Academic Paper

Managerial mind-set and behaviours that shape effective relationship building in employee coaching: An integrative literature review

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Abstract

Employee coaching is increasingly expected from managers, creating need for the awareness of factors that lead to coaching effectiveness. Research has emphasised the fundamental role of the employee coaching relationship as well as the challenges that managers face in their development. This integrative review explores the managerial coaching mind-set and key behaviours that shape effective employee coaching relationships. Findings indicate that such relationships build on compassion, mutual trust, respect and collaboration, of which the underlying factors are presented in a new applied model, *Co-ROUTE to Coaching Partnership*. Implications for organisations to support employee coaching practice and avenues for future research are explored.

Introduction

Various labels, such as managerial coaching or manager-as-coach, are used to describe managers coaching their subordinates. Adopting the term and definition introduced by Gregory and Levy (2010 p.111) 'employee coaching' is,

> A developmental activity in which an employee works one-on-one with their direct manager to improve current job performance and enhance their capabilities for future roles and/or challenges, the success of which is based on an effective relationship between the employee and manager, as well as the use of objective information, such as feedback, performance data, or assessments.

The employee coaching relationship, in turn, is described as a working partnership between an employee and their direct manager with focus on addressing the employee's performance and development needs (Gregory & Levy, 2010). Combined, these definitions cover the various purposes of employee coaching/coaching performed by direct managers while acknowledging unique features in the context that distinguish employee coaching relationships from other coaching modes.

The relationship between a manager and their employee is consistently acknowledged as being elementary for employee coaching effectiveness, for example as described in de Haan & Gannon, 2016. Only recently, DiGirolamo and Tkach (2019) emphasised that "coaching is about creating a partnership" (p. 199), as reflected in the context of manager–employee relationships, which are shown to predict the manager's propensity to undertake coaching (Anderson, 2013; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Simultaneously, many authors have explored the factors that affect relationship building particularly in this coaching context (Ladyshewsky, 2010; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Spaten & Flensborg, 2013). Challenges include: the power relation between the coaching manager and employee-coachee; employee-coachee willingness to engage in coaching; and the coaching manager's personal coaching-related attitudes, as well as their ability to manage multiple roles. Consequently, Lawrence (2017) named "exceptional relationship building skills" (p. 61) and appropriate mind-set as mandatory requirements for coaching managers concerning coaching effectiveness. Still, it has been argued that many managers do not meet these baseline requirements (Beattie, Kim, Hagen, Egan, Ellinger & Hamlin, 2014; DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007) and this is seen to contribute to the fact that, in organisational reality, effective employee coaching involving managers is still a relatively rare phenomenon (Axelrod, 2015; Gilley, Gilley & Kouider, 2010; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).

The literature on employee coaching has drawn among others from the more ample research on sports and executive coaching (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2014; de Haan & Gannon, 2016). Nevertheless, many authors view it as a distinct practice particularly in terms of the coaching relationship (Bozer & Jones, 2018, Gregory & Levy, 2010; Lawrence, 2017; Spaten & Flensborg, 2013). As literature on the other coaching domains may not be directly applicable (Lawrence, 2017), area-specific literature is warranted. However, relevant employee coaching literature is hard to find because it is scattered across a broad range of disciplines (psychology, human resource development, management, to name a few) and under several interchangeably used labels, such as managerial coaching or manager-as-coach (Joo, Sushko & McLean, 2012; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Additionally, the extant literature on employee coaching relationships appears to lack theoretical framing and structure (Egan & Hamlin, 2014; Hagen & Williams, 2019).

To address these practical and theoretical challenges, this integrative literature review aims to compile, evaluate, and synthesise the existing body of knowledge in the interest of providing guidance to coaching managers, practitioners and researchers in this field. This aim gives rise to the following research questions:

- What are the manager's qualities, skills, and behaviours that contribute to the building of effective employee coaching relationships?
- How are effective employee coaching relationships characterised?
- What are the underlying factors of effective employee coaching relationships?

Method

This research applies the integrative literature review guidelines set by Torraco (2016) and documentation guidelines proposed by Kable, Pich and Maslin-Prothero (2012). In alignment with the definition of employee coaching, all other coaching practices and relationships, for example

executive coaching, as well as other developmental interventions that managers employ, such as coaching other colleagues, informal and formal mentoring, and team coaching were excluded.

Search Strategy

The following databases were searched for English-language, peer-reviewed full-text articles, without limitation on dates or disciplines: PsycINFO, EBSCO Business Source Premier, and Web of Science Core Collection. Following recommendations of Adams, Smart and Sigismund Huff (2017) 1st tier grey literature of significant retrievability and credibility, such as pertinent books, conference proceedings and theses, were included. Websites of the following professional bodies were also reviewed: International Coach Federation, Association for Coaching, European Mentoring and Coaching Council, CIPD, Human Capital Institute, and British Psychological Society's Special Group in Coaching Psychology.

The search was conducted using two sets of search terms to gain full inclusivity, including:

1. Manager / leader / superior as coach, coaching manager / leader / superior, and the truncated terms managerial coach*, as well as interchangeably used employee / supervisory / hierarchical / internal / workplace coach*, this resulting in a total of 12 search terms, used to search within titles and abstracts.
2. Using Boolean operators, the above 12 terms (separated with OR) AND nine identified key words that reflect the relationship including coaching relationship, relationship building, rapport building, coaching alliance, working alliance, dual relationship, relationship development, interpersonal interaction, OR interpersonal relation*. These were used to search within full text.

To be included in this review, articles needed to meet the following criteria: (a) literature that discussed employee coaching relationships; or (b) specifically referenced empirical research on these relationships; and (c) materials that referenced employee coaching skills, behaviours, or scales.

Review

The search yielded a total of 835 articles, which were screened and reviewed using the PRISMA statement checklist and flow diagram (Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffman & Mulrow, 2020). Initial screening of the abstracts for relevance against the inclusion criteria, lead to 716 articles being excluded for falling outside the scope (for example, they either omitted the employee coaching relationship, focused on coaching by individuals other than direct managers, or involved other restricted contexts such as team coaching or project management).

The remaining 119 full-text articles were then categorised by study type, design details, purpose, key findings, referenced theories and limitations and reviewed for information relevant to the research questions, using a deductive approach based on Cox et al (2014) components of coaching engagement – coach characteristics, coachee characteristics, coaching relationship characteristics and processes, and contextual factors.

Building upon these categories, the review identified concepts that were consistently used to characterise effective employee coaching relationships and the manager attributes and behaviours associated with these characteristics, which lead to the development of five key themes of the literature including, manager's coaching mind-set; manager's coaching skills and behaviours; relationship characteristics of employee coaching; employee coachee characteristics; theoretical underpinnings of coaching relationships.

Findings

Manager's Coaching Mind-set

Managers' beliefs and mental models have been an enduring topic of interest in efforts to explain employee coaching effectiveness (Ellinger, Ellinger, Hamlin & Beattie, 2010; Lawrence, 2017). For example, Mink, Owen and Mink (1993) recognise three founding pillars for coaching effectiveness – skills, values, and job knowledge – of which they name values as "perhaps the most important" (p. 8). Crane (2002), in turn, illustrates the indispensability of the coaching mind-set through his results cycle, which maps the causal pathway between four coaching elements: mind-set, which determines behaviours, which influence relationship quality, which then affects coaching results – and again – the mind-set.

According to Hunt and Weintraub (2017), coaching mind-set refers to a set of attitudes and beliefs that are common for coaching managers. They encapsulate these commonalities using the term "attitude of helpfulness" (p. 53). Other authors have variously characterised managerial coaching mind-set as non-directive, humanistic, motivating, and empowering (Lawrence, 2017). The literature provides an extensive list of more specific requirements; however, empirical research into the topic is still notably sparse, as beliefs are difficult to research (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Misiukonis, 2011). In addition, this research builds on relatively small and purposively selected sample sizes, which may limit the generalisability of the findings (de Haan & Gannon, 2016). In their seminal study, Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) interviewed 12 managers regarded as exemplary facilitators of learning. Misiukonis (2011) followed their line of research with a sample of four trained middle managers. However, these studies provide support for the enduring themes that are associated with coaching mind-set within the broader literature.

Beliefs Regarding the Coach Role and Coaching

Many authors argue that the mandatory first step for committing the coach role is recognising the distinction between command-and-control management style and more collaborative, empowering coaching style (Dixey, 2015; Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Evered & Selman, 1989; Ladyshewsky, 2010; Rafferty & Fairbrother, 2015; Spaten & Flensborg, 2013). Some authors point to mental flexibility that is required to shift between these styles in order to manage the multiple managerial roles and ambiguity in the ever-changing organisational environment (Fatien & Otter, 2015; Filsinger, 2014; Riddle & Ting, 2006). Spaten and Flensborg (2013) emphasise the need to be aware of the power relation between the manager and their employee when building the employee coaching relationship. They suggest that the managers should draw clear boundaries between their role as a leader and their role as a coach. This requires ability to address the employee-coachee as an equal and to demonstrate respect towards them.

Beliefs Regarding Employees

An implicit person theory (IPT) offers a lens to examine managerial mind-set by contrasting the individuals who consider personal characteristics, such as personality and abilities, as innate and unalterable (fixed mind-set) with those who view them as malleable (growth mind-set). Accordingly, Heslin, VandeWalle and Latham (2006) found that managers with a growth mind-set are more likely to see their subordinates as coachable. Their studies also indicated that managers' IPTs predict their propensity to coach as well as employee evaluations of their coaching. Earlier, the same authors discovered that managers' IPTs affect their tendency to notice changes in their subordinates' performance (Heslin, Latham & VandeWalle, 2005). As a compelling complement to these studies, Kam, Risavy, Perunovic and Plant (2014) explored managerial IPTs from the employee perspective and proposed that subordinates formulate an impression of their manager's IPT. While other researchers (Rafferty & Fairbrother, 2015; Özduran & Tanova, 2017) have also

confirmed the importance of managers' IPT to effective coaching, IPT appears to have impact though various mechanisms, importantly, also due to the potential effects on employee motivation. However, Gregory and Levy (2011) failed to establish the link between managers' IPTs and the quality of their coaching relationships. Notably, these researchers explained their unexpected findings with reasons that involve, among others, the managers' potential biases (which contradicted their general IPTs) concerning the specific employees they supervise as well as socially favourable responding (Gregory & Levy, 2011). While these aspects represent limitations to the study, they provide additional, noteworthy viewpoints to the theme of managers' self-awareness.

Beliefs Regarding Self as a Coach

Many authors emphasise the importance of managers' self-efficacy beliefs for their motivation to enter the coach role and perseverance to learn and master the required behaviours (Anderson, 2013; Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Rafferty & Fairbrother, 2015; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Another consistent feature within the literature is the importance placed on the manager's pursuit of self-awareness and self-management (Filsinger, 2014; Kemp, 2009; Maddocks, 2009; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Smith, 2019). There is indeed some evidence that an individual's level of emotional maturity is associated with their propensity to coach (Dixey, 2015; Ellinger, Beattie, & Hamlin, 2018). Many authors suggest that successful coaches are not only self-reflective (Axelrod, 2015; Crane, 2002; Elrod, 2013; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018): They are also receptive to learning from others even through feedback and coaching from their employees – something Kemp (2009) referred as "the adoption of the mindset of an inquisitive and curious learner" (p. 108).

Beliefs Regarding Workplace Relationships

There is a broad consensus within the literature that the coaching mind-set at its heart involves caring about people and valuing good relationships (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Graham, Wedman, & Garvin-Kester, 1994; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017; Peters & Austin, 1986). If a manager does not care about their employees, they are not likely to take the time and effort to build rapport and trusting relationships with them nor recursively to invite their employees to do so by appearing interested and approachable. Turner and McCarthy (2015) referenced coaching relationships in their study, which explored manager's perceptions of coachable moments. They found that the manager–employee relationship and perceived level of mutual trust and respect is a critical determinant to a manager's decision to undertake coaching. Interestingly, these researchers also found that the managers' assessments of the psychological risk – or the possibility of an adverse employee response – involving a coaching attempt acts as another antecedent for coaching. Rafferty and Fairbrother (2015), in turn, recognised courage as one of the barriers to managerial coaching but associated this feature with the managers' self-efficacy beliefs.

Coaching Relationship Characteristics and Related Managerial Skills and Behaviours

There is a broad consensus among researchers that the development of a strong relationship, "partnership", or "alliance" is the key task for a managerial coach (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Gregory & Levy, 2010, 2012; Kemp, 2009; Smither & Reilly, 2001). Nevertheless, there is limited evidence-based insight into how this should occur (Beattie, 2006; Echeverri, 2019). The research base consists largely of qualitative case studies with potentially limited generalisability, studies that focus only on the managers' perspective, and studies that rely on self-report measures. At the same time, the concept and content of relationship building skills appears to be lacking clear description.

Firstly, this review approaches relationship building through the characteristics that are repeatedly related to effective employee coaching relationships. While they are numerous and diverse, some common themes exist. Respective managerial skills and behaviours are discussed alongside these components based on empirical research and theoretical best-practice literature.

Care, Support and Empathy

Within the employee coaching literature, the most diverse discussion about caring is offered by Beattie (2002, 2006), who conducted a case study involving the actual behaviours of voluntary-sector managers as facilitators of learning. Beattie identifies a hierarchy of developmental behaviours which are built on the foundation of caring behaviours. These behaviours involve approachability, availability, and attentiveness to employees' needs as described below. In comparison, Beattie's list appears to align with Kroth and Keeler (2009), who provide an encompassing and detailed theoretical examination on managerial caring and care building.

Beattie (2002) defines support as giving aid or courage to an employee. Other researchers associate support with the provision of counselling, encouragement, recognition, praise, and confirmation (Zhang, 2008; Wheeler, 2011), as well as with attentive and responsive body language (Noer, 2005; Noer, Leupold, & Valle, 2007; Spaten & Flensborg, 2013). Ellinger (2013), in turn, discusses employee coaching with reference to the Paustian-Underdahl, Shanock, Rogelberg, Scott, Justice and Altman (2013) work on supportive supervisors. Ellinger identifies the behaviours of supportive supervisors that characterise also coaching managers These include caring and listening, but also more technical coaching behaviours: helping with respect to expectations and developing employees through the provision of learning opportunities (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Beattie 2002).

Instead, empathy is featured as showing understanding of employees' situations or looking at things from their perspectives (Beattie, 2002; Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; David & Matu, 2013). Beattie (2002) suggests that empathising involves demonstrating deeper-level support in dealing with employees' work and personal issues. Some authors highlight empathy in listening (Axelrod, 2015; Moss & Sanchez, 2004; Spaten & Flensborg, 2013). The connection between empathy and relationship quality is confirmed by Gregory and Levy (2011).

Care, support and empathy are all themes that are verified by Hamlin, Ellinger, and Beattie (2006) mini meta-analysis, which provides an account of the manager's coaching behaviours. Similarly, Graham et al. (1993, 1994) associate such manager qualities as "person-able" and "relationship oriented" with the building of warm and friendly relationships. Indeed, warmth and friendliness, even love, are attributes that are linked with effective employee coaching relationships and manager behaviours (Dawber, 2019; Evered & Selman, 1989; Spaten & Flensborg, 2013; Zhang, 2008). Concordantly, a fresh study presented "compassion and sensitivity towards others" as the most efficient coaching practice as rated by direct subordinates (Ringwood & Brown, 2020, p. 38), which can be beneficial for the mechanics of trust, as discussed in the next theme.

Mutual Trust and Respect

There appears to be a consensus on the significance of mutual trust as a hallmark of effective coaching relationships (de Haan & Gannon, 2016; Kim & Kuo, 2015). Several qualitative studies indicate trust as potentially the most paramount factor for employee coaching (Ladyshewsky, 2010; Smith, 2018; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Additionally, Gregory and Levy (2011) provide quantitative evidence which associates trust particularly with the quality of the employee coaching relationship.

Trust is often defined as the willingness of a person to be vulnerable to other person's actions (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). According to McAllister (1995), it builds on two components: cognition-based trust which in a coaching context refers to the employee's rational basis for trusting

their manager considering how competent, reliable, and dependable the manager has been. Affect-based trust, on the other hand, involves the emotional bonds between those two, for instance, based on the care and concern exhibited by the manager towards the employee.

Peterson and Hicks (1996) propose an illustrative trust test which indicates the behaviours the managers should demonstrate in order to build trust. These behaviours mainly involve the following themes supported by other authors: being open and authentic (Crane, 2002; Hicks & McCracken, 2011; Kim & Kuo, 2015); exhibiting honest interest in and support for the employees even in terms of defending them against the manager's own benefit (Ladyshewsky, 2010; Misiukonis, 2011; Orth, Wilkinson & Benfari, 1987), demonstrating integrity and congruence in "thoughts, words, and deeds" (Batson & Yoder, 2012; Crane, 2002, p. 56; Ladyshewsky, 2010); as well as professional competence and communications skills (Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008; Gilley et al., 2010; Ladyshewsky, 2010). In comparison, the above set of behaviours appears to align with evidence regarding the five elements of workplace trust: openness, loyalty, integrity, consistency, and competence (Schindler & Thomas, 1993).

Something that often accompanies the concept of trust, is mutual respect between the coaching manager and employee-coachee (Batson & Yoder, 2012; Burdett, 1991a, 1991b; Dixey, 2015; Kemp, 2009). Spaten and Flensborg (2013) refer to respect in the sense of "being at equal levels with" (p. 29) an employee; the importance of this aspect is explicitly supported by empirical evidence (Dawber, 2019; DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Wheeler, 2011). Some authors discuss respect with regard to an employee's capability, individuality and background (Allenbaugh, 1983; Filsinger, 2014; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017), and others in terms of unconditional positive regard (Evered & Selman, 1989; Gregory & Levy, 2012; Kemp, 2009). Respect has much to do with the coaching manager's perceptions regarding power and authority, and their attitudes towards other people in general and – especially – the employee to be coached. Therefore, the building of a respectful relationship is largely a matter of mind-set: respectful behaviour, for instance, involving the choice of words, non-verbal communication, and appreciation the manager exhibits for the employee's thoughts will most likely reflect such disposition with positive effects on the coaching manager and employee's collaboration.

Open Communication and Collaboration

The magic of employee coaching is in creating "by communication only" (Evered & Selman, 1989, p. 18) an environment that empowers employees. Aligned with this long-standing definition, employee coaching relationships are consistently characterised by open, two-way communication, or collaboration (Barry, 1992; Echeverri, 2019; Egan & Hamlin, 2014; Park, McLean, & Yang, 2008). While there is a plethora of literature on how to conduct a coaching conversation (Bianco-Mathis, Nabors, & Roman, 2002; Crane, 2002; Fournies, 2000; Mink et al.,1993; Rogers, 2012), some aspects appear essential in building rapport and trust between the managerial coach and employee-coachee. Firstly, managers should be able to engage their employees to openly share thoughts and emotions with them. In addition, this involves discussing and managing the complex issue of confidentiality (Chong, Yuen, Tan, Zarim, & Hamid, 2016; DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Some authors advise managers to role-model openness specifically regarding personal interests, values and vulnerabilities; to search for common ground; and from there, to build on similarities between the two (Crane, 2002; Ladyshewsky, 2010; McLean, Yang, Kuo, Tolbert, & Larkin, 2005). Secondly, the research underscores the importance of enhancing understanding through active and authentic listening as well as questioning and reflection on what the employee says and leaves unsaid (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Gilley et al., 2010; Kemp, 2009; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Wheeler, 2011). The findings of Spaten and Flensborg (2013) highlight sensitivity and awareness of body language, keeping eye contact, and giving time to answer; other literature points to word choice, for instance, not using words that imply judgement or threat (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017; Orth et al., 1987).

Employee Coachee Characteristics

The limits of this research do not allow thorough investigation of the operant employee characteristics. However, certain aspects are worth recognising when considering manager behaviour.

Employee Coachability

Employee coachability – or the willingness to engage in coaching – is a mandatory requirement for an effective employee coaching relationship that builds on reciprocity (Batson & Yoder, 2012; Dixey, 2015; Evered & Selman, 1989; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017; Smither & Reilly, 2001). Coachability results from several factors – the employee's perceptions of the manager and the coaching relationship being of utmost importance as indicated above. The other factors include, among others, the employee's age and experience (Batson & Yoder, 2012; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017); self-awareness, personality and learning style preferences (Dawber, 2019; Kim & Kuo, 2015); and openness for feedback (Gregory & Levy, 2012; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Consequently, many authors have underscored the importance of managers knowing their employees to be able to provide individualised support that is attentive to the employee preferences and prevalent needs (Axelrod, 2015; Dawber, 2019; Gregory & Levy, 2011; Longenecker, 2010; Nguyen, Artis, Plank, & Solomon, 2019). Some researchers even note that coaching may not be the optimal approach for all the employees (Ellinger, Ellinger, Bachrach, Wang, & Baş, 2011; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017; Kim & Kuo, 2015). However, this standpoint is reliant on the organisational context and alternative forms of available support.

Match between Manager and Employee

In contrast to other coaching practices, in employee coaching the match between the coach and coachee is pre-set as the parties are not in a position to choose their coaching pairs (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010; de Haan & Gannon, 2016). Accordingly, coaching managers must be able to manage even complicated relationships (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; McComb, 2012b; Smither & Reilly, 2001). Executive coaching literature distinguishes between three components of match that may influence the development of interpersonal rapport and trust: commonality in demographic, personal, and professional characteristics, or experiences; compatibility in behavioural preferences such as managerial and learning styles; and credibility with coaching competency in meeting the coachee's needs (Boyce et al., 2010). Currently, the employee coaching research provides little insight into this topic of interest: Positive examples include Ladyshewsky's (2010) discussion of the significance of aligning interests and shared values for the creation of trust. Other examples include the evidence concerning the regulatory fit, which links the match between a manager's coaching orientation (promotion/prevention) and an employee's IPT to employee performance (Lin, Lin, & Chang, 2017; Sue-Chan, Wood & Latham, 2012).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Coaching Relationships

Employee coaching is still described as being in need of a firm theoretical grounding (Ellinger & Kim, 2014; Hagen & Williams, 2019). The empirical research has drawn from a few differing approaches (Pousa, Mathieu, & Trépanier, 2017) of which the most relevant for the purpose of this review are discussed below.

Social Exchange, Leader-Member Exchange Theory, and Psychological Contract

Theories of social exchange and leader–member exchange (LMX) are consistently used to explain workplace attitudes, behaviours, and relationships (Hagen & Williams, 2019). They are also the key theoretical approaches used to investigate both the underlying factors of employee coaching (Dahling, Taylor, Chau, & Dwight, 2016; Onyemah, 2009; Pousa, Richards, & Trépanier, 2018) and employee coaching relationships (Anderson, 2013; Hagen & Williams, 2019; Sue-Chan, Chen, & Lam, 2011). Social exchange and LMX theories feature how manager–employee relationships develop through series of interactions and exchanges. The manager may initiate these exchanges, for example, by demonstrating genuine care towards the employee, something the employee would then reciprocate by developing positive attitudes towards the manager. LMX theory helps to explain the unique exchange relationships managers develop over time with each of their employees: High-quality relationships (versus low-quality relationships) build on open and honest communication, mutual respect, trust, and increased obligation (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Mathieu & Pousa, 2011). Consequently, these factors have a positive effect on employee behaviour. In comparison, the above characteristics of high-quality LMX relationships bear considerable similarity to those of effective employee coaching relationships. However, within the coaching context, the emotional aspects of the bond appear highlighted, extending beyond mere liking (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). This may be due to the need for deeper-level sharing of one's self. Some researchers have employed psychological contract theory in connection with the above theories (Hagen & Williams, 2019; Kam et al., 2014). Psychological contract regulates the manager's and the employee's mutual expectations concerning performance, reciprocity, and affective responses such as trust.

Attribution Theory

Employee coaching research has taken its preliminary steps in the application of the attribution theory, which is concerned with individual interpretations of the causes of one's own behaviour and the behaviour of others (Dahling et al., 2016; Kam et al., 2014). Accordingly, the attributions managers and employees make can impact the quality of their relationships. Relationship quality can also impact attributions and subsequent responses to the behaviour of others. Sue-Chan et al. (2011) found that in low-quality LMX employees were more likely to attribute their manager's coaching behaviours to self-focused motives rather than other-focused motives, while the opposite prevailed in the high-quality relationships. These researchers also found that attributions partially mediated the links between LMX quality and subsequent employee performance.

Self-Determination Theory

Several authors have recognised a role for employee motivation and need-satisfaction in effective employee coaching relationships (Burdett, 1998; Dawber, 2019; Gilley et al., 2010; Gregory & Levy, 2010; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017). Therefore, it is surprising that theories of motivation have attracted limited focus within the employee coaching research (Gabriel, Moran, & Gregory, 2014; Spence & Oades, 2011). Besides the referenced attribution theory, examples of such efforts include the papers by Spence and Deci (2013) and Gabriel et al. (2014), who examined coaching against the self-determination theory. According to these researchers, the conversations that compose the coaching relationship can facilitate the satisfaction of all three basic psychological needs that underlie autonomous motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Despite the potential significance of this argument, the employee coaching literature entails only a few isolated references to the theory, which acknowledge the importance of the coaching relationship for the fulfilment of relatedness-needs (Hagen & Williams, 2019; McCarthy & Milner, 2020).

Discussion and Conclusion

As identified in the introduction, this integrative review was conducted to provide support to coaching managers, practitioners and scholars working in the field by offering a thorough account of: (a) the range of managerial qualities and behaviours that affect the building of effective employee coaching relationships; (b) the key characteristics; and (c) the underpinning factors of these relationships. With that aim, this review introduces a model titled Co-ROUTE to Coaching Partnership (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Co-ROUTE to Coaching Partnership Model
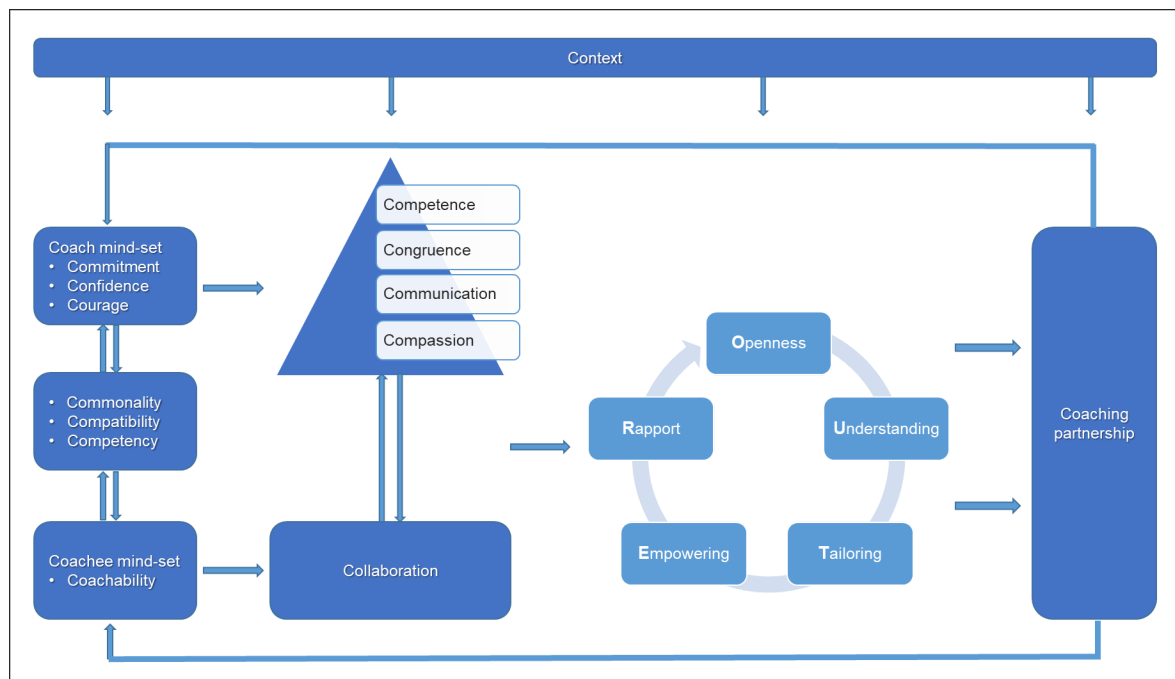
The left side of the model focuses on the qualities of the manager-coach and the qualities of the employee-coachee and what they share as antecedents for the coaching relationship. To begin with, the manager must possess a coach mind-set (Lawrence, 2017): Commitment refers to the manager's dedication to the coach role and developing others. In short, this involves accepting and managing the necessary shift in approach and facing employees as equals as well as caring about them and believing in their abilities to benefit from coaching (Fatien & Otter, 2015; Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Heslin et al., 2006; Ladyshewsky, 2010). Confidence represents the manager's self-efficacy beliefs as to functioning as a coach, but also to the level of emotional maturity and humility to learn through self-reflection and feedback from others (Anderson, 2013; Crane, 2002; Elrod, 2013; Dixey, 2015; Kemp, 2009). Courage is needed in learning new skills and developing effective relationships even with employees the manager perceives as challenging (Gregory & Levy, 2010; Rafferty & Fairbrother, 2015; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Coachee mind-set, or coachability, represents the employee's beliefs and attitudes that influence their motivation to engage in coaching, especially perceptions regarding the coaching relationship in facilitating the employee's prevalent needs (Batson & Yoder, 2012; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017; Longenecker, 2010; Spence & Deci, 2013). The match of manager and employee consists of three components, commonality, compatibility, and competency that are likely to influence the building of rapport and trust and are therefore worth acknowledging (Beattie et al., 2014; Boyce et al., 2010; Lawrence, 2010).

The pyramid section presents the managerial behaviours this review identified as significant for building effective employee coaching relationships. The analysis revealed a hierarchy of

behavioural sets, which build upon and overlap each other. Additionally, they exert their influence on the different components of effective employee coaching relationships. The bottom of the hierarchy, compassion, covers the broad range of interpersonal coaching behaviours (Graham et al., 1994; Hamlin et al., 2006) which in essence involve noticing employees' needs, empathising with them, and acting to enhance their well-being (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; Boyatzis, Smith, & Beveridge, 2012). Communication refers to the expression of compassion and other verbal and non-verbal behaviours that enhance openness and reciprocity in a coaching conversation (Ladyshewsky, 2010; Spaten & Flensborg, 2013; Wheeler, 2011). Congruence involves honest communicating and exhibition of integrity and predictability (Crane, 2002; Kim & Kuo, 2015; Peterson & Hicks, 1996). Competence, in turn, refers to mastering the coach role and the manager role as a whole (Ellinger et al., 2008; Gilley et al., 2010; Smither & Reilly, 2001). The coaching behaviours of the manager impact the employee attribution, subsequent response and their level of collaboration (Hsieh & Huang, 2018; Kam et al., 2014; Kroth & Keeler, 2009); the two-way arrows represent the flows of exchange between the two.

The wheel outlines the pathway, ROUTE, for building effective employee coaching relationships and coaching success. The elements in the wheel represent the intertwined conditions or behavioural objectives identified from the literature that promote the building of an employee coaching relationship. To begin with, Rapport refers to the bond that the manager must be able to establish and augment to a trusting partnership between the two (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; de Haan & Gannon, 2016; Ladyshewsky, 2010). The prevalence of rapport and trust creates a safe, coaching friendly environment (Axelrod, 2015; Hunt & Weintraub, 2017; Smith, 2018; Wheeler, 2011) which supports Openness, entailing a productive mutual participation and the provision of beneficial feedback (Kemp, 2009; Longenecker & Neubert, 2005; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018). Consequently, openness allows for true Understanding that the manager must pursue with the aim of discovering the employee's needs and common goals for coaching (Kemp, 2009; Park et al., 2008; Peterson & Hicks, 1996). Understanding and knowing one's employees enables Tailoring, in other words, adjusting tone, approach, and the developmental actions to be taken (Dawber, 2019; Longenecker, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2019). Coaching that succeeds in facilitating individual employee's needs serves Empowerment and the goal of the coaching, that is, evoking the employee's internal motivation for development (Burdett, 1998; Gilley et al., 2010; Spence & Deci, 2013). Finally, positive coaching experiences are likely to contribute to the manager's and employee's attitudes towards each other and towards coaching itself, and hence enhance the development of a true coaching partnership that is characterised by compassion, mutual respect and trust, and collaboration (Ali, Lodhi, Orangzab, Raza, & Ali, 2018; DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Hagen & Williams, 2019; McCarthy & Milner, 2020; Onyemah, 2009).

The top of the model denotes the impact the broader situational, organisational, and cultural context has on the parties' attitudes, behaviour, and the coaching relationship as a whole (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017). Ample literature highlights the significance of an encouraging organisational culture and the linkage of coaching to the organisation's strategy, provision of training as well as top management support and role-modelling for the promotion of coaching relationships (Beattie et al., 2014; Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; McCarthy & Milner, 2020). Organisational preconditions and HR practices may also facilitate (or impede) the coaching process with respect to allowing the time, frequency, space, and means for interaction that are required to develop effective coaching partnerships (Filsinger, 2014; Gregory & Levy, 2011; Misiukonis, 2011; Turner & McCarthy, 2015).

The analysis reveals an interesting overlap in the behaviours that characterise effective employee coaching and employee coaching relationships. As indicated above, both concepts are also commonly examined using the LMX theory. Furthermore, the extant research shows a reciprocal association between the two: employee coaching improving employee coaching relationships and vice versa (Ali et al., 2018; DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Gregory & Levy, 2012; Hsieh & Huang, 2018; Onyemah, 2009). Gregory and Levy even found a relatively high correlation between the constructs (r = .69). Indeed, similar notions have created some hesitations among researchers

whether these constructs are distinct (Gregory & Levy, 2012; Pousa & Mathieu, 2014). However, only recently, Tanskanen, Mäkelä, and Viitala (2019) linked both of them to different coaching outcomes: employee coaching relationships to individual work performance and the use of employee coaching behaviours to team-performance indicating that there are, after all, two separate constructs and motivational processes at play.

Researchers have repeatedly questioned the validity of the current employee coaching scales, the problems relating for instance to unsatisfactory model fit regarding dimensionality (Hagen & Peterson, 2014, 2015; Ladyshewsky & Taplin, 2017). The review showed a high inter-relationship between the different relationship building behaviours and steps of the ROUTE and employee coaching. This may in part explain the difficulties in distinguishing discrete components for the coaching role or relationships. Nevertheless, Gregory and Levy's (2010) scale for the employee coaching relationship, the PQECR (Perceived Quality of the Employee Coaching Relationship) measure consists of four dimensions: genuineness of the relationship, effective communication, comfort with the relationship, and facilitating development. A comparison to the findings of this review reveals a strong similarity in terms of the content with the PQECR, although the additional fifth component, distinctiveness (cf. Tailoring) – which was eliminated during the scale-development process by Gregory and Levy – appears elementary for empowering employees.

Recommendations for Practice

For many managers, learning to build effective employee coaching relationships involves a transformational process and a skill to be acquired over time (Burdett, 1991a, 1991b; Clydesdale, 2009; Grant, 2007, 2010; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). However, building effective relationships requires not only skill but frequent interaction, time, and determinant effort (Beattie et al., 2014; Gregory & Levy, 2011; Ladyshewsky, 2010). The research proposes that these relationships stabilise only within six months (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Sue-Chan et al., 2011) but can be improved through determinate interventions such as coaching (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Hagen & Williams, 2019; Hsieh & Huang, 2018). Accordingly, organisations play a significant role in ensuring that managers have the ability, motivation, and actual opportunity to take on and develop in this task (McCarthy & Milner, 2020). From this standpoint, this review provides the following recommendations for organisations that wish to enhance employee coaching practice:

- Ensure that organisational HRD policies and practices, for example, involving management recruitment, selection, and performance appraisal, support the promotion of mind-sets and skills elementary for building effective relationships (Clutterbuck & Meggison, 2005; Heslin & VandeWalle, 2008; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).
- Provide on-going training support (Grant, 2007; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Milner, McCarthy, & Milner, 2018). Ensure that training initiatives build on the needs of the coaching managers. This may necessitate turning the prime focus on the requisite relationship building skills over specific coaching tools and techniques.
- Identify and work to ease the organisational factors that may discourage or impede managers from taking the time for coaching and building effective relationships (Anderson, 2013; Beattie et al., 2014; McCarthy & Milner, 2020; McComb, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Rafferty & Fairbrother, 2015). This may involve, for instance, the evaluation of manager work demands, goals and priorities, or number of employees to be coached.
- Role-model and build on compassion, trust, respect, and collaboration (Kroth & Keeler, 2009; McCarthy & Milner, 2020). Promote organisational culture and environment that value good interpersonal relationships.

Future Research

This review paints a holistic picture of the manager mind-set, behaviours, and processes involved in effective employee coaching relationships. Furthermore, it points to avenues for future research across the above sections. The review revealed that many of the earlier calls for research stressing, for instance, the need for longitudinal research, are still valid (de Haan & Gannon, 2016). Similarly, within current organisational settings, research involving relationship building in virtual and cross-cultural coaching contexts is ever more significant (Ellinger et al., 2018; Filsinger, 2014). However, in closing, some of the indicated needs arise as perhaps the most urgent with regard to the development of employee coaching practice. For example, further quantitative evidence regarding the role of the employee coaching relationship for individual and organisational performance would aid targeting on the actual factors that drive employee coaching success, and this could be explored in future research to test the application of the Co-ROUTE model developed here. Accordingly, a potential line of research could involve methodologies with interaction analysis to investigate simultaneously the effects of the employee coaching relationship and employee coaching on significant outcomes. Nevertheless, such efforts rely on valid scales for measuring the two constructs, preferably, from both the manager and the employee perspectives (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Hagen & Peterson, 2015; Munteanu & Raţiu, 2018). In the absence of such coaching-specific scales, existent limited research has largely relied on established LMX measures (Ali et al., 2018; Hagen & Williams, 2019; Lin et al., 2017; Tanskanen et al., 2019). However, the analysis showed that LMX-based approach may not capture the breadth or quality of the motivational factors, especially compassion and empowerment, involved in the employee coaching process. Quantitative research into the factors of effective employee coaching relationships would be invaluable for advancing our understanding of the assumed unique nature of these relationships. This would also benefit the identification and integration of additional theories that would contribute to a fuller picture of the factors of employee coaching relationships – and eventually – effective employee coaching.

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