

The Manager as Coach: The Role of Feedback Orientation

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Abstract

Purpose This study investigated the consequences of manager feedback orientation in the manager-as-coach process. Integrating theories of feedback and coaching, we examined the extent to which manager feedback orientation was related to indicators of effective coaching and subordinate feedback orientation.

Design/methodology/approach One hundred three manager–subordinate dyads participated in this study.

Findings Managers who value feedback for themselves (high feedback orientation) were viewed as better coaches as assessed through employee perceptions of coaching behaviors, the coaching relationship, and the feedback environment. Manager feedback orientation was also related to subordinate feedback orientation, and this relationship was mediated by the coaching effectiveness indicators.

Implications This study demonstrated that the coaching manager with higher feedback orientation is viewed as more effective than the coaching manager with lower feedback orientation. This study assesses previously untested theories of coaching and demonstrates the value of manager feedback orientation in the coaching process.

Originality/value This is the first study to integrate the feedback and coaching literatures to test derived hypotheses regarding feedback orientation in the manager-as-coach framework.

Keywords Coaching · Managerial coaching · Manager-as-coach · Feedback · Feedback orientation · Feedback environment · Coaching behaviors

Introduction

Performance management is an ongoing process that involves employee assessment, feedback, and coaching for development. It focuses on motivating employees and improving future performance rather than just assessing past performance for administrative purposes. Within this context, responsibility for coaching and developing employees falls on the manager. The manager-as-coach is an increasingly popular talent management tool, and coaching is now quite frequently viewed as an essential aspect of effective management (Graham et al. 1994). Gregory and Levy (2009) suggest that ongoing coaching from one's manager is critical for performance management because it facilitates the process of providing feedback, setting goals, and monitoring progress toward those goals. As such, coaching is inextricably linked to the feedback process and more specifically, feedback from one's own manager. Although feedback is commonly noted as being part of coaching (Feldman 2001; Joo 2005; Kilburg 1996), it was only recently that Gregory et al. (2008) developed a model of feedback for the executive coaching paradigm. This model specifically highlights the role of the coach as the feedback source and suggests the coachee's receptivity to feedback is a critical lynchpin in the process. These researchers also suggest that characteristics of the coach can facilitate the coachee's receptivity to what may be difficult feedback. However, the Gregory et al. (2008) model was developed for an executive coaching framework and a gap still exists in our understanding of the feedback

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process within the framework of manager-as-coach. Gregory and Levy (2009) note that the specific characteristics of the coach that enable this feedback process are not well understood.

The current study addresses this gap by examining the role of one coaching manager characteristic, feedback orientation in the coaching process. In particular, we draw on frameworks for the manager-as-coach process (Gregory and Levy 2009; Hunt and Weintraub 2011) and feedback processes within a general coaching framework (Gregory et al. 2008; London and Smither 2002) to examine the impact of manager feedback orientation on employees' perceptions of the coaching process including effective coaching behaviors, development of a quality coaching relationship, and facilitation of a favorable feedback environment. We also examine the extent to which manager feedback orientation may be related to employee feedback orientation and if this relationship is mediated by coaching behaviors, coaching relationship, and feedback environment. Figure 1 depicts our theoretical model.

This study offers several contributions. First, we contribute to theories of manager-as-coach by integrating Gregory et al.'s (2008) model of feedback in executive coaching with perspectives on the manager-as-coach process and feedback orientation (London and Smither 2002) to assess the relevance of the neglected coach characteristic of feedback orientation. We propose that the most effective manager coaches value feedback for their own insight and motivation. In other words, effective coaches are likely to have high feedback orientation themselves. Second, this study contributes to theories of feedback orientation (Linderbaum and Levy 2010; London and Smither 2002) by developing and testing a theory of the role manager feedback orientation plays in the manager-as-coach process. Third, while the popularity of the coaching manager has increased in practice, empirical research has struggled to keep up (Feldman and Lankau 2005; Joo 2005). The current study addresses a call for research to improve our understanding of why some managers are more effective coaches than others and to identify recommendations for enhancing a manager's ability to coach his or her subordinates (Gregory and Levy 2009). This type of coaching by one's direct manager has long been part of managerial competency models and recent articles continue to urge researchers to study this process (Pulakos et al. 2015). Pulakos and O'Leary (2011) suggest that the reputation of performance management in general will improve with an

increased focus on factors associated with the manager-as-coach.

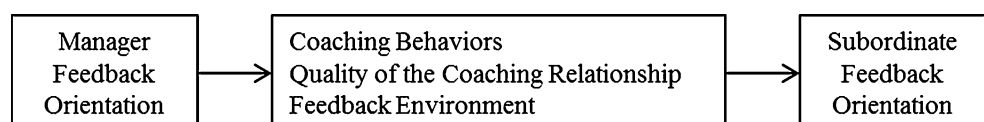
The Manager-as-Coach

The manager-as-coach is a critical component of organizational performance management processes. Managers who actively work to improve the skills, competencies, and performance of direct reports are viewed as coaching managers (Beattie et al. 2014). Gregory and Levy (2010) define the manager-as-coach process as a "developmental activity in which an employee works one-on-one with his or her direct manager to improve current job performance and enhance his or her capabilities for future roles and/or challenges, the success of which is based on the relationship between the employee and manager, as well as the use of objective information, such as feedback, performance data, or assessments" (p. 111). Effective coaching managers do more than conduct an annual performance appraisal. They evaluate patterns and trends in employee performance, they create awareness through ongoing feedback, they provide learning experiences, opportunities for reflection, and assist in action planning and identifying critical steps to goal accomplishment. Coaching managers provide guidance in the interpretation and utilization of feedback for goal setting and self-regulation.

The manager-as-coach process is an ongoing method for improving problem work performance, recognizing and developing employee growth and potential, empowering employees and providing guidance, encouragement, and support (Joo et al. 2012). The notion of manager-as-coach has grown in both research and practice because of the increased importance of talent management and retention, and the expectations that employees have of their managers to provide developmental opportunities. However, the number of managers who embrace the role of coach is still relatively small (Hunt and Weintraub 2011). The lack of coaching managers in organizations is often attributed to little time, competing work demands, and limited training on effective coaching practices (Ellinger et al. 2010).

Research has identified numerous benefits of the manager-as-coach process including: job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Ellinger et al. 2003, 2005). Kim et al. (2013) reported that effective manager-as-coach processes were indirectly related to job performance through role clarity. They also found that manager-as-coach processes

Fig. 1 Model of the role of feedback orientation in the manager-as-coach process



were indirectly associated with positive job attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational and career commitment through role clarity. Overall, coaching from one's manager can improve personal productivity, and as a result, organizational performance (Hunt and Weintraub, 2011). Employees believe that being the recipient of coaching from their manager will result in higher performance and personal advancement and want more coaching than they report receiving (Longenecker and Neubert 2005).

A number of studies have identified taxonomies and behaviors associated with the manager-as-coach process including: observation, analysis, interviewing, and feedback provision (Orth et al. 1990), empowerment and facilitation (Ellinger and Bostrom 1999), communication, goal setting, feedback, and performance improvement planning (Graham et al., 2004). Heslin et al. (2006) suggest that effective coaching behaviors include guidance, facilitation, and inspiration. Guidance refers to clear communication of expectations and use of constructive feedback with information on how to improve. Facilitation enables the employee to solve problems through exploration and deducing their own feedback, and inspiration encourages employees to use feedback to reach their full potential. All of these models of the manager-as-coach process suggest that feedback provision and use is a critical component.

Gregory et al. (2008) discuss a theoretical approach to feedback provision in executive coaching that provides a foundation for the current study. The model starts with a critical event that acts as a catalyst for the need for feedback. In subsequent stages, the coach gathers and provides feedback, helps the coachee understand and interpret the feedback, and deals with initial emotional and cognitive reactions to the feedback. If the coachee is able to work through his or her initial emotional response, the stage is set for the coachee to mindfully process the feedback and use it to set goals and track progress. This model also states that the coachee's feedback receptivity is an important moderator in the process such that coachees who value feedback more will be better able to analyze and interpret the feedback, make better use of the feedback, and achieve more favorable coaching outcomes as compared to coachees who do not have a strong value for feedback. Finally, Gregory et al.'s model highlights the role of the coach as the feedback source. They suggest that effective coaches give feedback in such a way that the recipient understands and accepts it, and values the feedback for performance improvement. The Gregory et al. (2008) model is the first to fully integrate the feedback process with the coaching process. Their model identifies the important role of feedback orientation, or feedback receptivity, to the effectiveness of the coaching process. This provides a solid foundation for the current study.

The Role of Feedback Orientation in the Manager-as-Coach Process

Feedback orientation is a multidimensional construct that determines receptivity to job performance feedback (London and Smither 2002). Elements that make up feedback orientation include: liking feedback, belief in its value, a tendency to seek feedback and process it mindfully, feeling accountable to act on feedback, and sensitivity to others' view of oneself (London and Smither 2002). Those who are high in feedback orientation like and value feedback for self-development and tend to have lower levels of evaluation apprehension. They recognize the value of feedback and seek it out as they strive for self-awareness and self-enhancement (Linderbaum and Levy 2010). In fact, Dahling et al. (2012) demonstrated that the relationship between feedback orientation and job performance was mediated by feedback seeking frequency. Those high in feedback orientation are also likely to process feedback thoroughly and deeply when they receive it and tend to feel accountable to act on the feedback (London and Smither 2002). Construct and measurement development work conducted by Linderbaum and Levy (2010) suggests that feedback orientation is comprised of four dimensions. Feedback utility is the belief that feedback is useful for attaining goals. Accountability refers to feelings of obligation to use feedback. Feedback self-efficacy is an individual's tendency to have confidence in the ability to appropriately interpret and respond to feedback. Social awareness is a sensitivity to others' views of oneself and the tendency to use feedback to be cognizant of these views.

Researchers have suggested that an individual's receptivity to feedback plays a critical role in the coaching process. For instance, in their initial discussion of the feedback orientation construct, London and Smither (2002) propose that individuals who are high on feedback orientation should be more responsive to coaching. This is consistent with Joo's (2005) model of coaching that emphasizes the importance of coachee characteristics including readiness for coaching and openness to feedback. Goal orientation is a motivational variable that has been linked to coachee readiness (Gregory and Levy 2012; Joo 2005) and Linderbaum and Levy (2010) report a positive correlation between goal orientation and feedback orientation. Learning goal orientation, like feedback orientation, is associated with a focus on mastery and the use of feedback for learning and real performance improvements.

Although the feedback process is critical in coaching and there is a clear justification for the role of coachee feedback orientation in the process, there is little discussion of the role of a coach's feedback orientation in the process. We suggest that managers who value feedback for themselves, in other words have high personal feedback

orientation, should be more likely to understand the importance of feedback and coaching for others and ultimately be better coaches. Aligned with this rationale, Hunt and Weintraub (2011) identified openness to personal learning and receiving feedback as characteristic of effective coaching managers. In fact, Hunt and Weintraub (2002) suggest that a manager's openness to feedback directly affects the context for coaching. In this way, a manager's feedback orientation should not only affect how he/she responds to feedback but also the extent to which the manager views feedback as critical for developing subordinates. If a manager values feedback and understands its importance for development and behavior change, he or she should be more inclined to provide high-quality feedback to subordinates, in a thoughtful, empathic manner, and encourage subsequent feedback seeking. In their model of feedback in executive coaching, Gregory et al. (2008) posit that a coach needs to be an effective source of feedback and display feedback source credibility characteristics such as integrity, trustworthiness, and expertise (Ilgen et al. 1979). However, they do not carry these ideas to their next logical step that good coaches are likely to have high feedback orientation themselves.

In their initial conceptualization of feedback orientation, London and Smither (2002) stated that “feedback orientation may evolve over time as feedback becomes more meaningful and valuable to the individual” (p. 84). Receiving feedback and coaching is not a one-time event, instead the manager-as-coach process occurs over time as part of a performance management process that will ideally lead to learning and performance improvement. These positive outcomes give rise to a positive learning process in which the effects of feedback accumulate over time. Thus, effective coaching supports the value of feedback and its productive use, suggesting that an effective manager-as-coach process may even be related to coachee feedback orientation.

Indicators of Manager-as-Coach Effectiveness

Although there is little theoretical or empirical research specifically identifying the factors associated with effectiveness in the manager-as-coach process, or what differentiates a good coach from a bad coach, our synthesis of the coaching literature suggests at least three factors are relevant when discussing effective coaching from one's manager: the specific coaching behaviors performed, the nature of the coaching relationship developed between the manager and the subordinate, and the feedback environment. Kilburg's (2001) model of coaching effectiveness includes coaching behaviors, relationship, and supportiveness of the environment. Gregory et al.'s (2008) model includes gathering and delivering feedback (coaching

behaviors), establishing the coaching relationship, and the organization's feedback environment as critical pieces of executive coaching. Finally, Hunt and Weintraub (2011) suggest that being an effective coach involves a variety of behaviors associated with giving feedback and enabling reflection and self-awareness, establishing a constructive relationship, and creating a coaching-friendly context. The next sections explain how a coach's feedback orientation is related to the three key coaching processes: coaching behaviors, the coaching relationship, and the feedback environment.

Coaching Behaviors

Researchers have been working to understand just what behaviors constitute effective an effective manager-as-coach process. Overall there is general agreement that the skills associated with effective managerial coaching include: listening, analysis, interviewing, observation, communication and giving feedback, and setting clear expectations (Joo et al. 2012). Heslin et al. (2006) conceptualize coaching behaviors as guidance, facilitation, and inspiration. Effective coaches provide guidance through clear expectations and feedback, facilitation through helping employees analyze and solve their own problems, and inspiration via challenging employees to develop their potential. This approach is consistent with other taxonomies of coaching behaviors (Ellinger and Bostrom 1999; Graham et al. 2004).

Coaches have a responsibility to provide engaging and purposeful feedback (Gregory et al. 2008). Coaches with high feedback orientation are likely to understand the value of feedback for development and acknowledge their role as a feedback source. As such, coaches with high feedback orientation should focus on effectively communicating a clear, direct feedback message. They also understand that constructive feedback may precipitate an emotional reaction in the recipient and work to frame the feedback so that it is viewed as information rather than evaluation and encourage the recipient to have realistic expectations about feedback and the coaching process. Therefore, we propose that coaches with a higher feedback orientation will be more likely to engage in effective coaching behaviors than their counterparts with lower feedback orientation. Effective coaching behaviors may also be related to a coachee's feedback orientation, as they are mechanisms through which the manager can either encourage or discourage the perceived value of feedback. For instance, coachees who believe their manager is providing clear guidance through high-quality feedback will be more likely to value the coach's feedback in the future. Alternatively, when a coach does not display effective coaching behaviors, the coachee may have more difficulty formulating action plans and achieving goals and thus not view feedback as particularly

helpful. In other words, the coachee may have lower feedback orientation.

Hypothesis 1a Managers with high feedback orientation will exhibit effective coaching behaviors as perceived by their subordinates.

Hypothesis 2a Coaching behaviors will mediate the relationship between manager feedback orientation and subordinate feedback orientation.

Coaching Relationship

Effective coaches form a partnership or coaching relationship with their subordinates. Within the context of manager-as-coach, this relationship is one piece of the overall relationship between a manager and direct report. Evered and Selman (1989) stress that the relationship is a critical component of coaching and when there is a positive relationship there is less coaching to control a subordinate's behavior and more coaching to facilitate that subordinate's behavior. Graham et al. (2004) identified a "warm relationship" as one of the eight components of effective coaching. Similarly, Hunt and Weintraub (2011) suggest that the effectiveness of coaching depends on the nature of the relationship. Gregory and Levy (2010) define the coaching relationship as "a working partnership between an employee and his or her direct supervisor that is focused on addressing the performance and development needs of that employee" (p. 111) and suggest that this coaching relationship is a critical aspect of an effective manager-as-coach process. In their development of a measure of relationships in the manager-as-coach process, Gregory and Levy (2010) suggested that high-quality coaching relationships between a manager and subordinate are comprised of four dimensions: genuineness of the relationship, effective communication, comfort with the relationship, and facilitating development. Therefore, effective coaches develop a high-quality coaching relationship with their coachees.

Characteristics of the coach should be related to the type of relationship the coach develops with his or her coachees (Gregory and Levy 2010; Gregory et al. 2008). Because they value feedback themselves, coaches with high feedback orientation are likely to develop a coaching relationship that supports the coachee in his or her use of feedback. Coaches with high feedback orientation want to provide helpful feedback and thus will establish a relationship that is comfortable and genuine and based on effective communication. High feedback orientation coaches want their subordinates to understand and value feedback and will promote a supportive relationship that will be conducive to the delivery of both positive and emotionally tinged constructive feedback. Furthermore, a

coach who establishes a favorable coaching relationship is implicitly indicating feedback is valuable for development and therefore the favorableness of the coaching relationship should also be related to the coachee's perceived value of the feedback, feedback orientation.

Hypothesis 1b Managers with high feedback orientation will develop favorable coaching relationships as perceived by the subordinates.

Hypothesis 2b Coaching relationship will mediate the relationship between manager feedback orientation and subordinate feedback orientation.

Feedback Environment

Since feedback is such a critical component of the manager-as-coach process, it follows that coaching from one's manager will be more effective if the context within which feedback and coaching is provided is supportive of feedback and self-development. London and Smither (2002) suggest that managers who facilitate a favorable feedback environment set the stage for effective coaching. The feedback environment refers to the contextual factors associated with the provision and use of day-to-day, ongoing job performance feedback (Steelman et al. 2004). A favorable feedback environment is one in which managers provide high-quality feedback in a thoughtful, considerate manner, promote the mindful use of feedback for self-awareness and self-development, and encourage feedback seeking (Steelman et al., 2004). A supportive feedback environment creates a climate of continuous learning for employees and thus sets the tone for the coaching process (London and Smither 2002). Consistent with this approach, Evered and Selman (1989) suggest that effective coaches create a climate or context that empowers individuals to learn and get things done. Similarly, Hunt and Weintraub (2011) suggest that effective coaches develop a coaching-friendly context in which learning is an important value, and reflection, discussion, goals, and feedback are fostered. Finally, Gregory et al. (2008) posit that the coach must maintain a favorable feedback environment for the coachee to be able to work through the emotions associated with feedback and accept the feedback to move forward.

A coach's feedback orientation should color the way he or she interacts with subordinates. If a coach values feedback and understands its importance, this individual should be more inclined to create a favorable feedback environment by doing things like delivering frequent positive and negative feedback in a useful and supportive manner and encouraging feedback seeking. In other words, a coach's favorable feedback orientation should spill over into behaviors that promote a favorable feedback environment.

Furthermore, London and Smither (2002) specifically state that the feedback environment should be related to a coachee's feedback orientation. A favorable environment conveys that feedback is just information to benefit the individual at work. This should help recipients navigate an initial emotional response to feedback, allowing them to concentrate on the feedback itself and its implications for improvement. As a result of this environment, employees are more likely to mindfully process feedback and use it to make necessary behavioral changes. If those changes are successful and rewarded, subsequent feedback should be viewed as valuable. Alternatively, if the environment is not supportive, feedback may be interpreted through an emotional lens and less accepted and valued. In fact, studies have reported a relationship between feedback environment perceptions and feedback orientation (Dahling et al. 2012; Linderbaum and Levy 2010).

Hypothesis 1c Managers with high feedback orientation will foster favorable feedback environments as perceived by their subordinates.

Hypothesis 2c Feedback environment will mediate the relationship between manager feedback orientation and subordinate feedback orientation.

In sum, we predict that coaches who have stronger feedback orientations will be perceived as more effective as measured by subordinate perceptions of coaching behaviors, the coaching relationship, and the feedback environment as opposed to coaches with weaker feedback orientation. Furthermore, we predicted that coaching behaviors, the coaching relationship, and the feedback environment will mediate the relationship between the manager's feedback orientation and the subordinate's feedback orientation (see Fig. 1).

This study answers numerous calls to better understand the manager-as-coach process (Gregory and Levy 2009; 2015; Joo et al. 2012) by integrating theories of feedback with theories of coaching. First, theories of feedback suggest that feedback orientation is critical to the coaching process (Gregory et al. 2008; London and Smither 2002). Second, theories of the manager-as-coach process indicate that the coach's characteristics are important for a successful coaching outcome (Gregory and Levy 2015; Hunt and Weintraub 2011). This is the first study to integrate and test these theories. We test the theory that managers with stronger feedback orientation are more likely to be better coaches (as measured by coaching behaviors, the coaching relationship, and the feedback environment). We also test theories of feedback orientation that suggest that effective coaching may be related to the coachee's feedback orientation and may mediate the relationship between manager feedback orientation and subordinate feedback orientation.

Methods

Participants

Participants in the current study included 103 manager–subordinate dyads. Participants came from a number of different organizations and represented varied job titles including: data programmer, nurse, bookkeeper, sales associate, and teacher. Manager–subordinate dyads were recruited from two technology organizations (19 dyads), MTurk (80 dyads), and student employees at a university in the southeast USA participated as subordinates and provided the email address of their manager (4 dyads). In all cases, subordinates participated in the study and at the end of the survey provided the name and email address of their manager, who was subsequently contacted to fill out the manager measures. The manager name and email address had to be consistent for the dyad to be included in the data analysis. Attention checks were included in both the subordinate and manager surveys. Dyads were not included in the analysis if any attention checks were missed (Liu et al. 2013). Furthermore, consistent with recommendations, MTurk workers were limited to US participants who had at least a 95 % HIT approval rate (Buhrmester et al. 2011).

Sixty-two percent of the managers were male and 72 % of managers were between the ages of 31 and 50 years; 20 % reported organizational tenure of 1–5 years and 70 % reported tenure of 5–20 years. Of the subordinates, 58 % were male, 77 % were between the ages of 20 and 40 years old, and 52 % had worked for their organization for 1–5 years. Seventy percent of subordinates worked with their manager between 1 and 5 years with a range of less than 1 year to more than 10 years. All participants worked at least part time.

Measures

Subordinates completed a feedback orientation self-assessment and then provided ratings of their manager's coaching behaviors, quality of the coaching relationship, and feedback environment. Managers completed a feedback orientation self-assessment. Both subordinates and managers were asked demographic information at the end of their surveys. All measures were completed online.

Feedback Orientation

Manager and subordinate feedback orientation was assessed using Linderbaum and Levy's (2010) Feedback Orientation Scale (FOS). The FOS measures four facets of feedback orientation with five items each, resulting in a total of 20 items. The four facets are utility, feedback self-

efficacy, social awareness, and accountability. Sample items from the FOS include: “I find that feedback is critical for reaching my goals,” and “I feel confident when responding to both positive and negative feedback.” The items were answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Linderbaum and Levy (2010) developed and validated the measure of FOS, and they along with others (e.g., Dahling et al. 2012) demonstrated that feedback orientation is related to individual differences (learning goal orientation, self-monitoring) and work-related outcomes (feedback seeking, intentions to use feedback). Braddy et al. (2013) extended the nomological network and validation evidence for the FOS. They reported convergent and criterion-related validity evidence demonstrating that feedback orientation was related to implicit person theory, achievement motivation, and reactions to 360° feedback. In the current study, the internal consistency reliability for the manager feedback orientation measure was .94 and the internal consistency reliability for the subordinate feedback orientation measure was .95, which is comparable with the values reported by Linderbaum and Levy (2010) and Braddy et al. (2013).

Coaching Behavior

Subordinate’s perception of their manager’s coaching behavior (CB) was assessed with Heslin, et al.’s (2006) measure of coaching behavior. This measure assesses the fundamental components of managerial coaching including the dimensions of guidance, facilitation, and inspiration. There were a total of 10 items measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*to a very great extent*). Example items include, “To what extent does your supervisor provide guidance on performance expectations?” and “To what extent does your supervisor help you to analyze your performance?” Initial validation evidence of the composite coaching behavior measure suggests it is related to leader consideration and social support from one’s supervisor, and that managers with an incremental IPT (implicit person theory) displayed more favorable coaching behaviors than did managers with an entity IPT (Heslin et al., 2006). The internal consistency reliability was .95 which is comparable to the reliability reported by Heslin et al. ($\alpha = .95$).

Perceived Quality of the Coaching Relationship

Subordinate’s perceptions of the quality of the coaching relationship between themselves and their manager were assessed with Perceived Quality of the Coaching Relationship scale developed by Gregory and Levy (2010). This scale consists of 12 items across four dimensions:

genuineness of the relationship, effective communication, comfort with the relationship, and facilitating development. Subordinates responded to the items using a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Sample items include: “I feel at ease talking with my supervisor about my job performance” and “My supervisor and I have mutual respect for one another.” Gregory and Levy (2011) reported that supervisor individualized consideration (a dimension of transformational leadership), supervisor empathy, and subordinate trust in supervisor were related to the Perceived Quality of the Coaching Relationship scale. The internal consistency reliability was .96, which is consistent with Gregory and Levy (2010; 2011).

Feedback Environment

Subordinate’s perception of the feedback environment as created by their manager was measured using the shortened version of Steelman et al.’s (2004) Feedback Environment Scale (FES). The scale has 21 items and 7 dimensions, consisting of: manager credibility, quality of feedback, feedback delivery, promotion of feedback seeking, frequency of favorable feedback, frequency of unfavorable feedback, and manager availability. Participants responded to the items on a 7-point Likert-type scale, in which 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Examples of the items include: “My supervisor is tactful when giving me performance feedback” and “My supervisor is usually available when I want performance information.” The FES is related to satisfaction with feedback, feedback seeking frequency (Steelman et al. 2004), organizational citizenship behaviors (Norris-Watts and Levy 2004), and job performance (Rosen et al. 2006). The internal consistency reliability was .97 which is consistent with reliabilities reported in other studies (e.g., Norris-Watts and Levy 2004; Rosen et al. 2006).

Results

First, we assessed the four-factor measurement model for all four measures included in the study with a confirmatory factor analysis. All of the measures were indicated by parcels created by calculating the scale scores associated with each of the a priori dimension (Hall et al. 1999). Feedback orientation was indicated by four parcels, coaching behavior was indicated by three parcels, perceived quality of the coaching relationship was indicated by four parcels, and the feedback environment was indicated by seven parcels. Based on the rules of thumb for evaluating fit statistics (e.g., Hu and Bentler 1999), the four-factor model fit the data adequately well ($\chi^2_{(129)} = 381.53$, $p < .001$, CFI = .97,

NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .10, SRMR = .06), and better than a one-factor model in which all of the constructs served as indicators of one global feedback construct ($\chi^2_{(135)} = 705.17$, $p < .001$, CFI = .94, NNFI = .93, RMSEA = .17, SRMR = .08). The Chi square difference test was significant suggesting the four-factor model fit the data better than a one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2_{(6)} = 323.64$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, in the four-factor model, the parcels all had strong factor loadings on their representative constructs (Jackson et al. 2009).

The fit statistics for the four-factor model are generally acceptable, except for the RMSEA which is higher than most benchmarks for a good fit. Examination of the modification indices suggests allowing 2 parcels to cross-load would improve the fit. The modifications suggested were conceptually reasonable, and the measurement model was re-estimated with these adjustments. First, the delivery dimension of the FES was allowed to load onto PQCR. The delivery dimension of the FES assesses the consideration, tact, and empathy with which feedback is delivered; this could easily be related to the perceived quality of the coaching relationship. Second, the facilitating development dimension of the PQCR was allowed to also load on the coaching behavior scale. The facilitating development dimension of the PQCR assesses the extent to which the coaching relationship facilitates the learning and development of the subordinate which is clearly associated with coaching behaviors. We note that these modifications were only among the coaching indicators. The fit of this revised 4-factor model was slightly better ($\chi^2_{(127)} = 342.10$, $p < .001$, CFI = .98, NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .07) than the original 4-factor model. The Chi-square difference test was significant suggesting the revised 4-factor model fits the data better than does the 4-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 39.43$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$). Based on these analyses, we concluded that the coaching constructs were reasonably, but not wholly, discriminant. In particular, there was some overlap among the indicators of coaching effectiveness which will be addressed in subsequent analyses and in the discussion section.

Descriptive statistics and scale intercorrelations can be found in Table 1. The relationship between manager and subordinate feedback orientation was significant ($r = .43$, $p < .01$). Hypotheses 1a–c predicted that manager feedback orientation would be positively related to subordinate perceptions of their manager engaging in effective coaching behaviors (1a), maintaining a high-quality coaching relationship (1b), and promoting a favorable feedback environment (1c). Manager feedback orientation was significantly related to subordinate perceptions of supervisor coaching behaviors ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), perceived quality of the employee coaching relationship ($r = .28$, $p < .01$), and manager feedback environment ($r = .34$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, regression analyses controlling for tenure with

manager demonstrated that in all three cases manager feedback orientation predicted the coaching effectiveness measures above and beyond tenure with manager. Therefore, Hypotheses 1a–c were supported.

Hypotheses 2a–c predicted that coaching behaviors (2a), the coaching relationship (2b), and the feedback environment (2c) would mediate the relationship between manager feedback orientation and subordinate feedback orientation. Bootstrapping procedures recommended by Hayes (2013) were utilized to test the mediation hypotheses. Table 2 provides the mediation results, including the direct and indirect effects, with the bootstrapped tests of the indirect effects. Significance is indicated by 95 % confidence intervals that exclude zero. Shrout and Bolger (2002) and MacKinnon et al. (2004) have shown that a bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval can be more informative than tests of statistical significance of each path in the proposed model. Results suggest that manager feedback orientation had a significant indirect effect on subordinate feedback orientation through coaching behaviors ($\beta = .14$; 95 % Bca[.05, .27]), the perceived quality of the coaching relationship ($\beta = .11$; 95 % Bca[.03, .23]), and the feedback environment ($\beta = .17$; 95 % Bca[.07, .31]). The analyses were also run controlling for tenure with manager, but the results did not change. A parallel multiple mediator model was also estimated through the simultaneous entry of all three mediators (Hayes, 2013). Results of this analysis suggest that the feedback environment was the only significant mediator because it was the only mediator for which the confidence interval did not contain zero (feedback environment: $\beta = .19$; 95 % Bca[.06, .41]; coaching behaviors: $\beta = .05$; 95 % Bca[−.02, .21]; coaching relationship: $\beta = −.06$; 95 % Bca[−.24, .02]). Thus, controlling for coaching behaviors and the perceived quality of the coaching relationship, a manager's feedback orientation is related to the subordinate's feedback orientation through its relationship with the quality of the feedback environment the manager promotes. In other words, neither coaching behaviors nor the coaching relationship contributes to the indirect effect above and beyond the feedback environment. Thus, hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c were partially supported.

Because of the intercorrelations among the mediators, a supplementary relative weight analysis was conducted using RWA-Web (Tonidandel and LeBreton 2015). Relative weight analysis addresses the problem of correlated predictors by using a variable transformation that creates a new set of predictors that are orthogonal to one another (Johnson, 2000). The weighted combination of the three indicators of coaching effectiveness explained 36 % of the variance in subordinate feedback orientation. All three variables explained a statistically significant amount of variance in subordinate feedback orientation, as none of the

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Scale Intercorrelations

Measure	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Manager feedback orientation	5.71	.87	.94				
2. Subordinate feedback orientation	5.74	.85	.43**	.95			
3. Coaching behaviors	5.41	1.14	.32**	.53**	.95		
4. Perceived quality of coaching relationship	5.60	1.23	.28**	.47**	.81**	.96	
5. Feedback environment	5.61	.97	.34**	.59**	.81**	.87**	.97

Reliabilities are presented on the diagonal

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2 Regressions testing the mediating effect of the coaching effectiveness indicators on the relationship between manager feedback orientation and subordinate feedback orientation

Variable	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	SE	95 % CI	
				LL	UL
Coaching behavior	.31	.14	.06	.05	.27
Perceived quality of coaching relationship	.34	.11	.05	.03	.23
Feedback environment	.28	.17	.06	.07	.31

Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size: 1,000

CI confidence interval, LL lower limit, UL upper limit

95 % confidence intervals for the tests of significance contained zero (coaching behavior $RW = .11$; perceived quality of the coaching relationship $RW = .08$; feedback environment $RW = .17$). The relative weights rescaled as a percentage of the predicted variance in subordinate feedback orientation attributable to each variable are: coaching behavior 31.16 %, perceived quality of the coaching relationship 21.79 %, and feedback environment 47.05 %.

Discussion

The growing literature on executive coaching and the manager-as-coach process suggests that feedback is a critical component of coaching (Gregory and Levy 2009; 2015; Joo 2005), and the manager-as-coach should be viewed as the feedback source (Gregory et al. 2008). Within the feedback arena, feedback orientation, or receptivity to feedback, has been identified as important for feedback acceptance and use (Dahling et al. 2012; London and Smither 2002). The purpose of this study was to integrate these theories to develop and test a model of feedback orientation within the manager-as-coach process and contribute to the growing literature on feedback processes in coaching in general (Gregory and Levy 2012, 2015; Joo 2005; Peterson 2009).

First, based on theories of feedback orientation (Linderbaum and Levy 2010; Levy and Thompson 2010; London and Smither 2002), it stands to reason that managers who value feedback for themselves and their own

personal professional development should also understand the value of developmental feedback for their subordinates, they should promote an effective feedback and coaching process, and they should be viewed as better coaches. For instance, managers with a strong feedback orientation should be more likely to provide good guidance, clear feedback, and develop a constructive coaching relationship with their subordinates. Our results supported these propositions. Manager feedback orientation was related to subordinate perceptions of effective coaching behaviors, quality of the coaching relationship, and favorability of the feedback environment. These results are consistent with the notion that the individual differences of a coach impact the coaching process (Gregory et al. 2008; Joo 2005; Kilburg 2001). For instance, Joo (2005) suggests that successful coaches need personal characteristics such as credibility, knowledge, experience and the “right attitude about coaching” (p. 477), highly consistent with feedback orientation. Furthermore, Hunt and Weintraub (2011) identified openness to personal learning and receiving feedback as characteristic of effective coaches. In fact, they suggest that a manager’s openness to feedback directly affects the context for coaching. The relationships uncovered in this study provide the first empirical evidence in support of these propositions.

Furthermore, research on feedback orientation thus far is still limited and has only been examined on the feedback recipient’s side. For instance, Dahling et al. (2012) demonstrated feedback orientation was related to job performance through the feedback recipient’s feedback seeking frequency. A manager’s feedback orientation should

not only affect how he or she responds to feedback but also how important he or she deems feedback to be for subordinates and the tone he or she sets for feedback within the work environment. The results of the current study support these predictions and suggest that a manager's own feedback orientation is related to subordinate perceptions of manager feedback behaviors and the feedback environment he or she establishes. This is the first study to examine the role of a manager's feedback orientation in his or her feedback and coaching behaviors, addressing a call for research in this area (Gregory and Levy 2015).

The second purpose of this study was to test whether manager feedback orientation is related to subordinate feedback orientation through the indicators of effective coaching. We found that manager feedback orientation was correlated with subordinate feedback orientation and indirectly related to subordinate feedback orientation via the coaching effectiveness indicators of coaching behaviors, quality of the coaching relationship, and feedback environment. Thus, managers who value feedback for themselves are likely to set up a context that supports and promotes feedback and coaching by utilizing effective coaching behaviors, forming high-quality coaching relationships with subordinates, and promoting a favorable feedback environment, and this positive coaching environment is related to positive feedback orientation in subordinates. Employees finding themselves in this favorable context are in a better position to receive, process, and use the feedback provided during coaching encounters with their direct manager. Furthermore, effective coaching behaviors should frame feedback as job performance information rather than an evaluation and reduce the emotional reaction to feedback thus allowing the recipient to process feedback more mindfully. Until now there has been limited empirical support for these propositions, however, Dahling et al. (2012) and Linderbaum and Levy (2010) reported positive correlations between feedback environment and feedback orientation, and Gregory and Levy (2012) reported a positive correlation between employee feedback orientation and perceptions of coaching behaviors and perceived quality of the coaching relationship. Our study contributes to this expanding literature by examining the relationship between manager feedback orientation and coaching effectiveness and subordinate feedback orientation using different sources of measurement.

There was also a direct effect between manager and subordinate feedback orientation. It could be the managers select and hire employees who are similar to them (Schneider et al. 1995), and this extends to feedback receptivity. Alternatively, employees who identify with their manager (Ashforth et al. 2008) may over time display characteristics similar to their manager. Through the identification process of sensemaking, employees might come to mirror the

characteristics of their supervisor. Or, in the process of developing a reciprocal exchange relationship between the leader and the subordinate (LMX), employees demonstrate a receptivity to their manager's feedback and communication. For instance, there is some evidence that a favorable LMX relationship is related to leader-member value agreement (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Future research should explore these possibilities.

The manager feedback variables were correlated; this is not unexpected as the variables measure aspects of the feedback process that are related. For example, managers who promote a favorable feedback environment are very likely to also have a positive coaching relationship with subordinates. The CFA results confirm that the feedback variables are related but distinguishable. However, due to the relationship among these variables, we also conducted a relative weight analysis (Tonidandel and LeBreton 2011) to allow for more accurate variance partitioning among correlated predictors. The feedback variables were treated as predictors of subordinate feedback orientation. The RWA results suggest that all three feedback variables are meaningful, and the relative weights (effect size estimates) suggest that the feedback environment has the most importance, relative to coaching behaviors and the coaching relationship. This is consistent with the multiple mediator analysis in which the feedback environment emerged as a significant mediator in the relationship between supervisor and subordinate feedback orientation, after accounting for the other two feedback variables. It could be that the context for feedback, the feedback environment, is a necessary antecedent to effective coaching behaviors and a favorable coaching relationship. Future research should use causal designs to assess how the manager-as-coach feedback process unfolds, as Tonidandel and LeBreton (2011) argue that results of RWA can be used for theory building.

Future research should, therefore, examine theories of the manager-as-coach process in a longitudinal framework. An especially important direction for future research is identifying the extent to which the coach's feedback orientation and indicators of coaching effectiveness result in improvements in employee performance or other measures of coaching success. A better understanding of how a coach's feedback orientation contributes to coaching success is also needed. For instance, feedback can be daunting and trigger an emotional reaction (Brett and Atwater 2001). Effective coaches should be able to frame feedback so the recipient can cognitively reappraise the feedback to be less threatening. Cognitive reappraisal is a form of cognitive change that involves changing one's interpretation of a situation's meaning (Lazarus and Alfert 1964). In this case, coaches with high feedback orientation should help a coachee view potentially emotion-eliciting feedback as

valuable, objective information and thus reduce its emotional impact. The coachee's feedback orientation is also an important area for future research. London and Smither (2002) suggest that employees who have a strong feedback orientation are more likely to be receptive to coaching and get more out of coaching, than employees with weaker feedback orientation. However, this proposition has yet to be tested. London and Smither (2002) also suggest that recipients of effective coaching should develop an appreciation for feedback and stronger feedback orientation over time. Longitudinal studies of feedback orientation within the manager-as-coach process are needed to test these propositions.

Implications for Practice

Currently, there is a trend in organizations to reduce reliance on once-a-year performance appraisal and promote ongoing manager feedback and coaching (Pulakos et al. 2015). This study has a number of implications for managers and organizations interested in moving in this direction and enhancing the manager-as-coach process. Organizations can help increase a manager's awareness of the indicators of coaching effectiveness, coaching behaviors, the coaching relationship, and the feedback environment. Managers are being asked to do more ongoing coaching of their subordinates and understanding some of the behaviors that have been theoretically linked to effective coaching can help them manage these new expectations. This involves communicating performance expectations and providing ongoing feedback (guidance), helping employees analyze situations and solve problems (facilitation), and challenging employees to realize their full potential (inspiration) (Heslin et al. 2006). Second, managers can be made aware of the relevance of a high-quality relationship when coaching their direct reports. Managers should invest in forging a genuine and meaningful relationship with employees they are coaching (Gregory and Levy 2010). Finally, managers can become more aware of the environment or context for coaching and how to promote a favorable feedback environment (Steelman et al. 2004). Our results suggest that the feedback environment may be the most important consideration, relative to the other coaching variables, and developing interventions to address and improve the feedback environment in organizations is an important next step.

Organizations and managers should also know about the role that manager value of feedback plays in the coaching process. If a manager values feedback for themselves, they may be viewed as better coaches, and even promote greater acceptance of coaching and valuing of feedback in their direct reports. All of the instruments used in this study can be used by organizations as diagnostic tools to assess

coaching proficiency and develop training programs. Training managers to be more open and receptive to feedback themselves would be an ideal place to start.

Limitations

Although the dyadic nature of the sample is strength in that not all measures were single-source self-report; the sample size of 103 manager–subordinate dyads is relatively small. Furthermore, a somewhat biased sample could exist in the current data set as the subordinates had to indicate their manager's email and thereby indirectly request a favor, depicting one aspect of their relationship with their manager. Another sample-related limitation is the possibility that managers select subordinates based on compatibility on feedback orientation. We also note that in this sample 70 % of subordinates have worked with their manager for 1–5 years and while there is a range of tenure with manager from less than 1 year to 10 or more years, this may limit the interpretations drawn from the data. Future longitudinal research should examine the development of feedback orientation in manager–subordinate dyads to get a better understanding of feedback orientation and whether it emerges over time or is more fixed. We encourage future research with different samples to replicate our results and further explore feedback orientation in the coaching process.

A second limitation is that the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow us to draw causal conclusions. Finally, there were strong correlations among the coaching effectiveness indicators suggesting that they may not be entirely distinct. Future research should continue to develop and refine measures for use in the coaching field and pay attention to the degree of overlap to ensure they are distinct.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the manager-as-coach process and the role of feedback orientation in this process. Although managers are expected to provide feedback and coaching to their subordinates, with the increased emphasis on performance management it has only recently become viewed as a core managerial competency. Drawing from the executive coaching literature and the small literature on manager-as-coach, we integrated feedback processes into the coaching framework and found that managers who value feedback for themselves are likely to be viewed as better coaches as assessed through employee perceptions of coaching behaviors, the coaching relationship, and the feedback environment. We found that managers with stronger feedback orientation

engage in coaching behaviors encourage favorable relationships with their subordinates and foster a favorable feedback environment. Furthermore, these behaviors are related to subordinate feedback orientation and mediate the relationship between manager feedback orientation and subordinate feedback orientation. The findings deepen our understanding of feedback orientation and indicators of coaching effectiveness in terms of the relationship they share and expand the concept of managers as coaches.

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