The Influence Of Coaching On Employee Perceptions Of Supervisor Effectiveness And Organizational Policies

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of the use of coaching as a management style on supervisor effectiveness and key employee-related organizational policies. Specifically, we examine the direct effects of coaching on employee perceived supervisor effectiveness and organizational work-family balance support, as well as the impact of supervisory effectiveness on employee perceived effectiveness of organizational rewards programs. Ordinal regression was used to test the hypotheses, and data from 134 undergraduate and graduate business students enrolled in a Northeast university who indicated that they were currently employed on a full-time basis support these relationships. Results show that the degree to which employees view their supervisor as acting as a coach positively influences perceived supervisor effectiveness and organizational work-family balance support. Additionally, results support the notion that organizational work-family balance support also leads to perceived supervisor effectiveness which, in turn, positively influences employee perception regarding the effectiveness of organizational rewards programs.

Keywords: flextime; flextime appeal; work-family balance; job outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Coaching as a management style is becoming more and more prevalent for human resource development (Barner and Higgins, 2007; Bartlett II, 2007). A primary reason for this shift away from traditional management styles has been the realization of the many benefits of a coaching management style. While coaching has been conceptualized in varying forms, the tendency to focus on employee results and performance enhancement is a central theme across these definitions. Peterson and Hicks (1996: 14) describes this process as, "…equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective." While there is disagreement on the uniqueness of the coaching concept to counseling, mentoring, or teaching, there is general agreement, "that the overall goal of coaching is to achieve growth and development," (Moen and Allgood, 2009: 71).

For coaching to be most effective, close attention must be placed upon goal setting, feedback, and the providing of guidelines. Furthermore, unlike a traditional hierarchical management approach wherein the supervisor is perceived by the employee as serving "above" him or her, effective coaching can result in an employee-supervisory relationship that is qualitatively different. While the relationship formed between a supervisor and subordinate is possibly the most important type of relationship within any organization for an individual employee (Harris and Kacmar, 2005; O'Driscoll and Beehr, 1994; Manzoni and Barsoux, 2002), we are only beginning to understand the dynamics of this relationship. Effective coaching can lead to deep respect for the employee, a greater perception on the part of the employee that he or she is trusted, an increase in an employee's perceived abilities, and the formation of an employee-supervisory relationship that is more partnership in nature (Bivens, 1996).

Moen and Allgood (2009: 71) define coaching as, "… a method which aims to achieve self actualization by facilitating learning and development processes to promote the resource base of another person". The method is characterized by its active involvement of the coachee through powerful questioning and active listening (Kvalsund and Moen, 2008). A coaching style of management, therefore, creates strong communication flows between the supervisor and subordinate which would encourage open information gathering and discussion of issues relevant to job performance. This strong communication plays a 'buffer' or moderating role that can reduce the amount of strain or stress experienced by subordinates (Harris and Kacmar, 2005), as the communication between the superior and the subordinate promotes higher understanding of the politics of the organization and the feeling of inclusion in the workings of the firm. This reduces the negative feelings toward the firm, reducing the feelings that actions in the firm are political as well as overall job strain.

Currently, there is a dearth of empirical findings in the literature regarding the effects of coaching (Bartlett II, 2007). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to empirically assess the effects of coaching on employee perceptions of key managerial constructs at two organizational levels: (1) the supervisory level (i.e., perceived supervisor effectiveness); and (2) the organizational level (i.e., perceived organizational work-family balance support, perceived effectiveness of organizational rewards programs) in order to better understand the impact of this management style, as well as to lend supporting evidence to its overall effectiveness. Finally, based upon the findings of this paper, we propose a model illustrating these effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Coaching And Perceived Supervisor Effectiveness

A primary goal of coaching is to create behavioral changes in employees that are aligned with the organization and which are lasting. Through goal-setting, feedback, and guidance, coaches are able to not only create such behavioral change, but also to allow their employees to experience the positive reinforcement that comes with such behavioral change (Anderson and Anderson, 2005). Campbell and Swift (2006) found that supervisors tend to have more positive attributions of those with which they have a strong communication (mentoring or coaching) relationship (i.e., the "in group") than with those of "out of group" members and are more likely to blame poor performance on external factors and positive performance on subordinate skills for their mentees and vice versa for the out-group members. This gives credence to the strength and valence of a strong coaching relationship for both parties involved. We posit that the reverse is also true, that the subordinate will give positive attributions to the effectiveness of their coach. Much like a baseball player who perceives his enhancement in play to be a result of effective coaching, it is likely that employees whose work productivity increases are likely to attribute a portion of their work-related growth to their coaches.

Hypothesis 1a. Coaching is positively related to perceived supervisor effectiveness.

Coaching And Perceived Organizational Work-Family Balance Support

Researchers have contended that an important antecedent to career satisfaction is the perceived balance between work and family (Powell and Mainiero, 1992). Work-family conflict has been shown to negatively impact career outcomes (Stroh and Reilly, 1999). Additionally, work-family conflict has been shown to negatively affect career progression (Stroh *et al.*, 1996), career involvement (Tenbrunsel *et al.*, 1995), and job and life satisfaction (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998).

It is likely that employees who are being coached will perceive their employers as being effective in supporting a healthy balance between their work and family lives. As previously discussed, a strong coaching relationship between the supervisor and subordinate will provide a buffer, reducing the strain associated with understanding and implementing work family balance. A subordinate with a strong coaching relationship is able to communicate one's needs with one's supervisor and has access to advice, policy, explanation, and examples of how other employees have successfully solved work-family balance issues. There is less likelihood of misunderstanding the organization's support and flexibility and more likelihood that the employee will know one's options in achieving some semblance of balance. An employee without a strong superior-subordinate relationship would

experience increased strain or stress in working through these issues and potentially view the organizational policies in a negative light.

Therefore, an employee who views one's supervisor as a coach and, thus, as someone providing useful information, explanation, and advice, will likely have a more positive perception about the organization and its support (in this case) of the employee's needs in attaining work-family balance. The employee may also have more realistic expectations of what the organization can provide in terms of job or task flexibility and the most effective procedures for arranging and obtaining flexibility in assigned tasks or scheduled deadlines. This relationship allows for deeper, more specific communication to occur concerning the specific needs of the employee.

Hypothesis 1b. Coaching is positively related to greater levels of perceived organizational work-family balance support.

Perceived Organizational Work-Family Balance Support And Perceived Supervisor Effectiveness

As previously stated, work-family conflict can negatively affect overall job satisfaction. Therefore, it is likely that a perceived healthy balance between an employee's work and family obligations would lead to more positive assessments of one's overall job satisfaction. It was previously stated that an employee who enjoys a strong coaching relationship with one's supervisor is likely to feel comfortable in communicating one's needs with one's supervisor. Furthermore, a portion of an effective coach's role is to provide useful information and advice to the subordinate regarding the policies of the organization, including the organization's efforts in supporting a healthy work-life balance.

While it has been hypothesized that this form of open communication would positively influence employee perception of the organization's support of work-life balance, it is expected that a portion of this perception can be attributed to the effectiveness of one's coach. Specifically, if a subordinate views the organization as having supportive work-life balance policies, in part, due to the advice and information provided by a coach, then such a phenomenon is likely to have a reciprocal effect regarding the perception of the effectiveness of the supervisor. The outcome is that the employee will have positive attributions toward one's supervisor's effectiveness as a result of the coaching relationship, and its ability to provide a vehicle to critical information and understanding of the organization's policies on flexibility and work-family balance issues, thereby reducing stress and strain on the job and increasing the perceived effectiveness of the supervisor. The reduction of the knowledge gap between the subordinate and any set of organizational policies, whether work-family balance, retirement, or promotion, would be viewed positively and provide positive attribution on the perceived effectiveness of the supervisor.

Hypothesis 2. Perceived organizational work-family balance support is positively related to perceived supervisor effectiveness.

Perceived Supervisor Effectiveness And Perceived Effectiveness Of Organizational Rewards Programs

Employee rewards programs have long been utilized as a means to increase employee commitment and motivation (Young *et al*., 1998). Therefore, it is commonplace for organizations to implement varying types of formal rewards programs. However, if an employee is rarely, or even never, able to achieve the work-related results to obtain such rewards, then this employee may have a negative view of these rewards programs. The employee may view the rewards as unrelated to actual job performance. They may view the rewards programs as part of organizational politics. Harris and Kacmar (2005) found support for the effectiveness of the supervisor relationship acting as a buffer and reducing the likelihood of viewing organizational actions as politically motivated. Therefore, it is expected that an employee who perceives his or her supervisor as being highly effective will have more positive perception of the rewards or recognition programs of the organization. They will view them as more connected to their efforts, as they would potentially have a better understanding of the rewards system and the decisions behind what is rewarded. This better understanding would have been communicated via the coaching relationship with their supervisor. Continuing, it is also expected that if any employee has been consistently rewarded for one's work, then this employee would possess a positive view of the effectiveness of the organization's rewards programs and the support and guidance provided by the supervisor in attaining the levels of performance that result in such rewards.

Hypothesis 3. Perceived supervisor effectiveness is positively related to perceived effectiveness of organizational rewards programs.

METHOD

Sample

134 undergraduate and graduate business majors at a Northeast university participated in this study. All of the respondents indicated that they were currently employed on a full-time basis.

Measurement

This study is measuring four constructs: the extent to which a supervisor is viewed as acting as a coach, perceived supervisor effectiveness, perceived organizational work-family balance support, and perceived effectiveness of organizational rewards programs. All constructs were measured using single-item scales except for perceived effectiveness of organizational rewards programs which used a two-item scale and exhibited satisfactory reliability ($r = .686$; $p < .01$). The use of single measurements has been supported in the literature by Finn and Kayande (1997), who argue that global measures are very reliable in measuring aggregate judgments of respondents. Please see Appendix for all measurement items.

Results

Since the data in this study is ordinal in nature, the SPSS ordinal regression procedure, or Plum (Polytomous Universal Model) was used to test the hypotheses. The Logit link function was chosen to run the ordinal regression analyses.

Model-Fitting Information

The chi-square statistic is used to assess the individual model-fit for each of the hypotheses. A good fitting model exhibits a significant chi-square, allowing for the rejection of the null hypothesis that the model without predictors is as good as the model with predictors (Norusis, 2006). Table 1 reveals that each of the four hypotheses is supported as their corresponding chi-square statistics are significant at $p < .01$.

Table 1: Model Fitting Information

Model	Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	d.f.	Sig.
(H1a) Coach → Effectiveness	Intercept Only	116.442			0.000
	Final	56.602	59.840	1	
(H1b) Coach → W-F Balance	Intercept Only	71.945			
	Final	60.186	11.759	1	0.001
(H2) Balance → Effectiveness	Intercept Only	104.488			
	Final	80.891	23.597	1	0.000
(H3) Effectiveness → Reward	Intercept Only	66.500			
	Final	57.944	8.556	1	0.003

Goodness-of-Fit Measures

The Pearson and Deviance goodness-of-fit measures were used to assess the goodness-of-fit for each hypothesis. In a well fitting model, the observed and expected cell counts are similar, the value of each statistic is small, and the observed significance is large (i.e., not significant). Therefore, good models exhibit large observed significance levels (Nurosis, 2006). However, these statistics should be used with caution due to their sensitivity to small sample sizes which are likely to result in many cells with small expected values, as is the case in this study.

However, Table 2 shows that, with the exception of H2, both the Pearson and Deviance goodness-of-fit measures reveal large and insignificant levels for each hypothesis, providing further support for the hypotheses.

Table 2: Goodness-Of-Fit

Model		Chi-Square	d.f.	Sig.
(H1a) Coach → Effectiveness	Pearson	18.310	15	0.247
	Deviance	17.761	15	0.275
(H1b) Coach → W-F Balance	Pearson	10.558	15	0.783
	Deviance	10.891	15	0.760
(H2) Balance → Effectiveness	Pearson	34.326	15	0.003
	Deviance	29.829	15	0.013
(H3) Effectiveness → Reward	Pearson	30.223	27	0.304
	Deviance	30.920	27	0.274

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to empirically assess the effects of coaching on key employee perceptions of management and organizational policy effectiveness. Furthermore, the results of this study provide additional evidence regarding the effectiveness of the use of coaching as a management style. Specifically, the results indicate that the degree to which an employee perceives the management style of a supervisor as being coaching-oriented directly influences the employee's perceived effectiveness of one's supervisor as well as the employee's perception of organizational support for work-family balance Additionally, results provide support that employee perceived organizational support for work-family balance also leads to perceived supervisor effectiveness. Finally, the more effective a supervisor is perceived to be, the more likely an employee is to view an organization's rewards programs as being effective.

Coaching as a style of supervisory relationship provides positive outcome for the supervisor, subordinate, and the organization by reducing the knowledge gap between the employee and the supervisor, as well as the employee and the organization as a whole. Better understanding of the organization's policies potentially creates a set of more realistic expectations on the part of the employee regarding the accommodations and rewards systems that exist in an organization. This would result in a more positive perception of employee needs and recognition of employee accomplishments. The coaching relationship has benefits for the supervisor as well, as a strong communication channel is opened up between the supervisor and subordinate, creating a vehicle to provide specific information more useful to the employee. This will provide a more positive outcome, as both the supervisor and the subordinate will find the interactions to be fruitful. Both parties will provide positive attribution to the other in regards to positive outcomes, thus increasing supervisor effectiveness in the eyes of the employee, and increasing the positive attributions of the subordinate as viewed by the supervisor. The organization is viewed more favorably by the subordinate due to the more realistic and depth of understanding of organizational goals, procedures, and programs since the communication between the coach and employee provides an environment wherein questions are asked and answered and misunderstandings are identified early and resolved.

While each of the construct relationships were analyzed independently in this study, both the results of this study and pursuant management and coaching theory strongly suggest the existence of the conceptual model proposed in Figure I. Specifically, results do lend support for the positive relationship between a coaching style and both perceived supervisor effectiveness and perceived organizational work-family balance support. Furthermore, each of the remaining relationships in this model has been supported individually in the current study. Such multi-level effects of coaching as a management style should provide additional support for a more extensive use of such a management style among practitioners.
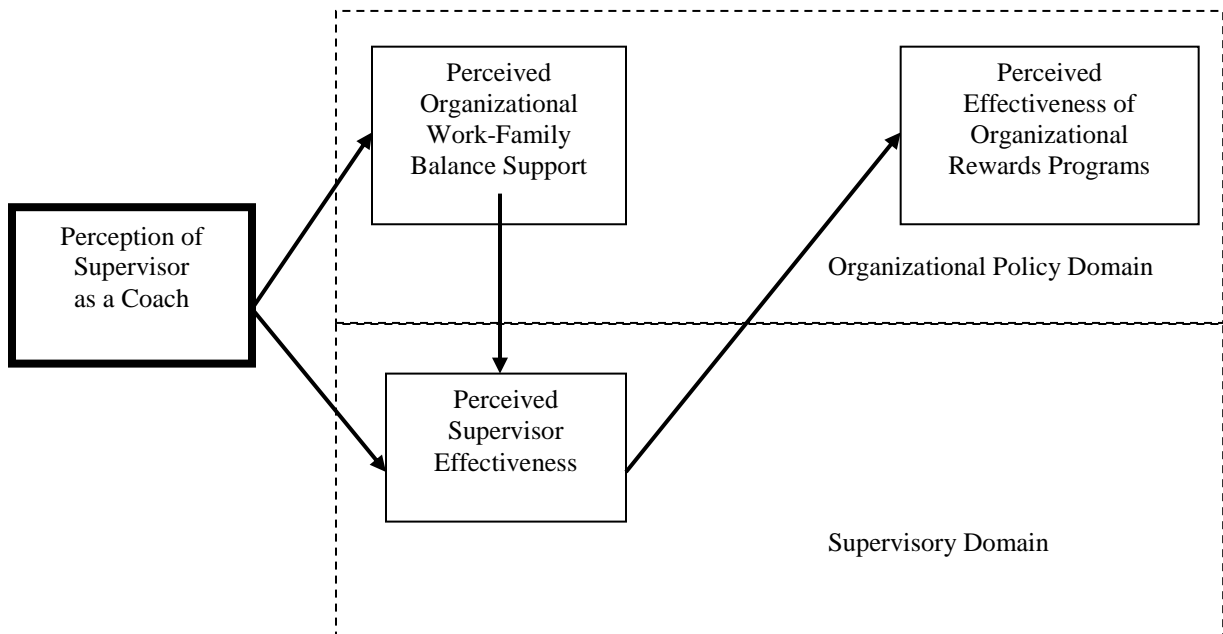
Figure I. Conceptual Model For Coaching Effects On Supervisory Effectiveness And Organizational Policies

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In the present study, each of the constructs, except for perceived effectiveness of organizational rewards programs, used single-item measures. While there is support in the literature for such single-item global measures, such measures do not allow for structural equation modeling (SEM) since the current data results in an under-identified model. However, as previously stated, both the results of this study, as well as current management and coaching theory, strongly support the existence of the conceptual model proposed in Figure I. While results of this study support the significance of the individual paths in the model, future research should be directed toward assessing the appropriateness of this proposed model.

Additionally, while work-family balance support and effectiveness of rewards programs are two important types of organizational policies for employees, they are, by no means, the only forms of organizational policies. Future research should investigate the effects of coaching on employees' perceptions of additional organizational policies such as flex time programs or employee evaluation systems.

AUTHOR AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Joseph F. Rocereto, Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Leon Hess Business School, Monmouth University, earned his Ph.D. from Drexel University. His research specializes in strategic branding, marketing communications, and managerial decision making. He has published in *Advances in Consumer Research* (ACR), the American *Marketing Association Conference Proceedings*, and other North American and international conferences.

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Dr. Stuart Rosenberg, Associate Professor of Management at the Leon Hess Business School, Monmouth University, earned an M.B.A. and Ph.D. from Fordham University, an M.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a B.A. from Marquette University. His research has covered many areas, with the primary emphasis on Strategic Management. He has published articles in *The Case Journal* and the *Indian Journal of Economics and Business*, he co-edited the book *Emerging Business Theories for Educators and Practitioners* (2007), and he is the author of the book *Rock and Roll and the American Landscape: The Birth of an Industry and the Expansion of the Popular Culture* (2009). srosenbe@monmouth.edu

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APPENDIX

Perception of Supervisor as a Coach Item*:

How would you describe the style of the person to whom you report?

1. A coach
2. Primarily a coach but also a manager
3. Equally a coach and a manager
4. Primarily a manager but also a coach
5. A manager

Work-Family Balance Item*:

How effective is your company in supporting a balance of your work and personal life?

1. Excellent
2. Very Good
3. Good
4. Just Fair
5. Poor

Perceived Supervisor Effectiveness Item*:

How would you describe the overall effectiveness of the person to whom you report?

1. Excellent
2. Very Good
3. Good
4. Just Fair
5. Poor

Perceived Effectiveness of Reward Program Items*:

If your company has a reward program, how would you rate its effectiveness?

1. Excellent
2. Very Good
3. Good
4. Just Fair
5. Poor

If your company has a recognition program, how would you rate its effectiveness?

1. Excellent
2. Very Good
3. Good
4. Just Fair
5. Poor

*All items used reverse scoring for analysis

NOTES