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IMPROVING PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK PERCEPTIONS THROUGH MOTIVATING LANGUAGE USE

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Abstract:

This study examines the link between leader motivating language and follower performance feedback perceptions It also explores whether follower/leader gender compositions moderate this relationship. Results show that a follower's performance feedback perceptions benefit from a leader's use of motivating language. This relationship is further positively moderated by the presence of certain follower/leader gender matches and mismatches. The results provide support for a stronger use of motivating language in diverse workforces. This characteristic gives motivating language the potential to support diversity in organizations. Implications of the study's findings and future avenues for research are discussed. Considering the increasing need for more effective performance reviews, motivating language might be one of the future tools to increase their positive perceptions and ultimate success, especially in a diverse workforce.

Key words: *Leader Motivating Language, Performance Feedback, Gender, Diversity, Leadership Communication*

1. Introduction

Performance feedback is a fundamental communication tool in employee performance management (DeNisi and Murphy, 2017). Constructive feedback is needed for providing directions, for giving and receiving information, creating meaningfulness of the job, and showing a genuine interest in the personal development of an employee. However, looking at today's organizations, many firms struggle to implement the right employee performance appraisal system and don't realize its value, leading to dissatisfied employees (Cook and Crossman, 2004; Iqbal and Kureshi, 2016; Thompson and Dalton, 1970). Performance feedback usually revolves around giving directions, thus undermining its potential for constructive feedback, and often resulting in low performance feedback

satisfaction rates. Reduced feedback satisfaction can be expressed in lower performance, job satisfaction, etc. Furthermore, employees might even resent feedback itself and develop a negative, fearful attitude towards it, instead of approaching it as an opportunity for growth.

Alternatively, Alvero et al. (2001) also underline the essential role of performance feedback in improving performance by citing fundamental studies in the field of organizational behavior by Komaki et al. (1978) and Sulzer Azaroff (1980) and discussing its use in various organizational settings. The authors cite different definitions of performance feedback. This paper will adopt the definition by Rummler and Brache (1995), defining performance feedback as "information that tells performers what and how well they are doing" (Alvero et al., 2001, p. 5; Rummler and Brache, 1995).

There is no doubt that feedback is critical for improving employee performance (Kuvaas, 2006). This paper will focus on the content of such feedback communication and employee perceptions of these messages. Furthermore, leaders in organizations require a tool that includes Rummler and Brache's (1995) definition to guide performance feedback communication. One theory that incorporates these qualities and that has been gaining credibility over the past few decades is motivating language (ML) theory. Current research on motivating language finds significant links between ML and employee outcomes such as more effective decision making, higher job satisfaction, higher communication satisfaction toward a leader, higher perceived leader competence, higher team creativity quality, higher self-efficacy, enhanced organizational commitment, lower absenteeism, and lower intent to turnover (Holmes, 2012; Madlock and Sexton, 2015; Mayfield et al., 1998, 2015; Mayfield and Mayfield, 2012, 2017; McMeans, 2002; Sharbrough et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2009; Zorn and Ruccio, 1998).

When integrated into the performance feedback process, motivating language may nurture the experience by providing the appropriate leadership communication strategies to increase how well performance feedback is being perceived. Therefore, this study develops and tests a model that explains how leaders can use motivating language to increase positive performance feedback perceptions. Secondly and due to its exploratory nature, this study measures the influence of gender match/ mismatch on performance feedback perceptions. A match occurs when both feedback participants (leader-follower) are of the same gender. A mismatch happens when these pairs include mixed genders.

Overall, this study aims to explore whether motivating language has a significant relationship with performance feedback perceptions. It also addresses the question of whether a gender match or a gender mismatch moderate the relationships between motivating language and performance feedback perceptions.

These inquiries contribute to scholarship and practice by shedding light on the specifics of effective leader-to-follower communication during the performance feedback process. The study also examines the possible effects of leader/follower gender matches/mismatches on the relationship between motivating language and performance feedback perceptions. In doing so, it adds value to diversity studies in organizational settings, expanding the human resources literature. Furthermore, this article gives new insights into motivating language applications.

2. Selected Literature Review

2.1. *Motivating Language Theory*

Motivating language theory asserts that leader speech can motivate employees and in turn, can improve desirable follower and organizational outcomes. Motivating language communicates follower value, aligns their personal goals with organizational vision, dispels ambiguity, is transparent and emotionally supportive. Introduced by Sullivan (1988), motivating language is "a comprehensive model developed to guide leaders' communication strategies in order to improve worker outcomes" (Madlock and Sexton, 2015, p. 256). Such communications bridge leader intentions with employee motivation and are especially useful during times of change. But leaders often struggle to understand just what effective communication really is.

Sullivan (1988) addressed this question through conceptualizing motivational language theory (now mostly referred to as 'motivating language theory') as a template for enriching and organizing strategic leader speech. In brief, he advocated a broader spectrum of linguistic potential as a way to enhance employee motivation (Sullivan, 1988).

This scholar categorized three leader-subordinate oral communication dimensions: (1) Direction-Giving Language, (2) Empathetic Language, and (3) Meaning-Making Language (Sullivan, 1988; Mayfield et al., 2014). These dimensions have been operationalized into a reliable and well-validated scale in several investigations (e.g. Holmes, 2012; Madlock and Sexton, 2015; Mayfield et al., 1995; Sharbrough et al., 2006).

Direction-giving language is the most frequently used leader talk. It helps in providing clear directions and goals for employees to strive for. These messages reduce ambiguity, as they explain what needs to be done, how and when. Direction-giving language also prioritizes tasks. This language style helps address questions when an employee enters a new organization or faces change, such as 'What am I supposed to do?', 'How am I supposed to do it?'.

Empathetic language is far more complex and used less frequently. It surpasses informational talk. Empathetic language communicates genuine concern, support, understanding, and appreciation for the employee and his/ her personal background. With this ML dimension, a leader expresses perspective-taking and genuine compassion through putting her/ himself in the follower's shoes. Empathetic language creates affective relations by using statements, such as 'How are you feeling today?", 'Let me know, if you need anything', 'You're doing a great job!'.

Meaning-making language is far more complex as well, which probably explains its less common usage. It motivates employees by providing meaningfulness of the work someone is assigned to do and aligns his/ her goals with the organization's goals and vision. Furthermore, it clarifies cultural/ behavioral norms at work based on the organization's culture. Its usage answers questions, such as 'What's the story here?', 'Why is my work important?'.

2.2. *The Relationship between Performance Feedback Perception and Motivating Language*

In this study, performance feedback perception is defined and measured by four components used in earlier research by Greller (1978). Performance feedback perception consists of: (1) Perceived Utility (i.e., How much did the employee learn from the appraisal?; Did it create a better understanding of the leader's expectations?), (2) Satisfaction (i.e., How satisfied is the employee with the review?; Could something have been done differently?), (3) Anxiety (i.e., Did the employee experience negative feelings during the review?), and (4) Derogation (i.e. Did the leader capture the performance accurately?).

How an employee perceives the performance feedback received from the leader heavily depends on the way it is communicated. In his study, Greller (1978) concludes that "the key factor associated with positive results from an appraisal interview is the creation of a sense of ownership or psychological participation" (p. 657). Ownership is described as there being an "acceptance of responsibility by the subordinate," a subordinate's belief "that their thoughts were welcomed and that those topics which they felt required attention were addressed," as well as her/his feelings "that their work was praised by the boss" (Greller, 1978, p. 649-650). Furthermore, the notion of justice perception in the performance feedback process has been heavily studied as well as the role of participation (e.g. Cawley et al., 1998; DeNisi and Smith, 2014; DeNisi and Murphy, 2017; Taylor et al., 1995).

These findings concur with the basic tenets of motivating language theory. Overall, it is important to point out that motivating language transparently provides information, i.e., "message content that reduces uncertainty", which is crucial to motivation (Sullivan, 1988, p. 104). Several motivation theories, such as arousal theories of motivation, choice theories of motivation, expectancy theory, and operant conditioning, explain how the process of providing information will lead to a reduction in worker uncertainty (Sullivan, 1988). The next paragraphs will discuss how each dimension of motivating language may affect an employee's performance feedback perception.

First, direction-giving language provides the information needed for constructive performance feedback through explicating organizational goals, energizing goal attainment, setting objectives, dispelling ambiguity, and linking rewards to organizational goals (Mayfield et al., 2015). Clarifying goals and time guidelines for achieving those reduces uncertainty (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2016). The need for an employee to understand her or his job responsibilities is based on goal-setting theory, which "views workers-and all humans-as creatures trying endlessly to turn flawed beliefs into perfect knowledge" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 105). Goal-setting theory (Locke and Latham, 1990, 2002) implies that an employee who has specific, difficult goals will perform better than a peer with only general, easy goals. The more often constructive performance feedback is given via direction-giving language, the more ambiguity is reduced.

Direction-giving language (combined with other ML dimensions) is not restricted to just positive feedback. For example, a leader may inquire about a lower performance, 'Unfortunately, you did not meet the performance standards during the past month. Is there

anything I can do to support you in reaching your performance goals?'. According to Mayfield and Mayfield (2016), direction-giving oral language is also rooted in "expectancy theory and instrumental leadership in path goal theory" (p. 4). If a person expects a specific outcome as a result of a certain achievable behavior and if the rewards from this outcome are valuable to that person, he or she will engage in this behavior. These messages may also result in performance feedback being perceived as more just, as one knows what specific goals need to be achieved to receive desired rewards and a good performance evaluation. Moreover, motivating language helps performance reviews to be more developmental, i.e., motivating language assists in career progression. By providing constructive feedback, an employee can develop through reflecting on past and present achievements. Collaboratively, with the leader, he/ she sets new goals to strive for in order to progress to improved performance.

The next motivating language dimension, empathetic language, "occur(s) when a leader expresses humanity to an employee, and surpasses the boundaries of an economic exchange rapport" (Mayfield et al., 2015, p. 100). This kind of oral language expresses communication on a deeper, more personal level by showing support for, understanding of and appreciation for employees and their daily work efforts and contributions (Miller, 2013). A leader using empathetic language does so by showing compassion and "genuine concern for hardships encountered by employees" (Mayfield et al., 2015, p. 100). This language style is rooted in "path goal's supportive leadership (actions that nurture employee relationships), and people-directed (strong concern for individual and interpersonal satisfaction at work) leadership models in organizational behavior" (House, 1971; Mayfield et al., 2015, p. 100; Miner, 2005; Sullivan, 1988; Yukl, 2013).

Empathetic language responds to employees who want to receive praise for their work during a performance appraisal (Greller, 1978). However, empathetic language may not just be praise like "You are doing a great job!", it also may be giving support for an employee who needs to improve his or her performance, such as "I noticed, your performance has been decreasing, how can we address this issue to bring you back on track?". A study conducted by Meinecke et al. (2017) supports the role of a leaders' relation-oriented statements (i.e. empathetic language). They find that giving praise, actively listening, and providing support leads to active employee contributions to a performance review, as well as to higher interview success.

Lastly, a leader's meaning-making language gives the employee a higher purpose in the work he or she is assigned to do (Mayfield et al., 2015). It aligns an employee's values with the goals and vision of the company. When a follower sees her/ his unique contribution to the larger picture a sense of ownership increases. (Parker, 2014, p. 667) states that "enriched jobs … enhance individuals' reason to be proactive, for example, by giving individuals a better appreciation of the impact of their work and by promoting flexible role orientations in which individuals feel ownership for broader work goals (Grant, 2007; Parker, 2014; Parker et al., 2001). It can even lead to organizational citizenship behavior, as employees will strive towards fulfilling the leader's performance expectations (Gutierrez-Wirsching et al., 2015). Most likely, followers will take more responsibility and initiative based on performance feedback that includes meaning-making language.

A sense of ownership also relates to perceived justice. Colquitt et al. (2001) underline the importance of justice in fairness perception. In the context of performance feedback, interactional justice is of special importance, i.e., the quality of interpersonal treatment. Interactional justice combines two types of treatment, 'interpersonal justice,' which "reflects the degree to which people are treated with politeness, dignity, and respect by authorities or third parties involved in executing procedures or determining outcomes" and 'informational justice,' which "focuses on the explanations provided to people that convey information about why procedures were used in a certain way or why outcomes were distributed in a certain fashion" (p. 427). A perception of interactional justice should play an important role during the feedback process. Interpersonal justice reflects both empathetic and meaning-making language (respect and recognition). And informational justice captures the essence of direction-giving language. Hence, motivating language may improve performance feedback perceptions through increasing perceived interactional justice.

Overall, all three dimensions of motivating language may affect performance feedback perception by setting clear goals one has to strive towards, and letting the employee become part of this process, creating meaning for doing so, and praising/ offering constructive guidance about achievement. Additionally, Sharbrough et al. (2006) found that motivating language is positively linked to perceived leadership competence, which heavily influences performance feedback perception, particularly since the derogation factor measures the overall competence of a leader to provide feedback. This research further supports a link between motivating language and performance feedback perception.

Based on the previous discussion, it is hypothesized that

Hypothesis 1: A leader's use of motivating language positively influences a follower's performance feedback perception.

Hypothesis 1a: A leader's use of motivating language positively influences a follower's performance feedback utility perception.

Hypothesis 1b: A leader's use of motivating language positively influences a follower's performance feedback satisfaction perception.

Hypothesis 1c: A leader's use of motivating language negatively influences a follower's performance feedback anxiety perception.

Hypothesis 1d: A leader's use of motivating language negatively influences a follower's performance feedback derogation perception.

2.3. *Gender and Communication Style Differences*

The study of gender differences has been of interest in scholarship for several decades. Tajfel et al. (1979) introduced social identity theory, stating that we define ourselves based on our group membership(s), including gender. (Eagly, 1987) further introduced the study of sex differences in social behavior based on social role theory. Social role theory states that women and men act in a certain way (i.e., they take on different roles) in social situations, because society has certain expectations for each gender based on inherent physical differences (e.g., men traditionally occupied higher-

level jobs and were paid more, while women assumed more domestic responsibilities and often had lower status with less pay).

Gender differences do not only affect social behavior but sparked much debate in scholarly research on their effect on communication styles. It is important to point out that the purpose of examining the results of this research is to demonstrate sex differences in communication style, not differences in the effectiveness of different genders and their way of communicating. (Carli, 2016) point out that when differences in communication across gender are reported, "they typically reveal more status asserting, dominant and negative communications by men and more collaborative, warm and supportive communications by women" (p. 70) (Carli, 2001; Carli and Bukatko, 2000). Men are characterized as keeping more eye contact while talking, and a meta-analysis by (Anderson and Leaper, 1998) revealed that men interrupt more often than women to have a certain standing/dominance in conversations (Carli, 2016). The author further acknowledges that women's speech is "more socially supportive of others" and encourages others to speak (p. 71).

Carli (2016) also discussed gender composition effects, emphasizing that "people modify their communication style depending on the gender of the person with whom they are interacting" (p. 72). Hence, gender differences in communication are present for both mixed- and same-sex interactions. However, most studies report "stronger differences in same-sex interactions, with higher levels of positive social behavior and lower levels of task behavior directed at female partners" (Carli, 2016, p. 72) (Aries, 1976; Carli, 1989; Johnson et al., 1996; Piliavin and Martin, 1978; Wheelan and Verdi, 1992). This pattern was also evident in a meta-analysis by (Dindia and Allen, 1992) who found that "both men and women self-disclosed more to women than to men" (Carli, 2016, p. 72). Related scholarship by (Hall and Braunwald, 1981) reports that "pleasant warm voices were most characteristic of conversations between women and least characteristic of conversations between men, with men and women behaving more similarly in mixed-sex interactions" (Carli, 2016, p. 72). Carli (2016, 1989) further finds that women among themselves convey more encouragement and support than men do among themselves and that there is no gender difference for mixed-gender communication. Results by (Brouwer et al., 1979) and (Sayers and Sherblom, 1987) find that "interactions with women involve less hierarchy and more communality and warmth than interactions with men, whereas interactions with men elicit more competition for dominance than those with women" (Carli, 2016, p. 72).

Goman (2016) conducted cross-national research on gender differences in communication in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, and found three common strengths and weaknesses in women's and men's communication styles. Women's top three communication strengths included the "ability to read body language and pick up nonverbal cues; good listening skills; and effective display of empathy." Their top three weaknesses in communication included being overly emotional; meandering- will not get to the point; and not being authoritative. Men, on the other hand, exhibited strengths like commanding physical presence; direct and to-the-point interactions; and an effective display of power." Their top three weaknesses included being "overly blunt and direct; insensitive to audience reactions; and being too confident in own opinion."

Conversely, Ragins (1999) studied gender differences in mentorship and expected gender differences based on social identity theory and the similarity-attraction paradigm.

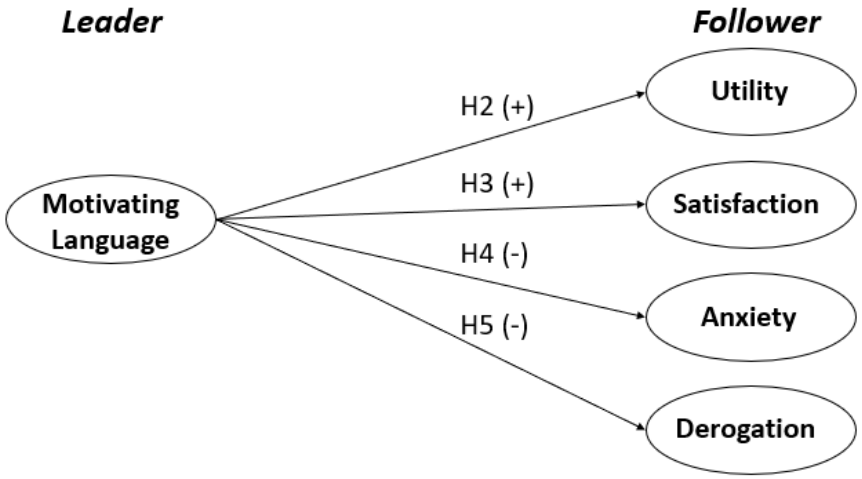
However, her research did not translate into benefits in mentorship if a gender match is present. Nonetheless, social benefits (e.g., private meetings/ interaction after work hours) between female mentors and female protégés were found.

Based on the previous discussion, I want to explore whether the relationship between motivating language and performance feedback perception is moderated by the presence of a leader/follower gender match or a gender mismatch.

Research Question 1: Do leader/follower gender matches/mismatches affect the relationship between ML and performance feedback perception?

The following conceptual model (figure 1) presents the framework used in this study and depicts the hypothesized relationship between motivating language and performance feedback perception:

Figure 1: A Model of the Effects of Leader Motivating Language on Performance Feedback Perception



3.Methodology

3.1. *Analysis*

The data were collected on the individual level of analysis using Mechanical Turk by Amazon (Buhrmester et al., 2011). The Mechanical Turk website lets a researcher post a call ("HIT") that can be accessed by a large diverse pool of possible respondents. The HIT contains information of the task required (complete a study on the workplace for this study), time expected to complete the task (10-20 minutes for this study), expected respondent qualifications (in this case being employed and from the U.S.), the payment amount for completing the task, and confirms respondent confidentiality. Once the HIT is posted online, Mechanical Turk participants can view it and answer the survey.

A sample of 142 qualified working individuals from the U.S. was collected. Mechanical Turk features the ability to select participants based on certain characteristics such as geographic location or work experience. Research on Mechanical Turk reports a high resemblance between US subjects and the overall US population (Ross et al., 2010). Overall, it is a high-quality tool that meets and satisfies standard social science survey

requirements (Peer et al., 2014). Also, Mechanical Turk offers financial compensation as an incentive to participants of the study.

To measure each variable of the model, the study drew from and adapted existing scales that have been proven reliable and valid in past research studies, i.e. the motivating language scale (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2009), and the performance feedback perception scale (Greller, 1978). To test the hypotheses, the study used WarpPLS, a software that is based on structural equation modeling using the partial least squares methods. A confirmatory factor analysis and structural analysis were performed accordingly, whose results will be discussed below.

3.2. *Results*

The Mechanical Turk HIT resulted in 142 responses. The sample was composed of 51% men, 80% were white, 9% were African American, 7% were Asian, and no other racial group accounted for more than 5% of the sample. The average respondent's age was 36 years. As for educational levels, 24% of workers had a high school degree, 23% had an associate degree, 35% had a four-year college degree, and 18% had a graduate degree.

The average respondent had 14.8 years of full-time work experience, 3.6 years of part-time work experience, had been working with their current employer for 5.9 years, had been in their current position for 5.2 years, and had been with their current supervisor for 3.7 years. The size of the organizations that respondents worked in, ranged from small (less than 100 employees), medium (100 to 1,000 employees), to large (more than 1,000 employees) with 25%, 44%, and 31% of the respondents falling in each respective category. The three largest sectors that respondents came from were health care, retail sales, and information technology –accounting for 20%, 15%, and 13% respectively. Most respondents were either professional employees (49%) or skilled labor (38%), with only 13% being unskilled labor. The largest number of participants were in management jobs (25%), 16% in the professional, scientific, or technical areas, 15% in healthcare support, and 14% in office and administrative support.

To analyze the data, two-stage structural equation modeling was performed. First, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to check for reliability and validity. To test for reliability of the scales used, composite reliability values and Cronbach's alpha values were analyzed and compared to empirically proven thresholds (Kock, 2017). The reliabilities of the used scales were maintained in this study (see Table 1). All reliabilities exceed a value of 0.7 or (in case of the derogation factor) are very close to this value (Kock, 2017).

Table 1: Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

	ML	**UTLY**	**SAT**	**ANX**	**DER**
Composite Reliability	0.943	0.913	0.855	0.860	0.815
Cronbach's Alpha	0.909	0.857	0.743	0.783	0.696

Next, the data were analyzed to check for convergent and discriminant validity. Table 2 presents the loadings and cross-loadings of each latent variable. All P-values are statistically significant since they are equal to or lower than 0.05 (less than 0.001 in all cases). The cross-loadings have values higher equal to or greater than 0.5 (Kock, 2017). Therefore, the model has acceptable convergent validity. To check for discriminant validity, the correlations among latent variables with the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) were examined. All values on the diagonal of the table containing correlations among latent variables, which are the square root of the average variances extracted for each latent variable, should be higher than any of the values above or below them, in the same column (Kock, 2017). This is the case, as shown in Table 3. Hence, the model has acceptable discriminant validity.

Table 2: Loadings and Cross-Loadings

	ML	UTLY	SAT	ANX	DER	SE	P-Value
DGAVG	(0.952)	0.033	-0.036	-0.007	-0.132	0.068	<0.001
EMAVG	(0.927)	0.002	-0.016	-0.088	-0.112	0.068	<0.001
MMAVG	(0.880)	-0.038	0.056	0.1	0.261	0.069	<0.001
UTLY1	0.023	(0.882)	-0.043	0.107	-0.036	0.069	<0.001
UTLY2	0.049	(0.906)	0.033	-0.065	0.118	0.068	<0.001
UTLY3	-0.075	(0.858)	0.009	-0.042	-0.088	0.069	<0.001
SAT4	0.094	0.047	(0.862)	0.018	0.26	0.069	<0.001
SAT5	-0.076	0.106	(0.876)	-0.149	0.065	0.069	<0.001
SAT6	-0.021	-0.192	(0.695)	0.165	-0.404	0.072	<0.001
ANX7	0.008	-0.149	0.342	(0.803)	0.271	0.07	<0.001
ANX8	0.153	-0.164	0.121	(0.819)	0.195	0.07	<0.001
ANX9	-0.053	0.251	-0.066	(0.749)	-0.065	0.071	<0.001
ANX10	-0.124	0.089	-0.438	(0.741)	-0.442	0.071	<0.001
DER11	-0.075	-0.128	0.019	0.109	(0.788)	0.07	<0.001
DER12	-0.037	0.117	-0.103	-0.125	(0.783)	0.07	<0.001
DER13	0.228	0.084	0.215	0.146	(0.588)	0.073	<0.001
DER14	-0.064	-0.055	-0.084	-0.102	(0.728)	0.071	<0.001

Table 3: Correlations among Latent Variables with Square Roots of AVEs

	ML	UTLY	SAT	ANX	DER
ML	(0.920)	0.556	0.324	-0.130	-0.148
UTLY	0.556	(0.882)	0.455	-0.111	-0.193
SAT	0.324	0.455	(0.815)	-0.608	-0.679
ANX	-0.130	-0.111	-0.608	(0.779)	0.605
DER	-0.148	-0.193	-0.679	0.605	(0.726)

Finally, a test for multicollinearity is performed. To do so, full collinearity variance inflation factors (VIFs) are being analyzed as a measure of multicollinearity among variables (both indicators and latent variables). Table 4 depicts the correlations among latent variable error terms with VIFs. All measures are equal to or lower than 3.3 (Kock, 2017). Therefore, the model has no multicollinearity, which also implies that there is no common method bias (Kock, 2017). These steps of the first stage prove the reliability and overall validity of the study's model.

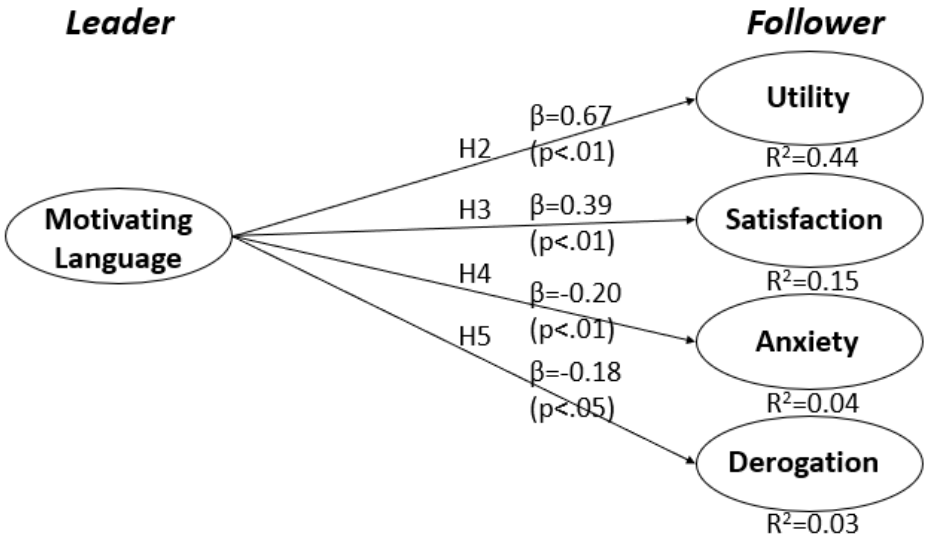
Table 4: Full Collinearity Variance Inflation Factors

	ML	**UTLY**	**SAT**	**ANX**	**DER**
Full Collin. VIF	1.463	1.742	2.734	1.847	2.109

The second stage of the SEM analysis involves the structural analysis, which results in the path coefficients, their significance levels, as well as relevant R-squared values. The model with the main results is shown in Figure 2 and demonstrates that all hypotheses are supported by the data. The beta coefficients are standardized partial regression coefficients provided for each independent–dependent variable pair. All beta-coefficients are statistically significant at the $P < .01$ level ($P < .05$ for ML and Performance Feedback Derogation Perception). R-squared coefficients are shown under dependent variables; they reflect the percentage of explained variance for those variables by their independent variables in each variable block.

Greater levels of motivating language were associated with greater levels of performance feedback utility perception ($\beta = 0.67$, $P < .01$), supporting hypothesis 1a. Higher levels of motivating language were also associated with higher levels of performance feedback satisfaction perception ($\beta = 0.39$, $P < .01$), supporting hypothesis 1b. On the contrary, larger levels of motivating language were associated with smaller levels of performance feedback anxiety perception ($\beta = - 0.20$, $P < .01$), supporting hypothesis 1c. Greater levels of motivating language were associated with lower levels of performance feedback derogation perception ($\beta = - 0.18$, $P < .05$), supporting hypothesis 1d. Overall, since hypotheses 1a-1d were supported, hypothesis 1 is as well, i.e. motivating language positively influences a follower's performance feedback perception.

Figure 2: A Model showing the Correlations between Leader Motivating Language and Performance Feedback Perception



To address Research Question 1, a full latent growth analysis was conducted (Kock, 2017). To do so, four possible leader/follower gender match/mismatch categories were created (Match-MM, Match-FF, Mismatch-FM, Mismatch-MF). For example, the category "Mismatch-FM" represents having a female leader providing performance feedback to a male follower. These four categories were then converted into numerical values. An initial analysis of each category showed a leader's use of motivating language for the respective leader/follower gender match/mismatch category. The categories rank as followed, going from the least to the highest use of motivating language: Match-MM, Match-FF, Mismatch-FM, Mismatch-MF, as seen in Table 5. Overall, the results show that a leaders' use of motivating language increases with the presence of a gender mismatch. More specifically, motivating language use seems to be the lowest when a male leader provides performance feedback to a male follower, and the highest when a male leader provides performance feedback to a female follower.

Table 5: Use of ML by Gender Composition

	Use of ML
Match- MM	0.138
Match- FF	0.236
Mismatch- FM	0.316
Mismatch- MF	0.678

The subsequent full latent growth analysis treats the moderating variable 'gender match/mismatch' as "latent," i.e., it does not include it directly in the model (Kock, 2017). Hence, it does not "disrupt" the model. Results of the full latent growth analysis show that group membership (i.e., Match-MM, Match-FF, Mismatch-FM, Mismatch-MF) positively and significantly (at P<.001) moderates the relationship between motivating language and

performance feedback utility perception, as well as the relationship between motivating language and performance feedback satisfaction perception. Both moderating effects increase when going from a gender match (Match-MM) to a gender mismatch (Mismatch-MF). Hence, moderation between the two relationships increases in the following order going from weakest to strongest: Match-MM, Match-FF, Mismatch-FM, Mismatch-MF. However, there seems to be no evidence for a moderating relationship for anxiety and derogation. An overview of the results can be found in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of Full Latent Growth Analysis

	ML
UTLY	0.412 (P < .001)
SAT	0.242 (P = .001)
ANX	-0.133 (n.s.)
DER	-0.127 (n.s.)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether motivating language has an impact on performance feedback perception and to explore whether follower/leader gender matches/mismatches would make a difference. As discussed, the results show that all hypotheses were supported, meaning that all three dimensions of motivating language have a significant positive impact on performance feedback perception. Furthermore, gender mismatches increase the use of a leader's motivating language. The results of the full latent growth analysis proof that follower/leader gender matches/mismatches moderate the hypothesized relationships in the case of performance feedback utility and satisfaction perception. These moderations increase when going from a gender match (Match-MM) to a gender mismatch (Mismatch-MF). Therefore, a male leader uses the lowest level of motivating language when providing performance feedback to a male follower yet uses the highest level of motivating language when evaluating a female follower.

The findings of this research contribute to scholarship in multiple ways. First, they add knowledge to the performance feedback effectiveness literature. Second, they help fill the gap about language content in performance feedback. Third, the study's findings advance motivating language research in the context of leader/follower gender matches/mismatches. Finally, this study used a cross-industry, diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the results.

However, the study results are limited due to its nature of being a cross-sectional survey restricted to the U.S. only and a limited sample size. Therefore, future research on a larger sample size should use a longitudinal mixed-method (i.e., qualitative and quantitative data) research design that studies the linkages in an international setting. This way, it is possible to study a possible change in perceptions after for instance three months. This will provide richer data and a deeper understanding of the use of motivating language and its impact on performance feedback perceptions.

The results of this study have significant implications for practice. Motivating language could be part of a performance review training for managers. For example, companies could give a workshop in which managers will receive training on how to effectively use motivating language when giving feedback to an employee about her or his performance. Hence, it can be used as a frame of reference when providing constructive feedback.

Additionally, the results of this study show us that gender differences matter in the use of motivating language and its impact on performance feedback perception, i.e., gender does count in performance feedback perceptions. However, this study presents an initial exploratory stage for examining motivating language in the context of leader/follower gender matches/mismatches. The question of why these moderating effects appear needs to be further studied, i.e., why do male followers use motivating language least when providing feedback to male followers, and why do they use is most when evaluating female followers? One explanation could be that motivating language serves as a tool to overcome gender barriers in the performance feedback process. Previous literature tells us that gender differences in social behavior and communication exist. Hence, a male leader might feel a stronger need to use motivating language towards a female follower than a male counterpart. This might provide support for a stronger use of motivating language in diverse workforces. This characteristic gives motivating language the potential to support diversity in organizations.

In conclusion, there is convincing evidence that a leader's use of motivating language has a positive impact on performance feedback perception. Therefore, its usage and further exploration in other (e.g., international) settings may be beneficial both for researchers and practitioners. Considering the increasing need for more effective performance reviews, motivating language might be the future tool to increase their positive perceptions and ultimate success, as well as promote diversity in organizations.

5. References

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