Effect of a Coach’s Regulatory Focus and an Individual’s Implicit Person Theory on Individual Performance

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Consistent with the arguments of regulatory focus theory, an experiment revealed that a promotion coaching orientation relative to a prevention coaching orientation had a more positive effect on the performance of recipients following coaching. Moreover, in support of regulatory fit theory, a prevention coaching orientation had a more positive effect on the performance of recipients with implicit fixed beliefs about ability than for those with implicit incremental beliefs. The robustness of these results was supported through replication in a lagged, correlation field study of employees in the production facility of a global company. In addition, in the field study, there was a significant additive component in the effects for promotion-oriented coaching, due to better regulatory fit for employees with incremental beliefs.

Keywords: coaching orientation; regulatory focus; implicit person theory; regulatory fit

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At the core of every coaching process is a set of interactions between a coach and the recipient of coaching in which each brings a range of capabilities and predispositions to the interplay. In these interactions, the coach’s orientation toward the learning process is an important part of the coaching context. Of relevance to coaching orientation are developments in motivation theory that draw attention to regulatory focus as a determinant of goal pursuit (Higgins, 1997). Regulatory focus theory identifies two different foci that underpin motivated behavior. These are the pursuit of development in order to succeed and the avoidance of failure through the fulfillment of obligations and responsibilities, which are labeled as *promotion* and *prevention* foci, respectively (Higgins, 1998).

Considerable research has investigated how an individual’s self-regulatory focus influences performance (see Higgins, 1998, 2001, for reviews). This research has demonstrated that performance contexts can be framed as promotion oriented or prevention oriented (e.g., Higgins, 1997; Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004). This finding has led to the proposition that a regulatory focus could influence leaders’ behavior (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Kark & Van-Dijk, 2007). Even though employee coaching is a constituent component of leaders’ behavior (Kark & Van-Dijk, 2007; Yukl, 2009), the impact of the regulatory framing during coaching on recipients’ performance has yet to be examined. This is an important consideration because, despite the prevalence of coaching in organizations (Latham, Almost, Mann, & Moore, 2005), empirical examinations of coaching have not clearly demonstrated its positive influence on performance (Wageman, 2001). Moreover, investigations of the effects of coaching that do not consider differences in the interactions between coaches and recipients may be masking the positive and negative effects of moderators, such as the regulatory focus of the coach. Coaching that focuses recipients’ attention on the promotion of success versus prevention of failure may have different consequences on their performance.

Theories of person–situation interaction (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995) suggest that contextual factors, such as a coach’s regulatory focus, do not affect individuals as if they are blank slates. Individuals have beliefs and attitudes that filter and interpret the messages they receive from their environmental contexts. A recipient’s belief that seems likely to influence reactions to the regulatory focus of a coach is the belief regarding the changeability of the skills to be developed. As the ultimate purpose of coaching is to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals (Mace, 1950), that is, to enable learning (D’Abate, Eddy, & Tannenbaum, 2003), recipients’ belief that their abilities are changeable should influence any impact of the coaching they receive on their performance. Consequently, a second purpose of our research is to examine whether implicit person theories of ability moderate the association between the regulatory framing of coaching and the performance outcomes from coaching.

A final purpose of our research is to examine the effectiveness of coaching through the perspective of regulatory fit theory (Higgins, 2000, 2005, 2006). While interaction theories predict a person–situation interaction, they do not specify the nature of the interaction. Regulatory fit theory states that performance is highest when the regulatory demands and opportunities of the context match the individual’s motivational orientation. In our study, we suggest that the fit between the regulatory framing of coaching by the coach, in promotion versus prevention terms, and recipients’ beliefs about improvement versus demonstration of their competence influences the effectiveness of coaching.
Our research contributes to the small body of extant empirical studies on the determinants of coaching effectiveness, which is currently dwarfed by the voluminous practitioner literature on coaching in the workplace. The scholarly literature offers many definitions and descriptions of the contexts and formats of coaching and of the characteristics of the interaction between a coach and a recipient. Our investigative lens is focused on the interactions between a trainee and a coach in the context of helping recipients to develop a skill (Study 1) and coaching that is given by supervisors to employees on an ongoing basis in a manufacturing facility (Study 2). Across both coaching contexts examined, we investigate how the orientation of the coach in his or her framing of the learning process and the interaction between the regulatory framing of coaching and recipients’ implicit beliefs about ability influence the outcomes of their interactions. Previous research has not considered the impacts of framing and beliefs in the interactions between coaches and trainees, which are at the heart of all coaching processes, as possible theoretical explanations for the effectiveness of coaching. By focusing on the application of regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997, 1998), implicit ability (Dweck, 1996, 1999), and regulatory fit theories (Higgins, 2000, 2005, 2006) to the interactions between coaches and trainees, we seek to expand the scope of existing theory and clarify the conditions under which coaching can positively influence performance, as called for by Feldman and Lankau (2005). Nevertheless, we caution that the characteristics of the coaching contexts and interactions we examine do not match all extant definitions and characteristics of coaching (e.g., Feldman, 2001).

We begin with an overview of coaching. We then explain the theoretical bases used to develop our hypotheses and the hypotheses we tested.

Coaching

Since Mace (1950) introduced the concept of coaching to management, there has been much confusion about what coaching means, as definitions and operationalizations vary in the published research literature (e.g., Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Heslin, VandeWalle, & Latham, 2006). Coaching, in common with other developmental practices, is a goal-directed interaction between one developer (e.g., coach) and one or more learners (e.g., recipients of coaching; D’Abate et al., 2003). There is also agreement that coaching is a way of relating and communicating with others (Evered & Selman, 1989) and that it refers to what leaders (e.g., managers, supervisors, team leaders) do in their everyday interactions with subordinates and team members to influence the results obtained by them (Morgeson, 2005; Wageman, 2001).

What occurs when coaches communicate and interact with recipients is not well understood because the behaviors that constitute coaching are specific to the organizational context in which coaching occurs (Wageman, 2001). Moreover, the number of individuals with whom coaches simultaneously interact and the regularity of interactions between coaches and recipients are open questions (D’Abate et al., 2003). For example, one of the behavioral categories used by Wageman (2001) to assess coaching performed by leaders of teams is “problem solving consultation” (p. 566). The study included assessments of how often problem-solving consultation and other behavioral categories were performed by leaders, but it was unclear how often specific behaviors within each behavioral category, such as “teaching the
group to use a problem solving process” (p. 565), were performed. It is also unclear whether the coaching behaviors were enacted with groups or with individual members of teams reporting to a leader.

The context-specific nature of coaching notwithstanding, there are characteristic actions that coaching has in common with other developmental interactions and the related learning process. Goal setting, providing feedback, and practical application, as well as modeling and observing, are frequently mentioned as coaching behaviors intended to enhance a recipient’s ability and motivation (D’Abate et al., 2003). Others, who equate coaching and learning, include work by Evered and Selman (1989). They noted that “great” coaches perceive themselves foremost as teachers. Similarly, Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) found that managers perceived coaching to be synonymous with facilitating learning on the part of their subordinates. For this reason, how coaches frame the learning process and the associated behaviors is important because coaching is a situational prime that can induce recipients to pursue the same achievement goal in one of two quite different ways (Higgins, 1997, 1998).

**Regulatory Focus**

Higgins’s (1997, 1998) theory of regulatory focus describes the different ways in which individuals pursue goals and what are experienced as desirable (positive) or undesirable (negative) outcomes. In Higgins’s theory, the motivational orientations adopted in respect to goals lead individuals to use one of two different means to accomplish the same achievement goal. The first regulates the achievement of rewards, focusing individuals on positive outcomes, and hence is labeled a *promotion* focus. The second regulates avoidance and focuses individuals on negative outcomes and therefore is labeled a *prevention* focus. Individuals with a promotion regulatory focus typically pursue novel ideas and practices to achieve personal hopes, wishes, and challenging aspirations. They tend to be eager and opportunistic in their goal pursuit activities. Contrasted with this approach is that of individuals with a prevention focus. They typically tend to avoid actions that could prevent them from fulfilling normative expectations, duties, and responsibilities. Consequently, they tend to be vigilant and cautious in their goal-pursuit activities. In short, people with a promotion focus strive to attain desired, positive end states, such as success, whereas those with a prevention focus are motivated to avoid undesired, negative ends states, such as failure (e.g., Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998).

Kark and Van-Dijk (2007) and Brockner and Higgins (2001) have suggested that the actions (behavior) and language (communication) of leaders or other influential people in a person’s environment inspire a focus on either positive (promotion) or negative (prevention) end states. Both foci can be functional, as effective performance in an organization often requires both eagerness (promotion) to succeed as well as vigilance (prevention) to avoid failure. For example, assembly line employees need to make high-quality products as quickly as they can while minimizing errors that would lead to rejection of the product. Problem solving requires generating and sifting through many alternatives before finding an appropriate solution. Consequently, promotion and prevention foci are required for effective performance. In an empirical examination of these notions among professional employees as diverse...
as loan underwriters and accountants, the stronger the prevention regulatory focus of indi-
viduals, the higher their in-role performance, while the stronger the promotion regulatory focus of
individuals, the higher their creative and helping behaviors (Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, 
Chonko, & Roberts, 2008). Although not mentioned by those authors, the prevention focus 
was, presumably, related to in-role performance for the respondents because the nature of 
their jobs requires vigilance for performance effectiveness. While these findings reveal the 
relationship of these two regulatory orientations that individuals bring to bear on performance,
what remains unexamined in a work context is whether the coaching that leaders provide to
recipients framed with a promotion versus a prevention orientation influences performance.
Evidence from laboratory studies by Higgins and his colleagues is suggestive.

Findings from experiments indicate that prevention framing leads to better but slower per-
formance than does promotion framing on tasks requiring vigilant attention (Förster, Higgins, 
& Bianco, 2003). Promotion framing causes better and faster performance than does preven-
tion framing on tasks requiring eagerness to try many alternatives (Friedman & Förster, 2001).

In the context of coaching, investigations of employee coaching allude to but have not 
explicitly examined how the framing of coaching with a promotion versus a prevention ori-
entation influences performance outcomes. Wageman (2001) referred to the everyday inter-
actions that leaders have with team members as leaders’ coaching intended to influence 
members to take responsibility for their performance. By describing coaching as a way to 
influence individuals’ normative expectations, Wageman implicitly framed coaching with a 
prevention orientation. Tewes and Tracey (2008) developed an on-the-job posttraining sup-
plement that required managers to coach themselves to reinforce earlier interpersonal skills 
training. The self-coaching program required them to set goals to either continue or start 
effective behaviors, as well as to set goals to reduce the frequency of ineffective behaviors. 
This self-coaching was implicitly framed with a promotion orientation (continue or start to 
perform behaviors to achieve successful future performance) supplemented with a preven-
tion orientation (minimizing behaviors that obstruct effective performance). The implicitly 
framed prevention coaching behaviors assessed by Wageman were unrelated to overall per-
formance. However, the implicitly framed promotion plus prevention self-coaching assessed 
by Tewes and Tracey was related positively to posttraining performance. In summary, some 
coaching interventions have implicitly framed behaviors with these two regulatory orienta-
tions. Moreover, both promotion and prevention regulatory orientations are positively asso-
ciated with performance, although evidence supporting the former association is stronger 
than the latter. Accordingly, we hypothesized the following:

_Hypothesis 1:_ Coaching framed with a promotion or prevention regulatory focus is positively related 
to performance, although the association between promotion-framed coaching and performance 
is stronger than the association between prevention-framed coaching and performance.

Interaction theories (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995) state that individuals’ behaviors are 
influenced not only by the situation but also by the personal qualities they possess. Therefore, 
the influence of the framing of the learning process in coaching on performance may be 
enhanced or tempered by what recipients believe about their ability to acquire the knowledge 
and skills that are being taught by the coach.
Implicit Person Theories

Dweck’s (1996, 1999) implicit person theories framework refers to the conceptions or beliefs that individuals hold about specific abilities, such as intelligence or problem solving. In brief, Dweck’s theory, which has received extensive empirical support (e.g., Butler, 2000; Plaks & Stecher, 2007), states that individuals differ in the degree to which they view abilities as either fixed-trait-like entities (entity theory) versus dynamic states that can be changed over time through developmental activities, experience, and new strategies (incremental theory). These beliefs or theories about ability have been shown to influence how people respond to interventions designed to improve their performance (Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004).

People who hold entity beliefs see abilities and other personal characteristics as stable. Hence, effort and persistence to develop strategies for achieving difficult outcomes are often viewed as relatively futile or as evidence of lack of ability. Failure, setback, and errors, or other feedback that suggests substandard performance, are also interpreted as evidence of lack of ability for performing the task effectively. Relatedly, because they view performance as an indicator of ability, goals are often viewed as something they must achieve in order to demonstrate to themselves and others that they possess ability. Hence, these people are vigilant for possible errors or failures, which they try to avoid, that may block their attainment of a goal. They are particularly attentive to and motivated by situational cues that highlight the avoidance of mistakes that would prevent goal attainment.

In contrast to those who hold an entity view, people who have an incremental conception of ability believe that skills can be increased through effort and persistence, and they commit to challenges such as a high goal so that they can improve their portfolio of skills (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Setbacks are more likely to be viewed by them either as opportunities to learn or as reflecting a need to work harder or change strategy, rather than as an indicator of ability or reason to withdraw from a task. Incremental theorists are more likely to experiment with alternative strategies in the hope of learning more about a task, even when doing so may undermine their short-term performance (Wood & Bandura, 1989a). People with an incremental view of ability are attentive to and are motivated by situational cues (e.g., feedback) that highlight their need for improvement. Compared with their counterparts with entity beliefs about the same ability, those with an incremental belief are more likely to view goals as a target to strive for and their performance as an indicator of progress.

In summary, the behavior of entity theorists is directed by normative expectations, whereas incremental theorists are guided by their self-defined expectations. Since needs are a determinant of regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997), the need to fulfill normative expectations versus personal development places entity versus incremental theorists in different regulatory foci (cf. Brebels, De Cremer, & Sedikides, 2008). Because entity theorists’ beliefs about the fixedness of their ability motivates them to minimize errors so as to avoid a negative outcome—failure to demonstrate their competence—their beliefs place them in a regulatory mode that is consistent with a prevention focus (Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004). In contrast, because incremental theorists’ beliefs about the malleability of their ability motivates them to improve so as to attain a positive outcome—success—their beliefs place them in a regulatory mode that is consistent with a promotion focus (Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004). Extension of regulatory
focus to regulatory fit theory suggests how the framing of coaching interacts with recipients’ implicit beliefs to influence their performance.

**Regulatory Fit**

*Regulatory fit* refers to the degree to which the demands and opportunities people experience in the performance of task activities sustain the motivational orientations of their regulatory focus (Higgins, 2005). The central proposition of the regulatory fit argument is that individuals are more engaged and get more value out of an activity when their regulatory focus is matched to the regulatory demands and opportunities of the context. Thus, an individual with a promotion focus will remain more engaged and get greater value out of a task in which the context and other related task demands support an eager and opportunistic striving for the goal in which improvements, learning, and other forms of progress are emphasized. In contrast, an individual with a prevention focus will be more engaged and gain more intrinsic value from the activity when performance, minimization of errors, demonstration of capability, and other forms of responsible behavior are stressed.

Regulatory fit enhances the value associated with the performance of a task as opposed to the value associated with the attainment of a goal. The two are separate (Avnet & Higgins, 2003; Higgins, 2000, 2005). However, on many tasks, engagement and the intrinsic value of activities are usually associated with persistence and better performance (Higgins, 2006). Therefore, regulatory fit is often associated with high performance, particularly on tasks where engagement, attention, and persistence contribute to outcomes, such as acquiring a skill, processing new information, or complying with regulations and advice (Freitas, Liberman, & Higgins, 2002; Hong & Lee, 2008; Lee & Aaker, 2004).

Based on the preceding discussion, we tested a second hypothesis. The arguments underlying it are based on the effects of the regulatory fit of a coach’s framing of the learning process with the implicit beliefs about ability of the recipient.

**Hypothesis 2:** Individual implicit theories of ability moderate the association between the regulatory framing of coaching and the performance effects of coaching.

**Regulatory Orientation of Coaching and Fit**

Their differing conceptions of ability place recipients in either a prevention or a promotion regulatory focus (Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004) in their approach to a task. At the same time, a coach’s motivational orientation (i.e., regulatory focus) in the coaching process creates a context that facilitates and sustains either a prevention or a promotion focus. As a result, individuals with an entity belief about ability typically have a better regulatory fit with coaches who provide a prevention-oriented context, while individuals with an incremental belief about ability typically have a better regulatory fit with coaches who provide a promotion-oriented context. This is because regulatory fit leads to greater engagement in the learning task (Higgins, 2005) and thus enhances the effectiveness of the coaching process.
Both Higgins’s (1997, 1998, 2005) and Dweck’s (1999) theories state that individuals are particularly attentive to and motivated by contextual cues that support their predisposition to adopt either a prevention (entity) or a promotion (incremental) orientation when working on achievement tasks, such as learning a new skill that is complex for them. In the interactions between a coach and a recipient, the communications from the coach provide most of the contextual cues that orient the recipient to the learning process. These include communications of standards or goals; descriptions and demonstrations of appropriate behaviors; and the provision of feedback on achievements, errors, and gaps between actual performance and standards.

It is through the communication of standards, description of actual performance, and feedback that a coach can create a context that encourages and sustains either a promotion or a prevention focus (Kark & Van-Dijk, 2007). The creation of either context is a product of the language and framing of standards, behaviors, and feedback by a coach in his or her communications to the recipient.

A coach with a prevention orientation typically stresses goal attainment in order to avoid failure and hence may make statements to the effect that “if you cannot reach this goal, then you are not cut out for this task and might as well give up.” When describing behaviors and strategies, a coach may emphasize the recipient’s obligation to “get it right.” When providing feedback, the coach may highlight errors and shortfalls as well as how to correct them. During interactions with the recipient, a coach’s language may include words that stress prevention such as “poorly,” “mistakes,” “problems,” and “to be avoided,” words that have been shown to prime a prevention orientation (cf. Hong & Lee, 2008; Lee & Aaker, 2004; Shah et al., 1998). For entity theorists, the framing of goals and behaviors, interpretation of feedback, and language of such a coach match their own expectations of the task (e.g., not making mistakes, getting it right) and the type of guidance they seek in order to minimize errors and avoid failure (Dweck, 1999). This conforms to their entity beliefs, sustains their prevention regulatory focus, and increases their attentiveness to the coach and their engagement in the task (Higgins, 2005).

Incremental theorists look for and are receptive to task framings and feedback that stress mastery over performance, and feedback that encourages them to discover strategies and assesses their progress on the task. A coach who focuses recipients’ attention on the goal of not making mistakes in order to avoid failure is inconsistent with incremental theorists’ belief that mistakes and learning from them are signs of progress. A mismatch between their expectations and a preventive coach likely leads to less engagement with the coach and task.

A coach with a promotion orientation typically describes goals as challenges to be overcome so as to achieve success. Comments are made to the effect, “Let’s see if you can attain this goal” and “Focus on your improvement and progress over time.” When describing behaviors and strategies, the coach emphasizes the need to “test different approaches” and “see what happens if you try this.” When providing feedback, this coach highlights progress and strategies that work versus those that do not. During coaching interactions with a recipient, the coach’s language tends to include words such as “better,” “improve,” and “positive,” words that have been shown to prime a promotion orientation (cf. Hong & Lee, 2008; Lee & Aaker, 2004; Shah et al., 1998).

For incremental theorists, the promotion framing of goals and behaviors, interpretation of feedback in terms of progress and what works, plus the language of a promotion-oriented
coach matches their expectations (e.g., trying different strategies, making progress) of the type of guidance they seek in order to master the task (Dweck, 1999). The framing and language of a promotion-oriented coach conforms to beliefs that sustain the promotion regulatory focus of incremental theorists. This increases their engagement with the task and their learning from the coach (Higgins, 2005). For entity theorists, a mismatch with their expectations makes the promotion-oriented coach less rewarding. Coaching that focuses recipients’ attention on the goal of improving contradicts entity theorists’ beliefs that they cannot improve. This leads to less engagement with the coach and a less successful outcomes from the coaching process. Based on regulatory fit theory, the following hypotheses were tested:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Individuals with an entity belief about ability have higher performance than those who hold an incremental belief when their coach displays a prevention orientation.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Individuals with an incremental belief about ability have higher performance than those who hold an entity belief when their coach displays a promotion orientation.

Two studies were conducted to test these hypotheses. The first was a laboratory experiment that allowed us to isolate the promotion versus prevention framing of coaching of recipients performing a problem-solving task. The second was a correlation study conducted in an organizational setting that assessed the framing of supervisors’ coaching relationships with their subordinates.

**Study 1**

**Method**

**Sample**

The sample consisted of 118 undergraduate university students in a human resource management course in a large university in Canada. Of the students who reported their sex, 57 (48%) were female and 62 (52%) were male. Their mean age was 21.44 years ($SD = 2.25$), and their mean grade point average (GPA) was 3.27 ($SD = 0.56$) on a 4.0 scale.

**The Task**

Consistent with Wageman (2001), who identified “teaching the group to use a problem solving process” (p. 565) as a coaching behavior in the *Fortune 500* organization where she conducted her research, the task that the participants performed was a fishbone diagram. This problem-solving tool is widely used to generate and organize information in the identification of “root causes” or potential solutions to problems in organizational settings (Wood, Cogin, & Beckmann, 2009). The word *fishbone* refers to the appearance of the diagram, which has a head where the main issue or problem is recorded and spines that are labeled with major categories of root causes or solutions. Specific causes or solutions are recorded on the spines under each category to which they best fit. Spines containing a specific cause
or solution may be extended to include subcauses or subsolutions. The process is dynamic in that the categories and sets of causes or solutions within each category may be reorganized periodically and then redrawn on a clean fishbone diagram. There are specific rules for the construction of fishbone diagrams, which are “Clearly define the problem (Head),” “Clearly identify the problem categories/causes/solutions (large bones),” “Correctly pursue each line of causality back to its root cause” (small bones), and “Organize categories into subcategories clearly and logically.”

Completed fishbone diagrams can be assessed and scored for how well the rules have been applied and the overall quality of the analyses, based on how well the specific causes or solutions are organized within each of the categories and subcategories on the final diagram. In addition to providing a clear set of standards for the assessment of performance, the rules are relatively straightforward to teach and master in one coaching session. Because fishbone diagrams are used in problem solving on a wide range of tasks in organizations (Rudin, 1990), coaching people on the use of the tool has practical relevance (Latham & Lee, 1986).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (coach’s prevention vs. promotion focus) × 2 (participants’ incremental vs. entity beliefs) design. After random assignment to the two coaching conditions, we primed rather than assessed dispositional implicit beliefs to enable us to have a fully crossed, between-participants factorial design. Considerable evidence indicates that the effects of entity versus incremental beliefs about ability are consistent across trait measures and situationally primed beliefs (e.g., Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). The priming was done by having participants read a description of the determinants of intelligence that stressed either fixed, innate determinants for those in the entity belief condition or development determinants for those in the incremental belief condition. Participants then completed a set of questions that provided a manipulation check on the priming of entity versus incremental beliefs.

Coaching of an individual on how to create fishbone diagrams followed immediately after the participants finished the questionnaire on the entity versus incremental beliefs. During the coaching session, depending upon the condition to which they were randomly assigned, participants observed a coach using either a prevention or a promotion focus when coaching a confederate on how to produce a fishbone diagram. Observing a recipient versus being the direct recipient of another’s actions does not have significantly different consequences on the expended effort following action (Spencer & Rupp, 2009). Hence, the performance of the participants should be influenced by the coaching interaction they observed in a similar manner to them being the direct recipient (cf. Avery, Richeson, Hebl, & Ambady, 2009).

Groups of participants observed the individual receiving coaching. This was done for three reasons. First, on and off the shop floor and in and outside the classroom, employees and students of management benefit from the role-modeling effects of observing a coach provide coaching to another individual. This is because role modeling is an effective way to enhance learning of new skills (Wood & Bandura, 1989b). Second, presenting coaching in this way allowed for the demonstration of the behaviors that are frequently reported.
learning-related coaching behaviors—teaching, providing feedback, providing practical application, observing, and modeling (D’Abate et al., 2003). Third, demonstrating coaching with a live model gave the participants an opportunity to observe the behavioral interactions between the coach and recipient and listen to the communication between the two as the coaching relationship developed. This permitted participants to experience how coaches relate to and communicate with others (Evered & Selman, 1989).

Throughout the coaching session, the coach and the individual who was directly coached stood in front of the group of participants and recorded all work on a whiteboard that was clearly visible to the participants (teaching, role modeling, and observing). The participants completed each of the steps required to create a fishbone diagram immediately following the coaching of that step (providing practical application). The participants were able to question the coach at any time during the coaching demonstration (teaching). After the model had completed the diagram, the coach posed questions and gave feedback (providing feedback) that was consistent with the coaching orientation of the experimental condition.

To hold nonmanipulated conditions constant, the coach and the model were the same two people in both the prevention and the promotion focus coaching conditions. The model was a female student, similar in age to the participants. The coach, who was older than the students, was also female.

The session ended with the participants completing another fishbone diagram that was returned for objective assessment. After the participants had submitted their fishbone diagrams, each one was given an information sheet that provided a debriefing of the experiment.

**Manipulations and Measures**

*Entity–incremental beliefs* were induced by asking participants to read a passage, developed by Hong et al. (1999), that described the properties and determinants of intelligence as either fixed and innate or developmental, respectively. For example, the entity prime included statements such as, “The results of research show that intelligence is not influenced by education or developmental opportunities and that intelligence is fixed long before people reach adulthood.” In the incremental prime, developmental statements were made about intelligence such as, “The results of research show that intelligent people are the product of their environments and their abilities are continually being shaped, even in adulthood.”

As a manipulation check on the effectiveness of the priming manipulation, participants completed a questionnaire regarding their beliefs about ability immediately after they had read the brief article on intelligence. The eight-item questionnaire, developed by Dweck (1999), included four items that assessed entity beliefs (e.g., “You can learn new skills, but you really can’t change your basic abilities”) and four items that assessed incremental beliefs (e.g., “You can increase your basic abilities”). Entity items were reverse coded to reflect an incremental orientation, and the eight items were averaged to give a measure of beliefs ranging from strong entity (low) to strong incremental (high) beliefs. This scale had adequate internal validity. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .81.

The manipulation of the beliefs about ability was tested with a single-factor ANOVA with the two levels of the prime (entity or incremental) as a between-participant’s factor and
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