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Contextual features affecting managers undertaking coaching and its impact on employee performance in competitive and supportive psychological climates

Nicholas Clarke [a], Najla Alshenaifi [b] and Thomas Garavan [c]

[a]Organizational Behaviour & HRM, University of Kent Business School, Cork, UK; [b]Department of management, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; [c]Leadership Practices, CUBS, University of Cork Business School, Cork, Ireland

ABSTRACT

Managerial coaching is an important responsibility of line managers, yet our understanding of the contextual factors influencing its effectiveness remains limited. We propose mutual high-quality relationships between managers and subordinates as an important antecedent to managerial coaching. Drawing upon social exchange, social determination, and substitutes of leadership theories, we theorise that psychological climates can attenuate or substitute for the effects of managerial coaching on job performance. Results obtained using 389 supervisor–subordinate dyads from 31 organisations in Saudi Arabia show that high-quality dyadic Leader member exchange was an important antecedent of managerial coaching, and this in turn leads to employee job performance. We found that the relationship between managerial coaching and employee job performance was weaker in a competitive psychological climate. A supportive psychological climate did not moderate this relationship. Our findings suggest that organisational investments in managerial coaching will have less impact if they are simultaneously implementing a competitive psychological climate.

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KEYWORDS
Managerial coaching; social determination theory; dyadic LMX; psychological climate

1. Introduction

Managers play critical roles in enabling organisations to more effectively respond to the increasingly complex business environments in which they now find themselves. Many writers highlight the significant changes that have occurred as managers have had to transition from behaviours associated with managing through a command and control mentality, to one where the priority is unleashing the commitment and innovation of those they manage through supporting their learning and development (Deloitte, 2025; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). Most notably now, managers are expected to perform a coaching role. Managerial coaching refers 'to a manager or supervisor serving as a coach or facilitator of learning in the workplace setting, in which they enact specific behaviours

CONTACT Nicholas Clarke nc430@kent.ac.uk

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that enable their employees (coaches) to learn and develop' (Ellinger et al., 2023, p. 254) and is an important human resource (HR) practice performed by line managers (Saundry et al., 2021). In particular, it is a key element of a devolved HRM model (Trullen et al., 2016), and research has emphasised its contribution to individual-level outcomes, including performance (Hwang et al., 2023), organisational citizenship behaviour (Mowat et al., 2025), well-being (Zhao & Liu, 2020), engagement (Duplessis et al., 2021), and turnover intention (Chin Chin Lee et al., 2019). Consequently, many organisations now require managers to incorporate coaching as part of their job and have implemented strategies to build managerial coaching capability (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). It is assumed that managers will implement this important HR practice as part of their overall job role, yet there is ample anecdotal and practitioner evidence suggesting that managers may not implement coaching as expected by the devolved HR model (Trullen et al., 2016).

Research on the antecedents, moderators, and outcomes of managerial coaching is scarce compared to other employee development practices (Ellinger et al., 2023), which is surprising given that organisations make considerable investments in developing managerial coaching capabilities. A survey in the UK, for example, found that line managers take the most responsibility for delivering coaching (CIPD, 2021). Our limited understanding of the contextual factors affecting the impact of managerial coaching is problematic for a number of reasons. First, managerial coaching is increasingly recognised as distinctive from coaching provided by others, such as external coaches or executive coaching (Pelaez et al., 2020). Research has shown, for example, that managers only identified 5 of the 11 international coaching federation competencies as relevant to their role (Chong et al., 2016). Second, whilst some studies have reported positive effects for managerial coaching on job performance (Agarwal, Angst, & Magni, 2009; Ellinger et al., 2003; Hannah, 2004; Huang & Hsieh, 2015; Pousa & Mathieu, 2014), others have also reported non-significant effects (Carson et al., 2007; Sue-Chan et al., 2011; Tanskanen et al., 2018). Given that the impacts of managerial coaching on job performance may potentially vary depending on the organisational context, it is important to understand the conditions under which managerial coaching will result in improvements in employee job performance (Nyfoudi et al., 2021).

Our study draws on the social determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and substitutes of leadership (Jermier & Kerr, 1997) theories to explain the effects of managerial coaching on employee job performance and the moderating effects of the psychological organisational climate. We argue that the effects of managerial coaching on job performance are less pronounced where the psychological climate is shaped by HR policies that provide strong goal cues and performance feedback similar to that found in managerial coaching. Conversely, managerial coaching is likely to have stronger effects on job performance where employees perceive their climates to emphasise these behavioural cues and norms less but foster problem solving and knowledge sharing. This can explain why managerial coaching may have greater effects on job performance in some contexts, whilst not in others. Specifically, we propose that the relationship between managerial coaching and job performance will be stronger where there is a supportive rather than a competitive psychological climate.

Our second contribution concerns the extent to which a manager engages in managerial coaching is impacted by an important antecedent: the mutual quality of the work

relationship with a subordinate. Scholars have argued that the quality of the relationship between the coach and the coachee plays a significant part in determining the effectiveness of coaching (Bono et al., 2009). Similar arguments have also been made in relation to managerial coaching (Ladyshewsky, 2010). We go further by positing that the mutual quality of the relationship between managers and their direct reports is associated with manages undertaking coaching. Given that significant variations have been found in whether managers implement HR practices such as coaching (Wright et al., 2001), we need more knowledge to understand why line managers undertake coaching with their direct reports.

Finally, we advance research on managerial coaching by investigating these relationships in a novel country, Saudi Arabia. Despite the evidence of an increasing interest in managerial coaching as a means to improve employee motivation and job performance in the Middle East (Al Shamsi et al., 2015; Hajizadeh et al., 2022), no studies to date have demonstrated a relationship between managerial coaching and job performance in this distinctive cultural context. Two of the most important cultural factors associated with Saudi Arabia are power distance and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980), which influence the relationship between managers and their employees. Given that particular leadership or management behaviours are found to vary in their effectiveness between Western and Middle Eastern contexts (Kabasakal et al., 2012), the impact of managerial coaching on employee job performance in this under-researched cultural context provides new insights to counterbalance research on managerial coaching that has been conducted in the US and European countries.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. Dyadic LMX as a predictor of managerial coaching

Developing a theory of managerial coaching and its effects requires us to delineate what it entails and how it differs from other forms of coaching. Managerial coaching has been suggested to comprise a number of key activities. These include providing feedback, guidance, and encouragement on how to improve the performance (Heslin et al., 2006). Developing and setting performance-related goals with employees enables employees to recognise the performance standards and targets that are valued by the organisation. This focuses their attention on how best this might be achieved and facilitates employee self-regulation (Theeboom et al., 2014). This is consistent with recent research demonstrating that managerial coaching enhances a subordinate's goal awareness, suggesting that they gain a greater understanding of the gap between actual and expected performance (Kim et al., 2014).

Managerial coaching differs from other forms of coaching in often being intermittent and arising in response to specific job performance requirements and issues. Line managers also typically lack the in-depth knowledge of psychological models and techniques available to external coaches (Pelaez et al., 2020). Jones et al. (2016) highlight that coaching by external coaches, rather than managerial coaching, often includes a formally defined coaching agreement as well as greater exploration of interpersonal and intrapersonal issues. Further, the dominant focus of much of this type of coaching is on personal growth rather than performance improvement per se. Similar perspectives have been

echoed by Grover and Furnham (2016), who suggested that the content of coaching by external coaches is more likely determined by the coachee, and therefore not necessarily aligned with organisational performance priorities. Within the literature, a number of authors have made a distinction between directive and facilitative coaching styles that might be adopted by managers (Hui et al., 2021; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).

Downey explained that coaching styles could reflect 'push' or 'pull' approaches corresponding to these directive and facilitative styles. Typically, the coaching literature focuses on the facilitation style of coaching, whilst giving far less attention to the directive coaching style others have suggested as more typically found in managerial coaching (Dahling et al., 2016; Dhar, 2022; Gilley et al., 2010; Heslin et al., 2006). These distinctions are important since they refer to differing sets of manager behaviours (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019), the effects of which may be subject to differing contextual factors. Based on these observations, we focus in this study on this directive style of managerial coaching defined as 'leadership behavior that supports and prompts individuals and work groups to set and attain their goals, to improve performance, to develop competencies and to understand the broader goals of the organization' (Tanskanen et al., 2019, p1217).

Despite organisations suggesting that coaching should now form a part of what managers do, we know relatively little of the factors that determine whether managers engage in coaching behaviours with their employees (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2013). A number of factors suggested as playing a role include whether they have the necessary skills, workload pressures, time constraints, their previous experience of coaching or being coached, as well as the organisational context in which coaching takes place (Ellinger et al., 2003). Often explanations for failing to coach have tended to fall within either categorisations of managers as being either 'unable' or 'unwilling' (Gilley et al., 2010; Heslin et al., 2006). We suggest that the quality of the relationship shared between managers and their direct reports (as captured by dyadic leader member exchange) can explain why managers are more likely to engage in directive coaching with their employees. Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), LMX suggests that leaders develop relationships with subordinates characterised by varying levels of quality, particularly trust, affect, loyalty, and respect (Shore et al., 2009). Leaders offer increasing support, career enhancing resources, and autonomy to those subordinates with whom they share a high-quality relationship. Subordinates reciprocate in turn by demonstrating increased commitment and effort, resulting in higher levels of job performance (Martin et al., 2016; Mazur, 2012). We suggest that mutuality and reciprocity (agreement between managers and their direct reports on LMX) bring a further dimension to the relationship to facilitate managerial coaching that is captured through a dyadic measure of LMX. Previous agreement between managers and their employees on LMX or dyadic LMX has been found to be a stronger predictor of outcomes than either misaligned LMX or employee-rated LMX (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Clarke & Mahadi, 2017; Markham et al., 2010). Mutuality is characterised by the active engagement of both the manager and the subordinate involved in the dyad demonstrating positive regard and trust for each other (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). It is this reciprocity that is the basis of interpersonal attraction and leads to more frequent exchanges of information between each other (Kenny & La Voie, 1982). Mutuality gives rise to higher levels of trust between members of the dyad and is associated with psychosocial support (Methot & Cole, 2023), a characteristic of managerial coaching. This being the case, we hypothesise the following:

Hypothesis 1: *Dyadic Leader Member Exchange will be positively associated with Directive Managerial Coaching Behaviour.*

2.2. Dyadic LMX and employee job performance

In addition to predicting directive managerial coaching behaviour, dyadic LMX is also posited to positively predict employee job performance directly. A number of previous studies (Breevaart et al., 2015; Mazur, 2012) as well as meta-analyses (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2016) have shown employee perceptions of LMX to be positively associated with job performance. This is thought to arise through a wide range of mechanisms including enhancing psychological empowerment, giving greater job latitude and autonomy as well as employee voice. Employees then increase the performance as part of the social exchange relationship (Harris et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2015). We therefore suggest the following:

Hypothesis 2: *Dyadic Leader Member Exchange will be positively associated with Employee Job Performance.*

2.3. Managerial coaching and employee job performance

One mechanism suggested to potentially explain coaching effects draws upon the social determination theory (Moen & Federici, 2012; Spence & Oates, 2011). The social determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) posits that goal-directed behaviours play a role in satisfying the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to an individual's need to be in control of their own behaviour; competence refers to the need to feel efficacious and capable; whilst relatedness refers to the need to belong and feel connected to others. When these basic needs are satisfied, then research shows this positively affects job performance (Sheldon et al., 2003). We suggest that directive managerial coaching plays a role in satisfying these needs. For example, an individual's needs for autonomy can be satisfied by their manager acknowledging their perspectives, showing them consideration, and offering them flexibility and choice in how they perform their work. The need for competence can be satisfied through the manager role modelling behaviours associated with effective performance, providing feedback to an employee on how their performance might improve, facilitating learning from errors, and supporting an employee's problem solving to discover how things might be done differently. Finally, managers who offer high levels of social support to their subordinates contribute in meeting their need for relatedness (Baard, 2002). We therefore suggest the following:

Hypothesis 3: *Directive Managerial Coaching will be positively associated with Employee Job Performance.*

2.4. The managerial coaching-job performance relationship in competitive psychological climates

Positing that self-determination theory can account for the effects of managerial coaching on employee job performance can also help explain why particular types of psychological climate may moderate this relationship. An important tenet of self-determination theory concerns the potential influence of the broader work environment beyond managerial actions in either satisfying or hindering an individual's need for satisfaction. Both high performing work practices as well as particular types of organisational climate have been suggested as being able to meet an employee's needs for autonomy and self-control, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017). Substitutes for leadership theory, similarly, posit that contextual variables found in the work environment can substitute or neutralise leader behaviours such that certain leader behaviours, such as managerial coaching, are rendered less effective (Doucet et al., 2015; Ling et al., 2016). Psychological climates are psychologically meaningful representations of proximal organisation structures and processes that arise as a result of individual perceptions of their work environment (Fletcher et al., 2008). Based on social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), psychological climates influence employee attitudes and behaviour by providing cues as to the types of behaviours the organisation values and act as a guide to how they need to behave and act to align with expected social norms (Priesmuth et al., 2014).

Competitive psychological climates emphasise productivity, skills, quality enhancement, and focus on goal setting and performance feedback (Spurk et al., 2021). These organisational climates are characterised by strong performance management systems often involving 360-degree feedback mechanisms, engaging in high levels of project working, and target-driven incentive and reward structures. These support employees continuously seeking out feedback on their performance from wide-ranging sources, such that they engage in high levels of performance correction (Pulakos et al., 2012). We argue that a competitive psychological climate meets an employee's need for competence in similar ways to directive managerial coaching, such that the additive effects of managerial coaching are far weaker in such work environments. This idea that the characteristics of an organization's climate can weaken the effects of particular managerial coaching behaviours would also explain why Ellinger et al. (2011) found the effects of *facilitative* managerial coaching on employee job performance were far weaker, and that the more employees perceived the organisational climate as both relatedness and autonomy supporting. Ozduran and Tanova (2017) similarly found the effects of managerial coaching on employee organisational citizenship behaviour to be weaker where the procedural justice climate was high. We therefore propose the following:

Hypothesis 4: *The relationship between Directive Managerial Coaching Behaviour and Employee Job Performance will be weaker in more Competitive Psychological Climates.*

2.5. The managerial coaching-job performance relationship in supportive psychological climates

A supportive psychological climate is defined as the 'overall amount of perceived support employees receive from their immediate peers, other departments, and their supervisor

that they view as helping them to successfully perform their work duties' (Luthans et al., 2008, p. 225). When individuals perceive the climate to have positive characteristics, they form behavioural expectations through internalising supportive norms. Consequently, a number of studies have previously found supportive psychological climates to be positively related to employee commitment and job satisfaction (Mercer & Bilson, 1985) and psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2008). We perceive supportive climates that emphasise knowledge sharing and promote problem solving to provide additive effects to managerial coaching on an employee's job performance. Supporting this notion, previous research has shown that the effects of managerial coaching on employees' creative performance were attenuated in innovation climates (Zheng et al., 2022). We therefore propose the following:

Hypothesis 5: *The relationship between Directive Managerial Coaching Behaviour and Employee Job Performance will be stronger in more Supportive Psychological Climates.*

2.6. The relationship between supportive psychological climates and dyadic LMX

Finally, the perceived organisational climate has been suggested to influence the development of LMX (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Previous research has found a work group climate characterised by a lack of harmony and friendliness was negatively related to LMX quality (Cogliser & Schreisheim, 2000). More recently, Aryee and Chen (2006) showed that a work group climate with a high degree of group maintenance behaviour (including warmth, cooperation, openness, and trust) was positively associated with LMX. Dienesch and Liden (1986) suggested that a harmonious and open climate may impact initial interactions between leaders and followers and their expectations of how they will be received or accepted. Consequently, psychological climate will affect the role-making process of LMX. Building on this previous work and drawing upon social information processing theory, we suggest that a supportive psychological climate will send strong signals and behavioural cues that facilitate relationship building. We posit that a supportive climate will influence relational manager and employee behaviours that will influence the development of dyadic LMX.

Hypothesis 6: *A Supportive Psychological Climate will be positively associated with Dyadic LMX.*

3. Methodology

Our sample was drawn from 31 organisations from public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia. We collected data through online surveys from matched supervisor–subordinate dyads. Dyads were completely independent in that no supervisor or subordinate appeared in more than one dyad. Our surveys were translated from English to Arabic using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). A statement detailing the aims of the study and anonymity safeguards was included. Of the 680 dyads we contacted, we received matched responses from 389 dyads (52.2%). Approximately 68% of our dyads had been in

a supervisor–subordinate relationship for 2 years or more. Our supervisors were 58% male, and 71% were aged 43 or below. A significant majority (82%) had Bachelor's degrees or above, and 61% had been employed in the organisation for 7 years or more. Fifty percent of subordinates were female, and 63% were aged 43 or below. Almost 75% had been educated to Bachelor's degree level or above. Almost 46% had been working in the organisation for 7 years or more. To minimise the common method variance, we collected data in two waves separated by a 14-day interval, with antecedent variables in our model being collected first (Manager: LMX; Employee: Managerial coaching behaviour and LMX). We then collected measures of employee job performance from managers and psychological climate from employees and managers in the next wave.

3.1. Measures

We used Liden and Maslyn's (1998) 12-item LMX scale and collected measures from both supervisors and subordinates. These measures were assessed on a 7-point rating scale. Alpha reliabilities were 0.92 (supervisors) and 0.90 (subordinates) for the LMX scale.

We used the 2-item measure of managerial coaching developed by Tanskanen et al. (2018) and assessed by employees on a 5-point scale. Items were 'My manager understands the problems and needs of my work' and 'I receive encouraging feedback for my work'. Subordinates rated their managers on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) ($\alpha = .87$).

We used 7-item in-role performance scale (Williams & Anderson, 1991) and asked managers to rate their employee's performance on a 5-point scale ($\alpha = .84$).

Rogg et al. (2001) previously developed a supportive psychological climate scale comprising four factors. We used four items from their cooperative coordination scale, changing the wording of items 1 and 2, replacing the word 'departments' with 'work colleagues' to fit the focus of our study. The four items rated by employees on a 5-point scale were as follows: (1) Work colleagues cooperate to get the job done effectively and efficiently; and (2) Employees across differing departments work effectively together ($\alpha = .88$).

We used the 4-item scale developed by Brown et al. (1998) to measure competitive psychological climate. All items were rated by employees on a 5-point scale ($\alpha = .82$).

Gender similarity and length of relationship were included as control variables, since these have previously been found associated with LMX effects on job performance (Ng & Feldman, 2008; Quinones et al., 1995).

3.2. Level of analysis – dyadic LMX

Within organisational research (Yammarino & Markham, 1992) and in leadership research more specifically (Dansereau et al., 1995), the importance of establishing the level of analysis at which relationships are significant is well established. Prior research has shown that the effects of LMX on behaviour are primarily at the between-group rather than within-group level (Markham et al., 2010; Zhou & Schriesheim, 2009). Research involving LMX as a variable should, therefore, initially establish whether LMX is treated as a dyadic construct rather than at the individual level (Gooty et al., 2012). To determine whether the effects of LMX are primarily at the group level, we utilised within and between analysis (WABA) using the DETECT software for Windows (Dansereau & McConnell, 2000). This provides information as to whether our data show that LMX varies between, within, both between and within, or neither within our focal groups (our leader–follower dyads). This is done through comparing within and between-group eta values. Note that neither leaders nor followers in our sample appeared in more than one group. We therefore do not have a problem with groups of employees being nested with supervisors. In addition to LMX, we included two additional variables, supportive psychological climate and competitive psychological climate, collected from both managers and employees for comparative purposes, as research suggests these variables exert their effects at the individual level (i.e. within rather than between groups) (Baltes et al., 2009).

Table 1 shows that for LMX, the between-group eta value (0.78) is larger than the within-group eta value (0.63). Importantly, the F-statistic is significant. WABA also provides additional tests of practical significance (magnitude of effects) to offer further confirmatory data of the level of effects. The requirement for exceeding the practical test of significance is set at 15 degrees or .26 radians practical criterion and provides an inference as to whether the variable effects are between groups referred to as wholes, within groups referred to as parts, or equivocal. The results of the geometric test for LMX show a value of 1.24 for the E-ratio, again meeting the criteria for drawing the inference of between rather than within groups, i.e. that LMX should be calculated at the dyadic level. The data do not suggest between-group effects for our two psychological climate variables as expected.

3.3. Aggregating LMX data to dyadic level

Between-group effects suggest a high level of alignment between manager and subordinate LMX scores (Markham et al., 2015). We therefore followed recommendations by Klein and Kozlowski (2000) to calculate a dyadic (mutual) measure of LMX. We employed two approaches to justify aggregating our LMX data to the dyad level. First, we obtained intra-class correlations (ICC1) for our LMX items. The intra-class correlation indicates the

Within and between analysis showing Eta^B (between) and Eta^W (within) values.

Variable	Eta^B	Eta^W	E Ratio	F Test	Induction
LMX	0.78	0.63	1.24	1.54**	Wholes
Supportive Climate	0.71	0.70	0.99	0.99	Equivocal
Competitive Climate	0.73	0.68	1.07	1.00	Equivocal

**p < .000.
Wholes (15) E > or =1.20, Parts (15) E < or =0.77.

variation that can be accounted for by group membership (Bliese, 2000). ICC1s generally vary between 0 and 0.50 and a median of 0.12 (James et al., 1984). The ICC1 value of 0.2 justifies data aggregation suggesting high levels of agreement (Bliese, 2000). Our ICC1 value was (ICC1 = .30, F = 10.55) (.28 Lower Bound .33 Upper Bound) and statistically significant ($p < .001$). This suggests high convergence in LMX scores. We then calculated the degree of agreement between supervisors and their subordinates on LMX items by determining the rwg statistic. This indicates the degree of inter-rater agreement among raters using multiple-item rating scales (James et al., 1984). The mean rwg (12) score we obtained was 0.77, and we found that 68% of supervisor–subordinate dyads had rwg scores above the 0.70 criterion (Biemann et al., 2012). Based upon these data, we were justified in aggregating the data to obtain a measure of dyadic LMX, calculated as the mean of supervisor and subordinate LMX scores.

3.4. Data analysis

Although we sought a temporal separation of our measures and collected data in two waves over two weeks, we wanted to run a check on common method variance. We undertook the Harman single-factor test and loaded all our measures into an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring and constraining the factor to 1. Our results showed that this factor accounted for 26.04% of the variance, below the 50% cut-off point indicative of CMV. We next used AMOS v21 to undertake structural equation modelling to test our hypothesised relationships. Prior to testing, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to establish the discriminant validity of the measures used in our study (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). We assessed model fit using a number of indices including the $\chi^{2,}$ root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and normed fit index (NFI). We compared three separate estimated models shown in Table 2.

First, we estimated a three-factor model loading all psychological climate items onto one factor, employee job performance items onto a second factor, and items from our LMX and directive managerial coaching scales together onto a third factor. Our results showed a very poor fit to the data. Next, we created a four-factor solution loading all psychological climate items onto one factor, whilst loading directive managerial coaching, LMX, and job performance onto their corresponding factors. Again, the results showed a poor fit to the data. Finally, we estimated a five-factor solution with each of scale's items loading onto its corresponding factor. This measurement model showed a much better fit to the data and offered support for the discriminant validity of our measures.

Intercorrelations between study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Length of Relationship	–						
2. Gender Similarity	−.08	–					
3. Dyadic LMX	.10*	−.02	–				
4. Supportive Climate	.03	-/10	.31**	–			
5. Competitive Climate	.04	.02	.22**	.50**	–		
6. Job Performance	.08	.05	.46**	.04	.08		
7. Managerial Coaching	−.04	−.07	.15**	.07	.05	.16**	–

*p < .05, **p < .01, N = 389.

CFA results.

Models	χ^2	df	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA
Three-Factor	2771.70	461	.74	.70	.72	.12
Four-Factor	2413.40	458	.80	.78	.79	.09
Five-Factor	2060.74	454	.92	.91	.90	.08

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Inter-correlations and descriptive statistics for variables included in our study are mentioned in Table 3. Dyadic LMX was significantly correlated with both managerial coaching and job performance. Both competitive and supportive psychological climates were significantly correlated with dyadic LMX and with each other. Neither psychological climates were associated with job performance.

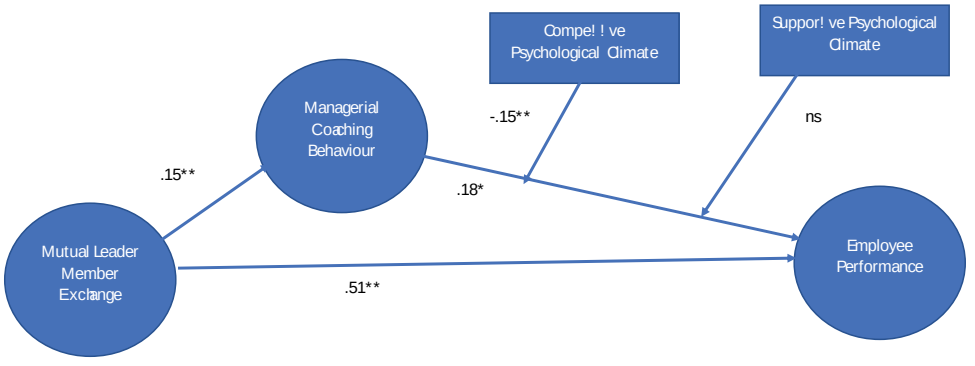
4.2. Further analyses

Since our sample consisted of organisations located in both the private and public sectors, we examined whether there were any significant differences in levels of employee job performance and managerial coaching behaviour reported in these sectors. One-way ANOVAs only found statistically significant differences in the reported levels of managerial coaching ($F = 5.28$, df = 2, $p < .01$), with the mean score of managerial coaching behaviour higher (5.01, SD = 1.56) in the public sector compared to that in the private sector (4.45, SD = 1.68).

4.3. Testing our hypotheses

We next used structural equation modelling and a bootstrapping procedure, which has greater control over type I and II errors, and set AMOS to undertake 2000 resamples to test our hypotheses with a bias of 95% confidence intervals. Our model fit indices were as follows: ($\chi^2 = 2026.0$, $df = 512$; $p < .000$; CFI = .90, NFI = .92, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .08). Brown and Cudeck (1993) indicate that the RMSEA indices of 0.5–0.8 represent an adequate fit to the data, whereas the CFI indices of 0.92 represent a fair fit to the data.

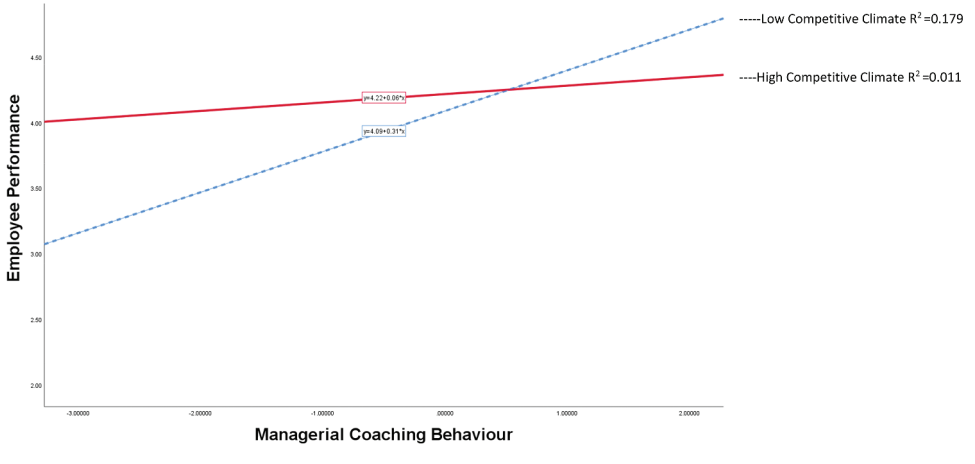
Our full findings are presented in Figure 1. Examining the standardised regression weights and levels of significance for each pathway, we found that the pathway from mutual (dyadic) LMX to managerial coaching behaviour ($\beta = .15$ $p < .01$, CI LO = .06, UP = .24) was significant, thus supporting hypothesis 1. We found that the pathway from mutual (dyadic) LMX to employee job performance was significant ($\beta = .55$ $p < .001$, CI LO = .47, UP = .63) supporting hypothesis 2. The pathway from managerial coaching behaviour to employee job performance was significant ($\beta = .07$ $p < .05$, CI LO = .01 UP = .17), supporting hypothesis 3. We also found a significant result for the moderating effect of competitive psychological climate on the relationship between managerial coaching behaviour and employee job performance ($\beta = -.17$ $p < .01$, CI LO = −.32, UP = −.06), supporting hypothesis 4. However, we failed to find a significant moderating effect for supportive psychological climate on this relationship ($\beta = .09$, $p < .ns$, CI LO = −.01, UP = .25). Hypothesis 5 was



Relationships between study variables.

therefore not supported. A supportive psychological climate was positively associated with dyadic LMX ($\beta = .33$, $p < .05$, CI LO = .19, UP = .44), supporting hypothesis 6. Given the significant findings regarding the moderating effect of a competitive psychological climate, we proceeded to plot the interaction effects between managerial coaching behaviour and competitive climate (Figure 2). An inspection of the slopes in the graph is consistent with our hypothesis. Finally, we should note that pathways between both our control variables, gender similarity and length of relationship, and mutual LMX were not significant.

We also ran an alternative model where employee job performance was antecedent to managerial coaching and mutual (dyadic) LMX, and managerial coaching was antecedent to mutual (dyadic) LMX. Our model fit indices were as follows: ($\chi^2 = 2391.16$, $df = 612$; $p < .000$; CFI = .80, NFI = .75, TLI = .78, RMSEA = .09). These statistics suggested that our posited relationships show a poor fit to the data. It is worth noting here, however, that we did find a significant relationship between employee job performance and mutual (dyadic) LMX ($\beta = .50$, $p < .01$, CI LO = .42, UP = .58).



Interactive effects of competitive psychological climate and managerial coaching behaviour on employee performance.

5. Discussion

Business interest in managerial coaching has been significantly driven by changing work practices in today's organisations. A new generation of workers now place far greater emphasis on expectations of development as part of the psychological contract (Adkins & Rigoni, 2016), whilst many organisations are abandoning traditional performance management processes, such as the annual appraisal, in favour of ongoing coaching and performance feedback (Schwartz et al., 2017). Coaching is therefore now highlighted as the first priority for developing managers' leadership skills (Blanchard, 2024). Despite many authors suggesting that coaching is now firmly established as part of the contemporary managerial role, pressures relating to time, workloads, and wider spans of control can mean managers engage far less in coaching than believed (Greene & Grant, 2003). LMX and managerial coaching are not synonymous constructs. Whilst managerial coaching might reasonably be thought of as a form of leadership behaviour (Huang & Hsieh, 2015; Ladyshewsky, 2010), dyadic LMX captures the quality of the relationship shared between a leader and a follower.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Our first chief theoretical contribution is that we add to the dyadic LMX literature in finding that the quality of relationships shared between leaders and their followers in terms of leader–member exchange does indeed predict managerial coaching behaviour. We found that dyadic LMX influences the extent to which managers undertake coaching. This finding adds to and extends research which shows that the LMX quality is associated with a manager undertaking a number of positive behaviours to support employee development including providing feedback on the performance (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008; Thuan, 2021) and career mentoring (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). It also supports previous research highlighting that employees seek out more developmental activities when the LMX quality is high. This includes seeking feedback from their supervisors on their performance (Moss et al., 2009) as well as setting goals with them (Riggs & Porter, 2017). Our finding that a supportive psychological climate is positively associated with dyadic LMX further suggests that interventions to develop this type of organisational climate may indirectly increase managerial coaching in the workplace through its positive effects on dyadic LMX.

We found a significant relationship between managerial coaching and employee job performance; however, a key contribution of our study to understanding this relationship is that the effects were far weaker in a competitive psychological climate. This finding is supportive of previous research, such as that by Graves and Luciano (2013), who argued that the context in which managerial coaching is embedded plays a significant role in impacting whether coaching was effective or not. They emphasised that 'coach-coachee relationships do not occur within a static context . . . they will naturally be influenced by the dynamic organizational culture the coachee is embedded in, which may make attaining psychological needs and self-actualised behaviour more or less challenging' (p. 518). Our understanding of managerial coaching is still evolving, and there has been a lack of theorising more broadly in the literature as to the processes by which managerial

coaching is thought to result in higher levels of job performance (Hagen, 2012). We argued that the effects of managerial coaching on job performance can be explained through social determination theory and that need satisfaction is the primary psychological mechanism connecting managerial coaching to employee job performance. Providing feedback and goal setting are the processes through which managerial coaching results in satisfying employees' need for competence. Showing care and concern and providing support are relational managerial coaching behaviours that satisfy employee needs for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It is as a result of these needs being met that employees are intrinsically motivated that then positively affects job performance (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Research shows that the broader job and work environment plays a role in satisfying individual needs (Roche & Haar, 2013). This being the case and also drawing upon substitutes of leadership theory, we theorised that a competitive psychological climate can substitute for managerial coaching, thereby weakening its effects on employee job performance. Our significant finding here therefore offers some indirect support for social determination theory as a convincing theoretical basis that can explain the effects of managerial coaching on job performance.

Based on social determination theory, we also theorised that a supportive psychological climate would augment the effects of managerial coaching on employee job performance. Our failure to find that the relationship between managerial coaching and employee job performance was stronger in a supportive psychological climate was therefore unexpected. One explanation may be due to the cultural context in which our study was undertaken. Our measure of supportive climate emphasised cooperation and effective communication between employees and work colleagues. Saudi Arabia scores highest in both collectivism and power distance among all countries in the Middle East (Mellahi, 2007). Collectivists demonstrate a self-construal with a preference for the in-group, and as a tribal culture, family and kinship bonds are emphasised over and above other relationships such as those with colleagues. Cultural differences have been found in the extent to which individuals will draw upon social support such that those in collectivist cultures seek support far less or differently compared to those in individualist cultures (Kim et al., 2008). Collectivist cultures place demands on individuals to maintain harmony and interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As a result, they may be reluctant to draw upon support from the entire social group instead of relying on established social or kinship networks. This reluctance may stem from a desire not to burden others with an individual's problems or to avoid any future obligations (Taylor et al., 2004). Specifically, within the Saudi context, the practice of wasta (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993) also places a primacy on using personal social networks to obtain information and knowledge. The high power distance found in Saudi Arabia may also place limits on the extent to which employees may traverse hierarchical boundaries in attempting to solve work-related challenges or problems. In these circumstances, a supportive psychological climate is less likely to influence knowledge sharing and problem solving between employees than might be expected in more individualistic cultures.

Finally, our study contributes to a limited body of work that has examined the effects of managerial coaching in differing cultural contexts. Noer et al. (2007) found support for

Saudi managers scoring higher on the challenging and supporting managerial coaching dimensions compared to the US managers. They suggested that the strong family and collectivist cultural values found in Saudi mean that Saudi managers undertake supportive coaching behaviours more frequently, while the preference for a high-power distance would mean Saudi managers would be more comfortable engaging in challenging behaviours. Managers in this cultural setting may be more predisposed to undertake coaching behaviour as part of the social exchange relationship they have with their subordinates (Ye et al., 2016). These factors may explain the strength of the relationship we found between dyadic LMX and managerial coaching in this cultural context.

5.2. Managerial implications

Our findings have implications for organisations who implement a devolved approach to HRM practice implementation. A survey of employee development practices (Human Capital Institute, 2025) found that organisational respondents were looking to provide coaching training to managers and develop a coaching culture (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2022). Our study furthers our understanding on how to increase the effectiveness of managerial coaching in organisations through enhancing shared LMX. Frequent and open communication, showing appreciation for contributions, conveying respect, building trust, and developing transformational leadership are strategies that strengthen LMX relationships (Anand et al., 2011; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Nahrgang & Seo, 2016) and should indirectly increase the amount of managerial coaching. Similarly, there has been limited research on how the organisational climate affects LMX despite theorising that it should have a role (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Kim et al., 2021). It suggests that a key lever in ensuring that managers implement directive coaching practices is focused on the mutual quality of the relationships between the manager and direct report. Organizations should also be aware that HR policies directed to develop competitive climates might undermine the impact of other HR initiatives, such as managerial coaching. HR practices that support the development of competitive climates in conjunction with managerial coaching are not complementary. Finally, our findings support a role for HRD in designing development programmes that are effective in equipping managers with coaching skills. HR managers might also consider how to audit manager's coaching skills and ensure minimum quality standards across the organisation. HRD practitioners can also facilitate managers undertaking coaching through interventions that develop a supportive workplace climate, given it has a positive effect on dyadic LMX relationships. This would include a strong emphasis on well-being and managers prioritising empathy, trust, and psychological safety, valuing employee contributions, and providing them with resources to perform optimally.

Our study has limitations which present opportunities for future research. A significant challenge for research investigating the effects of managerial coaching on employee performance is the continued disagreement over how a measure of managerial coaching might be operationalised (Hammack-Brown et al., 2024; Sue-Chan, Wood, & Latham, 2012). Criticisms continue that a few measures are grounded theoretically (Hagen & Peterson, 2014). In a review of coaching measures, Lawrence (2015) found that 16 of the

22 studies examined had measured managerial coaching using the Ellinger et al. (2003) scale and/or the Park, Yang, & McLean (2008) scale, neither of which scales had been demonstrated to be universally valid. We used the 2-item managerial coaching scale developed by Tanskanen et al. (2018), as this had been based on earlier qualitative data investigating the nature of managerial coaching (Viitala, 2004) and therefore better grounded in practice. But it is likely we have not satisfactorily captured the broad domain of directive managerial coaching. A priority for future research must be therefore to collect more data on the validity of measures of managerial coaching, if we are to advance our understanding of the mechanisms by which it brings about its effects. Our study does nonetheless draw attention to the importance of specifying the behaviours associated with managerial coaching since this explained the influence of a competitive psychological climate as a major contextual factor. Future research might also investigate whether manager and employee personality variables, such as a prosocial inclination, might also interact with a supportive psychological climate in the development of dyadic LMX.

A major contribution of our study is that it investigated the relationships between managerial coaching, job performance, and psychological climates within a novel country, Saudi Arabia. However, this collectivist culture may have affected our results. In particular, the extent to which a supportive psychological climate affects HR practices, such as managerial coaching, and its relationship to employee job performance. Future research should therefore examine the influence of both competitive and supportive psychological climates in individualistic cultural contexts.

Finally, we collected measures of managerial coaching behaviour and psychological climate from employees. We followed recommendations from Podsakoff et al. (2012) to minimise common method variance through ensuring a psychological separation of our measures in our instruments and adding filler items. Results from our confirmatory factor analysis, however, showed good discriminant validity. The results from Harman's one-factor test also indicated that CMV was unlikely to explain our observed relationships. This is also a cross-sectional study that precludes definitive causal inferences. However, we tested for the possibility of reverse causation in our model. This did show a significant relationship with employee job performance associated with dyadic LMX but a poor fit to the model overall.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we extend the literature on managerial coaching by managers and the important role of LMX relationships and climate in explaining its effectiveness. We found that where managers and their direct reports both perceive a high-quality relationship, then employees report they receive greater levels of managerial coaching. We also found managerial coaching behaviour positively predicted employee job performance in a Saudi context, but this was weaker in a competitive psychological climate. Where the psychological climate signals behavioural cues that mirror those found in directive managerial coaching, then this may substitute for its effects on employee job performance. Our results suggest that differing psychological climates may explain the mixed results obtained in studies that have investigated relationships between managerial coaching and employee performance.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Nicholas Clarke http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2048-9785

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