

Can Feedback Feel Good? The Link Between Motivating Language and Performance Feedback Perception

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine whether motivating language has an impact on performance feedback perception. Results show that a follower's performance feedback perception benefits from a leader's use of motivating language. The results provide support for a stronger use of motivating language in workforces. 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 the future tool to increase their positive perceptions and ultimately their success.

Introduction

"You're cold! Now you're getting warmer! You're HOT!" Even children playing the popular "Hot or Cold" game know that to perform well (find the hidden object) people need to be told how they're doing." (U.S. Office of Personnel Management). The U.S. Office of Personnel Management recognizes the importance of performance feedback: "Without feedback, you're walking blind. At best, you'll accidentally reach your goal. At worst, you'll wander aimlessly through the dark, never reaching your destination." (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d., para. 1).

Many firms today struggle to implement the right employee performance appraisal system, leading to dissatisfied employees (Iqbal & Kureshi, 2016; Cook & Crossman, 2004; Thompson & Dalton, 1970). Iqbal and Kureshi (2016) argue that "Performance Management has been one of the most criticized yet widely implemented HR functional strategy that serves the sole purpose of ensuring the achievement of organizational objectives" (p. 4).

Alvero et al. (2001) 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 (1978) 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" (Cited in Alvero et al., 2001, p. 5).

Performance feedback is a fundamental communication tool in employee performance management (DeNisi & 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, in today's organizations, performance feedback usually revolves around giving directions, thus undermining its potential for constructive feedback and often resulting in low rates of performance feedback satisfaction. 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.

There is no doubt that feedback is critical for improving employee performance (Kuvaas, 2006). This paper focuses on the content of such feedback communication and employee perceptions of these messages. One theory that addresses effective communication and that has been gaining credibility over the past few decades is motivating language (ML) theory. Current research on motivating language finds “positive, significant relationships between ML, and desirable employee behaviors and attitudes including more effective decision making, higher job satisfaction, higher communication satisfaction toward a leader, higher perceived leader competence, more innovation, higher job performance, higher team creativity quality, higher employee promotive and prohibitive voice, higher self-efficacy, enhanced organizational commitment in Mexico, lower absenteeism, and lower intent to turnover” (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016, p. 5; Holmes, 2012; Madlock & Sexton, 2015; Mayfield et al., 1998; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2015; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; McMeans, 2001; Sharbrough et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2009; Zorn & Ruccio, 1998).

When integrated into the performance feedback process, motivating language may provide the appropriate leadership communication strategies to increase how well performance feedback is being perceived. Therefore, this paper develops and tests a model that explains how leaders can use motivating language to increase positive perceptions of performance feedback.

This inquiry contributes to scholarship and practice by shedding light on the specifics of effective leader-to-follower communication during the performance feedback process. Furthermore, this article gives new insights into motivating language applications. The study is organized into the following sections. The next part presents a selected literature review about motivating language theory and how it relates to performance feedback perceptions. Based on the literature review, a model was created, and its empirical analysis is described in the subsequent methodology section. The final part discusses the findings, implications for research and practice, and offers possible future directions.

Selected Literature Review

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 followers’ personal goals with the organizational vision, dispels ambiguity, and 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 & 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 usually 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 to enhance employee motivation.

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

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?’.

Four key assumptions that must be met in order to optimize motivating language potential were summarized by Mayfield et al. (2014): “(1) The leader must walk-the-talk; (2) the three facets comprise the majority of leader speech; (3) although ML only refers to leader-employee speech, the employee must accurately perceive the leader’s intended message; and (4) all three components of ML must be used appropriately” (p. 101). The first assumption, congruence between words and actions, has been supported in later work by Holmes and Parker (2017). And the third assumption is evidenced in the motivating language scale (Mayfield et al., 2009) which is based on follower evaluations.

All three dimensions of motivating language are of special importance in the performance feedback process. The next section highlights why and how these three types of language may influence it.

The Relationship between Performance Feedback Perception and Motivating Language

In this study, performance feedback perception is defined and measured by four components used by Greller (1978): (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. DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; DeNisi & Smith, 2014; Cawley, Keeping & Levy, 1998; Taylor, Tracy, Renard, Harrison, & Carroll, 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 discuss how each dimension of motivating language may affect an employee’s performance feedback perception.

First, direction-giving language provides information needed for constructive performance feedback through explicating organizational goals, energizing goal attainment, setting objectives, dispelling ambiguity, and linking rewards to organizational goals (Mayfield, Mayfield & Sharbrough, 2014). Clarifying goals and time guidelines for achieving those reduces uncertainty (Mayfield & 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 & 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 an improved performance.

Second, *empathetic language* responds to employees who want to receive praise for their work during a performance appraisal (Geller, 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.

Third, a leader's *meaning-making language* gives the employee a higher purpose in the work he or she is assigned to do (Mayfield, Mayfield & Sharbrough, 2014). 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 (Parker et al., 2001; Grant, 2007; Parker, 2014).

A sense of ownership also relates to a sense of perceived justice, i.e. a fair evaluation perception should develop. 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. Thus, based on the literature, I expect that all three motivating language dimensions positively influence procedural fairness perceptions.

More linkages between motivating language and performance appraisal perceptions can be found by delving more deeply into each dimension. Meaning-making language is rooted in the job characteristics model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Sullivan, 1988), that describes how certain core job characteristics, e.g. task significance, i.e. to experience meaningfulness of the work will lead to an increase in worker outcomes, such as motivation, performance, satisfaction, etc. It is also based on cultural sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005), organizational entry and assimilation (Jablin, 2001), and visionary change (Yukl, 2013) (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2016). In their article, Gutierrez-Wirsching et al. (2015) state, "employees will tend to work more enthusiastically and productively if they feel their efforts make a difference" (p. 1237). 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.

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, Mayfield & Sharbrough, 2014, 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, Mayfield & Sharbrough, 2014, 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" (Mayfield, Mayfield & Sharbrough, p. 100, House, 1971; Miner, 2005; Sullivan, 1988; Yukl, 2013).

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.

The following hypotheses are based on the previous discussion:

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

Hypothesis 2: A leader's use of motivating language positively influences a follower's performance feedback utility perception.

Hypothesis 3: A leader's use of motivating language positively influences a follower's performance feedback satisfaction perception.

Hypothesis 4: A leader's use of motivating language negatively influences a follower's performance feedback anxiety perception.

Hypothesis 5: A leader's use of motivating language negatively influences a follower's performance feedback derogation 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:

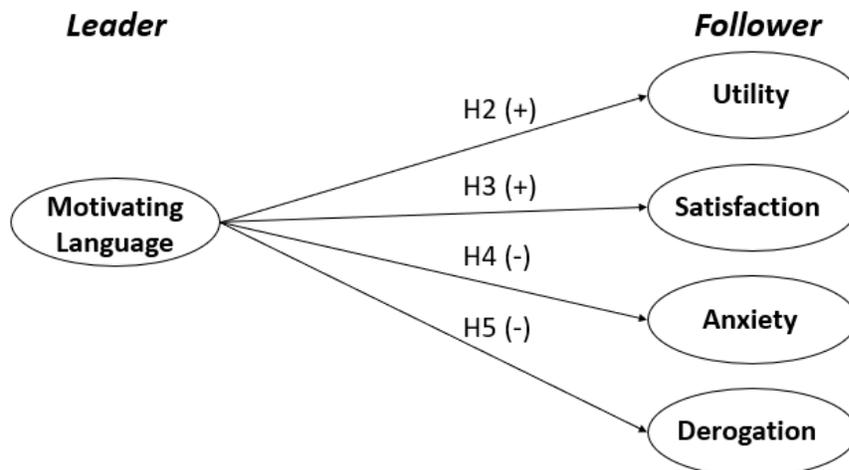


Figure 1. A model of the effects of leader motivating language on performance feedback perception.

Methodology

Procedures and Sample

The data were collected on the individual level of analysis using an online questionnaire that was distributed through Mechanical Turk by Amazon (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). For details about the questionnaire items, please refer to Appendix A. 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 work place 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.

Mechanical Turk features the ability to select participants based on certain characteristics such as geographic location or work experience. Research on Mechanical Turk reports high resemblance between US subjects and the overall US population (Ross, Zaldivar, Irani, & Tomlinson, 2009). Overall, it is a high-quality tool that meets and satisfies standard social science survey requirements (Peer, Vosgerau, & Acquisti, 2014). In addition, Mechanical Turk offers financial compensation as an incentive to participants of the study.

The Mechanical Turk HIT resulted in a sample of 142 qualified working individuals from the U.S., who were each paid fifty Cents to complete the survey. 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 associates degree, 35% had a four-year college degree, and 18% had a graduate degree. Therefore, regarding the ethnicity groups, the sample is not very diverse, which may impact the generalizability of the results.

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. The financial and educational sector accounted for the two next largest portions of the sample at 11% each. The industrials sector (production of goods used in construction and manufacturing) accounted for 7%, followed by food service and government (non-military) both at 6%. No other industry accounted for more than 5% of the sample.

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. Trade workers and laborers accounted for 8% of the sample, and food preparation and services for 6%. No other job type accounted for more than 5% of the sample. Therefore, the sample is very diverse and cross-sectional.

Measures

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 & Mayfield, 2009), and the performance feedback perception scale (Greller, 1978) (see Appendix A). In order 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.

Analysis and Results

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’ 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, using confirmatory factor analysis, 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 was performed. To do so, full collinearity variance inflation factors (VIFs) were 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, that 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 H2. Higher levels of motivating language were also associated with higher levels of performance feedback satisfaction perception ($\beta = 0.39$, $P < .01$), supporting hypothesis H3. 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 H4. Greater levels of motivating language were associated with lower levels of performance feedback derogation perception ($\beta = -0.18$, $P < .05$), supporting hypothesis H5. Overall, since hypotheses 2-5 were supported, hypothesis 1 is as well, i.e. motivating language positively influences a follower’s performance feedback perception.

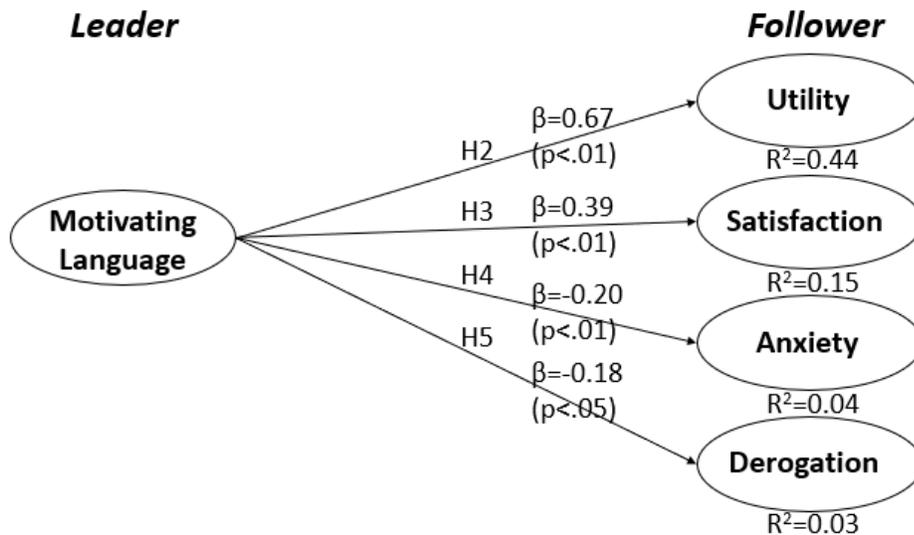


Figure 2. A model showing the correlations between leader motivating language and performance feedback perception.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether motivating language has an impact on performance feedback perception. 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.

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. 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 is needed to increase the generalizability of the results. This study can be seen as a preliminary study with the goal to extend it in the future. Future research should aim to 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 work-shop 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.

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.

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Appendix A

Motivating Language Scale

The examples below show different ways that your boss might talk to you. Please use the following selections to choose the answer that best matches your perceptions, and then click on the appropriate response. (5-point Likert scale, very little to a whole lot)

DIRECTION GIVING/UNCERTAINTY REDUCING LANGUAGE

1. Gives me useful explanations of what needs to be done in my work.
2. Offers me helpful directions on how to do my job.
3. Provides me with easily understandable instructions about my work.
4. Offers me helpful advice on how to improve my work.
5. Gives me good definitions of what I must do in order to receive rewards.
6. Gives me clear instructions about solving job related problems.
7. Offers me specific information on how I am evaluated.
8. Provides me with helpful information about forthcoming changes affecting my work.
9. Provides me with helpful information about past changes affecting my work.
10. Shares news with me about organizational achievements and financial status.

EMPATHETIC LANGUAGE

11. Gives me praise for my good work.
12. Shows me encouragement for my work efforts.
13. Shows concern about my job satisfaction.
14. Expresses his/her support for my professional development.
15. Asks me about my professional well-being.
16. Shows trust in me.

MEANING MAKING LANGUAGE

17. Tells me stories about key events in the organization's past.
18. Gives me useful information that I couldn't get through official channels.
19. Tells me stories about people who are admired in my organization.
20. Tells me stories about people who have worked hard in this organization.
21. Offers me advice about how to behave at the organization's social gatherings.
22. Offers me advice about how to "fit in" with other members of this organization.
23. Tells me stories about people who have been rewarded by this organization.
24. Tells me stories about people who have left this organization.

Performance Feedback Reaction Scale

Please use the following selections to choose the answer that best matches your perceptions, and then click on the appropriate response. (5-point Likert scale, very little to a whole lot)

UTILITY

1. The appraisal helped me learn how I can do my job better.
2. I learned a lot from the appraisal.
3. The appraisal helped me.

SATISFACTION

4. I was satisfied with review.
5. I feel good about the way the appraisal was conducted.
6. There are many ways in which I would have liked the appraisal to be different.

ANXIETY

7. The review made me angry.
8. The interview was upsetting.
9. I was tense during the review.
10. I was at ease during most of the review.

DEROGATION

11. The boss really did not have enough information about my performance.
12. The boss overlooked important parts of my past performance.
13. The boss seemed too emotional.
14. The appraisal seemed arbitrary.