

You're not my dad, you're my coach! When Paternalism Impairs Agility Performance

Aude Silvestre*, Benoit Dardenne

Department of Psychology: Behaviour and Cognition - social psychology unit, University of Liège, Belgium

*Also Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (F.R.S.-FNRS) – Correspondence should be addressed to asilvestre@ulg.ac.be

Introduction

- Paternalism (when A acts towards B with a father-like attitude) has been extensively studied but mainly when targeted at women as a category. However, paternalism is a widespread phenomenon and can be targeted at other categories as well, such as the young, the elderly or the handicapped person. Paternalism has been shown detrimental for the cognitive performance of its target that could be explained by a feeling of incompetence and self-doubt (e.g., Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007). Some evidence also suggested that emotions such as test-performance anxiety could (partially) mediate the effect of stereotype threat on performance (Steele, 1997). Far less well known is the effect of paternalism on the motor performance of the target.
- It has been shown that feedback's valence plays an important role in motor performance. A positive feedback leads to better sport performance than a negative one (Woodcock & Corbin, 1992).
- In the present study, we were thus interested in the impacts of a coach's negative paternalistic motivational speech on motor performance (agility test) of young high-performance sportsmen and sportswomen.
- According to the literature on paternalism and feedback's valence, it is quite straightforward to predict a main effect of both, such that paternalism (vs. a control condition) and negative feedback (vs. positive) would end up in a lesser performance. More interestingly, we investigated the additive effect of paternalism and valence of the feedback on performance, as well as the mediating process (feeling of anxiety and incompetence). Additionally, we tested whether this mediating process is moderated by the participants' need of internal locus of control.
- The **global model tested** is that the more participants self-blame themselves for negative outcomes, the more the deleterious effect on performance would be explained by anxiety and feeling of incompetence.

Methods

- We created 4 types of a coach's motivational speech, varying in valence (positive vs. negative) and paternalism (presence vs. absence). In the paternalistic motivational speech, the coach was acting in a father like attitude, telling the team exactly what to do and how to do it, but with benevolence (e.g. "I know what's best for you", "You have to trust me and do everything I say"). A positive (negative) speech emphasised the team's positive (negative) past performances. 60 young high-performance sportsmen and sportswomen (mean age = 22.5 SD = 2.81), native French speakers, were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Participants read a description of an invented collective sport, followed by the coach's motivational speech.
- After reading those texts, they were asked to do a motor agility test. Time (in sec) and number of errors (number of "dings" when they touched the electrical wire) were recorded.

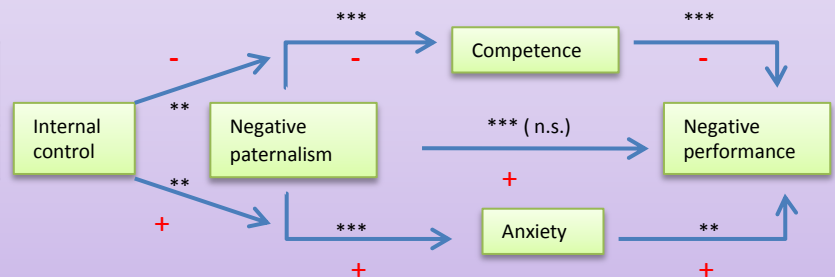


- They also had to complete a performance's anxiety measure ($\alpha=.97$) on a 7-point Likert scale (adapted from Cury, Sarrazin, Pérès, & Famose, 1999), some items from the French version of Levenson's control scale ($\alpha=.88$ for internal control) on a 7-points Likert scale (1974; Rossier, Rigozzi, & Berthoud, 2002, for the French validation) and had to self report their level of general anxiety ($\alpha=.97$) and feeling of competence ($\alpha=.95$) on a 7-points Likert scale.

Results

We performed a linear regression analyses entering a standardised measure of performance as DV and paternalism (absence vs. presence, coded -1 and +1 respectively) as well as valence (negative vs. positive, coded -1 and +1 respectively) and paternalism X valence omnibus interaction as IV. The analysis revealed a significant effect of paternalism, $b = .70$, $SE = .07$, $t = 10.03$, $p < .001$, as well as a significant effect of valence, $b = -.31$, $SE = .07$, $t = -4.45$, $p < .001$. The omnibus interaction was not significant, $b = -.05$, $SE = .07$, $t = -.05$, $p = .50$. We then tested the specific additive interaction by way of a contrast between negative paternalism (coded 1/2) and the 3 others cells (coded -1/2). The analysis revealed a significant effect of the contrast on performance, $b = 1.41$, $SE = .21$, $t = 6.66$, $p < .001$. We also performed a moderated parallel double mediation (Hayes, 2012), with the above contrast as IV, the performance as DV, a global measure of anxiety and the feeling of competence as mediators and the internal control as moderator. The direct effect of negative paternalism on performance was no longer significant $b = .32$, $SE = .21$, $t = 1.49$, $p = .14$. The indirect effects of the contrast on performance are significant through both mediators (5000 bootstrap estimates; for anxiety, indirect effect = .44, with 95% CI between .09 to .86; for competence: indirect effect = .54, with 95% CI between .29 to .91). The contrast X moderator interaction was significant on both paths to mediator ($b = .46$, $SE = .16$, $t = 2.90$, $p < .01$, for IV to anxiety, and $b = -.36$, $SE = .13$, $t = -2.77$, $p < .01$, for IV to competence). Further analyses revealed however that competence always mediates the impact of the contrast whatever the level of internal control (possibly even more strongly at higher level of internal control than at lower level), whereas anxiety seems to be a mediator only at a mean level of internal control.

	Simple med. (M=anx)	Simple med. (M=cptce)	Double med.	Mod ^d . double med.
r^2	.66	.76	.79	.81



Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

References

- Dardenne, B., Dumont, M., & Bollier, T. (2007). Insidious dangers of benevolent sexism: consequences for women's performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93, 764–779.
- Cury, F., Sarrazin, P., Pérès, C., & Famose, J-P. (1999). Mesurer l'anxiété du sportif en compétition: Présentation de l'échelle d'état d'anxiété en compétition (EEAC). In C. Le Scannf & J-P. Famose (Eds), *La Gestion du Stress*, Dossier EPS n°43, Paris: EP.S.
- Hayes, A. F. (2012). PROCESS: A versatile computational tool for observed variable mediation, moderation, and conditional process modeling [White paper]. Retrieved from <http://www.afhayes.com/public/process2012.pdf>
- Rossier, J., Rigozzi, & Berthoud, S. (2002). Validation de la version française de l'échelle de contrôle de Levenson (IPC), influence de variables démographiques et de la personnalité. *Année Médicale Psychologique*, 160, 138-148.
- Steele, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52, 613-629.
- Woodcock, A. J., Corbin, C. B. (1992). The effects of verbal feedback on intrinsic motivation and perceived competence of cricketers. *Australian Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 24 (4), 94-99.

Conclusion

Acting in a father-like attitude might look like a good idea to motivate a sport team, using a little bit of father authority. But by doing so, the risk is that the team might perform badly instead. Indeed, our study showed that when young athletes are confronted by paternalism, their performance decreases significantly. When paternalism is associated with negative emphasis on performance, the decline of performance is mediated by anxiety and feeling of (in)competence. Being the target of negative paternalism induces a higher level of anxiety and a lessened feeling of competence in participants, leading them to underperform. This mediating process through competence seems particularly at stake the higher people's needs for internal control. Anxiety, though, appears to be a mediator only at mean level of internal control, leading us to think that maybe other variables could explain the anxiety's mediating effect or that the mediation is not linear. Negative paternalism, instead of creating a family-like environment that could boost performance, creates a state of anxiety and a feeling of incompetence, leading to a drop in motor-task performance.