

## Positive Interdependence Theory in Effective Manager-Coach and Employee Coaching Relationships

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**[Abstract]** The purpose of this explorative qualitative study was to find the factors of effective coaching relationships that contribute to successful employee coaching outcomes. Results showed that positive interdependence was an antecedent for effective manager-coach and employee relationships. All 18 (100%) of the participants indicated they established positive interdependent relationships with their manager-coaches. The results also showed that employee relationships were mutually dependent partnership-oriented relationships that positively evolved over time to become personal and professional working relationships. The researcher concluded that positive interdependence was necessary to establish effective manager-coach and employee relationships in organizational settings.

**[Keywords]** interdependence theory, positive interdependence, positive interdependent relationship, manager-coach and employee coaching relationship, employee coaching outcomes

### Introduction

Coaching has been defined as the solution made in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to help individuals cope with pressing demands and challenges of a modern personal and professional life (Louis & Diochon, 2018). Great emphasis has been placed on managerial coaching to address issues with modern human development and organizational learning (Ali & Aziz, 2018). One of the top six contributors to employee job satisfaction and engagement has been the relationship with immediate supervisors (SHRM, 2016). The SHRM (2017) reported that 53% of employees rated relationship with their direct supervisor as very important to their job satisfaction. Nurturing a coaching relationship has been a major topic of interest for coaching researchers (Spaten, O'Broin, & Lokken, 2016). Spaten et al. (2016) and O'Broin (2016) described the need for greater understanding of the coaching relationship through specific research questions. In addition, coaching researchers called for more clarity and deeper understanding of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates before coaching (Gregory & Levy, 2012). Gregory and Levy assumed that supervisors and employees shared an established working and professional relationship before they started practicing coaching. Steelman and Wolfeld (2018) believed that the effectiveness of the manager as coach process depended on the manager-coaches competence to develop high-quality coaching relationships with their direct reports.

Researchers found that managers who coach employees face difficulties developing (McCarthy & Milner, 2013) effective coaching relationships with their direct reports. McCarthy and Milner described how managers are unable to coach their direct reports effectively because

they lack coaching relationship skills and specific knowledge about how to create positive environments to foster employee growth. Gallup (2017) reported that managers' roles have changed from bosses to coaches, and they need to be well-trained to be able to effectively coach, engage, and motivate their employees. In addition, Gallup showed that promoting positive working relationships is paramount for employee's engagement and employee's greater performance. The SHRM (2017) showed that 40% of employees rated relationship with their direct supervisors as very satisfied. Manager-coach/employee relationships were the focus of the study because they could be an important strategy for engaging and retaining employees. Therefore, the research question in this qualitative theoretical thematic study was as follows: What are the factors that employees believe lead to an effective manager-coach and employee-coaching relationship?

## Literature Review

### *Employee Coaching Relationship*

Earlier research has served as a foundation and a stepping-stone for future research about the employee coaching relationship. The employee coaching relationship literature lacked empiricism (Ellinger et al., 1999; Graham et al., 1993, 1994). Early researchers focused on examining manager traits and manager coaching skills (Buzzota et al., 1977; Frankel & Otazo, 1992). Other researchers focused on the relational role of leaders in a business setting (Mace, 1950), the importance of coaching relationships (Axmith, 1982), and employee partnerships and empowerment (Evered & Selman, 1989). Ellinger et al. (1999) produced the only study found that used theory and a scale to measure manager's coaching skills in business settings.

Most empirical contemporary research centered on the investigation of the manager's coaching role and effective coaching behaviors in organizations (Ellinger et al., 2011; Ladyshevsky, 2010). Researchers created new scales to measure manager coaching skills (McLean et al., 2005; Park, 2007) and perceived high-quality employee coaching relationships (Gregory & Levy, 2010). The development of new scales was a response to the call for an urgent need to develop self-assessments and perceived assessments in managerial coaching and employee coaching relationships. Clearly, empirical contemporary researchers (Beattie, 2006; Gregory, 2010; Ladyshevsky, 2010; McLean et al., 2005; Wheeler, 2011) built upon seminal studies to create new and original knowledge (Evered & Selman, 1989; Frankel & Otazo, 1992; Mace, 1950; Minter & Thomas, 2000; Stowell, 1988; Terry, 1977).

Research in employee coaching continued building knowledge in previous studies. Most recent studies (Huang & Hsieh, 2015; Kim, 2014; Kim & Kuo, 2015; Kim et al., 2013; Pousa & Mathieu, 2015) employed seminal (Ellinger et al., 2003), contemporary managerial coaching scales (McLean et al., 2005; Park, 2007) and perceived high-quality coaching relationship scales (Gregory & Levy, 2010) to explore the link between employee coaching and employee coaching outcomes. Again, as in seminal and contemporary research, recent studies lacked empirical and theoretical foundations; the researcher found only one empirical research on employee coaching relationship (Gregory & Levy, 2012) and theoretical research (Gabriel et al., 2014). However, a significant contribution of multidisciplinary studies in the employee coaching relationship was

found. Most recent multidisciplinary studies about the coaching relationship informed the practice of employee coaching (Appleton & Duda, 2016; Appleton et al., 2016; de Haan et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2014; Gan & Chong, 2015; Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2016). Also, employee coaching relationship research (Gabriel et al., 2014) and multidisciplinary studies (i.e., sport coaching) started a new direction of research focus by exploring the association of coaching relationship outcomes and the psychological needs of those being coached (Appleton et al., 2016). Others studied the influence of social support on coaching relationship outcomes (Lu et al., 2016; Moll et al., 2017).

### ***Social Interdependence Theory (SIT) and Employee Coaching Relationship***

Social Interdependence Theory (Deutsch, 1949a, 1949b, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 2005, 2009; Kelley, 1984; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) offered essential theoretical tenets and the basis to understand manager-coach and employee relationships. Johnson and Johnson (1989) defined social interdependence as shared influence between two people. Deutsch (1949a, 1962) found two types of social interdependence: positive interdependence and negative interdependence. Positive interdependence exists when an individual's actions foster the other partner's goals to reach common goals. On the other hand, negative interdependence occurs when an individual's actions impede the attainment of joint goals (Deutsch, 1949a, 1962). Similarly, effective actions positively impact the quality and the outcomes of interdependent relationships and improve efforts to achieve common goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). What follows is a discussion of the core tenets of SIT linked to the manager-coach and employee relationship.

**Positive interdependence.** It is a positive correlation that fosters the achievement of common goals between two partners (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Johnson and Johnson (2009) believed two people could attain their mutual goals only if they work cooperatively in a partnership. In coaching, Gabriel, Moran, and Gregory (2014) found that collaboration could foster the process and effectiveness of coaching. In addition, Gabriel et al., (2014) reported that goal attainment in coaching is a collaborative process. Also, Deutsch (1962) claimed that the impact of effective actions on positive interdependence involves three psychological processes.

**Substitutability, cathexis, and inducibility.** These are three psychological processes that could effectively impact positive interdependence through effective actions or behaviors (Deutsch, 1949b). Substitutability is the feelings of responsibility and accountability of each partner in the relationship toward common goals. In the coaching relationship, Grant (2014) found that coaches could promote feelings of responsibility and accountability in the people they were coaching by asking the them to offer weekly progress reports and updates on the achievement of goals. Cathexis is the mental energy and positive attitude formation invested in the relationship to enhance the well-being of both partners in the relationship (Deutsch, 1949b).

In a theoretical study of the coaching relationship, Gabriel et al. (2014) proposed that informal, meaningful conversations and fun activities could enhance well-being. Inducibility is the willingness of both partners to show openness in the relationship to influence each other and set the basis for cooperation toward common interest (Deutsch, 1949b). Gan and Chong (2015)

reported that openness and honest communication between a coach and the one being coached could enhance the coaching relationship. The coach and the one being coached could influence each other by sharing professional and personal information (Gan & Chong, 2015). Deutsch (1949b) found that promotive interaction cultivated positive interdependence.

**Promotive interaction.** It is the reciprocal and contributive activities in a partnership that exists when two partners act to increase their chances of success to reach mutual goals (Deutsch, 1949b). Deutsch reported that variables, such as shared influence, reciprocal help, a motivation for mutual benefit, shared trust, and enhancing promotive interaction between two partners. In a coaching study, Cox (2012) reported coaches and the ones being coached formed trusting bonds based on respect and mutual appreciation, which allowed them to be open and share personal information.

In a study on motivational coaching climate, Appleton, Ntoumanis, Queded, Viladrich, and Duda (2016) found that supportive social behaviors, such as coaches' comfort behaviors, personal involvement, showing care, and active listening, positively empowered coaches to reach their goals. Appleton et al. (2016) also reported a positive correlation between socially supportive behaviors and the satisfaction of those receiving the coaching. Promotive interaction needs proper social skills and routine group processing skills (Deutsch, 1962).

**Social skills and group processing skills.** Johnson and Johnson (2009) defined social skills and group processing skills as useful, positive skills that foster the achievement of mutual goals. Coaches and employees need social skills and group processing skills to reach high-quality cooperation between them as partners with shared purposes (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Social skills must involve behaviors that enhance the partners' relationship by (a) getting to know and trusting each other, (b) communicating accurately, and (c) accepting and supporting each other (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Gan and Chong (2015) found that a good connection in the coaching relationship develops when coaches and the ones being coached get to know each other. Agwu and Luke (2015) reported that setting and communicating clear expectations could enhance coaching relationships.

Yager et al. (1986) claimed that group processing skills are conditional requirements for successful partnership work processes. In group processing, partners must reflect on their progress toward their common purpose, and they must also show respect for each other as human beings (Yager et al., 1986), which serves to drive up partners' self-esteem (Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998). Gabriel et al. (2014) proposed that showing relational behaviors, such as valuing, appreciating, and respecting the people being coached, could potentially enhance coaching relationships. In a sports coaching study, Freeman, Coffee, Moll, Ress, and Sammy (2014) found that emotional support through enhancement of the self-esteem of those being coached could positively affect coaching outcomes.

**Interdependence situation.** It is a relational process between two people (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In this relational process, people interact and assess their needs, thoughts, feelings, and motivations in the context of a given situation (Kelley, 1984). For example, within a gratifying interaction, people display prosocial behaviors and are responsive to attend other people's primary needs, such as psychological needs, safety security needs, and social and belonging needs, Kelley

(1979). In a quantitative study, Krot and Lewicka (2012) reported that working managers enhanced relationships by exhibiting trusting benevolent behaviors, such as interest for employee needs and welfare.

### Conceptual Framework

This current study is the first study using SIT to understand and describe the phenomenon of the manager-coach and employee coaching relationship. A situational, daily, positive interdependent working partnership is a necessary condition for an effective employee coaching relationship (Deutsch, 1949b, 1962; Fausing, Joensson, Lewandowski, & Bligh, 2015; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). A partner (manager-coach) engages in daily situations to address the other partner's (employee) psychological needs, safety and security needs, social and belonging needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Additionally, when partners engage in daily situations, they create positive experiences and feelings of gratification and fulfillment (Kelley, 1984).

Partners (manager-coach and employee) build positive interdependence when they interact with each other to foster each other's goals and enhance their relationships (Deutsch, 1949b, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Partners also engage in promotive interactions to foster positive interdependence. Partners display positive interdependence through mutual influence, motivation, help, support, benefits, and trust (Deutsch, 1949b). Partners engage in effective behaviors by showing mutual responsibility and accountability toward their relationship and toward their common goals (Deutsch, 1949b). Additionally, partners display positive attitudes and positive energy behaviors to enhance their relationship and well-being (Deutsch, 1949b). Some examples of positive and effective social skills and positive and effective processing skills are (a) respect, (b) support, and (c) getting to know each other to build mutual self-esteem (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Yager, Johnson, Johnson, & Snider, 1986).

Deutsch (1949b), Kelley and Thibaut (1978), and Johnson and Johnson (2009) used SIT to describe how partners initially set up, develop, and keep their relationships by engaging in mutual positive behaviors. Partners engage in a close relationship to build a secure connection displayed as a working and professional friendship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Additionally, partners engage in reciprocal, two-way open communication by showing openness and by self-disclosing (Deutsch, 1949b).

Partners interact through positive conversations and by practicing mutual feedback (Deutsch, 1949b; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Partners also engage in mutual collaboration to sustain their partnership by maximizing rewards and minimizing cost; partners are equal and share the creation of meaning (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Partners engage to work on mutual tasks through goal planning, and they share tasks and common goals (Deutsch, 1949b; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework of this study.

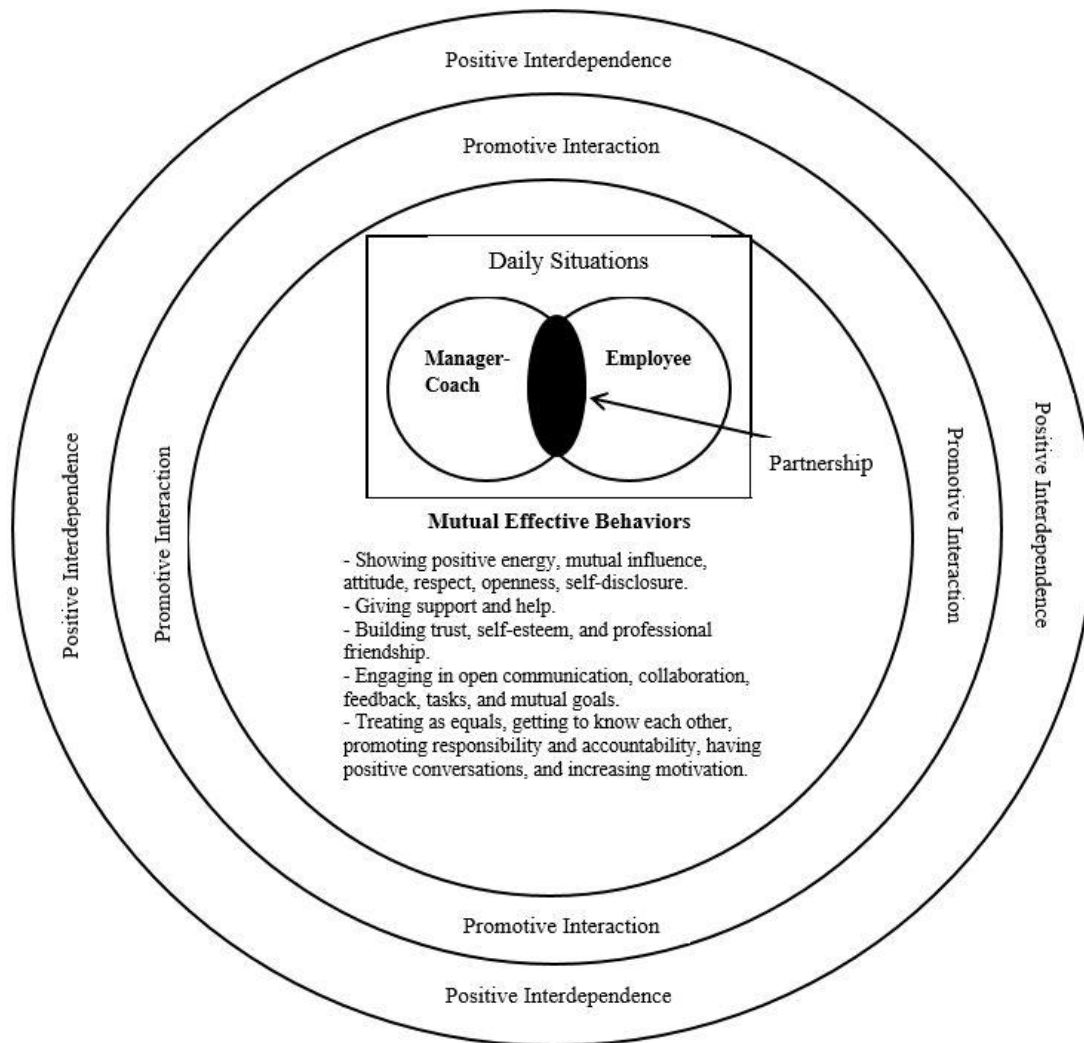


Figure 1. Represents the conceptual framework of this study

### Methodology

To address the limitations on the existing employee coaching literature, the current study adopted a qualitative methodology. The review of the literature showed that earlier quantitative studies about employee coaching relationships have not fully captured the common factors of effective coaching relationships that contribute to successful coaching outcomes (Gregory, 2010; Gregory & Levy, 2010, 2011, 2012). This exploratory qualitative research approach emerged from a constructivist-interpretive research paradigm (O’Neil & Koekemoer, 2016). A constructivist stance allowed the researcher to access the participants’ perceptions, meanings, and value systems to understand their unique subjective experiences.

### ***Participants, Recruitment and Selection Strategy***

Participants included lower-level employees in the United States. The inclusion criteria involved successfully coached, lower-level employees in the United States who (a) worked in diverse industries, (b) received coaching by their direct manager-coach in an organizational setting, (c) experienced successful coaching relationships, and (d) achieved positive coaching outcomes. The researcher used LinkedIn to successfully recruit participants online (King, O'Rourke, & DeLongis, 2014). The researcher searched for a variety of lower-level job titles, and upon identification of the research participants in LinkedIn, the researcher used an internal, direct messaging platform to directly ask potential research participants to take part in the study. The Capella University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the content of the recruitment message to potential research participants.

### ***Data Collection Procedure, Population and Sampling Method***

The primary method for data collection for this exploratory qualitative research was in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured telephone interviews (Gelling, 2015; Mealer & Jones, 2014). The secondary data collection method was an online survey service, SurveyMonkey (Pedersen et al., 2015; Shatz, 2017) to screen potential research participants to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. Once the researcher received notice that a potential participant completed the SurveyMonkey survey, the researcher e-mailed participants the telephone interview information and consent form. All participants signed and returned the telephone interview consent form via e-mail. Upon receiving the telephone interview consent forms signed by the research participants, the researcher began to schedule the telephone interviews. All telephone interviews were audio recorded using FreeConferenceCallHD service. The researcher, thus, was the central instrument for collecting and analyzing textual data from the transcripts of the telephone interviews (Orange, 2016). The researcher collected, transcribed, and analyzed the data gathered via the phone interviews.

The research population consisted of all successfully coached, front-line employees in different industries in the United States. The researcher used nonrandom, purposive snowball sampling (Woodley & Lockard, 2016) to reach research participants. This sampling strategy was useful because even though the practice of employee coaching has grown, employee-coaching relationships are still not practiced in all organizations and industries in the United States (Kim, 2014). Nonrandom, purposive snowball sampling allowed the researcher to recruit 18 research participants from various sectors. The researcher ensured the protection of the participants' identities by using pseudonym codes during coding. The participants' demographics entailed 61.11% of female and 38.89% of male responses, and the three predominant industries were healthcare 44.44%, government 22.22%, and retail 11.11%.

### ***Data Analysis Phase I: Deductive Approach (Theory-Driven)***

The researcher created a template code (Ando et al., 2014) a priori from theory (Feraday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) related to the phenomenon under investigation before conducting the theoretical

thematic analysis. In this study, the researcher identified and listed 20 predetermined theoretical concepts from the existing literature on SIT (Deutsch, 1949a; Johnson & Johnson, 2009) to initially organize the analysis of the raw dataset (Feraday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The template code, with the 20 predetermined thematic codes, allowed the researcher to have a clear structure to organize the raw dataset and ensure he examined the aspects of the employee coaching relationship.

The researcher also used a template code recommended by Ando et al. (2014) to add the definition and a brief description of the 20 predetermined thematic codes. Feraday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) recommended using a thematic code definition and description because they allowed the researcher to recognize what a thematic code does and how to know when the thematic code is applicable during the data analysis. The researcher started data analysis by using two developed template codes. The developed template codes served as a theoretical lens and audit trail in the analysis of the raw dataset (Ando et al., 2014). The researcher used the templates codes and applied the 20 predetermined thematic codes (Feraday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) while following the Percy et al. (2015) method for theoretical thematic analysis. Table 1 offers two examples of the definition and description of thematic codes from SIT.

*Table 1*

*Predetermined Thematic Codes' Definition and Description from SIT*

<b>The matic Code Number</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Behavior interdependence	Courtright et al. (2015) defined behavior interdependence as a team-like behavior. It is the level of interaction between two partners while doing task work.	Behavior interdependence involves interactions directed toward planning task work, defining team's strategy, monitoring progress, tracking resources, and coordinating efforts (Courtright et al., 2015).
2	Cognitive interdependence	Agnew et al. (1998) defined cognitive interdependence as partner-oriented thinking. Cognitive interdependence supports pro-relationships behaviors and motivation toward the partner to sustain the relationship.	Partner-oriented thoughts and behaviors are characteristics of close and committed partnerships. Another characteristic is a tendency to describe the relationship as a central component of self.

### ***Data Analysis Phase II: Inductive Approach (Data-Driven)***

The researcher stayed open to exploring the raw data in the dataset. The researcher also focused



on analyzing the un-coded raw data during Phase I (deductive approach) to conduct the inductive data analysis. Additionally, the researcher used a codebook (Ando et al., 2014) to track the development of emerging codes, patterns, and themes. The researcher also used the codebook to achieve code and meaning saturation as recommended by (Ando et al., 2014). The researcher started the process of data analysis by having a codebook to track emerging codes, patterns, and themes while he followed the procedure of data analysis recommended by Percy et al. (2015).

### *NVivo 11 Data Analysis*

The researcher used NVivo 11 software (Houghton et al., 2016) to support the theoretical thematic analysis conducted in Phase I and Phase II. The researcher input all 18 transcribed color-coded text interviews into NVivo 11 and coded the research participant responses. The researcher used the data analysis results from Phase I and Phase II to proceed with the coding process in NVivo. The researcher organized the dataset by using parent nodes (themes) and nodes (subthemes) as recommended by Houghton et al. (2016). Initially, in Phase I (deductive approach), the researcher coded 20 nodes (themes) and 121 nodes (subthemes). In Phase II (inductive approach), the researcher followed similar steps used in Phase I and coded two parent nodes (themes) and 57 nodes (subthemes).

## **Results**

In total, 18 employees with no supervisory experience voluntarily participated in this study. There were seven males and 11 females (age range 21-50) from different industries: healthcare 44%, government 22%, financial services 11%, retail 11%, information technology 6%, and manufacturing 6%. In addition, all participants (n=18) affirmed that they experienced professional growth or developed new skills as consequence of coaching. For example, some participants (n=8) incorporated new skills related to job performance while other participants (n=3) developed leadership skills. Furthermore, all participants (n=18) established positive relationships with their manager-coach before coaching. Finally, all participants (n=18) stated that the quality of their relationship with their manager-coach even improved after experienced coaching.

Eight specific themes emerged from the deductive and inductive theoretical thematic analysis. The eight themes were: (a) positive interdependence, (b) person-set, (c) role-set, (d) partnership, (e) psychological processes, (f) positive interdependent relationship, (g) coaching and development, and (h) employee coaching outcomes.

**Positive interdependence.** Positive interdependence theme was the major theme found during the deductive analysis. The manager-coach and employee worked together and relied in each other to accomplish their mutual goals because both partners hold similar developmental interest. This major positive interdependence theme had two subthemes: cooperation and positive interaction, which represented the basis for developing interdependence between the manager-coach and employee. All 18 (100%) participants mentioned having a positive interdependent relationship with their manager-coach. For example, Participant 12 said, “We are still in touch in a weekly basis because the success of our operation depends on each other and the bonds we have

built. My manager-coach made me a strong information specialist and my success is her success too, and vice versa.”

**Person-set.** The manager-coach used positive an interdependent thinking, feelings, and behaviors to interact with the employee to accomplish mutual goals. These are beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions based on positive interdependence. The manager-coach stays connected professional and socially with their direct reports, displays team-like behaviors, and partner-oriented thinking. This person-set theme had three subthemes: interdependent individual, cognitive interdependence, and behavior interdependence. Sixteen (89%) of the participants mentioned the subtheme of interdependent individual. For example, participant 8 said, “At the end of the day, she understands me, trusts me, and we get into a mutual agreement. She allows me to tell her how I feel. If a make a mistake, it is okay because she wants me to learn from my mistake. She is not judgmental.”

**Role-set.** The manager-coach led employees by using a set of positive and interdependent behaviors to accomplish the organization and employee’s goals. The manager-coach supports and advocates for the employee’s development and well-being. This theme was further organized into two subthemes: interdependence situation and promotive interaction. In an interdependence situation, the manager-coach addressed the employee’s needs while the manager-coach displayed pro-social behaviors when interacted with the employee. In promotive interaction, the manager-coach showed supportive behaviors, such as mutual influence, and trust when interacted with the employee. All 18 participants (100%) mentioned the subtheme of interdependence situation. For example, Participant 5 said, “She [manager-coach] was asking me how I want my nametag and how I prefer the layout of my office.”

**Partnership.** The manager-coach and employee used positive and interdependent behaviors to complement each other expertise and knowledge to accomplish mutual goals. Both partners used their own strengths to help each other while their respect and value their own differences in perspectives, beliefs and value systems. They both sought to understand each other and strive for win-win solutions when they worked together. This partnership major theme fell into five subthemes: (a) interdependent partner, (b) group processing skills, (c) joint control interdependence, (d) outcome interdependence, and (f) social skills. For example, as an interdependent partner, the manager-coach and employee were aware of having a positive working relationship. In using social skills, both partners got to know each other by being opened and self-disclosure. In joint control interdependence, the manager-coach and employee shared equally control of the partnership by making mutual adjustments on their behaviors. All 18 (100%) participants mentioned the interdependent partner subtheme. Participant 15 noted, “That is what successful working relationships are. If you want to be successful, you have to have a greater level of openness and intimacy.”

**Psychological processes.** The manager-coach and employee created a positive environment characterized by positive energy, positive feelings, and positive attitude. Within this positive environment, the manager-coach and employee felt safe to speak up, to brainstorm new ideas, to get to know each other, acknowledge their strengths, value their differences, and hold each other accountable and responsible for their working relationship. This psychological process

theme had three subthemes: cathexis, inducibility, and substitutability. For example, cathexis is the positive energy and attitude of both partners toward their partnership. In inducibility, both partners show openness to influence each other. In substitutability, both partners hold each other accountable and responsible to their working relationship and completion of mutual goals. Thirteen (72%) participants mentioned the cathexis subtheme. Participant 9 said, “He [manager-coach] makes me feel like my actual job has a purpose in the organization. I mean you know it is very meaningful. It’s a great feeling.”

**Positive interdependent relationship.** The manager-coach and employee built a positive and interdependent coaching relationship over time. This relationship was characterized by professionalism, friendship, and equal treatment between partners. The manager-coach and employee went through a positive relational process to build their relationship into a professional and friendly working partnership. Within this relational process, the manager-coach and employee experienced a good relationship from the very beginning when both partners met for first time in the workplace. In addition, the relationship of both partners gradually improved and became more positive and effective over time, before coaching and after coaching. All 18 (100%) of the 18 participants mentioned that their relational with manager-coach were positive from their first initial meeting and gradually become more positive over time. Participant 11 said, “Initially, the relationship with him [manager-coach] was very friendly. He was very approachable.” In addition, participant 14 stated, “When we met for the first time, I would say that our relationship was at ease like co-workers or equals.”

**Coaching and development.** The manager-coach used a set of positive and interdependent behaviors to facilitate coaching and support the development of the employee within a wide range of personal and professional needs. This major coaching development theme contained four subthemes: mutual communication, goal interdependence, process interdependence, and task interdependence. In mutual communication, the manager-coach and the employee held coaching formal and informal conversations to identify personal and professional goals aligned with the organization goals. In process interdependence, the manager-coach and employee coordinated their efforts by relying on their roles and skills. In goal interdependence, the manager-coach and employee shared mutual agency and workload to achieve their common goal. Sixteen (89%) participants mentioned the coaching development subtheme. Participant 17 said, “We had a conversation about my performance. My manager-coach one time said to me hey we need to talk. This is not a successful pattern. It is her [manager-coach] responsibility to call it out, and it is my responsibility to fix it.”

**Employee coaching outcomes.** This major interdependent outcome theme represented the positive results and benefits of the coaching relationship between the manager-coach and employee. In this study, the coaching relationship positively impacted employees’ career by helping employees to grow more professionally and personally. One important characteristic of this theme was that partners’ relationship has growth more positive and stronger. This interdependent outcome theme had one subtheme: effective interdependence. The subtheme of effective interdependence was reported by employees as an increased in motivation, increased in job satisfaction, increased morale, increased engagement toward manager-coach and organization, increased responsibility

to attain goals, increased productivity, have more willingness to listen and be influenced, and increased commitment to professional development. Seventeen (94%) participants reported this interdependent outcome subtheme. For instance, Participant 11 said, “As you get to know more someone [manager-coach], the respect increases and also the friendship increases. All my interactions with him [manager-coach] seemed to be on the positive side.” Figure 2 represents the conceptual framework of this study after data analysis.

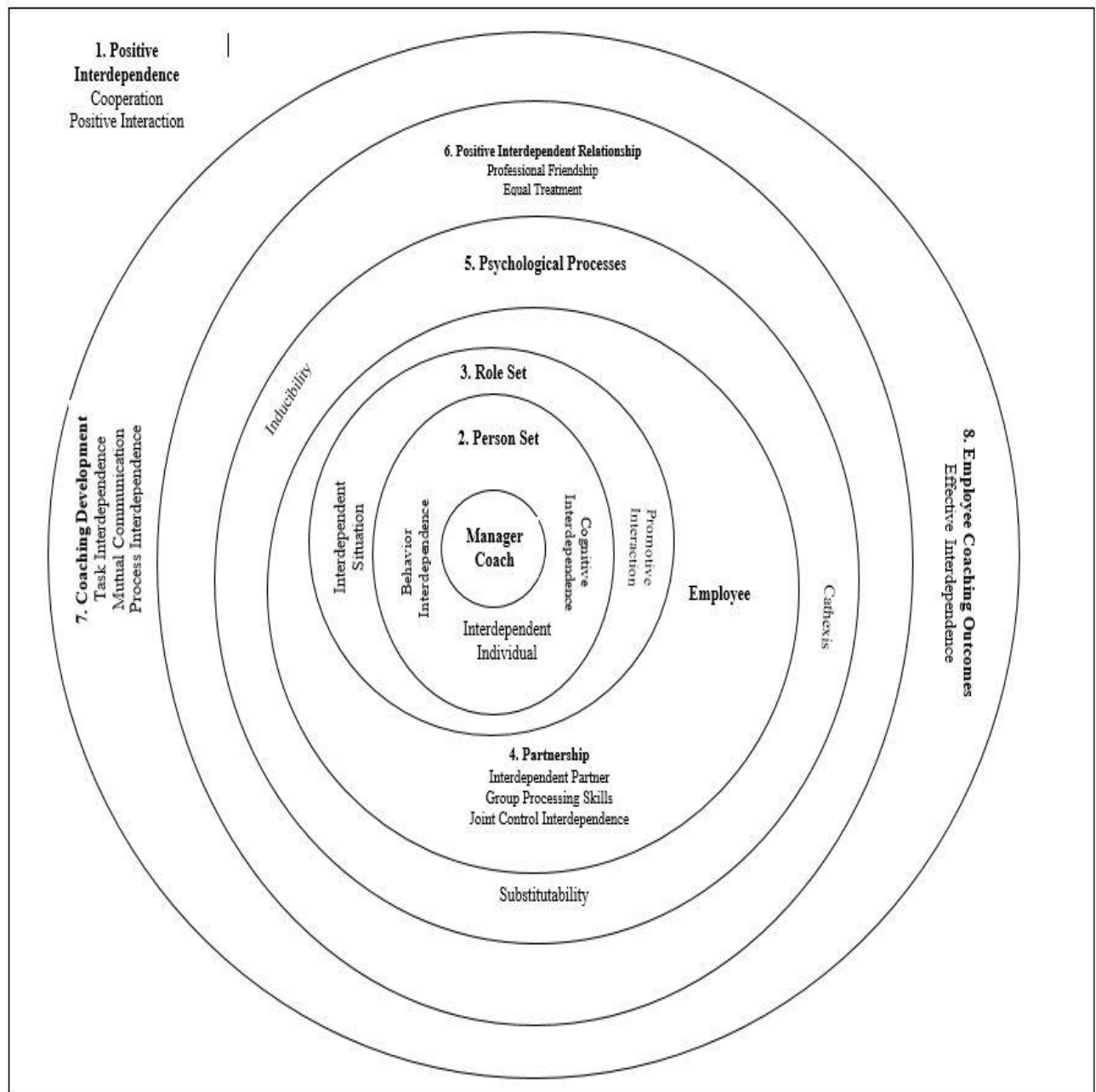


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the manager-coach and employee coaching relationship model after data analysis

### Discussion

The first contribution is that positive interdependence is perceived as the foundation of the relationship between the manager-coach and employee even before coaching. It is believed that the manager-coach and employee are positive and interdependent individuals. In using theoretical thematic analysis is uncovered that the manager-coach is employee-focused (other-focused) and practices cognitive interdependence and behavior interdependence when interacting with direct reports. Some interdependent positive behaviors displayed by the manager-coach are (a) expending time together, (b) active listening, (c) attentive to other's feelings, (d) thoughts and needs, (e) feeling empathy, (f) coordinating efforts, (g) partner-oriented thinking, and (h) relationship centered. It could be assumed that antecedents for an effective coaching relationship are the manager-coach and the employee.

Fausang et al., (2015) claims similar findings in a study about the positive influence of interdependence on a leader and employee performance. This study offers a unique perspective on how the manager-coach and employee relationship could function in the context of organizational settings; thus, this study could answer some researchers' calls (O'Broin, 2016; Spaten, O'Broin, & Lokken, 2016) for the need of greater understanding of the coaching relationship within a specific context.

The second contribution is the relational process of the coaching relationship. The manager-coach and employee experience positive interdependence during every situational and relational stage of their relationship. All participants in this study experienced five positive interdependent relational stages with their manager-coach: (a) meeting for first time, (b) the initial relationship, (c) the quality of the relationship before coaching, (d) the quality of the relationship after coaching, and (e) nurturance of the coaching relationship. In most cases, the manager-coach and employee meet for first time during the interview and hiring process. In all cases, the manager-coach and employee have an initial good relationship and even a friendly relationship before coaching.

Most importantly, the relationship between the manager-coach and employee become a close personal and professional relationship after coaching. The nurture of this coaching relationship is mostly cultivated by the availability to each other, which means the willingness of the manager-coach and employee to spend time together. This study also offers more clarity about the established working and professional relationship between the manager-coach and employee before they started practicing coaching; therefore, this study could answer some researchers' calls (Gregory & Levy, 2012; McCarthy & Milner, 2013) for the need of deeper understanding of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates before coaching.

The third contribution is the impact of positive interdependence on the coaching relationship and outcomes. As mentioned earlier, the manager-coach and employee seemed to be positive, interdependent individuals. They engage in mutual cooperation and positive interaction as a result of their mutual developmental interest to aim common personal, professional, and organizational goals. In this study, employee coaching outcomes is the result of the effectiveness of the interdependence between the manager-coach and employee. Seventeen (94%) of 18 participants mentioned that the relationship with their manager-coach developed more positively

over time. Some examples found in this study of employee coaching outcomes are (a) increased employee's motivation, (b) increased employee's satisfaction, (c) increased employee's morale, (d) increased engagement toward manager-coach and organization, (e) increased responsibility to attain goals, more willingness to listen and be influenced, and (f) increased commitment to mutual professional development. This study offers a unique view on how the manager-coach and employee's positive interdependence impacts the coaching relationship and outcomes; thus, this study could answer some researchers' calls (O'Broin, 2016; Spaten, O'Broin, & Lokken, 2016) for the need of greater understanding of how the coach's effective attributes can lead to productive coaching relationships and coaching outcomes.

### **Theoretical and Managerial Implications for Practice**

This study offers a unique theoretical new perspective. The first theoretical contribution is the use of SIT as theoretical foundation (Deutch 1949a; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) to inform the practice of employee coaching relationships in organizational settings. Viewing the manager-coach and employee relationships through the lens of positive interdependence offers a greater understanding of the development of positive and interdependent relationships between the manager-coach and direct reports. Managers are encouraged to build positive coaching relationships with direct reports by practicing the tenets of SIT identified in this study to aim effective coaching outcomes.

The study applies positive interdependence theory. The second theoretical contribution is that positive interdependence could be an antecedent for effective manager-coach and employee relationships in the workplace context (Utrilla et al., 2014). According to the thematic analysis in this study, it is inferred that manager-coaches and direct reports are positive and interdependent people even before they set up their employee coaching relationships. Positive interdependence is practiced when managers are empowered to create cooperative interdependent cultures and practice positive interaction to set the foundation for positive coaching relationships and effective coaching outcomes. As results revealed, a culture of cooperation means a manager-coach and employee work together as they hold similar developmental interests.

The study generates a new conceptual framework based on theory a literature review. The third theoretical contribution is the creation of a conceptual framework based on SIT (Deutch 1949a; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and the identification of eight interdependent developmental coaching relationship factors through strong chronological literature review in managerial coaching (Ellinger et al., 1999; Mace 1950; McLean et al., 2005), employee coaching relationship (Gregory 2010; Gregory & Levy, 2011), and interdisciplinary studies in the coaching relationship (Alvey & Barclay, 2007; Jowett, 2006; Philippe & Seiler, 2006). Organizations can use the conceptual framework of this study and the eight interdependent developmental coaching relationship factors through strong chronological literature review to implement effective leadership development programs that may aid recruitment and retention of top employees.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This qualitative study has some limitations. From a methodology standpoint, one limitation is the sample size and demographics. Qualitative research uses small representations of the population investigated to collect participants' perspectives. This study is limited by its being mostly female participants rather than males from the healthcare industry. It is suggested conducting further research to include a wider variety of industries and more male participants who have experienced successful coaching relationships with their manager-coaches in organizational settings. From the results of this study, it is suggested creating a scale based on the eight positive interdependent factors to measure the manager-coach competences in building coaching relationships from a positive interdependence perspective. Finally, another area for future research could be to test the association of the eight positive factors found in this study to assess whether there is a positive causation among the eight positive interdependent factors. In other words, it is important to test whether positive interdependence positively impacts the relationship between the manager-coach and employee before and after coaching and employee coaching outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

I believe that the current study has contributed to the coaching literature by adding more clarity to understand the employee coaching relationship and outcomes in organizational settings. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory theoretical thematic study was to explore the factors that employees believe lead to effective manager-coach and employee relationships. Factors found in the study emerged from collected data of 18 participants via telephone interviews using open-ended and semi-structured interview questions. The theoretical thematic analysis in this study revealed eight factors and 22 subfactors that exemplified the rich descriptions of the employees' beliefs about their successful coaching relationships with their manager-coaches.

This study used Social Interdependence Theory (SIT) as the theoretical foundation (Deutsch 1949a; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Using SIT allowed a unique perspective of the employee coaching relationship phenomenon in organizational settings. Viewing the manager-coach and employee coaching relationships through the lens of positive interdependence offered a greater understanding of the development of positive and interdependent relationships between the manager-coaches and employees before and after coaching. The results of this research could help manager-coaches in organizational settings as they work to build positive and effective coaching relationships with their direct reports.

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