisors were also less likely to have any recorded work experience prior to starting at the firm. Other human capital variables, including undergraduate grades and law school grades, whether the associate had been on the editorial board of a law review during law school (a competitive process), summer associate experience at the firm, and demographic characteristics such as being female, being of a minority race or ethnicity, or being married at the time of hire were not significantly different between the two groups.

These results are consistent with the notion that the initial assignment of associates to supervisors is not correlated with human capital or other observable factors which conceivably may influence associate success. Of course, it is possible that unobservable characteristics of associates still influence the initial assignment process. However, the quantitative evidence we have on observable characteristics, and the qualitative evidence we have from interviews, do not point to a sorting process until after the first two years of tenure as associates gain skills, reputations, and relationships which distinguish them in ways meaningful for the workplace.

EXPOSURE TO POWERFUL SUPERVISORS UPON ENTRY AND CAREER OUTCOMES OF PROGRAM USERS

Tables 4 and 5 present the results of analyses predicting our two main outcomes, performance pay and organizational attrition, respectively. These analyses use person-year observations with robust errors clustered on individual employees. The performance pay analyses use least-squares models, and the

attrition analyses use probit models which also include dummies for years of tenure, making them the functional equivalent of discrete time event history analyses. To aid in interpretation, the probit model results in Table 5 include a column showing the change in probability for a one-unit change in each independent variable.

The sequence of models is parallel in both tables. We start each series with a basic multivariate model showing how program use affects outcomes (Model 1). Then, we examine how our focal variable — the initial assignment effect — predicts outcomes among program users. We do this first without adjusting (Model 2) and then after adjusting (Model 3) for selection into the program. The next model asks how the initial assignment effect differs for program users (during years of program use) relative to all other employees (including all non-use person-years), also conducted while adjusting for selection (Model 4). Finally, for the performance pay outcome, we run an individual fixed-effects model to see how the initial assignment effect differs during program use versus non-use (Model 5, shown in Table 5 only).

Model 1 in both tables shows how program use itself affects outcomes. The changes in work assignments and relationships experienced by employees after program use (summarized in Table 2 above) suggest that program use itself may influence outcomes. Model 1 indicates that after controls are included, program use has a negative effect on performance pay (p<.05) and that program use increases the probability of attrition, although the latter effect is of marginal significance (p<.10). Hence, program use appears to have a generally negative direct effect on outcomes, at least before taking selection into account.[5]

In Model 2 of both tables, the initial assignment effect is entered, and Model 3 adds the selection adjustment. Selection into program use (the "treatment" group in Rubin's [1974] causal framework) is salient in our context if individuals who choose to enroll in the program are also likely to have different career outcomes. Specifically, the selection adjustment in Model 3 of Table 4 consists of an OLS model predicting performance pay with a simultaneous probit model for the probability of program use (shown in the lower panel of the table). We include an exclusion restriction in this and all other selection and treatment models discussed below.[6] Model 3 in Table 5 provides parallel results from a bivariate probit

model predicting the probability of exit for each person-year of use, while simultaneously predicting the probability of program use across all person-years. Dummies for each year of tenure in the exit model absorb any variance related to changes in probability over time. As a result, the attrition model is equivalent to a discrete time event history analysis (using probability rather than odds; see Allison [2004] for a discussion, including the appropriateness of the probit functional form for this type of discrete time model). These models also include additional controls for time-varying factors which could influence success among program users, derived from literature on work-family programs discussed above.

The results indicate that exposure variables captured immediately at entry into the organization are key predictors of success among program users even though program use does not begin until several years later. As anticipated, initial assignment is significantly associated with increased performance pay and lower probability of attrition (both p<.05). In the case of performance pay (Table 4), the impact of the selection adjustment on the initial assignment effect is to strengthen its statistical significance. In the case of attrition (Table 5), accounting for selection leads to an increase in the magnitude of the initial assignment effect while maintaining the same general level of significance.[7]

To assess the overall magnitude of these effects from initial entry, we can use the coefficients from Model 3 in Tables 4 and 5 to compare the difference between an associate who spent all her time with powerful supervisors at organizational entry (1.0) and an associate who spent no time with powerful supervisors at organizational entry (0.0). This difference translates into a $30,350 increase in performance-based pay relative to cohort (30.35*1000*1.0) and an 18.0% reduction in the probability of attrition (the latter figure is calculated for the hypothetical employee described above and in the table notes).[8] Fit is improved when the exposure variables are added to each model.

In Model 4, after finding evidence of the initial assignment effect for program users, we turn to the question of how this effect differs for program users relative to non-users—or, more precisely, whether there is a significant difference in the initial assignment effect for participant person-years relative to non-participant person-years. Since selection into treatment could bias our estimates of interest, we investigate this question using a treatment-effects model with an interaction of the initial exposure

effect with the treatment of program use. The results in the upper panels of Model 4 (Tables 4 and 5) indicate a significant increase in the initial assignment effect for program users. The interaction term is itself significant, and its inclusion improves model fit for both outcomes.

For a given difference in initial exposure, the coefficients from Model 4 indicate a significantly magnified effect on outcomes for program users. Whereas a 1.0 versus 0.0 difference in exposure leads to a $6,160 increase in performance pay for non-users (6.16 - 0.0), it leads to a $26,580 increase for program users ([6.16 + 20.42 – 20.46] - [-20.46]). This more than offsets the reduction in performance pay associated with program use itself. Because only a few employees have either 100% or 0% exposure to powerful partners, we also calculated the effects resulting from a difference of two Standard Deviations (2 S.D.) in initial exposure. A 2 S.D. increase in initial exposure corresponds to gains in performance pay of $8,771 for participants compared with $2,030 for non-participants. Turning to attrition, we find that the beneficial effect of initial assignment on the probability of attrition is again stronger for program users. A 1.0 versus 0.0 difference in exposure leads to a 4.7% decline in probability of attrition for non-users (again for the hypothetical employee described above), compared with a 27.2% decline probability of attrition for program users. A 2 S.D. gain in initial exposure corresponds to a 9.0% decline in the probability of attrition for participants versus 1.6% for non-participants.[9] Overall, these magnitudes for program users are broadly consistent with the results from the selection adjusted models described directly above.

For performance pay, we are able to implement a fixed-effects model by interacting program use with initial exposure to powerful supervisors. The advantage of the fixed effects model is that it implicitly controls for any unobservable (or observable) variation across employees. Only variables which vary within persons are included in the model, except for initial exposure to powerful supervisors, which is entered in the interaction term. The results, presented in Model 5 of Table 4, are consistent with our other models predicting performance pay. Specifically, the effect of powerful supervisor exposure at organization entry is significantly greater during program use, relative to non-program use.[10] Note also that we find similar and generally stronger results for the initial assignment effect if we omit the selection

and treatment adjustments shown in Tables 4 and 5. As a further sensitivity analysis, we implemented a modified Propensity Score Match based on program use and re-ran the career outcomes models using fixed effects for each matched set of program users and non-users. The results were consistent with those presented in Tables 4 and 5.

In the above analyses, some control variables for the social context at the time of enrollment are significant. In Table 4, having more project coworkers at the time of enrollment who were also project coworkers two years earlier increases performance-based pay (for both program users and all employees, but this effect loses significance for program users after adjusting for selection). In Table 5, spending more time on projects with twenty or more coworkers at the time of enrollment increases pay and decreases attrition for all associates, but it is not significant for program users. Exposure to power supervisors at the time of enrollment is marginally significant in unadjusted models of both outcomes for program users, but this effect loses significance after adjusting for selection and is not significant for all employees. In additional analyses (not shown), we also looked for effects from other time-of-enrollment variables suggested in the literature, including average tenure of project workgroup members and gender composition of workgroups; we found no significant effects.[11]

MECHANISM INVESTIGATION: WHY IS THERE AN INITIAL ASSIGNMENT EFFECT?

Table 6 summarizes the results from additional analyses in which we added separate variables designed to assess the relative importance in the initial assignment effect of three different possible mechanisms. The models predict performance pay and attrition, and the modeling strategy and control variables are the same as those presented in Model 3 of Tables 4 and 5. In this table, coefficients (and standard errors and significance levels) are provided for each of the three variables when they are entered separately into a baseline model. We also show the coefficients for Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry, and whether model fit improves after adding the mechanism variable. We are looking for evidence consistent with mediation. Evidence would include a significant coefficient on the mechanism variable while the Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry coefficient is diminished in size.

The mechanisms we considered are supervisors' provision of skills, provision of positive opinions, and provision of access to future reputation-building projects. Neither supervisor developmental quality (our indicator for provision of skills) nor supervisor centrality (our indicator for provision of positive opinions) explains the effect of initial exposure to powerful supervisors; we find no significant effects of supervisor developmental quality or supervisor social capital for program users on either outcome. Exposure to power supervisors continues to have a statistically significant and substantially sized influence on post-enrollment success even in the presence of these variables. And there is not a statistically significant improvement in model fit.

The third mechanism we proposed is provision of access to future reputation-building projects. We noted that powerful early supervisors may provide employees with access to future reputation-building projects if those supervisors have more ties than other supervisors or if they have more ties than other supervisors to supervisors who control more-valuable projects. One way to examine this mechanism is simply to compare the networks of powerful supervisors and other supervisors in the organization. Powerful supervisors do, in fact, have links to a greater number of supervisors (13.20 vs. 7.48 supervisors, t-test p<.001), and to supervisors who control more-valuable clients on the dimensions which contribute to the project-quality index (p<.001 on all three other variables in addition to the supervisor count, both in absolute comparisons and when those other variables are normalized by number of alter contacts per focal supervisor). Initial assignment to powerful supervisors could also allow employees to be placed on better subsequent projects if those staffing the projects simply preferred employees exposed to powerful supervisors, independent of any network ties between the supervisors.

The results suggest that the project quality index does mediate the initial assignment effect. When added to the models, project quality has a significant impact on performance-based pay (p<.05) and hazard of attrition (p<.05). The inclusion of project quality curtails the magnitude and eliminates the statistical significance of the powerful supervisor variable, consistent with its playing a mediation role in the impact of powerful supervisors on success among program users. In addition, project portfolio quality is itself predicted by the initial assignment effect. Results from analyses predicting project quality among

program users, provided in Table 7, indicate that exposure to powerful supervisors at entry increases project-portfolio quality measured prior to enrollment as well as project quality in the year after enrollment. Taken together, these findings are consistent with the mechanism of access to reputation-building projects mediating the effect of initial exposure to powerful supervisors on program user career outcomes.

DISCUSSION

THE INITIAL ASSIGNMENT EFFECT

We found that initial assignment to powerful supervisors facilitated positive career outcomes for later work-family program users, that initial assignment affected users more than non-users, and that it operated through the mechanism of improved access to reputation-building projects. Initial assignment to powerful supervisors upon entry, while random in this organization, was a key predictor of success among program users, even though program use did not begin until several years later. Conditions at the time of program use, such as assignment to a proximate powerful supervisor, were less important. Full initial exposure to powerful supervisors led to a $26,580 boost in annual performance pay and a 27.2% lower probability of exit. These effects were observed in the presence of a range of controls as well as an adjustment for the simultaneous effects of selection into program use.

The initial-assignment effect operated through the mechanism of providing employees with access to a range of reputation-building projects over time. By the time they enrolled in the reduced-hours program, employees who had been initially assigned to powerful supervisors had gained access to a greater range of reputation-building work opportunities than those who had not. We posit that this exposure to reputation-building project opportunities was important because the very use of a work-family program signaled employees' membership in traditionally disadvantaged groups (mothers and male primary caregivers) and led supervisors to negatively evaluate their abilities, commitment, and marketability to clients as a result. Project opportunities that provided employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups with exposure to a wide range of supervisors and clients allowed these employees to solidify their standing as able, committed, and marketable professionals in the eyes of this large

invisible college before becoming program users. This large invisible college directly experienced vulnerable employees' abilities, commitment, and marketability prior to program use, and this experience helped protect vulnerable employees from negative evaluation at the point of later program use.

Although all employees who were initially exposed to powerful supervisors benefited from reputation-building projects, the initial assignment effect was greater for those who eventually became users of the reduced-hours program. While program users with full initial exposure to supervisors saw a $26,580 boost in annual performance pay, non-users saw a $6,160 boost. Similarly, while program users saw a 27.2% lower probability of exit, non-users saw a 4.7% lower probability of exit. Why is it that, although program users and non-users both benefited from the exposure to reputation-building opportunities that early assignment afforded, program users benefited *more* from these opportunities than did non-users? We posit that, since program users were vulnerable to negative evaluation because of their very use of the programs (while non-users were not), program users were more positively affected than non-users by having a large invisible college of supervisors and clients directly experience their abilities, commitment, and marketability. High exposure to reputation-building projects buffered against the negative effects of program use on evaluation, so that highly exposed users suffered minor declines in career outcomes or none at all. Low exposure did not buffer against the negative effects, so that poorly exposed users suffered average or worse declines in outcomes.[12]

CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WORK-FAMILY PROGRAMS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

While many organizations adopt work-family programs to attract and retain employees or to comply with institutional pressure (e.g. Davis & Kalleberg, 2006; Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Kelly & Dobbin, 1999; Osterman, 1995) employees often choose not to use these programs because they are concerned about potential retaliation (e.g. Bailyn, 2006 [1993]; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, 2004; Eaton, 2003; Hochschild, 1997; Perlow, 1997; Williams, 2000). And, indeed, such programs often have a negative effect on the career outcomes of program users (e.g. Glass, 2004; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999).

Our findings contribute to this understanding of work-family programs in several ways. First, prior studies have highlighted either the conditions under which employees are likely to *use* work-family programs (e.g. Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, 2004) or the conditions that lead to effective implementation of employee rights programs at the *organizational level* (e.g. Kalev et al., 2006). In contrast, we identify conditions which allow *individual* employees to *successfully use* work-family programs.

Second, while prior studies have not specifically investigated the conditions associated with positive career outcomes for program users, they do suggest that positive outcomes would likely be facilitated by organizational conditions at the time of program use, such as the power of the employee's proximate supervisors and the design of the program they use. In contrast, we demonstrate that the seeds of success can actually be planted much earlier: initial assignment to powerful supervisors upon organization entry improves career outcomes of later program users even when organizational conditions at the time of program use are held constant. Our findings provide only limited support for the notion that powerful proximate supervisors can protect employees from negative career outcomes; instead, we find that once we include powerful initial supervisors in the analysis, the effect of powerful proximate supervisors loses significance.

Third, we identify the key mechanism through which the initial assignment effect operates—initial assignment to powerful supervisors matters because it helps employees gain access to reputation-building project opportunities over time. This finding is consistent with Kalev's (2009) finding that collaborative work relations can weaken stereotypes and so lead to promotion opportunities. But our finding differs from Kalev's in a substantive way: her study points to the levers of self-directed teams and cross-training while ours points to the lever of initial assignment to powerful supervisors.

These findings also add to our understanding of how relationships matter for career success. In many ways, our findings are consistent with the broad prediction of social capital theory—relationships are important to careers because they serve as valuable sources of information, influence, social credentials, and identity reinforcements (Blair-Loy, 2001; Burt, 1992; Ibarra, 1993; Lin, 2001; Podolny & Baron, 1997). For these reasons, mentors in organizations have been found to be important because they provide

protégés with access to new opportunities (Kay & Wallace, 2009; Thomas & Kram, 1988). We make two contributions to this research. First, we help to unpack the mechanism through which initial access to social capital shapes subsequent outcomes. We find that weak ties to powerful supervisors— ties which are formal, random, and relatively short-lived— can set off a virtuous spiral of reputation-building project opportunities.

Second, past studies have found that women in male-dominated organizations suffer social capital deficits (Kay & Hagan, 1998), yet little research directly connects the effect of social capital with the vulnerability of actors. We demonstrate that the value from prior relationships is heightened when employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups become doubly vulnerable through participation in a controversial workplace program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INEQUALITY REMEDIATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

To what extent are these findings generalizable to other kinds of employee-rights programs designed to remediate inequality in organizations? To help employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups succeed, organizations adopt not only work-family programs but also other programs such as diversity, disability, dispute resolution, and sexual harassment programs (e.g. Dobbin, 2009; Dobbin et al., 1988; Dobbin & Sutton, 1998; Edelman, 1990; Kalev et al., 2006). Since employees who are eligible for these employee rights programs suffer the same vulnerabilities as those who are eligible for work-family programs—women, minorities, or disabled employees are often perceived as less competent than other employees, and if they do use the programs, highlight their membership in traditionally disadvantaged groups and thus may invite their supervisors to question their commitment, abilities, and marketability (e.g. Albiston, 2007; Edelman, Erlanger, & Lande, 1993; Harlan & Robert, 1998; Heimer & Staffen, 1998; Morrill, 1995; Silbey, Huising, & Coslovsky, 2009) —our findings suggest that initial assignment to a powerful supervisor would likely promote positive career outcomes for users of these other kinds of employee rights programs as well. However, the timing of program use may be important. Since

vulnerable employees need to solidify their standing as professionals in the eyes of supervisors and clients before becoming program users, if they become users of, for example, disability programs or sexual harassment programs shortly after entering the organization, they may not benefit greatly from initial assignment to powerful supervisors for two reasons. First, the initial powerful supervisors may negatively evaluate them if they are already program users and choose not to help provide them with a stream of reputation-building projects. Second, even if the initial supervisors do provide these employees with such projects, the employees will have exposure to the large number of supervisors and clients under circumstances in which their ability, commitment, and marketability is already in doubt because of their choice to use the programs. Thus, the invisible college may choose to negatively rather than positively evaluate them.

To what extent is the employer practice of initial assignment generalizable to other organizations? We would expect that this practice would be most important to program users in organizations where powerful initial supervisors can provide employees with access to a stream of future project opportunities that allow them to solidify their standing as able, committed, and marketable professionals and where a large invisible college of prior supervisors and/or clients participates in the evaluation of these employees at the time of later program use. In short, we would expect to find similar results in investment banks, consulting firms, and accounting firms, but not necessarily in traditional manufacturing firms, where employees work with fewer supervisors and where supervisors are typically not involved in later evaluation of their prior employees. Future research can help to determine whether and how the initial assignment effect applies to other employee-rights programs and to other kinds of organizations.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

For individuals, the practical implications of the findings presented here are clear, if not encouraging: individuals who did not happen to be assigned to a powerful supervisor at the outset probably should not choose to use a reduced hours program. For organizations, the practical implications are more complicated. On the one hand, initial assignment of female employees to powerful supervisors may be a way for employers to help these vulnerable employees succeed. On the other hand, if initial

assignment became a program in its own right, it might develop the same stigmatizing effect associated with other employee rights programs. Perhaps initial assignment was so powerful in this case precisely because it was randomly assigned. This suggests that organizations should proceed with caution, piloting initial assignment in particular offices or departments to see if it is possible to implement the practice in a way that does not invite retaliation.

In sum, one of the great challenges associated with remediating inequality in organizations is that even when organizations introduce new programs such as work-family programs designed to help employees in traditionally disadvantaged groups succeed, employees who use the programs often suffer negative career consequences. This study demonstrates that assignment to powerful supervisors upon organization entry can improve career outcomes of later work-family program users by giving them improved access to reputation-building work opportunities which allow them to solidify their standing as able, committed, and marketable professionals in the eyes of a large invisible college of evaluators before becoming program users. In a world where particular groups are discriminated against in the workplace and where employee rights programs designed to remedy inequality are often avoided by intended beneficiaries, the identification of employer practices that improve career outcomes for vulnerable employees is critical. Initial assignment to powerful supervisors upon organization entry could be a way for employers to help level the playing field for traditionally disadvantaged groups in the workplace.

ENDNOTES

[1] These numbers are provided to give a sense of the category of firms to which our research site belongs. Here and elsewhere, precise details about our research site have been withheld to maintain anonymity.

[2] An additional advantage of this approach is that non-prorated pay nets out the effects of any irregular (partial) pay years which may arise if employees take leaves of absence.

[3] We also have data on partnering. However, analyzing partnering reduces the usable sample size greatly because many associates started at the firm too recently to have become partners.

[4] The results are similar if we choose other cut-points in the distribution of initial exposure for these comparisons.

[5] We find similar results using other model specifications, including a simple hazard rate model for attrition. The results are also similar for models which exclude male employees, although the negative effect of program use on performance pay increases from -20.57 ($20,570, $p<.05$) to -30.40 ($30,400, $p<.01$).

[6] Although these models can be identified without it, we included a weak exclusion restriction in the form of a dummy variable for the first two years of tenure. This variable is correlated with the treatment but not correlated with career outcomes across person-years. Few other options were available since many factors which select people into the program (e.g., sex, family status) are also correlated with exiting the firm. We patterned our approach after Fernandez and Sosa (2005) who modeled a two-stage hiring process in which many factors influencing first stage outcomes also influenced second stage outcomes.

[7] The attrition analyses are also robust to an alternative specification omitting the small number of exits which were internally designated by the firm as "unregretted attrition."

[8] As an additional analysis, we re-ran this analysis on female employees only. This produces similar results: $28,980 increase in pay and 21% reduction in the probability of attrition.

[9] These interaction magnitudes were generated using the *margins, predict() dydx()* postestimation command (available in STATA v.11) following the *biprobit* regression command. The marginal estimates of initial exposure were computed separately for program users and non-users.

[10] A parallel fixed effects approach to the retention outcome, using a conditional logit model run on discrete-time event history data as suggested by Allison (2005), did not converge.

[11] Future research could examine the durability of the beneficial initial assignment effect we identified over time, including after program unenrollment (i.e. following a return to regular employment status).

[12] Highly exposed users had performance pay outcomes around the same level as highly exposed non-users.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Program users N=71[a]		All associates N=958[a]	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Program use (0/1)			.074	.251
Performance Based Pay (person-year) [1]			.589	11.955
Performance Based Pay (post-enrollment)[1]	-5.81	23.02		
Exit (0/1)	.472	.499	.429	.498
Litigation Department	.214	.413	.275	.446
Other Department	.100	.302	.049	.216
Location 2	.114	.320	.221	.415
Location 3	.129	.337	.102	.303
Entering Cohort Size	.589	.498	.546	.430
Female	.871	.337	.476	.499
Parent	.657	.478	.119	.323
Minority	.186	.391	.176	.381
Acquisition unit	.086	.448	.096	.294
Law School Ranking	17.56	32.00	2.79	32.41
Undergraduate Grades	1.271	.700	1.191	.670
Megaproject Exposure at Enrollment	.129	.337		
Coworker Ties at Enrollment	.081	.176		
Prior Tenure at Enrollment (days)	1142	741		
Power Supervisor Exposure at Enrollment	.105	.173		
Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry	.111	.167	.136	.223
Supervisor Provides Skills Development	.887	.597	.958	.622
Supervisor is Central in Task Network	6.044	8.213	5.778	7.725
Cumulative Project Quality at Transition	1.079	.587		
Cumulative Project Quality (person-year)			1.0784	.674

[a] n for person-year data is 3350 for all associates person-years and 142 for program user person-years (post-enrollment)

[1] Employee's annual performance based bonus, in thousands, net of his or her class cohort average for that year. In other words, the variable reflects how much more or less of a bonus the employee received than others at his or her same level of tenure that year.

Table 2. Coefficients from Discrete Time Event History Model Predicting Program Use Among All Law Firm Associates

	Model 1	
	Coeff.	Hazard ratio
Constant	-3.03***	.05
	(.37)	
Litigation Department	-.28	.75
	(.18)	
Other Department	.46	1.58
	(.32)	
Location 2	-.31	.73
	(.39)	
Location 3	.15	1.16
	(.40)	
Entering Cohort Size	-.61	.54
	(.72)	
Tenure	.05**	1.05
	(.02)	
Female	1.12***	3.06
	(.22)	
Parent	1.50***	4.48
	(.17)	
Minority	.32	1.37
	(.22)	
Acquisition unit	.66	1.93
	(.52)	
Law School Ranking	-.01*	.99
	(.004)	
Undergraduate Grades	.17	1.19
	(.13)	
-2LL	-496.6	
Observations	3350	

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*p<.05; **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 3. Pre-Hire Characteristics of Associates Who Were Exposed Vs. Not Exposed to Powerful Supervisors

Pre-hire Characteristic (Variable)	0% of billable hours to matters led by powerful supervisors	50% or more of billable hours to matters led by powerful supervisors	Significant difference?
1. Female	.52	.47	n.s.
2. Minority	.17	.14	n.s.
3. Law School Ranking	17.1	24.7	*
4. Clerkship	.23	.16	*
5. Undergraduate Grades	1.25	1.28	n.s.
6. Work experience (0/1)	.54	.45	*
7. Years of client service business experience	.69	.72	n.s.
8. Summer Associate	.81	.80	n.s.
9. Law School Grades	3.57	3.54	n.s.
10. Married at hire	.66	.53	+
11. Law Review	.76	.78	n.s.
12. Overall Evaluation	2.31	2.28	n.s.
13. Intellect	3.47	3.51	n.s.
14. Articulateness	3.39	3.39	n.s.
15. Presence	3.28	3.36	n.s.
16. Judgment	3.50	3.40	n.s.
17. Motivation	3.52	3.25	n.s.
18. Client potential	3.36	3.41	n.s.
19. Lawyer potential	3.43	3.48	n.s.

Notes: N is reduced to 275 (183/92) for items 9-11, and 52 (31/21) for items 12-19. The sample reductions reflect the fact that some variables were only collected by the firm during a few years (or just one year in the case of items 12-19).

$*p<.05$; $**p<.01$ $***p<.001$; Significance tests based on chi-squared for dichotomous variables (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11) and two-sample t-tests for continuous variables (3, 5, 7, 9, and 12 – 19).

Table 4. Least-Squares Coefficients for Models Predicting Performance Pay Among Program Users and All Associates[a]

Outcomes models:	Model 1 All Person-Years	Model 2 Program User Person-Years	Model 3 Program User Person-Years, Selection Adjustment	Model 4 All Person-Years, Treatment Effects	Model 5 All Person-Years, Fixed Effects
Intercept	-1.32	-1.36	12.34	1.79	
	(.92)	(1.08)	(37.80)	(.98)	
Litigation Department	-.93	-1.67	-8.26	-2.59***	
	(.63)	(6.41)	(5.57)	(.77)	
Other Department	-6.40**	-9.21	-3.30	-7.24***	
	(2.31)	(9.01)	(6.16)	(1.45)	
Location 2	3.34***	14.10	8.61	2.80**	
	(1.00)	(12.61)	(11.08)	(1.00)	
Location 3	-2.95*	6.29	21.33**	-4.80***	
	(1.19)	(17.34)	(7.26)	(1.07)	
Entering Cohort Size	1.00	-11.88	23.25	-1.15	
	(1.09)	(26.10)	(22.85)	(1.42)	
Tenure at Enrollment[b]	1.23***	2.68	1.89	1.86***	1.02***
	(.28)	(1.87)	(1.54)	(.19)	(.28)
Female	-.55	11.40	-3.10	-1.16+	
	(.50)	(6.90)	(13.68)	(.67)	
Parent at Enrollment[b]	-1.44	.74	-7.96	-1.43	-2.07
	(1.37)	(7.00)	(16.36)	(1.19)	(1.62)
Minority	-.78	3.36	-1.72	-1.58+	
	(.80)	(6.72)	(5.60)	(.86)	
Acquisition unit	-1.32	-10.96	-34.38*	-4.15**	
	(1.48)	(15.97)	(16.67)	(1.46)	
Law School Ranking	-.00	.05	.06	-.01	
	(.01)	(.12)	(.23)	(.01)	
Undergraduate Grades	.13	-.24	-3.11	.19	
	(.46)	(4.00)	(3.23)	(.44)	
Megaproject Exposure at Enrollment[b]		7.55	5.65	2.70**	
		(6.80)	(5.35)	(.81)	
Coworker Ties at Enrollment[b]		7.85*	2.68	2.39**	
		(3.73)	(3.93)	(.89)	
Power Supervisor Exposure at Enrollment[b]		9.45+	6.66	1.32	
		(4.77)	(6.78)	(1.58)	
Power Supervisor Exposure at Organization Entry		25.04*	30.35**	6.16*	
		(7.02)	(7.72)	(2.48)	
Program use	-20.57*			-20.46+	-8.13**
	(1.23)			(1.30)	(2.94)
Program use X Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry				20.42*	10.33*
				(9.24)	(3.00)

(continued on next page)

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(continued from pervious page) Selection/treatment models:	Model 1 (cont'd)	Model 2 (cont'd)	Model 3 (cont'd)	Model 4 (cont'd)	Model 5 (cont'd)
Intercept			-3.31***	-2.78***	
			(.23)	(.24)	
First Two Years Dummy			-1.10*	-1.20***	
(exclusion restriction)			(.45)	(.31)	
Tenure			.15***	.15***	
			(.04)	(.04)	
Female			1.40***	1.58***	
			(.19)	(.21)	
Parent			1.83***	1.64***	
			(.13)	(.14)	
Acquisition Unit			-.06	-.00	
			(.27)	(.34)	
Law School Ranking			-.01***	-.01**	
			(.00)	(.00)	
Undergraduate Grades			-.12	-.15	
			(.09)	(.11)	
Type of model	OLS	OLS	Heckman Selection (OLS with probit)	Heckman Treatment (OLS with probit)	Individual Fixed Effects
R^2	.080	.259			.611
Change in Wald χ^2 (df)			6.9 (1)*	8.4 (2)*	
ρ			-.71**	-.04	
n person-years for selection/treatment model	n/a	n/a	3350	3350	n/a
n person-years for outcomes model	3350	142	142	3350	2948

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*p<.05; **p<.01 ***p<.001
[a]Dependent variable is the associate's annual bonus for the given year, net of her or his class-cohort average bonus for that year.
[b]For Model 4 (treatment effects model), these are simply time varying variables corresponding to each person-year, since there is no time-of-enrollment for non-users in this analysis.

Table 5. Probit Coefficients for Models Predicting Attrition Among Program Users and All Associates[1]

Outcomes models:	Model 1 All Person-Years Coeff	Change in P[a]	Model 2 Program User Person-Years Coeff	Change in P	Model 3 Program User Person-Years, Selection Adjustment Coeff	Change in P	Model 4 All Person-Years, Treatment Effects Coeff	Change in P
Intercept	-1.21***		-2.84***		-2.39		-1.69***	
	(.04)		(.76)		(2.12)		(.09)	
Litigation Department	.21**	.057	.34	.07	.20	.006	.20***	.06
	(.07)		(.36)		(.33)		(.06)	
Other Department	-.03	-.006	-.10	-.02	-.27	-.008	.004	.001
	(.02)		(.47)		(.49)		(.12)	
Location 2	.49***	.14	2.72***	.53	1.90***	.06	.41***	.12
	(.11)		(.61)		(.53)		(.09)	
Location 3	.38**	.10	.45	.08	.16	.005	.24**	.07
	(.11)		(.37)		(.41)		(.09)	
Entering Cohort Size	3.09***	.84	8.08***	1.59	7.03***	.22	2.96***	.89
	(.12)		(1.79)		(1.46)		(.10)	
Female	-.02	-.01	-.14	-.03	.07	.002	-.04	-.01
	(.01)		(.53)		(.79)		(.06)	
Parent	-.08	-.02	.29	.06	.17	.005	-.34***	-.10
	(.08)		(.34)		(.85)		(.13)	
Minority	-.05	-.01	-.15	-.03	-.40	-.01	-.01	-.004
	(.06)		(.33)		(.35)		(.07)	
Acquisition Unit	-1.04***	-.28	-1.54**	-.30	-.99	-.03	-.99***	-.29
	(.12)		(.72)		(.63)		(.10)	
Law School Ranking	-.003**	-.001	-.008	-.002	-.004	-.0001	.002***	.0007
	(.001)		(.006)		(.006)		(.0008)	
Undergraduate Grades	-.09*	-.03	-.099	-.02	-.17	-.005	.04	.01
	(.04)		(.25)		(.25)		(.03)	
Megaproject Exposure at Enrollment[b]			.37	.07	.28	.008	.41***	.12
			(.39)		(.36)		(.07)	
Coworker Ties at Enrollment[b]			.90	.17	.41	.01	.30	.09
			(.96)		(.89)		(.22)	
Power Supervisor Exposure at Enrollment[b]			-.95+	-.12	.64	-.09	-.14	-.04
			(.52)		(.55)		(.12)	
Power Supervisor Exposure at Organization Entry			-1.30**	-.25	-1.30**	-.18	-.27	-.04
			(.65)		(.63)		(.15)	
Program use	.22***	.05					1.20**	.36
	(.06)						(.50)	
Program use X Power Supervisor Exposure at Organization Entry							-.79**	-.23
							(.40)	
Tenure year dummies included in outcome models	X		X		X		X	

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page) Selection/treatment models:	Model 1 (cont'd)	Model 2 (cont'd)	Model 3 (cont'd)		Model 4 (cont'd)	
Intercept			-3.15***		-2.54***	
			(.28)		(.27)	
Female			1.10***	.002	1.24***	.01
			(.22)		(.22)	
Parent			1.68***	.005	1.29***	.10
			(.15)		(.18)	
Acquisition Unit			.07	.03	.50	.29
			(.30)		(.37)	
Law School Ranking			-.007**	-.0001	-.005	-.0007
			(.003)		(.003)	
Undergraduate Grades			.01	.01	.01	.01
			(.12)		(.12)	
First Two Years			-.98***		-1.12***	
(exclusion restriction)			(.19)		(.20)	
Type of model	Binomial probit	Binomial probit	Bivariate probit with sample selection		Seemingly unrelated bivariate probit	
-2LL	4964.7	87.6	1001.2		2565.6	
Improvement LR χ^2 (df)			8.4*(1)		12.4(2)	
ρ			.063		-.55*	
n person-years for selection/treatment model	n/a	n/a	3350		3350	
n person-years for outcomes model	3350	142	142		3350	

[1]These probit models run on person-year data with year dummies are the direct equivalent of discrete time event history models, with the additional advantage that they can be directly extended to accommodate selection and treatment effects using bivariate probit.

[a]Changes in the conditional probability of attrition associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable, for a employee with baseline characteristics on all dummy variables and average levels of all continuous variables. For the selection models, refers to the probability of surviving selection.

[b]For Model 4 (treatment effects model), these are simply time varying variables corresponding to each person-year, since there is no time-of-enrollment for non-users in this analysis.

Notes: LR Chi-sq tests relative to baseline models. Model 3 baseline omits Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry, Model 4 baseline omits Program Use and Program use X Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*p<.05; **p<.01 ***p<.001

**Table 6. Summary of Results from Inclusion of Mechanism Variables
in Performance Pay and Attrition Models**

	Baseline Model	Mechanism Variables Added to Models		
		Supervisor Provides Skills Development	Supervisor is Central in Task Network	Supervisor Provides Access to Future Quality Projects
Model Predicting Performance Pay				
Coeff. (S.E.) for Added Variable		-.80	-.02	-.31*
		(.50)	(.03)	(.13)
Coeff. (S.E.) for Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry	30.35**	29.24*	25.1*	13.7
	(7.72)	(12.20)	(12.20)	(15.30)
Sig. improvement in model fit from added variable?		No	No	Yes (.05 level)
Model Predicting Attrition				
Coeff. (S.E.) for Added Variable		-.03	-.04	4.94*
		(.07)	(.05)	(2.90)
Coeff. (S.E.) for Power Supervisor Exposure at Organizational Entry	-1.30*	-1.29*	-1.30*	.84
	(.63)	(.59)	(.61)	(.59)
Sig. improvement in model fit from added variable?		No	No	Yes (.05 level)

Notes: Results when each mechanism variable is added separately to Model 3 of Table 5 (Model Predicting Performance Pay) and Table 6 (Model Predicting Attrition). See Methods section and online Appendix A for descriptions of each specific mechanism variable added to the models. Sample size and other modeling specifications are the same.
Robust standard errors in parentheses
*p<.05; **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 7: Least-Squares Coefficients for Models Predicting Project Portfolio Quality

	Model 1 Cumulative project quality at time of enrollment	Model 2 Project quality during year after enrollment (non-cumulative)
Intercept	1.21***	1.50**
	(.27)	(.43)
Litigation Department	.01	.66
	(.20)	(.37)
Other Department	-.16	-.27
	(.18)	(.30)
Location 2	.52*	.46*
	(.26)	(.22)
Location 3	-.01	-.51
	(.23)	(.34)
Entering Cohort Size	-.20	-.08
	(.17)	(.26)
Female	-.33	-.19
	(.21)	(.30)
Parent	-.01	-.02
	(.13)	(.18)
Minority	-.37*	-.22
	(.18)	(.25)
Acquisition Unit	-.32	-.08
	(.21)	(.33)
Law School Ranking	.003	.002
	(.003)	(.005)
Undergraduate Grades	-.26*	-.14
	(.11)	(.18)
Power Supervisor Exposure at Transition	.39	.49
	(.45)	(.56)
Power Supervisor Exposure at Organization Entry	.92*	1.67*
	(.45)	(.79)
Supervisor Provides Skills Development	-.10	-.19
	(.15)	(.22)
Supervisor is Central in Task Network	.02	.01
	(.01)	(.02)
Adjusted R^2	.28	.32

n=71

Notes: Model 1 predicts cumulative project quality at time-of-enrollment. Model 2 predicts (non-cumulative) project quality during the first post-enrollment year, and therefore does not incorporate any memory of pre-enrollment projects. Since their dependent variables differ, coefficients cannot be compared across the two models.
Standard errors in parentheses
*p<.05; **p<.01 ***p<.001

Online Appendix A: Additional Variable Construction Details

CONTROL VARIABLES
DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES. We control for sex and minority status. The great majority of program users were female. Our findings are generally robust to the exclusion of men from the sample; however, we do not have enough men to run analyses on them separately. We control for parental status using a time varying dummy for the onset of a parental leave. Although the firm's policies make such leaves of absence available equally for men and women, this variable underestimates the true incidence of parenting, particularly for men, who are less likely to take an official leave of absence for childbirth or parenting.

HUMAN CAPITAL. Human capital controls are potentially important for at least two reasons. First, reduced hours program use might be more or less likely for employees with higher levels of human capital. Second, our outcome variables of retention on the path to partnership and relative performance-based pay should be at least partly a function of associates' initial human capital endowments. It is worth noting that the associates hired at this firm all possessed very high levels of human capital. Hence the scope for variation in human capital is much more limited than in typical samples of employees.

Our human capital controls include law school rank and undergraduate grade point average. These human capital variables are the ones that this law firm (as well as many others) chose to use in their own screening and evaluation of new hires. In fact, the variables were obtained from a database used by the firm for managing the recruiting process. Four additional human capital controls were used in early models: whether the associate was a court clerk after graduating from law school, whether the associate served as an editor or writer for a law review during law school, years of non-lawyering work experience, and law school first-year GPA. These controls had no significant effect on our findings. We excluded them from the final models presented in order to preserve statistical power.

DEPARTMENT AND ACQUIRED UNIT. We control for the department in which an associate worked. The base case department was corporate, which is the largest in size. Dummy variables were included for litigation, the second largest department, and for all smaller departments as a group. We also control for the city locations where associates are based. One of the firm's major office locations was used as the base case city. We also include a dummy to control for hires that entered the firm as a result of acquisitions of smaller firms, in which case their exposure to powerful supervisors on entry was based on their entry to the original legacy firm. We excluded from our analyses the few lateral associates who had entered the firm as a result of individual mobility. We also included a control for the size of the associate's incoming cohort (normalized by largest incoming cohort). Larger cohorts could limit associates' real or perceived prospects for advancement. In earlier models we also included dummy controls for different eras in which associates entered the firm; those controls had no effect on our findings.

MECHANISM VARIABLES
SUPERIOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT. To investigate whether powerful supervisors are influencing success among program users by directly providing superior skills development, we created an index of supervisor developmental quality. Each partner was assigned a score on a four point scale. One point was assigned if the partner enjoyed uniformly positive responses to an upward feedback question from associates asking "would you work with this partner again." A second point was assigned based on upward feedback results for a question asking associates to rate the partner specifically on "training & development." Partners were assigned a point if the average of responses for them was at least 4.0 on a 5-point scale. A third point was assigned if the partner had been assigned by the firm to do interviews of prospective associate hires. Our own interviews suggested that only partners with a positive reputation among associates were assigned this role. Finally, a fourth point was assigned if all those associates who were substantially involved on projects with the partner (500+ hours on common projects in a given year) were retained by the firm in the year following that substantial involvement. Interviews suggested that some partners had reputations for providing such poor skills development that they drove associates to leave the firm.

To use this index of supervisor developmental quality in our analyses, we created an average supervisor developmental quality variable for each associate, weighted by the hours he or she reported to projects that the partners in question were leading. We enter this supervisor developmental quality variable for the first year of the associate's tenure in the organization, parallel to our supervisor power variable.

SUPERIOR INFORMATION PROVISION. To investigate whether powerful supervisors influence success among program users by providing them with superior information because of the partner's position in the network of relationships among partners in the firm, we created a supervisor social capital variable. In the analyses presented here, we used the partner's Eigenvector centrality score in a network among partners in which partners shared ties if one partner logged at least 100 hours to the other partner's clients. As with the index of supervisor developmental

quality, we used supervisor social capital in our analyses by creating an average variable for each associate, weighted by the hours he or she logged to projects that the partner in question was leading. We entered this supervisor centrality variable for the first year of the associate's tenure. A network-brokerage variable constructed using the same partner network data produced no significant results and was omitted from the final analyses.

SUPERIOR ACCESS TO FUTURE REPUTATION-BUILDING QUALITY PROJECTS. To investigate whether powerful supervisors are influencing success among program users by providing them with superior access to future high quality projects, we created a project portfolio quality variable. To capture the quality or value of projects to which associates were assigned over time, we asked partners and associates in our interviews what they perceived to be important for success both in general and among program users. Based on their responses, we developed a project-portfolio quality index that characterizes the quality of the set of projects accrued to date by each associate by each year of their tenure.

Each project to which the associate bills hours can contribute to the project-portfolio quality index along four dimensions. These dimensions reflect the importance of gaining exposure to major clients, as well as the value of accruing broad experience with different supervisors (partners), clients, and work domains. The four dimensions are: 1) billings to major clients, 2) number of different partners with whom the associate has been substantially involved, 3) number of different clients with whom the associate has been substantially involved, and 4) portion of the associate's billings that are to projects whose lead partners are located outside of the associate's department and/or office.

First, each project contributes to a rolling tally of the portion of that associate's billings which are to major clients (those representing the most revenues in the prior year). Associates who spend more of their time billing to major clients have better project portfolios. Second, each project contributes to a rolling tally of the number of different partners with whom the associate has been substantially involved (substantial involvement is indicated when both associate and partner have logged at least 500 hours to common projects). Associates exposed to a wider range of partners have better project portfolios. Third, each project contributes to a rolling tally of the number of different clients with whom the associate has been substantially involved (substantial involvement is indicated when the associate has logged at least 500 hours to projects for that client). Associates exposed to a wider range of clients have better project portfolios. Finally, each project contributes to a rolling tally of the portion of that associate's billings which are to projects whose lead partners are located outside of the associate's department and/or office location. Associates with at least some exposure to other areas of legal practice and geographic regions have better project portfolios.

The four resulting dimensions are each rescaled to a 0.0-1.0 scale and added together to create the variable project-portfolio quality index for each associate in each year of tenure which can extend from a minimum of 0.0 to a maximum of 4.0. In our main analyses, we entered the project portfolio quality index for the year just prior to the associate's program enrollment—reflecting the associate's accrued project quality during his or her tenure at the firm to that point.

Online Appendix B: Qualitative Data on the Initial Assignment Process

In order to determine how associates were initially assigned to projects, and therefore to supervisors (partners), we draw on data from interviews with current and former partners and managers with responsibility for assigning associates to projects in the largest departments of the firm. Assignment was based on a system in which partners entered an estimated timeframe, amount of time needed, level of associate needed (e.g. 1st year, 3rd year, etc.), and general type of legal work. This information was crossed with a database of associate availability and work composition. For associates in their first two years, experience or type of work did not enter into the calculation. There was some consideration of the need to expose new associates to more than one partner and to anticipate future work flow so that huge overloads or huge gaps were avoided. But the chief concern was simply meeting the demands of clients and partners with a supply of associate employees.

In contrast, for more advanced associates, partners often sought particular experiences or skills and requested specific individuals on the basis of their experience and reputation. Associates could request re-assignment, though in practice this was rare.

This difference in staffing practices for new versus experienced associated makes sense. There was relatively high homogeneity in the human capital and composition of incoming associates. Associates generally entered the firm with a high level of formal training (law degree from a prestigious university) but with little or no practical experience in practicing law. As a result, there were few skills which differentiated incoming associates in any meaningful, task-related way. Legal skills and career potential emerged after the first several years.

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