



DIPARTIMENTO DI IMPRESA E MANAGEMENT

CORSO DI LAUREA IN MANAGEMENT

CATTEDRA DI ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND VENTURE CAPITAL

Coachability: from sport to entrepreneur

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Anno Accademico 2024/2025

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Introduction

Organizations are depending more and more on coaching techniques to improve employee performance, flexibility, and satisfaction in today's dynamic and rapidly evolving workplace. With roots in ancient philosophy and made famous by sports psychology, coaching has evolved into a strategic tool in the business sector with demonstrated advantages for employee wellbeing, innovation, and leadership development.

Coachability, which is defined as a person's capacity to take in, absorb, and apply feedback, is a key idea in this field. Coachability, which was once thought of as a personality trait, is now recognized as a learnable competency that is essential to investment decisions, organizational learning, and entrepreneurial success. The idea of employee engagement, which describes a mental state characterized by vigor, commitment, and total immersion in one's work, is closely connected. Improved performance and greater job satisfaction have been repeatedly associated with engagement.

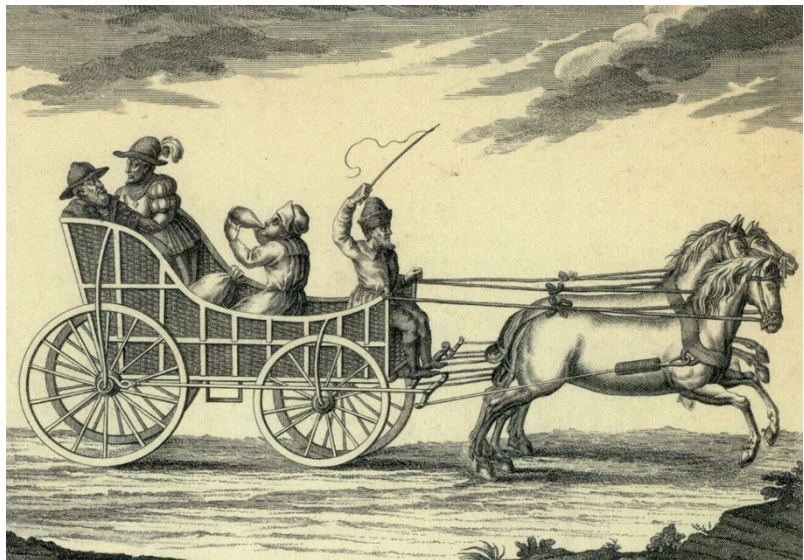
With engagement serving as a mediating variable, this thesis examines the relationship between line management style, more especially, proactive vs conventional behavior, and job happiness. This study investigates whether a proactive manager may improve engagement and satisfaction more successfully than a traditional manager using an experimental design including university students and young professionals.

By combining ideas of coaching, engagement, and leadership communication, the study adds to the body of knowledge in academia while also offering useful advice for managerial development and HR procedures. The results are intended to encourage the application of relational and feedback-oriented management approaches that promote organizational performance and personnel development.

Chapter 1

1.1 Historical background.

This section provides a historical overview of the path of coaching with the goal of placing it in the context of its broader philosophical and educational roots as well as corporate environments. The first time the term coach appeared was in the 1500s, talking about a means of horse-drawn transport from the small Hungarian town of Kòcs. Towards the middle of 1850 the



term was subsequently associated with the figure of the tutor, particularly in English universities, which more than others were able to stimulate students to pass exams. However, although the coaching activity known is quite recent, this discipline sunk its roots in ancient philosophy. The method that is adopted in coaching sessions is in fact the so-called "Socratic method". "Know thyself", said the Greek philosopher, and this statement is exactly the central core of the aforementioned method. In fact, it includes a dialogue made up of short questions in such a way as to influence others to search within themselves for the answers and therefore the truth, arriving at it in the most conscious and autonomous way possible. With coaching, the human being can discover the path to the Truth only if he assesses his own resources distinctive and special. The good coach is the one that understand that his client is somehow lost, because he thinks that he is not the right person in his job context or because he is not able to relate effectively with others, but his skill lies in the faculty to bring his potential to light. Only in this way the subject will really be himself in the world.

1.2 Coaching gaining economic value.

Focusing on more recent times, it is from the second half of the 1930s that started the sector publications where coaching also starts being talked about in the business world. The first examples

are in particular between the 1930s and the 1960s, when in renowned American companies it starts to spread the habit of senior managers training and monitoring young talents and, in general, when experienced employees dedicated themselves to training new hires. In fact, in its embryonic stages, coaching is much more similar to who nowadays is called a tutor. It was just in recent times that companies decided to rely on external professional figures. It is between the 60s and 80s that coaching begins to gain more value, arriving at making the coaching methodology part of the leadership programs of American universities in the 80s. This success was mainly due to areas not inherent to business, even if in the near future it will find more valuable applications with notable results. Sport definitely made coaching blossom, thanks to publications by internationally famed coaches such as "The inner Game of Tennis" by Tim Galloway or "Coaching" by Whitmore. The work of these authors aimed to create the synergy between sport and the world of work. As on the one side in sport, the coach in training encourages the athlete, pushing him to reach ambitious goals, on the other side, in the world of work the Business Coach must bring out the trust inside the client. Towards the end of the 90s, there was the arrival of the first studies about the amazing increases in yield of managers who had started a coaching path. Further studies were aligned with previous ones and confirmed the direct correlation between improvements in customer relations and increases in ROI and coaching interventions. A study by the Manchester Consulting Group reported a 5.7 times higher ROI thanks to a Mc Govern et al, (2001) coaching program launched in the four-year period 1996-2000 in a production context. In a study by the International Management Association, it is said that "if training programs on average improve productivity by 22%, with coaching it reaches 88%"¹. In the last years coaching is widely adopted in Europe and the United States, with applications that concern various areas previously listed (such as Life coaching, Business Coaching etc.). It is possible to find the reasons for this success in the dynamics that have occurred in recent decades, but particularly in the characteristics of coaching methods and the issues it intends to solve. First of all, it has already been emphasized how this is an era where companies often find themselves facing instant and unexpected changes. These dynamics scare a lot the managers of small businesses, because they believe they can not solve such problems. There is a specific reason if the term "believe" was used; in fact, these subjects often can't go forward for a lack of trust and creativity, troubles that coaching can manage. Secondly, coaching presupposes concepts that are essential for the spirit of change that must characterize the client in difficulty. First of all, it focuses on planning the future, remembering also the past, but "emphasizing the centering on planning and the development of solutions useful for the realization of a new future condition, rather than on the analysis of past opportunities and the causes of failures". Secondly, it is fundamental to underline how today's world leaves less and less room for

¹ Financial Times (1997)

theory, a world in which “acting”, and “acting quickly”, are essential elements to create value. Business Coaching is strongly practice-oriented, with the client’s or organization’s goals at the center of the activity carried out. This is the reason why the Business Coaching is easy to evaluate, considering the presence of very specific goals and objectives to reach. Another main point of coaching is an intense customization. Each person is incredibly unique, with their own problems and peculiarities. Although it uses consolidated techniques, coaching does not offer standardized methods or models to solve clients’ problems; in a certain sense, in fact, it does not directly give an answer to them but helps the individual to solve the problem on their own, trying to support its evolution in the direction that they want. The coaching relationship is therefore “between peers: there is no teacher and a student, nor an expert who provides technical advice on a topic to a client, but two interlocutors who establish a collaboration aimed at personal, relational or professional objectives”². But what is the last years opinion of managers about this discipline? According to a press release, “Coaching at work” of 16 May 2002, it appears that: 80% of managers say that they would benefit from coaching at work in a practical way and that it is not just another fashionable invention; theoretically all (96%) managers think that business coaching should be extended to every executive, regardless of seniority (degree of seniority); 85% of managers think that the main value of business coaching is in increasing team morale³. Finally, it is worth noting the data from a survey by the “Coaching Today Survey”, HRD show London of April 2002 where it appears that: 86% of human resources managers have a positive opinion about business coaching; 86% of the companies of the participants in the survey proposed coaching and that, at the time of the survey, business coaching activities were underway in 36% of the companies themselves. Let us now strong focus on one of the main players in this discipline: the coach. The coach is a professional who, in carrying out his activity (coaching precisely), drives people in improving their abilities to achieve their goals and high levels of performance. He offers customized methods and tools to develop the client's projects and potential, trying to develop his motivation. He has the task of supporting the individual, who is called "Coachee", and encourages him to let him answer to his questions. In particular, the coach does not provide personal opinions, does not advise or give information. The coach asks reasoned, complex and targeted questions through which he understands the client's culture, potential and goals. The coach therefore does not act as a teacher and does not have a curative function (typical of the psychologist) but has as its main purpose to help the individual to achieve the desired result. The coach is not a legally known professional figure, even if there are many countries in which official federations are being created for this new community of workers. Suffice it to think that in the United

² Business Coaching. Una tecnica per migliorare le performance aziendali. (2009)

³ Chartered Management Institute and Campaign for Learning (2002)

States the International Coach Federation (IFC) has been made official, with over 12,000 members registered in more than 80 countries. The IFC also presents itself as an “independent certification body for individuals and for Coaching schools around the world, thanks to a network of national Chapters in which mainly certified coaches are registered”⁴.

1.3 Business coaching benefits.

Let's now dive in the benefits related to coaching not only to individuals but even to companies that choose it. To understand how coaching can help changing the wish to achieve individual benefits into benefits for the company at all, it is useful an example. Employees often want to feel valued in the eyes of the employees. The manager in question searches for this objective in various ways: he asked for an increase in a direct and insistent manner or he tried to purposely behave in a fatalist manner. There



Image 1.2 <https://societaitalianacoachingaziendale.it/business-coaching-lo-strumento-per-raggiungere-i-risultati-aziendali-2/>

is the same result in both cases: nothing. Through coaching and its techniques, the manager began to expand his views, asking himself about the needs of the company in general and of the employees. By analyzing the possible actions that were also compatible with his sector, the manager identified the area which of eco-sustainable projects that were also crucial for the company's Top Management. His ideas were appreciated and he began to undertake this project which was positively received. He managed to obtain what he wanted, bringing benefits not only to himself but also to his company. The benefits that can be drawn from the coaching experience are many. In addition to improving performance, research has shown the direct impact of the productivity in individuals. This is due to the growth of staff that comes from the sessions and which is therefore not obtained through periodic training courses, which are more expensive and less effective. Coaching in fact is a fast track for learning, but without the waste of time derived from the bench. Also, the pleasure and the memory of what has been learned are much greater. Based on the interview and communication it improves not only the interpersonal relationships of the individual, but it raises the quality of his life. Coaching in fact induces respect from colleagues, reinforcing a positive atmosphere at work. By promoting the

⁴ Ibba R. , “Chi sono i coach?”, in *Personale e Lavoro*, n.505, Giugno (2008)

responsibility and self-development of the individual, it also allows for benefits to be brought to management, which will waste less time soliciting certain behaviors, thus being able to dedicate itself to important tasks. It is possible to say that coaching “forces” the client to think. The search for the most effective actions to achieve one’s goal encourages the creativity of the individual, and often creative ideas give rise to others. Not only that, but this process also allows him to become aware of the resources at his disposal, that perhaps he did not even believe to possess before. In this sense coaching can be very important talking about the search for new hidden talents. Coaching is so strongly oriented towards change that allows subjects who already have had this experience to behave in a more flexible manner during periods in which the company is subject to such moments. Another key benefit is that coaching principles reinforce the high-performance culture management style that lots of business leaders desire. Every coaching program will help to pragmatically implement the transformation of the corporate culture. It is therefore possible to assume that coaching is a powerful practice not only in the work world, but has applications that help the client enhancing their personal life. What is performance? Performance is the contribution that an entity makes through its action to the achievement of the goals and objectives and, ultimately, to the satisfaction of the needs for which the organization was created. This definition, however, is equivocal for our purposes, as it does not far from the concept that the individual can do the bare minimum to achieve a goal. Performance, in reality, consists of going beyond expectations and this is why it must be the best time to explode one’s potential. The definition provided by John Whitmore, who says that “performance is an undertaking, a remarkable act, a public display of skill,”⁵ is therefore more appropriate. In this sense, coaching is the fundamental tool for developing people's potential and their performance, as it can take, through its techniques, the performance itself beyond expectations. Unlike sports, in business it is much more difficult to be successful. It is rare to hear advertisement about recognition of any kind and if this happens, it is about bad reputation rather than something positive. However, the company is a place that offers countless opportunities for development to look for optimal personal growth, even if not all workers consider the workplace as a bench to face new challenges. All manager who wants to achieve high levels of performance must be willing to change. However, you often have to be really brave to do radical changes in a company. “Coaching for performance improvement in oneself, others and teams is simple and straightforward, provided that its fundamental principles are fully embraced, and adopting a coaching-oriented management style is the starting point for all changes.”⁶ It may be an error to focus only on performance improvement, because managers risk failure in this way. It is

⁵ John Whitmore: Coaching, come risvegliare il potenziale umano nel lavoro, nello sport e nella vita di tutti i giorni (2009)

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therefore appropriate to consider two other drivers that are useful for achieving optimal performance. Performance, learning and pleasure are incredibly intersected. A company that is not so oriented towards learning may not induce and convince its staff to express their potential and abilities. If one of these three elements is neglected, the other two will suffer. There can't be a high performance if there are not learning and pleasure. The latter is especially fundamental, as it is the element that stimulates new challenges, fueling enthusiasm towards achieving certain objectives. To confirm what has just been stated, it will follow an analysis of some empirical studies. In 2003, Smither et al. conducted one of the bigger studies on the impacts of executive coaching by monitoring for two consecutive years a sample of 1361 senior managers in 1999 and 1202 senior managers in 2000. The study identifies the main positive effects as: a more comprehensible definition of objectives, a greater promotion of ideas and also an improvement in the relationship between these managers and their superiors. Subsequently, Gyllensten and Palmer (2005) in their research demonstrate that executive coaching is also able to lower stress level measured through the scale of depression, anxiety and stress. In 2006, Parker-Wilkins claims that coaching has allowed the clients interviewed to develop leadership behaviors, create high-performance teams and develop staff.

1.4 Two kinds of approaches

In this book, the author Anthony M. Grant (2005) distinguishes two separated approaches that managers of an organization may adopt and places them at the ends of a continuum:

- **directive coaching:** when the coach trains, gives instructions and offers solutions to the client. Indirectly, it is assumed that the coach is an expert in the topic in question and that he must teach it to the employee and this represents an issue, because in today's organizations it is not required for managers to know the technical aspects better than their subordinates.
- **non-directive coaching:** when the coach hears, asks questions, makes the client question himself and manages to independently discover the solution that is best for him. With this approach the manager creates pertinent questions that allow for the stimulation of self-learning and the search for consciousness. The executive manager operates on the principle "I'll tell you because I know what's best to do and so you must follow my instructions" while the non-directive manager adopts the opposite principle 'I will ask you because I know that you know what to do and you choose'; in this way he gives confidence to his subordinate, transfers responsibility and independence to him, obliges him to take control of the situation and the solution (Starr, 2011). According to Grant (2005), the question is about to find the right balance between these approaches because it does not exist an approach that is absolutely better than the other. The balance can vary depending on the client's goals

and at which point he is in a specific coaching session, that is obviously customized. For example, when a collaborator is in a situation of panic or anxiety, asking him to decide on his own could even worsen the situation because you are creating more pressure on him (Starr, 2011). In a situation of this type, it would be better to reassure and lead the collaborator towards a solution. A directive style is also better when one's collaborator does not have enough information or skills on which to base his problems. To understand the importance of this distinction, it is enough to observe how managers used to question how much they should be coaching and how much directive they should be towards their collaborators. For example, when there is the crucial need to take quick decisions to achieve a certain objective in the shortest possible time, it is surreal for a manager to avoid being directive; the impulse to help their collaborators by offering a solution or telling them what to do and what not to do will be overwhelming. However, there are of course situations in which it is not necessary for the manager to make rapid decisions; he can dedicate more time to formulating questions aimed at stimulating the creative thinking of the collaborator. Furthermore, the authors Grant and Hartley (2013) state that non-directive coaching in the workplace can take place in two ways: it is formal in the case in which the coaching conversation between manager and collaborator occurs during scheduled meetings focused on specific objectives, for example it can take place during a performance review or a post-sales debriefing; while it is informal in all other cases. This means that there is no specific situation in which a coaching conversation should be held; this can happen at any time and in any place. For example, it can start in a corridor, during a coffee break, during a meeting, etc. Furthermore, according to the authors, this is the most adopted modality by managers in most coaching conversations. In conclusion, it can be stated that ideally a good manager must be able to move easily within this continuum between directive and non-directive coaching.

1.5 Types of coaching.

Getting even closer to the macro area of entrepreneurship, the authors Bavister and Vickers (2018) distinguish different categories, such as:

1. Business coaching or corporate coaching: it is aimed at freelancers, commercial areas, Business Unit managers, managers and entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized enterprises who want to boost the productivity of their business. In most of the cases, in this type of intervention the coach's task is to help the coachee to define short and long-term objectives, in the development of business plans, in the reconfiguration of business processes or in the creation of marketing campaigns (Bavister and Vickers, 2018).

2. Career coaching: it is aimed at those who want to enter the world of work, want to change work activities or intend to advance in their career path. For example, think of the situation in which a superior proposes to one of his collaborators to cover the role of sales department manager. It is assumed that the employee has been working as a salesperson for several years in the same store and department. This employee may be undecided between: getting involved and making the so-called 'career leap' or continuing to work in his monotony. In this situation, the presence of a coach could benefit the employee. A coaching conversation may help him to obtain greater clarity regarding the direction to take in his career. This type of intervention, in addition to being useful for those going through moments of professional change, such as corporate restructuring, job loss, development of skills related to a new role to cover, is also suitable for those who decide to train on attitudes that have always been possessed but until now never or little exploited; examples include leadership, willingness to confront and empathy.
3. Corporate coaching: it is aimed at the company as a whole. An example of this is the situation in which a company requires the intervention of a coach to improve the relationship dynamics within it or to build a management culture inspired by coaching. This type of intervention is usually adopted where there are key figures and talents to be enhanced.
4. Executive coaching: is aimed at top management such as: senior managers, CEOs, directors, etc. The authors Bavister and Vickers (2018) argue that for this type of intervention, most companies turn to external executive coaches and only a small part to internal executive coaches. The former are figures external to the company with a strong previous work experience as a top manager; while the latter are figures who work full time in the company and sometimes engaged in the functions of training, business development and human resources management. According to the author Anthony M. Grant (2005), executive coaching is a helping relationship established between a client who has managerial authority and management responsibility in the organization and a coach who helps him in the development of certain skills, such as: anger management, stress tolerance, change management, leadership and strategic planning and presentation.
5. Team coaching: is focused on company teams. Typically, this sort of intervention helps high-performing teams to get to their full potential; it boosts productivity, synergy, cooperation and idea sharing among team members. For example, for a team leader who wants to get a way to relate correctly with his collaborators, it may be useful to understand his own behavioral profile and that of his collaborators; this will permit him to increase mutual trust and improve communication within the team. An intervention of this type is also useful for redefining the

functions, rules, dynamics and processes within the team in order to achieve a boost in effectiveness. ISMO, a training and consulting company with a leading role in the Italian context, identifies two main advantages in using team coaching. First, it allows you to move from a vision centered on your skills and ways of thinking to a broader and more integrated one; and second, the focus is no longer on the contents but on the processes of your work.

6. Group coaching: is aimed at a small group of people, six or eight at most. These are groups of individuals, singles or members of one or more companies, who do not form a real working group or team. This means that the group participating in this type of intervention is without a leader and only shares a common learning experience but, outside of the scheduled sessions, does not share a group objective, which instead happens in a real team.

Chapter 2

2.1 Literature review

The coachability concept is more and more recognized as a critical element in entrepreneurship education and practice. While on the one side startup ecosystems have highlighted the importance of coachability in early-stage ventures and funding pitches, in educational contexts, on the other side its development and assessment still need to be explored deeply (Kuratko et al., 2021). It is important to underline that the gap mentioned will be faced with the proposal of a competency-based approach to understand and cultivate coachability among student entrepreneurs, especially through experiential learning.

Coachability is often considered as a prerequisite from investors perspective, particularly business angels and venture capitalists, who consider the entrepreneur's propensity to feedback and guidance as a key indicator of potential future success (Preston, 2011). However, the actual criteria used by investors to assess coachability are ambiguous (Kuratko et al., 2021).



Prior research has focused more on the initial part, settings, with less attention to later stages of the entrepreneurial process, such as due diligence, post-investment mentoring relationship and terms negotiation.

While coachability is often perceived as a feature, it should instead be considered as a buildable competence, a mix of understandable, observable behaviors that allow entrepreneurs to search, reflect on, and implement feedback (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Shannahan et al., 2013; Weiss & Merrigan, 2021). Observing coachability from this point of view will aligns it with wider frameworks in entrepreneurial competency theory and will enable educators to exhaustively promote it in students.

To refine this new definition, it is helpful to keep in mind how coachability has been handled across many disciplines. For instance, coachability was first thought to be a fundamental quality of top-performing athletes in sports psychology (Giacobbi, 2000; Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966). Studies in sales and workplace coaching also emphasize the importance of feedback receptivity, trust, and behavioral adaptation (Shannahan et al., 2013). These parallel findings add credibility to a merged, cross-disciplinary understanding of coachability as a feedback-oriented and active process. So, the coachability development, in particular through competency-based experiential entrepreneurship courses, will allow to create the habitat for entrepreneurship students to obtain resources from investors for venture initiatives. In this scenario it is fundamental the role of both self-awareness and implementation competencies to be effective. Therefore, entrepreneurship education programs should be more oriented on improving coachability capabilities by encouraging self-reflection and self-assessment among students, getting involved them to take the initiative, always keeping flexibility and adaptability to user feedback and changing circumstances.

This point of view is also shared by early empirical studies (e.g., Mitteness et al., 2010; Balachandra et al., 2014) that revealed the role played by coachability in influencing investor decisions during pitch sessions, where it is considered as a proxy for a founder's openness to guidance. However, these

studies primarily handled coachability in a social signaling scenario, without going deeper about its implications for learning or innovation outcomes.

Marvel et al. (2020) instead provide a more combining and theoretically grounded approach to this topic. Exploiting experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) and even entrepreneurial learning theory (Politis, 2005), they locate coachability not just as a behavioral disposition, but as a mechanism that encourages learning through feedback and adaptation. In contexts of high uncertainty, like for example the evolution of novel products, entrepreneurs often must correct or even change their initial assumptions. In this framework, coachability enables the entrepreneur to absorb new knowledge, to question prior beliefs, and enhance decision-making processes related to product development and opportunity exploitation.

Therefore, iterative learning cycles that involve reflection, experimentation, and refinement, processes essential to managing the ambiguity and complexity of innovation-driven environments, are more likely to be engaged by coachable entrepreneurs.

Delving deeper into the topic it is important to note that Becker (1964) introduced the concept of human capital, differentiating between:

- General human capital, which concerns the area of education and broad work experience.
- Specific human capital, which concerns instead domain-specific knowledge such as market familiarity, technical expertise, or customer insights.

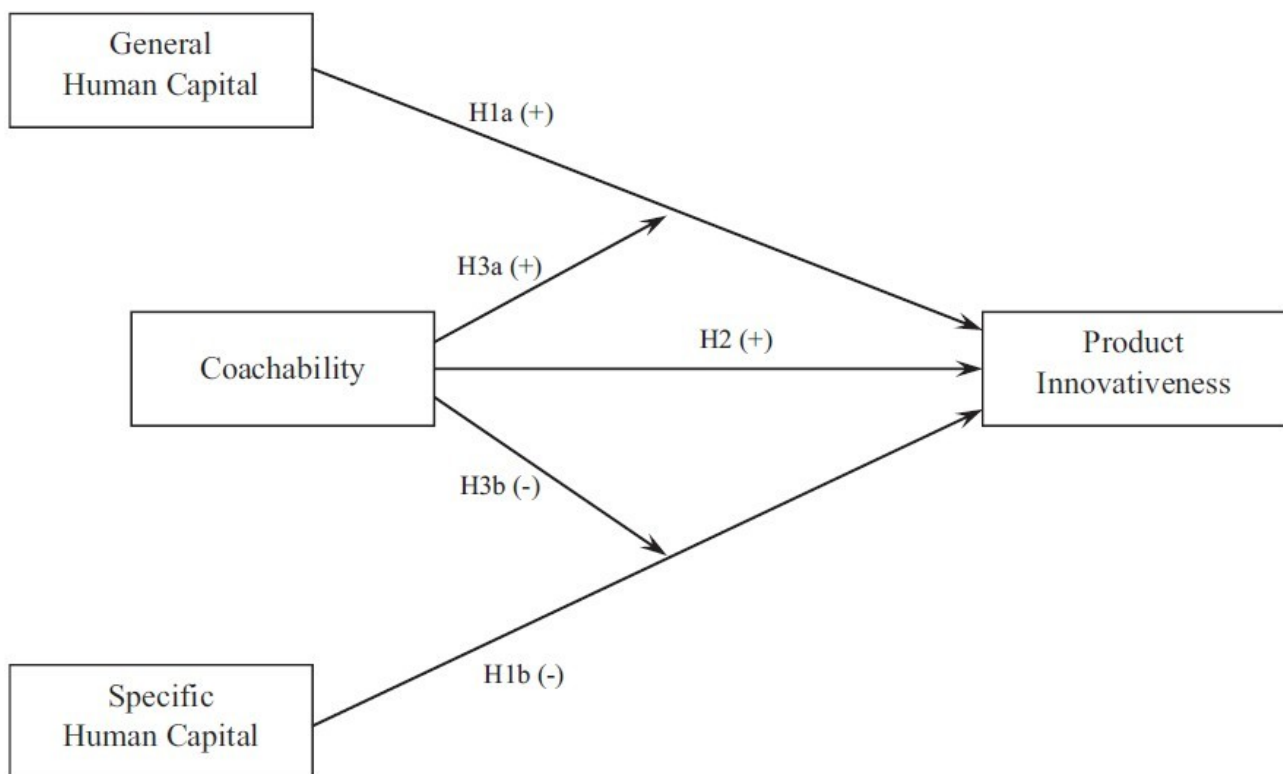
These constructs are related to Shane's (2000) theory of the knowledge corridor, which postulates that entrepreneurs' prior knowledge is going to shape the opportunities they can profit by. While general human capital is theorized to expand the knowledge corridor, enabling entrepreneurs to scout a wider range of opportunities, specific human capital can counteract it, limiting their ability to go beyond familiar contexts.

Considering these concepts Marvel et al.'s (2020) propose that coachability moderates the relationship between human capital and innovation, specifically by:

- Strengthening the positive effects of general human capital on product innovation (even though this interaction was not statistically significant in their findings).
- Weakening the negative effects of specific human capital, permitting in this way more innovative outcomes, even with the limiting influence of prior knowledge.

Their empirical analysis, based on 656 founder-coach dyads across U.S. technology ventures, supports several key hypotheses:

- H1a: General human capital is positively associated with product innovativeness.
- H1b: Specific human capital is negatively associated with product innovativeness.
- H2: Coachability is positively associated with product innovativeness.
- H3b: The negative association between certain human capital and product innovativeness is mitigated by coachability, which makes the relationship less negative (and even positive at high levels of coachability).



Marvel et al. (2020) also contribute methodologically by developing and then validating multi-item scales for coachability and human capital. Coachability is evaluated through coach ratings on behaviors, like feedback integration, openness to advice, and proactive learning. Furthermore, the use of dyadic data (coach and founder) expands the robustness of the findings and reduces common method bias.

Focusing more on the entrepreneurial field, it turns out that so far has not received the right attention in the entrepreneurship research. Entrepreneurial coachability is defined as “the degree to which an entrepreneur seeks, carefully considers, and integrates feedback to improve their venture’s performance” (Ciuchta et al., 2017). This construct is very rooted in both entrepreneurship practice and theory, even if it had previously lacked academic attention and a validated scale. This inaccuracy is stunning given how important the coaching function is seen in investor-entrepreneur relationships (Baum & Silverman, 2004).

To solve this problem, drawing on signaling theory (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011), it is possible to argue that coachability acts as an interpersonal signal during entrepreneurial pitches, enhancing traditional informational signals like business plans, credentials, or market data.

- Financial Signals → recommend expected returns on capital.
- Interpersonal Signals → show compatibility, adaptability, and potential for relational investment.
- Coachability → signals both financial and social return potential, making it a “flow signal” that predicts not just what the entrepreneur can do today, but how they will evolve through ongoing input from stakeholders.

In pitch contexts, this signal is really powerful because investors decide to make rapid judgments about founders' traits. Coachability thus informs investors' willingness to commit financial and social capital, including mentorship, advice, and network access.

The role of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) is also fundamental, emphasizing that the investor-entrepreneur relationship is not purely transactional. Instead, it is often built on mutual expectations of reciprocity, trust, and evolving commitments over time. From this perspective, coachability increases the perceived relational ROI of investing time, effort, and emotional energy into the entrepreneur. Investors are more likely to perform if they perceive the founder as likely to reciprocate by implementing advice and growing through collaboration.

It has been developed and tested a theoretical model involving three main hypotheses:

- H1: higher perceived coachability increases investors' willingness to invest.
- H2: the impact of coachability on investment decisions is stronger when the investor has significant prior coaching experience.
- H3: the impact is weaker (or negative) when the investor has prior entrepreneurial experience (not supported empirically).

These hypotheses are tested using data from investors and startup mentors, combining:

- Pitch evaluations from 69 Shark Tank clips.
- A validated 9-item coachability scale.
- Controlled tests for passion, preparedness, competence, and investor traits.

It emerged that coachability has a significant and unique effect on willingness to invest—even more than passion or preparedness.

Through rigorous psychometric analysis, it was found that coachability is distinct from:

- Personality traits (e.g., openness, agreeableness)
- Entrepreneurial passion
- Preparedness
- Competence

Coachability manifests positive correlations with openness to experience and agreeableness, and a negative correlation with neuroticism, consistent with findings from the sports coaching and mentoring literature.

The findings carry strong implications for:

- Investors: should re-consider coachability as a predictor of both financial and social ROI.
- Incubators/Accelerators: may use the validated scale for founder selection and developmental feedback.
- Entrepreneurship education: coachability should be contemplated as a core entrepreneurial capability, beside opportunity recognition and business modeling.
- This is foundational to understand how interpersonal traits like coachability model early-stage venture development. It bridges two important theoretical traditions:
- Signaling theory, emphasizing how founders communicate value under uncertainty.
- Social exchange theory, highlighting the relational dynamics of entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- It also offers boundary conditions by illustrating that coachability is most effective when investors are experienced coaches, underscoring the role of receiver characteristics in signal interpretation.
- However, to develop a coherent conceptual foundation for coachability it is important to synthesize findings from multiple fields like:
- Athletics: created as a concept describing athletes' responsiveness to coaching. It involves feedback receptivity, adaptability, and respect for coaching authority.
- Marketing: its use in sales is crucial to describe the salesperson's openness to external feedback to boost performance.
- Workplace coaching: considered as a cooperative, tailored developmental process. Core elements include readiness for change, feedback receptivity, and the quality of the coach-coachee relationship.
- Entrepreneurship: in the last years coachability has been linked to entrepreneurial learning, investor decision-making, and venture acceleration.
- Coachability is also influenced by individual characteristics and contextual factors:

- Demographics: women tend to be rated as more coachable; age negatively correlates with coachability (Bryan et al., 2017; Kuratko et al., 2021).
- Personality traits: high openness to experience and agreeableness are positively associated; neuroticism is negatively associated.
- Team size: mixed results. Some research links larger founding teams to lower coachability, others suggest diversity in teams increases receptivity.
- Control attribution: it is way more possible for entrepreneurs with internal locus of control to be coachable (Kuratko et al., 2021).
- The dimensions of entrepreneurial outcomes affected by the coachability are:
 - Resource acquisition: raises likelihood of securing financial and social capital.
 - Learning and development: encourages iterative learning, business model adaptation, and product refinement.
 - Venture milestones: supports in achieving early-stage goals such as customer discovery, prototype testing, and first revenue.
 - Well-being and resilience: coaching interventions can also boost coping capacity and emotional recovery, particularly after failure (Schermyly et al., 2021).
- To maximize the benefits of coaching a high-quality entrepreneur-coach fit is essential:
 - Matching criteria: includes values alignment, communication style, domain expertise, and personality compatibility.
 - Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis: similarity in goals, experiences, or thinking styles can enhance trust, rapport, and feedback receptivity.
- Working Alliance: a strong partnership marked by mutual respect, shared goals, and open communication improves coaching outcomes (Flaherty, 2005; O'Broin & Palmer, 2009).

Empirical research shows that coach-entrepreneur compatibility boosts learning outcomes, satisfaction with the coaching relationship, and the willingness to apply advice.

Conceptualizing coaching in a more practical and concrete vision, it is possible to state that it is a dialogue-based process between coach and individual (or team), designed to foster: behavioral change, emotional intelligence, cognitive restructuring, solution-focused thinking. These are all pertinent to entrepreneurial coachability, because, as said before, they represent mechanisms through which founders adapt to feedback, learn new strategies, and enhance performance.

It results crucial to distinguish coaching from:

- Counseling, which is more remedial
- Consulting, which is more directive

- Training, which is more skill-based and standardized

In contrast, coaching is individual-centered, goal-driven, and adaptively focused on real-time challenges. For entrepreneurs, this variation is important: they act in really dynamic contexts and benefit from adaptable, personalized learning through coaching, instead of rigid prescriptive models.

Coaching regards improving interpersonal understanding and dismantling communication barriers. In teams (entrepreneurial or corporate), this includes: boosted interpersonal trust, raised vulnerability and empathy, better collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Talking about practical implications for entrepreneurs it is possible to say that coaching can unlock unspoken interpersonal matters that hinder progress in teams. Additionally, entrepreneurs that are coachable are more likely to have stronger emotional resilience, increased dedication to venture goals, better group decision-making, and improved communication with their team or cofounder. Furthermore, coaching helps teams to review their behavior and align it with strategic goals, a dynamic that shows how coachable founders may evolve their startups.

This is incredibly relevant to entrepreneur coachability, because the ability to build trust, generate satisfaction, and accept feedback (as modeled in effective line manager communication) is parallel to how entrepreneurs respond to mentoring, feedback, and coaching. From a stakeholder point of view employees and line managers are seen as key internal actors. Communication is considered as a critical tool to align goals, share visions, and manage stakeholder expectations. For entrepreneurs, understanding their own coachability can be reassessed as stakeholder responsiveness: a willingness to internalize guidance from mentors, investors, or partners. LMC (line manager communication) does not directly have an impact on commitment. It rather influences commitment in an indirect way through trust and satisfaction. For entrepreneurs, this emphasizes that receiving coaching is not enough, what matters is whether the communication builds trust and satisfaction, making them more willing to adaptation. Trust, in this case, is defined as positive expectations about organizational actors. This comprehends cognitive trust (belief in competence) and affective trust (emotional bonds). Entrepreneurs who mature trust in their mentors or advisors are more likely to perform when they have to face changes or strategies, a symbol of coachability. A communication that provides coherence, empathy, and relevance clearly stimulates satisfaction. Entrepreneurs who feel heard and carried by mentors are likely to be more responsive to developmental input. Satisfaction in coaching relationships thus plays a crucial role in coachability. So, it is recommended that accelerators and incubators should evaluate not just mentor content expertise but even their communication approach. Entrepreneurs should be motivated to expand relational openness, a trait related to coachability. Keeping this in mind, to have an overall vision it is essential to also analyse the engagement. Vigor

(resilience and readiness to put forth effort), devotion (feeling of significance and pride in one's duty), and absorption (being totally absorbed in task) are its constituents (Schaufeli et al. 2002). An entrepreneur with vigor, dedication, and absorption in his startup is more likely to take coaching seriously, seek feedback proactively, and apply insights. This mental state puts down the foundation for high coachability.

Based on the results of Saks (2006) several key hypotheses have been proposed. H1: job engagement affects job satisfaction (strong positive effect). Entrepreneurs who are deeply involved in their venture get higher satisfaction, making them more emotionally available to coaching relationships. H3: organization engagement affects job satisfaction (strong positive effect). Coachable entrepreneurs often identify themselves with their startup's mission and vision. This identification mirrors organizational engagement and guides to greater satisfaction with their journey, also during feedback or pivots. H5: job satisfaction affects organizational performance (strong positive effect). Satisfaction with progress or process raises resilience and devotion, making entrepreneurs more likely to listen and be dynamic in changes through mentorship. To sum up engagement alone is not enough to perform; satisfaction mediates this link, emphasizing the importance of relational and psychological fulfilment, key to coachability.

2.2 Research questions and hypotheses

As discussed in the preceding sections, coachability, a word that was first used in athletics and more recently in entrepreneurship, should be viewed as a relational and developable competency rather than a fixed personality attribute. Because of its connection to feedback receptivity, openness to learning, and adaptability, coachability has been demonstrated to be crucial in entrepreneurial contexts for investor decision-making, post-investment mentoring, and venture success. These fundamental characteristics are ingrained in larger organizational dynamics, particularly in manager-employee relationships, and are not exclusive to founders or startup teams. By applying the main mechanisms of coachability to the corporate and workplace setting, where the line manager plays a function comparable to that of the mentor, coach, or investor in entrepreneurial ecosystems, this study expands on the theoretical understanding of coachability. According to this perspective, an employee's coachability may be facilitated or hindered by the line manager's behavioral style, particularly if it is proactive or typical. A proactive manager is more likely to create a work atmosphere where employees feel psychologically comfortable, engaged, and inspired to adapt and grow, all characteristics of a coachable climate. These traits include open communication, support for development, and frequent feedback. In this case, job satisfaction and employee engagement are

viewed as both effects and markers of whether coachability-supportive conditions exist in the workplace. Consequently, the construct of coachability offers the theoretical framework for interpreting how managerial behavior affects engagement and satisfaction, even though it is not measured directly in this study.

The following research questions are put forth in order to address this conceptual translation and evaluate the dynamics' empirical applicability:

- 1) How does job satisfaction change, based on employees' perceived engagement?
- 2) Does the type of line manager (proactive vs. standard) influence employee perceived engagement?
- 3) Does employee perceived engagement lead to an improvement in employee job satisfaction?

It is crucial to underline that in this study coachability is not examined as a direct variable; it is rather used as a guiding theoretical construct in various managerial situations, and its existence is implied by the psychological and behavioral consequences it suggests, including employee engagement and job satisfaction. In light of the literature analyzed and of the research questions mentioned the following research hypotheses have been stated to try to fill the gap presented in this thesis:

X (independent variable) = type of line manager (proactive vs. standard)

M (mediator) = engagement

Y (dependent variable) = job satisfaction

H1 (X → Y): A proactive line manager has a more positive influence on job satisfaction compared to a standard line manager.

H2 (X → M): Engagement mediates the relationship between the type of line manager and job satisfaction. Specifically, a proactive line manager has a more positive effect on engagement compared to a standard line manager.

H3 (M → Y): Engagement mediates the relationship between the type of line manager and job satisfaction. Specifically, a high level of engagement leads to a more positive effect on job satisfaction.

2.3 Conceptual framework

This study's theoretical model is the outcome of combining the most recent research on relational leadership, coachability, and employee well-being. This thesis aims to extend the implications of

coachability to more structured organizational contexts, especially through the lens of relational and communicative processes that occur between managers and employees. A large portion of the existing research has instead concentrated on coachability in entrepreneurial or investor-founder dynamics.

This idea views coachability as a theoretical lens through which to analyze how interpersonal dynamics, more especially, those triggered by the managerial style, shape individual outcomes like engagement and job satisfaction, rather than as a stand-alone construct. In this way, proactive leadership practices could serve as unspoken indicators of an environment at work that values development, transparency, and feedback (Spence, 1973).

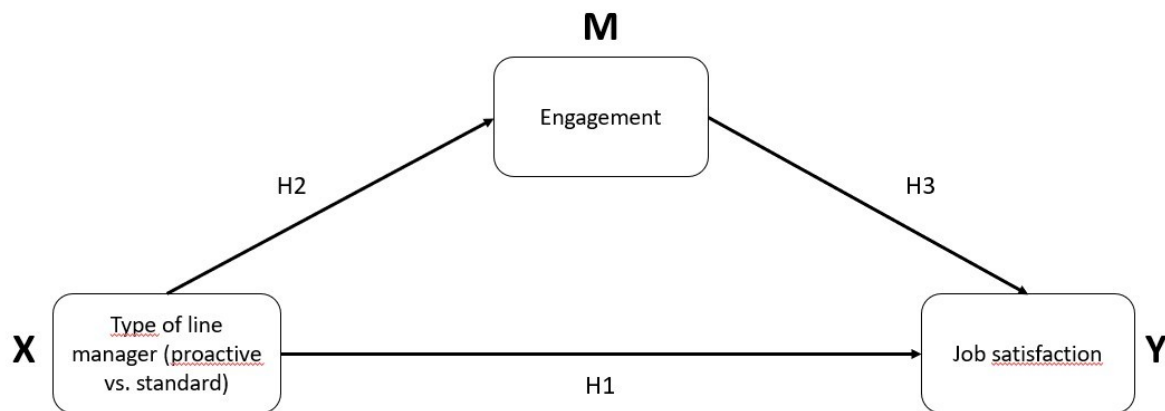
When these signals are understood in an enthusiastic way from employees, this scenario can encourage to enhance engagement, defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002) as a pleasant, satisfying state of mind related to work that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Furthermore, the paradigm, based on the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), assumes that when workers think their boss cares about their development and welfare, there is a higher probability that they will return the favor by becoming more emotionally and cognitively involved. In this instance, engagement serves as a psychological tool and a relational reaction that mediates the effect of leadership style on work satisfaction, a recognized measure of organizational health.

From this angle, engagement is seen as both a desirable result and a mediating mechanism that explains how relational leadership styles, particularly those that are in line with coaching principles, produce positive effects on the well-being of employees. The job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) also theoretically supports the addition of engagement as a mediator. It suggests that employment resources, such supportive leadership, can boost motivation and satisfaction by activating engagement.

This framework attempts to fill the gap between the organizational literature on leadership effectiveness and the entrepreneurial literature on developmental readiness by interpreting managerial conduct through the theoretical standpoint of coachability, and operationalizing its succeeding effects via engagement and satisfaction, and providing a cohesive viewpoint on how relational environments promote both individual and organizational flourishing.

Accordingly, the following path is hypothesized by the suggested conceptual model: a proactive line manager (X) stimulates employee engagement (M), which raises job satisfaction (Y). The study uses Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 to test this model, which enables evaluation of the independent variable's direct and indirect impacts on the result.



Chapter 3

3.1 Methodological approach

This chapter introduces the empirical study intended to evaluate the three hypotheses discussed in Chapter 2, which look at how line management style affects work satisfaction and employee engagement. The study intends to both validate these associations and determine whether proactive managerial action helps to create an atmosphere that is supportive of coachability, drawing on the theoretical framework established in the literature review. Engagement and satisfaction are regarded as psychological markers of a work environment that fosters development, feedback, and relational learning, even though coachability is not a criterion that can be assessed directly. The experiment in this case operationalizes the important relational dynamics discussed in previous chapters in order to confirm empirically the circumstances that lead to the emergence of coachability in conventional organizational settings.

3.1.1 Study and methodology

The following experimental study intends to experimentally investigate the ways in which coachability-supportive leadership behaviors, more especially those exemplified by a proactive line management style, affect important psychological outcomes like job satisfaction and employee engagement, building on the theoretical framework previously described. Although coachability has primarily been studied in the contexts of investment, its fundamental mechanisms, feedback openness, relational trust, and developmental responsiveness, are just as applicable in conventional organizational settings. A microcosm of the coach-coachee interaction can be found, in particular, in the relationship between an employee and his direct supervisor: in particular the aim is to

demonstrate that employees will choose a supervisor with proactive attitudes, because he will be more self-made and without any hierarchical pressure, as the coach will use customized methods to develop the client's untapped potential. Accordingly, this study presents the line manager as a relational agent whose actions can either promote or impede attitudes that are consistent with coachability and foster job satisfaction through engagement. The current empirical analysis aims to operationalize the conditions that support a coachable mindset by comparing perceptions of proactive versus traditional managerial approaches in a controlled experimental design. This will help to further understand how relational leadership translates into employee motivation and satisfaction. As a result, analyzing the effects of line manager conduct on employee satisfaction and engagement can be used as a stand-in to learn how coachability is triggered and strengthened in formal work environments.

It consists of a conclusive causal research design between-subjects 2x1. The results of the experiment are characterized by the answers to a questionnaire, obtained through a self-administered survey conducted in Italy during April 2025, thanks to the use of the Qualtrics XM online platform. The participants were selected by using a non-probability sampling methodology. Specifically, it was chosen to adopt a convenience method that has allowed to take advantage of both the ease and speed of accessing and choosing elements of the target population. In fact, this technique does not imply any economic cost and it is powerful in terms of a fast data collection and a high response rate.

Thinking about the target sample, it was decided to cover respondents of any demographic ages, collecting data from both female and male individuals, as demographic variables were not contemplated to have an impact on the results of the experiment in a statistically significant way.

3.1.2 Respondents and sampling procedure

The survey was spread out across 150 individuals of whom 145 respondents fully participated in this experimental study, answering fully and completely all the questions present in the survey. The remaining 5 incomplete responses were firstly chosen and later discarded from the dataset in the data cleaning procedure.

In particular, respondents were contacted through an anonymous link generated by Qualtrics XM's online platform and distributed afterwards through instant messaging apps and social media networks as main distribution channels (WhatsApp LinkedIn, Instagram...). The sample of the target population, reached by the questionnaire, is mainly represented by university students and newly employed people located in many Italian cities. Therefore, following this assumption the average age of the repliers was 25.56 years, even though the age range fluctuated between a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 43 years. Talking about the gender of the respondents, the prevailing gender was male,

represented by 51.7% (75/145), while the female gender was represented by 46.2% (67/145). The last 2.1% (3/145) of repliers opted not to be identified in a specific gender (0.7%; 1/145) or they chose the third gender/non-binary option (1.4%; 2/145).

3.1.3 Data collection and sampling composition

To conduct this experimental study, it was necessary to create a questionnaire made of 8 questions subdivided in 6 specific and 2 demographics.

In order to manipulate the independent variable (type of line manager: proactive vs. standard), it was essential to make two distinct visual stimuli. The first scenario turns out to be an image of a job application on LinkedIn with the presence of a manager manifesting proactive attitudes. The second scenario, on the other hand, turns out to be represented by the image of a job application on LinkedIn where the figure of the manager denotes a standard behaviour towards the employee.

As mentioned earlier, data were collected through a survey, which is divided into 4 main parts.

There is a short introduction in the first part of the questionnaire, together with an explanation of the academic purpose of this experimental research. In addition, after including the university's credentials, it was guaranteed the complete and total compliance with privacy regulations regarding the anonymity policy about data collection and management.

Two distinct situations comprise the randomized block that makes up the second section of the survey. Specifically, the randomization process was crucial within the structure of the questionnaire, in order to achieve a uniform number of exposures to both visual stimuli. In fact, to avoid potential cognitive bias and possible conditioning related to brand sentiment, both visual conditions are characterized by two mock-ups of job applications on LinkedIn, created with Microsoft Office Word and subsequently saved in the jpeg format.

Once after being subjected to the observation of one of the two scenarios, the third part of the survey was introduced to repliers. In particular, this block of the questionnaire consists of 6 questions: the first 3 related to the mediator (engagement) and the last 3 to the dependent variable (job satisfaction). Every question was rated using a Likert scale based on 7 rating points.

The first scale, related to the mediator, is derived from the scale prevalidated by *Bower, Amanda B. and Landreth Grau (2009), "Explicit Donations and Inferred Endorsements: Do Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives Suggest a Nonprofit Organization Endorsement?" Journal of Advertising, 38 (3), 113-126.*

The second one, related to the dependent variable, is originated from the scale prior validated from Chun, Rosa and Gary Davies (2006), “*The Influence of Corporate Character on Customers and Employees: Exploring Similarities and Differences*,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34 (2), 138-146.

Both scales were corrected according to the needs of the experimental research.

In the end, the fourth and final part of the questionnaire features the block devoted to demographic questions, where the gender and age of the respondents were requested.

3.2. Results of the experiment

3.2.1 Data analysis

All data collected from the questionnaire provided by the survey generated on Qualtrics XM were exported to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) statistical software to be analyzed.

Firstly, it was decided to perform two factor analyses in order to examine and validate all items of the scales used in the structure of the conceptual research model. Going into the specifics, principal component analysis was implemented as an extraction method by applying Varimax as a rotation technique. The total explained variance table was observed by verifying that, according to Kaiser's rule, the eigenvalues were greater than 1 and the cumulative variance, expressed in %, was higher than 60%, in order to decide how many factors to extract. In addition, it is important to underline the observation of both the communalities table and the components matrix. In particular, all of the items were found to have an extraction value higher than 0.5 and a loading score greater than 0.3. Consequently, analyzing the results obtained, it was chosen to keep all the items of the scales, validating them (scales).

After validating both scales, in order to verify the level of their accuracy, two reliability tests were conducted. Specifically, the Cronbach Alpha value of both constructs was spotted checking that it was above 60 percent. With regard to the first scale related to the mediator, a value of 0.951 was found, while about the second scale representing the dependent variable, a value of 0.950 was recorded. Therefore, both scales were found to be reliable.

In addition, it was performed the KMO test related to the measure of sampling adequacy. Talking about the first scale related to the mediator, a value of 0.752 was found, while with regard to the second scale that embodies the dependent variable, a value of 0.763 was recorded. Moving forward,

Bartlett's test of sphericity was executed, which was statistically significant, finding in all the two cases a p-value of 0.001 ($p\text{-value} < \alpha = 0.05$).

3.2.2 Hypotheses solution

After conducting both factor analyses and reliability tests, the three hypotheses of the conceptual model of the experimental research were analyzed, so that its statistical significance and, as a consequence, relative success could be confirmed or rejected.

H1

To verify the statistical significance of the direct hypothesis (H1), it was run a juxtaposition of averages by applying a One-Way ANOVA as an analysis in order to assess the effect of the independent variable (type of line manager: proactive vs. standard) against the dependent variable (job satisfaction). Especially, the independent variable (X) has a nature named nominal categorical and is divided in two different conditions coded as 0 (standard line manager) and 1 (proactive line manager); on the other hand, the dependent variable (Y) is continuous metric in nature. After conducting the ANOVA, observing carefully the descriptive statistics table, it was possible to deduct that the group of respondents who were subjected to the scenario coded with 0 (74 people) had a mean value of 2.6396, while on the contrary the respondents exposed to the visual condition coded with 1 (71 people) had a mean value of 5.7793 noted. Furthermore, considering the ANOVA table it was emerged a p-value related to the F-test of 0.001, which was statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < \alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, a statistically significant difference between the group averages could be noted, thus confirming the effect of X versus Y. Thus, the direct hypothesis H1 (main effect) was proved.

H2-H3

To check the statistical significance of the indirect hypothesis (H2 and H3), it was decided to run a regression analysis, through the application of model 4 of the SPSS Process Macro version 3.4 extension, developed by Andrew F. Hayes in order to test the mediating effect caused by engagement towards the relationship between the independent variable (type of line manager: proactive vs. standard) and the dependent variable (Job satisfaction). In particular, in nature the independent variable (X) is nominal categorical and it is splitted into two different conditions coded with 0 (standard line manager) and 1 (proactive line manager), while on the opposite, in nature, both the mediator (M) and dependent variable (Y) are continuous metric. To evaluate the success of the mediation effect, it was necessary to differentiate it into two distinct relationships: a first effect involving the independent variable and the mediator (H2: $X \rightarrow M$), while a second effect that regards the mediator and the dependent variable (H3: $M \rightarrow Y$). Specifically, to prove the statistical significance of both sections of the hypothesis, it was chosen to adopt a 95% confidence interval with a reference

value α of 5%. In addition, it was fundamental to make sure that the extremes of the confidence range (LLCI = Lower Level of Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level of Confidence Interval) had met the sign concordance for each hypothesis (either both positive or both negative) so that 0 was never passed within it. In conclusion, the values of the β coefficients of the regression analysis of both relationships between the variables were deeply analyzed to evaluate sign and magnitude of each effect.

H2

With regard to the first part of the indirect effect, through observation of the SPSS output, it was possible to notice a p-value of 0.0000, a favorable confidence interval (LLCI = 2.7929; ULCI = 3.5649) and a positive regression coefficient β of 3.1789. For this reason, this section of the indirect effect was found to be statistically significant, thus confirming the hypothesis H2.

H3

With regard to the second part of the indirect effect, through observation of the SPSS output, it was possible to see a p-value of 0.0000, a favorable confidence interval (LLCI = 0.8392; ULCI = 1.0080) and a positive regression coefficient β of 0.9236. Therefore, even this section of the indirect effect was found to be statistically significant, thus confirming hypothesis H3.

In view of the results obtained, considering the fact that both sections of the indirect effect were found to be statistically significant, it was possible to enact the overall success of the mediation effect, (indirect effect) that results proved. In the end, considering the statistical non-significance of the direct effect analyzed through regression analysis, it was possible to notice the so-called pure mediation.

Chapter 4

4.1 Theoretical contributions

In light of the literature analyzed in the second chapter, there is a series of relevant theoretical contributions, placing itself at the intersection of the strands of organizational psychology, entrepreneurial theory and leadership studies. The analysis conducted allows to reconsider consolidated constructs, such as coachability, engagement, job satisfaction and the role of the line manager (proactive vs. standard), in the light of a merged and active perspective, underlining their functional interconnections and potential transformative effects on nowadays organizational contexts.

The first and fundamental theoretical contribution is about the new conceptualization of coachability as a constructible skill and not just as a static trait or individual disposition. Although originally deep-rooted in sports psychology and then integrated into corporate coaching practices, coachability is reinterpreted as a strategic mechanism of learning and changing, really influenced by relational, cultural and organizational dynamics. Especially, it is emphasized the role of coachability as a development force in contexts with high uncertainty, innovation and the need for iterative learning, such as startups or knowledge-intensive sectors.

The empirical design was intentionally in line with the theoretical mechanisms of coachability, even though it was not measured as a distinct construct in this study. In particular, job satisfaction and employee engagement, which measure how supportive, interested, and receptive people feel at work, were regarded as indirect psychological proxies for coachability. By using this method, the study was able to convert coachability into quantifiable organizational dynamics and demonstrate how proactive leadership's relational signals can create an environment that supports coachability. By doing thus, the study provides an innovative approach to operationalizing coachability using generally accepted emotional markers.

This reinterpretation is based on a solid theoretical basis that merges the theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) with the theory of human capital (Becker, 1964; Shane, 2000), manifesting how coachability can behave as a moderating variable between human capital (general and specific) and innovation. The capacity to receive and implement feedback in particular, permits to reduce the potentially limiting effects of specific human capital, while favoring the expansion of the so-called knowledge corridor and the advent of more innovative outcomes. This represents a significant enrichment and improvement of the literature on human capital, in a metacognitive and relational dimension.

A further theoretical contribution is about the recognition of engagement as a mediating variable between leadership style and job satisfaction. Starting from the model of Schaufeli et al. (2002) and the empirical results proposed by Saks (2006), engagement is considered not only as a positive outcome of work well-being, but as an enabling condition for adaptive learning processes. In this perspective, a high emotional, cognitive and behavioral participation by collaborators is the high-yielding ground for the activation of coachability, with strong positive effects on satisfaction and organizational performance.

Theoretical understanding of the role of the line manager is also enriched and in particular of the proactive line manager, in encouraging psychologically safe work environments, oriented towards feedback and growth. The use of effective communication practices, coherent, empathetic and

relevant, is a prerequisite for establishing a relationship of trust and satisfaction, crucial conditions for the spread of engagement and, therefore, of coachability. In this sense, the concept of line manager communication (LMC) raises from a simple operational tool to a real relational mediator within the dynamics of organizational development.

Furthermore, it is proposed an original reading of coachability in the light of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958), enhancing how the relationship between investor and entrepreneur is not just transactional in nature, but even based on expectations of reciprocity, trust and shared commitment. Coachability, in this theoretical framework, is considered as a relational signal of inclination to understand and evolve, able of generating a social and psychological return on the relational investments made by the leader.

In addition, it is important to underline the value of coachability as a “fluid signal” according to the signaling theory perspective (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). This message divulges not just static and current skills, but even the tendency for upgrading, the ability to change fast and the evolutionary potential of the subject. In highly ambiguous decision-making scenarios, like the selection, entrepreneurial pitch or mentoring phases, coachability comes out as a predictive indicator of success, able to lead not only economic investments, but also relational and reputational ones.

4.2 Managerial implications

1. The central role of the proactive line manager

One of the most important implications is about the effectiveness of the proactive line manager related to the standard one. The results propose that a dynamic approach, oriented towards feedback, open communication and active involvement of the collaborator has positive influence not just on employee engagement, but even on their job satisfaction. Adopting this type of manager within a company means improving all those internal dynamics that are then reflected also externally: the result is characterized by happy employees satisfied with what they do who will therefore not create trade unions or any type of protest or strike and this leads to a better performance within the company that also has effects externally since consumers learn positive news about that flourishing environment. Therefore, in addition to the corporate brand image, brand equity would also be improved, that is, the absolute value of the company. Another benefit deriving from this is the reduction of corporate turnover, because, on the contrary, in a situation of general discontent, mass dismissal could occur that would leave the company in an uncovered position since the latter needs a certain amount of resources to carry on its turnover and would need years to recover the lost resources.

For managers, this means generating advanced relational and communication skills, including: active listening and empathy, offering constructive and timely feedback, flexibility for the needs of the team and the ability to enhance a climate of trust and collaboration.

In addition, companies should supply managerial training programs based on coachability, considered not as a fixed personality trait, but as an evolvable skill. This approach is aligned with the adaptive coaching and experiential learning models analyzed in the literature, where the leader-coach becomes a facilitator of change, able of leading the collaborator through iterative cycles of feedback, reflection and improvement.

2. Coachability as a strategic lever for innovation and organizational learning

The analysis conducted emphasized how coachability should not be seen simply as an aptitude, but as a strategic driver for innovation and people development. Within organizations, this means re-evaluating the practices of: workforce selection process, including validated measures and scales to evaluate coachability in recruitment processes, onboarding and mentoring, structured to stimulate a culture of iterative feedback, performance evaluation, which rewards not just results, but even openness to change and the ability to learn from suggestions received.

In scenarios of high uncertainty or innovation, like entrepreneurial teams or startups, coachability represents a key skill for adapting, learning and developing creative solutions. From an organizational point of view, this guides to the adoption of managerial models that encourage experimentation, certain failure and persistent reflection.

3. Engagement as a key mediator of organizational well-being

Another central implication regards the recognition of engagement (made of vigor, dedication and absorption) as a mediating element in the link between leadership and job satisfaction. Engagement, in fact, is considered as the optimal mental state that permits the employee to be inspired, productive and receptive to coaching.

For managers and HR managers, this means: the need to keep under control the level of engagement through systematic internal surveys, the use of strategies to enhance employee identification with the company mission, culture and values and the recognition of work experiences that produces a sense of belonging.

In this scenario, engagement is not only a consequence of good managerial practices, but an enabling condition for the development of coachability itself. Employees with strong engagement are inclined to actively seek feedback, give suggestions and cultivate stronger professional relationships with their

superiors. Furthermore, engagement is a fundamental business lever to keep employee loyalty. It is therefore very important as a value aspect of a company to be able to create an emotional or project bond with its employees: hence creating internal brand loyalty. The next step is characterized by the so-called Brand Advocate: someone who is so tied to the company that, even unconsciously, begins to profess and promote its image. A winning example is Google. The Mountain View corporation is well-known for its corporate culture that prioritizes the liberty and well-being of its employees. In addition to sleeping pods for power naps, Google offers recreational spaces, free canteens, the possibility of dedicating part of one's working time to personal projects (20% time) and strong support for professional growth. This pattern emphasizes identification with the company and make it an emblem of successful employee engagement. The Lego Danish Group, is even famed for encouraging a playful, innovative and creative corporate culture, in line with its product. Workers are continuously involved in internal co-creation initiatives, which make them a leading actor in the development of the corporate identity. This fosters a strong sense of emotional attachment to the corporation.

4. Consequences for training initiatives, incubators, and accelerators

For incubators, accelerators and universities, research highlights how coachability should be considered as a key skill for entrepreneurial and managerial careers. Training programs should: provide experiential modules, with simulations, role-play and even real-time feedback, supply assessments of coachability, through validated scales and behavioral observation and encourage individual reflection, self-awareness and cognitive adaptability.

In addition to this, in the selection processes of startups to support, investors and mentors ought to review coachability as a priority criterion, on a par with the business idea and the technical skills of the team.

5. Building a relational ecosystem with high added value

Finally, the interaction between coachability, engagement and job satisfaction recommends the creation of a prolific relational ecosystem, where the collaboration between the various organizational figures (managers, mentors, colleagues) is based on: reciprocity and trust, aligned with the social exchange theory, shared responsibility for both individual and collective success and support for personal and professional development, through the co-construction of growth paths.

In the context considered, coachability is not just an individual factor, but also a cultural element, which can be cultivated and stimulated at a systemic level, creating more resilient, innovative and learning-oriented organizations.

4.3 Limitation and future research

Regarding the limitations of this research, the first limitation of the study is related to demographic characteristics, such as gender and age. The research had a diverse sample by age and gender, however, future research could focus on a younger audience (limiting participants to only those belonging to Generation Z and Millennials) or on an older audience (such as baby boomers), to understand the differences in attitudes based on age. A further experiment could explore the perceptions of a female group compared to a male sample.

A second limitation concerns the language of the questionnaire, developed in Italian and therefore only administrable in Italy. A future research direction could involve the use of other languages. For example, the use of English could have expanded the research to a more varied audience, including individuals from different socio-cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The third limitation concerns the methodology used. Although this method allows us to obtain generalizable results on large samples and to measure the relationships between variables with statistical rigor, it inevitably involves a certain rigidity in data collection, which translates into a partial and "superficial" knowledge of the phenomena studied. So, it could be a fruitful development for future research to also employ qualitative methods. This would involve using focus groups, in-depth interviews or sentiment analysis rather than a simple survey. In fact, they allow to explore in a more detailed and multifaceted way the perceptions, motivations and subjective meanings attributed by participants to the dynamics under study. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, does not aim to extrapolate numerical and measurable data using statistics, but rather aims to broaden the study of a phenomenon through descriptive information collected through textual, audio and visual recordings. Furthermore, the qualitative approach is particularly well suited to investigating complex phenomena, still little explored or strongly linked to individual experience, which require a situated and contextual understanding rather than the standardized measurement of variables. For example, a questionnaire may reveal that a certain percentage of respondents associate a certain concept (e.g. exclusivity, accessibility, authenticity, innovation) with a brand or an experience, but it does not allow us to understand why that association occurs, how it is cognitively constructed, or what personal experiences underlie it. A qualitative interview, on the contrary, allows us to reconstruct this path, bringing out subjective narratives, recurring symbols, internal contradictions, and ambiguities that often escape standard measurement scales. From a methodological point of view, therefore, qualitative research could contribute to:

1. Generating unique exploratory theories that will be put to the test during the quantitative stage;
2. Contextualizing and interpreting the statistical results previously obtained;

3. Identifying latent variables that the original model did not anticipate;
4. Reconsidering segments of the population that are not so represented in the quantitative data.

In detail, the focus group is a technique lasting a couple of hours that consists of forming a heterogeneous group of about ten people who discuss a topic under the supervision of a moderator. In-depth interviews, instead, are conversations between interviewer and interviewee that has the scope to go through a specific issue. On the other hand, sentiment analysis is a method that can be effective in learning whether the attitude behind a message is positive, negative or neutral. In the end, a possible interesting methodological development for future research could be the mixed-methods approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative phases within the same research project. This approach permits to bypass the dichotomy between depth and breadth, integrating the advantages of the two paradigms: the measurability and generalizability of the quantitative method with the interpretative richness of the qualitative. An optimal strategy to create a completer and more accurate picture of the phenomenon investigated could be a two-phase structure, for example, exploratory qualitative followed by confirmatory quantitative investigation.

Conclusion

With an emphasis on the mediating function of engagement, this thesis sought to examine the connection between line manager conduct and worker job satisfaction. The study was based on a sound theoretical framework that incorporates ideas from leadership studies, organizational behavior, and coaching theory, with a focus on the importance of coachability and engagement in modern workplaces.

In comparison to a typical, less involved managerial strategy, the experimental results demonstrated that a proactive line manager, one who communicates honestly, promotes feedback, and supports staff development, has a considerably greater positive influence on both engagement and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the analysis confirmed that engagement is a potent mediator: motivated, committed, and engrossed workers are more likely to express greater levels of pleasure, especially when encouraged by dynamic and communicative leadership.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study supports the idea that coachability is a skill that can be developed rather than a fixed characteristic. By demonstrating how management style and feedback culture affect not only individual attitudes but also more general organizational dynamics, it also contributes to the body of literature. By doing this, it is consistent with earlier studies that highlight

the value of relationship trust, feedback receptivity, and psychological safety in promoting successful performance.

The results have pertinent applications as well. Companies should make a concerted effort to teach line managers to take on a more proactive, coaching-focused approach that improves engagement and communication. A more resilient organizational culture, less turnover, and increased employee happiness are all possible outcomes of this strategy, particularly for younger or early-career workers who place a higher value on mentoring and developmental support at work.

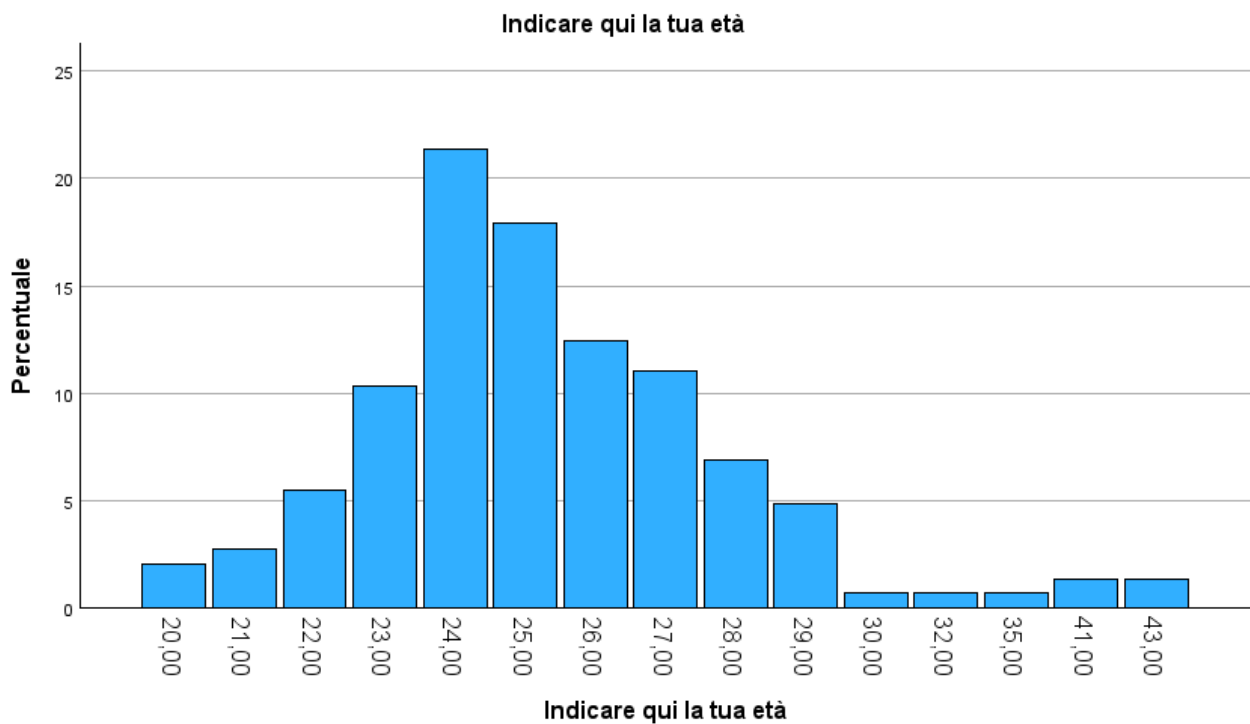
The study has limitations even if it offers insightful information. The sample's generalizability may be limited because it was mostly made up of recent graduates and university students from Italy. More varied populations might be included in future studies, and focus groups or interviews could be used to examine qualitative aspects like individual experiences or opinions on managerial conduct.

This thesis concludes by emphasizing the vital role that proactive leadership and employee involvement play in fostering job happiness. It urges a change in organizational procedures toward more growth-oriented, human-centered management models that see coaching as a strategic mentality for long-term performance and worker well-being rather than merely a method.

Appendix

Descriptive statistics: age

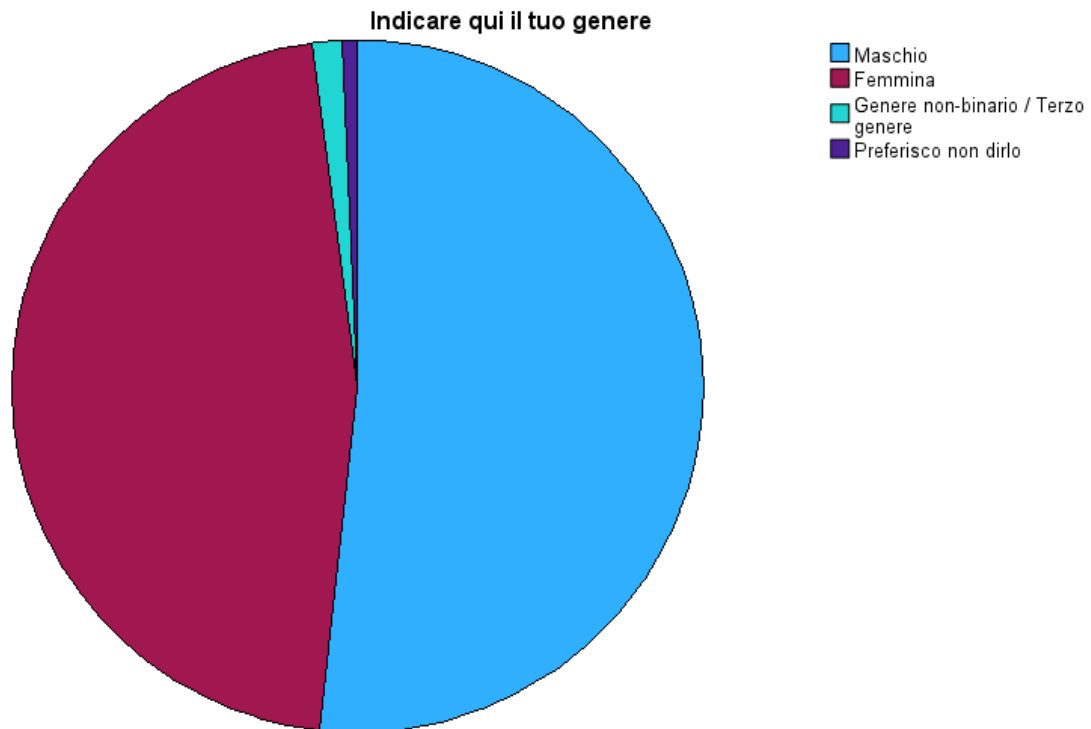
Statistiche		
Indicare qui la tua età		
N	Valido	145
	Mancante	0
Media		25,5655
Mediana		25,0000
Modalità		24,00
Deviazione std.		3,60712
Varianza		13,011
Intervallo		23,00
Minimo		20,00
Massimo		43,00



Descriptive statistics: gender

Indicare qui il tuo genere

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Maschio	75	51,7	51,7	51,7
	Femmina	67	46,2	46,2	97,9
	Genere non-binario / Terzo genere	2	1,4	1,4	99,3
	Preferisco non dirlo	1	,7	,7	100,0
	Totale	145	100,0	100,0	



Factor analysis: mediator

Varianza totale spiegata

Componente	Totale	Autovalori iniziali		Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
		% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	2,734	91,142	91,142	2,734	91,142	91,142
2	,178	5,939	97,081			
3	,088	2,919	100,000			

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Comunalità		
	Iniziale	Estrazione
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 1. Considero la job application che ho appena letto interessante.	1,000	,940
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 2. Considero la job application che ho appena letto coinvolgente.	1,000	,909
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 3. Considero la job application che ho appena letto personalmente rilevante.	1,000	,885

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Matrice dei componenti ^a	
	Componente 1
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 1. Considero la job application che ho appena letto interessante.	,969
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 2. Considero la job application che ho appena letto coinvolgente.	,954
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 3. Considero la job application che ho appena letto personalmente rilevante.	,941

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.
a. 1 componenti estratti.

Test di KMO e Bartlett

Misura di Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin di adeguatezza del campionamento.		,752
Test della sfericità di Bartlett	Appross. Chi-quadrato	448,448
	gl	3
	Sign.	<,001

Reliability analysis: mediator

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
,951	,951	3

Factor analysis: dependent variable

Varianza totale spiegata

Componente	Totale	Autovalori iniziali		Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
		% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	2,733	91,087	91,087	2,733	91,087	91,087
2	,167	5,551	96,638			
3	,101	3,362	100,000			

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Comunalità

	Iniziale	Estrazione
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 1. Raccomanderei l'azienda legata alla job application che ho appena letto ai miei colleghi o amici.	1,000	,900
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 2. Sarei contento di essere associato all'azienda legata alla job application che ho appena letto.	1,000	,899
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 3. Percepisco un'affinità con l'azienda legata alla job application che ho appena letto.	1,000	,934

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Matrice dei componenti^a

	Componente 1
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 1. Raccomanderei l'azienda legata alla job application che ho appena letto ai miei colleghi o amici.	,949
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 2. Sarei contento di essere associato all'azienda legata alla job application che ho appena letto.	,948
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni. - 3. Percepisco un'affinità con l'azienda legata alla job application che ho appena letto.	,966

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

a. 1 componenti estratti.

Test di KMO e Bartlett

Misura di Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin di adeguatezza del campionamento.		,763
Test della sfericità di Bartlett	Appross. Chi-quadrato	438,050
	gl	3
	Sign.	<,001

Reliability analysis: dependent variable

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
,950	,951	3

One-Way ANOVA

Descrittive

DV

	N	Medio	Deviazione std.	Errore std.	95% di intervallo di confidenza per la media		Minimo	Massimo
					Limite inferiore	Limite superiore		
,00	74	2,6396	1,29130	,15011	2,3405	2,9388	1,00	6,67
1,00	71	5,7793	1,18314	,14041	5,4993	6,0594	2,00	7,00
Totale	145	4,1770	2,00156	,16622	3,8485	4,5056	1,00	7,00

ANOVA

DV

	Somma dei quadrati	df	Media quadratica	F	Sig.
Tra gruppi	357,190	1	357,190	232,479	<,001
Entro i gruppi	219,711	143	1,536		
Totale	576,901	144			

Regression analysis: model 4

```
*****
Model : 4
Y : DV
X : IV
M : MED
```

```
Sample
Size: 145
```

```
*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
MED
```

```
Model Summary
R    R-sq    MSE    F    df1    df2    p
,8059 ,6495  1,3818 264,9907 1,0000 143,0000 ,0000
```

```
Model
coeff    se    t    p    LLCI    ULCI
constant 2,5676 ,1366 18,7894 ,0000 2,2975 2,8377
IV      3,1789 ,1953 16,2785 ,0000 2,7929 3,5649
```

```
*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
DV
```

```
Model Summary
R    R-sq    MSE    F    df1    df2    p
,9546 ,9113 ,3603 729,5863 2,0000 142,0000 ,0000
```

```
Model
coeff    se    t    p    LLCI    ULCI
constant ,2683 ,1300 2,0645 ,0408 ,0114 ,5252
IV      ,2038 ,1684 1,2097 ,2284 -,1292 ,5367
MED     ,9236 ,0427 21,6287 ,0000 ,8392 1,0080
```

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***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****
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