Reflections from the Field

Coaching to enhance learning and reinforce commitment

Paul Lyons ✉ (College of Business, Frostburg State University, University System of Maryland, USA)
Randall P. Bandura (College of Business, Frostburg State University, University System of Maryland, USA)

Abstract

The focus of the research was to search for and identify theory and practical constructs to guide the creation of a model for manager-as-coach to assist employees and the manager to improve knowledge and competence. At the same time the proposed model is aimed at stimulating a commitment relationship between manager and employee. Contributions the article makes are provision of a structured learning tool that increases the manager's repertoire, a focused approach serving learning and growth needs of employee and manager, and a deliberate means for experimentation with the enhancement of perceived commitment for both participants.

Introduction

The purpose of this work is to present a research-grounded, practical model for a manager, acting in a coaching role, to increase her/his knowledge, competence, and understanding and at the same time improve the knowledge, skills, and growth of employees supervised. In addition, the model aims to help stimulate a positive relationship between manager and employee. In this paper the manager-as-coach is referred to as manager and the person being coached is the employee.

There are several anticipated outcomes for the successful application of the model to include: enhanced manager and employee engagement with work and improved knowledge and skills. Further, using the tools provided, the manager learns to manage a learning orientation with employee(s) and then to adapt the learning orientation over time in ways that are responsive to the employee's needs, environment and changing conditions. Finally, with employee participation, the manager aims to deliberately build a positive relationship with the employee.

Several contributions to the coaching and management literature are linked in the approach offered. These include the following: (1) the creation of a different approach of coaching employees, with a focus on learning, change and performance improvement; (2) a structured learning tool(s) for managers, one that offers flexibility and increases the manager's repertoire; and (3) an approach that is under the control of the manager-as-coach and one that offers the means for the manager to improve relationships and skills related primarily to the coaching role.

In the segments that follow we present a brief methodological section, followed by some discursive elements to include material that generally defines the role of manager-as-coach, and some details regarding manager and employee learning and change. This is followed by a literature review of critical theory bases (self-regulated learning, integrative pedagogy, and the investment theory of building commitment). Following these segments is an expression of the transition from theory to practical applications of methods for experimenting in guiding learning and building commitment. Finally, we provide a discussion of implications for practice and research, and conclusions.

Methodological Approach

Based upon a review of relevant literature of theory and practice using the search tools Science Direct, PsycINFO, Education Research Complete, and Google Scholar; and guided by work encompassing many aspects of coaching in organizations (see, for example, Cox, et al., 2014) we have isolated a few critical areas to explore. The following segments of this discussion include: role of the coach (Dixey, 2015), performance assessment – as an initial stimulus for manager-as-coach interaction with an employee (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017), some details of learning and change to include self-regulated learning (Cleary et al. 2015) and learning orientation (Burnette et al. 2013), and growth mindsets (Caniels et al. 2018). In addition, in support of the proposed model or action guide, we examine the experiential learning approach by Ashford and DeRue, 2012, integrative pedagogy (Tynjala et al. 2016) and commitment via investment theory (Rusbult, et al. 2011).

Following exploration and coordination of these areas we offer a model or action guide for a manager to use with employees. The guide is intended to give the manager a structure from which to create a learning orientation with employees as she/he assumes a coaching role. Included is material that may guide the manager in incorporating relationship building

Manager-as-Coach

The setting is the manager assuming a coaching role with her/his direct reports. Lawrence (2017) in a recent literature review concluded that there is no generally accepted definition of managerial coaching. He suggests that there is a general alignment of it as to the role of coaching in improving performance and facilitating learning, but little clarity as to the nature of that process. He reports that existing definitions do not offer a clear distinction between managerial coaching and other forms of coaching. For example, some definitions of coaching emphasize facilitation and inspiration, others focus on setting goals and establishing expectations, and still other definitions emphasize relationship building.

Complexities attend the relationship of the employee and her/his relationship with the manager acting in a coaching role. Coaches who are paid to coach employees only may provide such coaching on a more regular schedule than manager-as-coach. Paid, contract coaches as contrasted with manager-as-coach may not have confidentiality, trust or power issues that could affect the interaction of manager and employee. Also, there may be some confusion generated owing to boundary issues raised when the manager is perceived to be in the coaching role as contrasted with other, expected roles.

There is the matter of the motivational forces that aim one in the direction to coach. Some managers desire to be of greater assistance to their direct reports in terms of facilitation and guidance; some feel an obligation to do more to assist employees to succeed, and some managers want to establish improved working relationships with employees (de Haan, 2008; Crosse, 2019; and Bozer & Jones, 2018). In addition to one's own personality and values, the motivation to coach may be influenced by organizational culture and mindset. In some organizations, not all, learning and growth are valued and managers are socialized into believing that coaching is an important element of their role and for which they may achieve recognition and/or rewards.

Dawber (2019) reports that for more than two decades manager-as-coach and the responsibilities of that role in terms of facilitating employee development have been of interest. Dahling et al., (2016) suggest that managerial coaching, sometimes referred to as performance, employee or developmental coaching, is primarily an unstructured process of giving individualized attention and guidance to employees to address their personal challenges and improve their performance. Also, as suggested by Shoukry and Cox (2018) coaching may be shaped as a social process for change, in general. In the discussion of the action guide, below, we suggest that manager-as-coach use a somewhat structured approach although not a directive one when it comes to assisting employees in a learning mode.

Dahling et al., (2016) claim that because coaching isn't training it is less focused on getting something right. Yet, with reference to the training function, Sonesh et al., (2015) posit that similarities between coaching and training suggest parallel process-based models involving (1) a facilitator (trainer, coach), (2) techniques or content (3) a coachee, learner or trainee, (4) an organizational context, and (5) distal and proximal outcomes. In their research, Steelman and Wolfeld (2018) report that they found coaching is not a one-time event; it takes place over time and learning and performance improvement should be expected. Feedback effects accumulate over time as the feedback represents information and not evaluation. Effective provision of feedback is one of the more critical components of managerial coaching.

Performance Appraisal as Backdrop to Manager-as-Coach

Performance appraisal as an element of performance management has existed in organizations for decades. Typically, manager-employee sessions to discuss performance appraisal occur on some schedule, yet infrequently. According to Pulakos et al., (2015) there is currently a trend in organizations to reduce reliance on once-per-year performance appraisal and promote ongoing manager feedback and coaching. Sonesh et al., (2015) state that organizations increasingly encourage managers to provide continual, tailored feedback and direction to their employees. The trend is influenced in part owing to increased performance expectations in organizations, shrinking training budgets, and to the growth of flatter organizational structures. A survey published by the Chartered Institute for Personal Development (2015) revealed that 80 per cent of organizations surveyed reported that managers are expected to coach. Ironically, according to Hunt and Weintraub (2011) the number of managers who embrace the role of coach is relatively small because of limited time, little training in effective coaching practices, and competing demands.

Coaching Realities and Commitments

DiGirolamo and Tkach (2019, p. 201) provide an explanation of managerial coaching that helps capture the relational nature of the activity as they suggest that the coach take on a style of participative leadership or management that blends coaching skills into everyday interactions with the aim of maximizing both individual and organizational growth. This explanation helps to link some performance appraisal tasks with assisting employees to improve. With regard to expectations of managers in the coaching role, DiGirolamo and Tkach (2019) offer some interesting observations. For example, it may be difficult for some managers to use coaching skills as a participative management style because many managers, especially newly appointed managers,

are learning their jobs and are struggling to keep up. These conclusions help to support our approach to help managers develop and grow, personally, while assisting employees. In the segment below we explore some of the foundations of manager learning as supported by theory.

Literature Review - Theory Bases

The theory grounding for the proposed program/approach could involve several areas. We limit the discussion to three areas: self-regulated learning, integrative pedagogy for workplace learning, and the investment theory of commitment.

Self-regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning (or, SRL) is a relatively new concept although individual self-regulation has been investigated for many years (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). SRL is a deliberate, and focused process whose core includes goals, motivation, and the systematic control of effort. An alternative definition states it thus: a multidimensional process whereby persons plan, control, and adapt their cognition, affect, and behavior to enhance goal attainment (Cleary et al., 2015). An understanding of SRL can assist the manager-as-coach better plan and construct coaching efforts aimed at assisting employees learn and improve.

Much research has been completed on SRL in the past two decades (see, for example, Murphy and Dweck, (2016). However, little of that research has found its way to the domain of training/learning in organizations. Self-regulated learning (SRL) is reflective of learner change, and performance improvement. Reflective of the growth mindset, the individual who regularly engages in self-regulation is one who seeks to improve her/his performance and motivation, and who has a strong focus on learning, persistence and effort (Plaks et al., 2005; Grant & Dweck, 2003).

The research of Yeager, et al., (2014) has identified several other features of self-regulating learners, such as improved use of feedback information, and better ability to cope with failure. Such capabilities are valuable to employees, team members, and organizations. Other recent research has proposed that organizations in which SRL behavior tends to be a cultural norm and/or where it is characteristic of many current employees may have a competitive advantage as a result (Pousa & Mathieu, 2015). Individuals with strong SRL skills typically display strategic thoughts and actions during learning. They deliberately expend the needed effort to plan, implement, and self-evaluate their use of different strategies (Weinstein & Acee, 2013). A valuable bonus is that self-efficacy beliefs may be enhanced with improvements in competence and self-confidence (Bembenutty, 2011).

Phases of Self-regulated Learning

In practice SRL can be regarded as a set of steps or phases that follow a somewhat ordered pattern. We say somewhat because the efforts made in a given step do not necessarily conclude in a tidy fashion as the work achieved is not always complete or clear. This may cause the learner to loop back to an earlier step in order to make adjustments based upon what has already been learned (Lyons & Bandura, 2017). The steps or phases, presented below, represent the dynamics of SRL intended for learner internalization. They are not necessarily made obvious to anyone as they usually are inconspicuous and undergird the strategy implementation of the learner. Later we express the details of the learning action guide in which both the manager and the employee being coached are engaged in SRL by design although individual goals are somewhat different.

- Planning phase. In the coaching context the manager alone, or jointly with the employee, identifies the "target" or goal(s) of the learning. Often, the focus is on some area representative of a new or ongoing problem, a skill or information need, or a skilled response

to some upcoming change in operations. The participants should find the need identified as being worthy of attention, meaningful and important. Involvement by both manager and employee is thus invited. Planning commences when the critical issues are fully recognized.

- Monitoring. This occurs over time as the problem-focused goal-work is underway. It can include understanding of context, assessment of knowledge of goal achievement, perception of knowledge applied to the task and effort expended.
- Control. Depending on goal progress one may decide to adjust strategy. This brings attention to information that is needed, effort, persistence or motivation, along with other issues and factors. In the control step strategy changes often take place.
- Reflection and reaction. As the goal-directed activity is underway the employee and manager-as-coach make judgments about what has become known about the task effort and an attempt is made to evaluate current performance. Following evaluation, they may loop back to the planning phase (above) to re-assess the content of the situation and results achieved.

The effort and tactics applied in these phases commence the journey in SRL. In theory, the participants begin to internalize what is learned and are thus stimulated to create new or revised strategies for goal progress and achievement. And, as new directions and actions are put into practice, the employee is further stimulated to self-regulate by seeking feedback from knowledgeable others and other sources.

Integrative Pedagogy (IP)

For the past several years Paivi Tynjala and colleagues (Tynjala et al., 2016; Tynjala 2008; and Tynjala 2013) have completed considerable work, conceptually and empirically, to advance the understanding of IP. A critical driver of the attention given to IP is the recognition that workplace learning can be improved by developing a clear focus on learning in the contemporary organization that is stimulated by a contextual, social, and shared model of learning. Ultimately it is reflective of the particular features of the operating environment.

The pedagogical features of IP are mostly aimed at expertise development for adult learners (Tynjala et al. (2012); Tynjala, (2017); and Tynjala and Newton (2014)). This development consists of a highly integrated unity of IP's four interactive knowledge components:

  i. Sociocultural knowledge,
 ii. Theoretical or conceptual knowledge,
iii. Practical or experiential knowledge, and
iv. Self-regulative knowledge.

Figure 1. A Representation of Integrative Pedagogy Components (Tynjala et al., 2016)
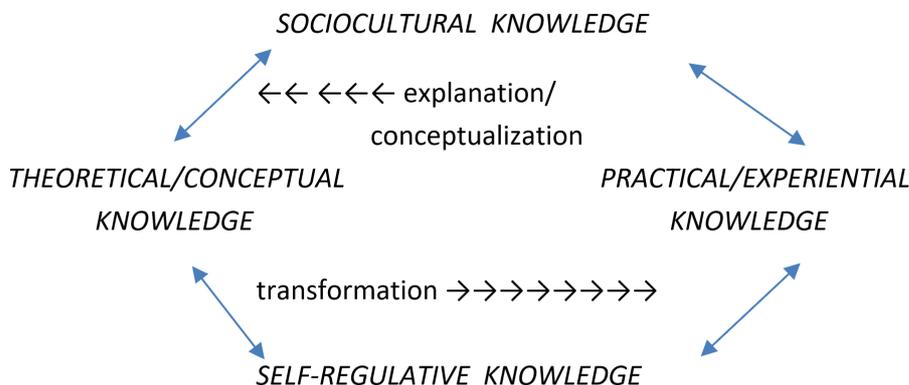
These four components provide the manager with categories of knowledge that might have influence in assisting employee learning. They give the manager a framework for considering different types of knowledge. Ideally, manager-as-coach in learning mode could provide learners (employees) with a setting and/or situation in which all four of the above components are present. Tynjala (2013) reports that the components should be integrated in practice. Integration could be achieved with a variety of tasks such as research assignments, writing assignments, analytical reports, and one-on-one discussions. More details on integration are presented below.

i. Sociocultural Knowledge

As part of the instruction or guidance of an employee the manager may need to rely on sociocultural knowledge which is mostly about the surround or context in which the new learning will take place. The employee possesses some knowledge of this context resulting from their experiences and/or perceptions. As the employee learns new things, the existing sociocultural knowledge may be increased or decreased, challenged and/or reinforced. For example, employees have some knowledge about organization practices, conventions, unspoken norms/implicit rules, and tools used in the particular setting. The important thing is that this knowledge exists, it influences choices and behavior, and it influences new learning. It influences the acquisition of both practical/experiential knowledge, and conceptual/theoretical knowledge.

The magnitude and variation of influence that existing sociocultural knowledge has on the development of new knowledge cannot be easily determined. However, collaboration of the manager and employee in a learning effort can facilitate knowledge integration.

The three remaining components of IP (conceptual/theoretical knowledge, practical/experiential knowledge, and self-regulative knowledge) are highly interactive in the learning process and may influence one another substantially as learners confront a situation/task. As Kallio (2011) summarizes, the integration of theory, practice, and self-regulation can be regarded as a problem-solving process, and having to use/apply the different forms of knowledge requires integrative thinking.

ii. Theoretical/Conceptual Knowledge

This is formal knowledge. The situation or task confronted is almost always tied to some information that helps to describe and explain aspects of the situation. For instance, in the detailed workplace example provided below marketing issues dominate. Based on inputs of the manager, peers, others, and the employee being coached, there are aspects of marketing, as a discipline, that may have a substantial bearing on the analysis of the situation. These aspects can be studied and researched. There is an information base that can be identified and negotiated by the participants.

iii. Practical/Experiential Knowledge

This component is mostly about the linking of existing conceptual knowledge with practical knowledge to affect some outcome. The employee may have some experience in confronting situations with features like the one in the task under consideration. Practical experiences can be brought to bear in the form of skills application. The integration of conceptual and practical knowledge is essential in the development of professional competence. This integration may occur on an individual or group level. At a high level it constitutes the development and shaping of expertise.

We cannot assume that integration of conceptual and practical knowledge takes place automatically; it must be shaped by various practices and tasks. For example, the manager could: assign some study assignment (text, video, case study) requiring some written responses, ask for a self-report of experiences related to the task at hand, invite discussion of how to identify critical

facts/assumptions related to the performance improvement effort. Such activities can accelerate knowledge integration.

iv. Self-Regulative Knowledge

We have introduced self-regulation earlier in this work. The last component of the IP model is self-regulative knowledge; probably the least visible component as much of it relates to thinking processes, for example, metacognition (learning about one's learning) and conscious reflection on one's own activities and related outcomes. As Lyons and Bandura (2017) conclude, self-regulation is an individually-focused, deliberate and active process whose foundation includes motivation, goal-direction and the systematic control of effort (see also, Cleary et al., 2015). Self-regulation makes use of monitoring behavior, making judgments about results attained, and then adjusting actions in order to succeed at reaching goals.

Individuals with strong self-regulation skills typically display strategic thoughts and actions during learning. They expend the needed effort to plan, implement, and self-evaluate their use of different strategies which may influence the transformation of both conceptual/theoretical knowledge and practical/experiential knowledge (Weinstein & Acee, 2013). These efforts speak to the control many individuals seek over their own development which is aimed largely at competence. Importantly, self-efficacy beliefs may be enhanced with improvements in competence and self-confidence (Bembenutty, 2011). As both the manager and the employee are in learning mode while addressing needed changes to improve performance, they are also participating in the self-regulation of learning. In our model the employee and manager are clearly engaged in learning, although individual goals may be slightly different.

The Investment Model

For managers building commitment with employees, and reinforcing their own commitment with employees supervised, we rely on the investment model as an integral component coinciding with actual instruction efforts. As presented below it is made part of the efforts at instruction.

Over the past four decades the investment model of Rusbult (1980) has become one of the most influential theories of commitment in relationships. It began as part of the discussion regarding close relationships and over the years the model has been extended in many other domains including buyer-seller relationships, politics and jobs. The model provides a practical framework for understanding the underlying causes and stimulation of commitment.

Dynamics of the Investment Model

The investment model posits that commitment to a person (or job, sports participation) is influenced by three independently determined factors:

- Satisfaction level (w/boss, job, co-workers, organization)
- Quality of Alternatives (a different job, or boss, situation, organization)
- Investment size (what resources, concrete or intangible, have been contributed to the relationship such as time, effort, preparation, and emotion)

There is research that demonstrates that satisfaction, by itself, is the most influential antecedent of the choice one makes to remain in a particular relationship such as a job or career (Fu and Chen, 2015). As Tran et al. (2019) make clear from their meta-analysis of dozens of studies of investment theory, commitment increased with more rewards or higher satisfaction, with weakening alternatives, and with increasing investments. When partners are satisfied, lack alternatives, and have heavily invested in their relationship, they form a strong intention to stay together. They see themselves as being connected (a sense of "we" –ness).

The influence of investment theory on positively influencing commitment of participants led us to suggest the introduction of special efforts of the manager-as-coach to identify and emphasize actual investments made by both the employee and manager in the learning and performance activities aimed at improvement. Investments matter and their recognition stimulates feelings of commitment; employee to manager and vice-versa. We assume that a positive learning approach for both the manager and employee result in some satisfaction and that highlighting or focusing on investments made and contemplated will have a positive influence on commitment to the manager – employee relationship.

Transition – Theory to Practice

We now move from theories to more practice-based conceptual considerations enabling fit per the dynamics of SRL, integrative pedagogy, and the investment model. The model or action guide presented below has three objectives. First, we rely on the reciprocal nature of manager and employee learning from the activities undertaken and from each other. That is, they have shared responsibility in learning for different purposes and in learning together (Dawber, 2019; Heslin et al., 2006). Second, the activities undertaken in the guide help to increase manager and employee engagement in work, learning and change (Caniels et al., 2018; Quijano & Johnson, 2018). Third, activities within the guide help to stimulate employee commitment to learning and the task at hand, the job, and the manager – and manager commitment to the progressing employee (Burnette et al., 2013).

The third objective encompasses the creation, over time, of investments, that is, efforts, trials, and attempts at progress made by and perceived by manager and employee. Investments help reinforce commitment which may result in a stronger, more positive relationship between them (Rusbult et al., 2011; Tran et al., 2019). The strengthening of the relationship helps set the stage for future learning/change endeavors. The three objectives represent a clear learning orientation based upon a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) that aims at learning, change, improvement and personal development for participants.

Method for Guiding Learning and Building Commitment

Brookfield (2009) suggests that manager-as-coach, taking the lead, can assist the employee to define and prioritize what the employee wants to learn, design a learning plan, and identify useful learning resources. The manager can offer encouragement, recognition of achievements, and assessments of progress per various learning goals. Corresponding somewhat to Brookfield's suggestions, the method proposed in this discussion is a combination of three interrelated elements. These are experiential learning process or ELP that serves to house the entire coaching guide, integrative pedagogy or IP that provides a framework for material, ideas, and concepts to be learned; and investment strategies or initiatives intended to aid in building commitment of the participants. Next, we explain the ELP structure and then display the three processes including a work example in a coordinated action guide.

Experiential Learning Process [ELP]

The approach we are using to guide the manager and employee is based largely upon the experiential learning process [ELP] proposed by Ashford and DeRue (2012) to assist manager learning. The process, which is highly reflective of a learning orientation and growth mindset, houses three distinct, coordinated phases. First, there is an approach phase focused on the joint setting of learning goals, followed by an action phase aimed at goal achievement. Finally, there is a reflection phase grounded on feedback with discussion. In total, the phases are the embodiment of a growth mindset and not a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006).

Cycling through the ELP phases is representative of self-regulated learning (Bjork et al., 2013). As Dweck (2016) has pointed out, people who hold a growth mindset typically view their performance outcomes as reflective of the strategies used and effort applied. Challenges, setbacks, and mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning, not problems, that is, they are a regular part of learning. Research on mindsets has shown, repeatedly, that the focus of the growth mindset motivates individuals to demonstrate improved performance in difficult situations (Burnette et al., 2013). This is somewhat reflective of a learning model of Jordan and Audia (2012) that posits that, when a manager is acting on a self-improvement motive, the desire to improve aims them in a direction to rely on feedback to identify performance needs. Ultimately this activity spurs a search for different, viable strategies and changes in performance.

The Action Plan – A Guide for Manager as Coach

The guide expressed below is intended for application by one who is in a coaching role. It is not sensitive to the background of the coach or the level of experience one possesses in coaching practice. Here we offer detailed action plan/guide, in chronological order, for the manager in a coaching role. She/he, participating with an employee, will aim to improve knowledge, skills, and performance and, at the same time, work together to strengthen a positive commitment to the work at hand and each other. The ELP model houses the guide and within that structure we apply Tynjala et al., (2016), integrative pedagogy for the learning elements. The investment model (Rusbult et al., 2011) provides the guidance for strengthening commitments.

In order to give some context to the instruction and coaching effort, some background information is provided as an example. First, our business is the manufacture, assembly, and world-wide sales of high-end bicycles ($2,000 - $9,000 U.S. dollars) to independent dealers and directly to customers via the internet. We have two roles: manager of sales (coach), and a sales representative (employee) for one or more types of bicycle. A basic learning need we have in the business is for sales staff to consistently and constantly update and improve their product knowledge because: consumers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about bicycle design and materials, on-line advertising must be up-to-date and convincing, and dealers need to be prepared with helpful, accurate information about the products.

1. Approach - A planning phase: set learning goals, plan experiments.

Goals: With employee, set specific, challenging goals that target area(s) needing improvement, in this case - product knowledge.

Examples:
Attain detailed knowledge about frame materials (composition, design, special features, and ride characteristics).
Learn of the features and competitive advantages of the following items from different suppliers: drive train components, saddles, wheels, bars and posts.

Connections with investment/commitment: Knowledge attained = investment in improvement. This leads to achievement and is followed by satisfaction. Satisfaction in performance should lead to increases in commitment (employee and manager).

2. Actions to Take (again, these are simply examples; they represent one experiment)

Goal #1: Attain detailed knowledge about frame materials (composition, design, comparative features, and ride characteristics).

Socio-Cultural:
Does our company evidence a certain point-of-view regarding design of our products? What is it? How does it compare with your understanding of customer needs?

Theoretical/Conceptual:
Discuss composition and design characteristics with our engineers and list the most distinguishing features.
Review popular and technical literature of bike products and identify information that confirms or is in contrast to what engineers offered.

Practical/Experiential:
From your experience what are the most important design features that customers have identified in the past 12 months?
What features influence most purchase decisions (feelings, research)?

Self-regulation:
Employee and manager need to discuss the material (above) employee has explored. Manager will bring similar information from experience to share.

Connections with investment/commitment: Both manager and employee are identifying information about the product. Together, they are making progress and learning facts, biases, and dispositions.

Time passes, employee makes investments (application of skills, effort, time on task, strategy trials) to improve performance. Manager supplies guidance, examples, support, tools, and encouragement as her/his investments.

3. Reflection (manager and employee)

What have we learned? What do we still need?

Assumptions:
Analysis of shortcomings can aid future performance; better strategies can improve performance.

Actions to take in reflection phases:
Manager and employee meet and review the material attained so far. The following questions can guide assessment and direction for strategy. Keep in mind that activity to date is just the opening:

What has feedback revealed?
What success can we identify?
What important lessons are learned?
How might each of us create the best product knowledge?
What other improvements are needed?

Connections with investments/commitment: Activities represent investments and feedback helps validate outcomes and investments. Future investments and improvement.

The above guide represents one ELP experiment (Ashford & DeRue, 2012) directed by manager-as-coach. The guide is highly reflective of a learning orientation and the growth mindset. Familiarity with the performance improvement effort, the identity and use of feedback, and subsequent analysis of the effort combine to stimulate future experiments.

The guide and the examples provided are the culmination of the position of this paper. The guide is a tool for a manager to consider as she/he plans to assume a coaching role with an employee and desires to assist employee and self-learning as well as build and reinforce a positive working relationship centered on commitment. The remaining segments of this article address implications for practice and research, and conclusions.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Presented herein is a conceptual discussion that offers a tool (an action guide) for consideration for manager-as-coach. Available to coaches are several models of coaching for consideration. Examples include the CLEAR coaching model (Hawkins & Smith, 2013), the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009), and the TGROW model (Downey, 2015). Each one provides a step-by-step process to use in coaching with clients or employees. The guide provided in this work provides a phase approach too, and it is grounded on conceptual and theoretical domains somewhat different from most coaching models. Here the focus is on a practical guide aimed at instructing an employee (integrative pedagogy) and, at the same time, working on establishing stronger commitments of employee to manager and vice-versa (investment theory). And the guide is structured in such a way that the manager is also in learning mode, creating a positive environment for change and growth.

The structure of the guide is important in that it is intended to represent a practical experiment for both manager and employee. The experiential learning process (Ashford & DeRue, 2012) provides clear guidance for a manager in creating an experiment for change in employee performance improvement. Owing to the give-and-take nature of the guide, the manager has several opportunities throughout the process to assess and regulate her/his own learning and change. Few other coaching programs are focused upon manager learning attendant to or combined with employee learning. In addition, recent literature (Dawber, 2019; Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015; and deHaan, 2012) has emphasized the importance and value of relationship building of manager with employee as well as the reciprocity of helping behavior of the participants. These sources report that the quality of the relationship between participants has a positive influence on learning and performance improvement. The positive, evolving relationship is helpful in stimulating future experiments.

Relationship quality in the approach offered is an expression of commitment that may attach in more than one way, that is, commitment to: task and to performance improvement, manager (and manager to employee), and to learning and growth. In part, commitment is constructed on investments. In the experiment, the manager puts into motion investments that each participant brings to the undertaking in terms of skills applied, effort expended, gains made in knowledge, and performance improvement. Observing and attending to these investments, by both participants, helps to build and reinforce commitment.

A broad body of research on investment theory (see, for example, Tran et al., 2019) has supported the notion that, as participants in a relationship attend to the actual and intended progress of what is being worked on and to the investments of others as well as their own, satisfaction accrues leading to enhanced commitment of the participants. Improved commitment tends to lead to better learning and performance. Additional efforts in mutual work towards other learning goals should invite positive growth in the relationships. Finally, the critical category of "investments" has undergone some exploration and some of the dimensions of investments have been revealed for the manager and employee to consider.

Implications for Theory and Research

There are several conceptual and theoretical areas that provide the background and scaffolding for this paper. We have attempted to present a coordinated approach to explain how the areas link to one another and support the detailed action plan (above). The concept of manager-as-coach was a starting point as it is a relatively recent area of study when contrasted with coaching, in general. Currently, the concept is receiving a growing amount of attention in coaching, management, and

human resources literatures, although study of it is in the embryonic stage. As Lawrence (2017) recently pointed out, research on coaching is largely descriptive with empirical research on the subject in its infancy. Herein, the focus on manager and employee engaged in the development and reinforcement of commitment is somewhat novel and it provides some avenues for further research. Because commitment matters in terms of job satisfaction, work performance, and turnover intention (Dawber 2019; Tran et al., 2019), it is desirable to study potential effects of coaching. Measures of commitment currently exist and they possess validity and reliability (see, for example, Rusbult et al., 2011). Other avenues for the study of coaching and generation of commitment are too numerous to list.

The focus on self-regulated learning (SRL) helps create speculation for avenues of research on manager-as-coach. Normally, SRL is not highly visible in practice owing to the reliance on metacognition (Lyons & Bandura, 2019). However, the action plan established in this paper brings SRL into the light because the manager and the individual being coached are both in learning mode – attending to goals, ambitions, improvements, gains in knowledge, and the use of feedback. Several research questions are thus generated, for example: how does the joint attention given to goals, actions, and/or feedback contribute to individual learning; how can a manager craft her/his own learning goals as derived from the coaching mission; do the phases of SRL, when evaluated, benefit one party more than the other? We believe that self-regulation takes on new dimensions.

Experiential learning process (ELP) as applied to manager learning (Ashford & DeRue, 2012) provides a useful, practical and manageable framework for addressing complex issues related to performance improvement. It is a clear example of bringing the growth mindset (Yeager et al., 2014) into focus. It may be desirable to examine the effects of using ELP on changes in individual mindsets. The literatures on learning, growth and change overwhelmingly support the value of the growth mindset as contrasted with the fixed mindset. It is desirable to encourage and reinforce the growth mindset which is what ELP should achieve, hence it is desirable to assess the changes in mindsets when ELP is used repeatedly (Helsin & Keating, 2017).

In the action plan – guide (above) we introduced the elements of integrative pedagogy (IP) based upon on the work of Tynjala and others (Tynjala 2017; Tynjala & Newton 2014; and Tynjala 2008) because IP is an instruction/learning model aimed primarily at employees in the workplace. In that regard it is somewhat novel. We proposed that a manager-as-coach with plans to assist employees with learning might use the model as it provides a framework for both planning and executing instruction. Application of the model opens up several avenues for research. Some issues to provoke research are: manager acceptance of the model for application, ease and practicality of use of IP, adaptability of the model for the instruction intentions of the manager, linking the components of IP with practical feedback on learning, and contrasts of using the model with other approaches to aid employee learning.

The IP model may be regarded as an instruction/learning tool for both the manager and employee. The manager, who has not prepared instruction elements for employees, is on the preparation and application side. She/he has considered, thought about, planned and executed the instruction. The employee is primarily on the receiving side, creating perceptions about its value and making decisions about how to use the instruction. All of these matters help create paths for future research.

Finally, with regard to theory/research implications, we have identified investment theory as an area that could be a useful one to gain a better understanding of commitment; employee to manager and vice-versa, all in the service of helping to reinforce positive, valued relationships. There is very little empirical or other research involving investment theory with managing or coaching. The recent work of Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018) made clear that contextual and social aspects of coaching should have more representation in research on coaching. The study of investment theory in the coach – employee setting is responsive to this need. Several areas for study include: how one introduces or sets the stage for consideration of investments, how investments are

perceived from point of view of manager and/or employee, how are perceptions and assessment of investments linked with outcomes, performance adjustments and the like. The relatively broad body of existing research on investment theory provides many suggestions for future research (Tran et al., 2019).

Conclusions

The action plan (guide) put forth in this work gives a manager who desires to take on a coaching role a model to try in experimenting with learning goals and performance improvement. The guide or tool offered is a structured yet adaptable approach. It gives direction but is not lock-step. The guide aids manager learning per the typical managerial skills such as guiding, communicating, and encouraging the employee. It aids in attaining coaching skills such as identifying goals, exploring desirable outcomes of efforts, and using feedback constructively with the employee. The manager's repertoire is enhanced. Finally, the action plan addresses the partnering of manager and employee in working on the building and reinforcement of commitment – to the job and to each other.

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About the authors

Paul R. Lyons (PhD, University of Florida) is Emeritus Professor of Management at Frostburg State University of the University System of Maryland, USA. Paul has taught MBA courses in organizational behavior and leadership and has experience as Dean of the graduate school, Department Chair, and Associate Dean - College of Business. Also, he has experience in sales management, human resources management, and Paul has experience as a consultant and trainer with businesses, as well as government and NGO.

Randall P. Bandura (MS, Pennsylvania State University, and CPA) is Emeritus Professor of Accounting at Frostburg State University of the University System of Maryland, USA. Randall has teaching experience in accounting and finance areas, specializing in financial accounting. He also has experience as Department Chair. His practical accounting experience includes work with a large international public accounting firm.