

The case for coaching

The ultimate goal of coaching is to help people learn more about themselves to achieve more. If this is the case, it is not surprising that interest in coaching is so high. In the latest CIPD Training and Development survey, 78% of organisations currently run coaching initiatives and respondents rated coaching and mentoring as the second most effective way for people to learn in organisations. Over the last few years, coaching provision has risen faster than any other learning method.

Coaching is obviously gaining not only in popularity, but also use. But how well is coaching understood? What does coaching mean to the average line manager? Again referring back to the CIPD Training and Development survey, a massive 81% of respondents agree that there is confusion about what is meant by coaching.

Background to the research

Our enquiries revealed that, despite this confusion, there had been no previous research in the area. We set about our work to establish what the 'line manager' regards as coaching.

Our methodology was to use questionnaire-based research to look into this area; we looked at what line managers do when they say they are coaching in three key areas:

- The activities / behaviours, they display when coaching

- The beliefs or attitudes they hold about coaching
- The structure or process of coaching.

The responses were grouped into two categories, financial services (FS) and non-financial services (non-FS).

The research findings are based on the 62 questionnaires that were completed; 41 from line managers from FS companies and 21 from non-FS companies. In total, 24 different organisations took part in the research.

Summary of Findings

Overall, 50% of respondents said they rarely use a structure or use a particular model when they are coaching. This is interesting as 65% of those who responded said they would document their coaching which may suggest that although coaching is seen as an informal process, the outcomes are still documented. An impressive 85% of managers would monitor the results and follow-up their coaching.

The survey was keen to establish if managers saw coaching as a particular tool they could use as appropriate or whether it was seen as a style of management. 65% of responses did regard coaching as a style rather than tool although there were some marked differences between FS businesses and non-FS businesses (which are commented on later).

So who does most of the talking during a coaching session? Isn't coaching just another way of telling people what to do? Here the picture becomes confused. Overall, 67% reported that their staff usually or always do most of the talking (a collaborative style of coaching) and a mere 12% see teaching or showing someone to do a task as a key part of their coaching role.

In contrast, 73% also stated that they usually or always had to provide guidance or direction while coaching. This does, of course, indicate the reverse and suggests, perhaps, that coaching styles are polarised.

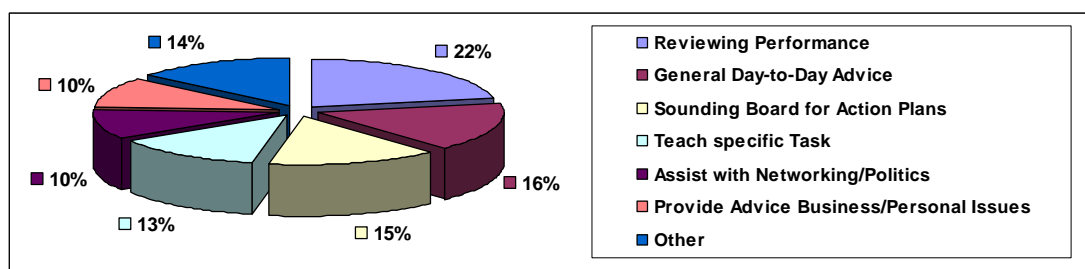
The plot thickens when respondents were asked to identify the three most common characteristics they associated with coaching. At the top with a clear overall lead is reviewing performance which was identified by 22% of responses which was followed by giving advice on general day-to-day work issues (16%) and acting as a sounding board for action plans (15%). The least popular characteristic was giving advice on any issue – business or personal (10%) – refer to Chart 1.

Unhelpfully, the results suggest there is no consistent picture about whether coaching is manager-led or staff-led. This could potentially indicate that managers respond to the needs of staff members with an appropriate style. It could also suggest that views are markedly different about how much direction should be included when coaching.

Coaching is clearly regarded as an effective way of helping to develop staff as businesses move away from more traditional course-based approaches.

A resounding 98% of respondents see part of their coaching role to encourage staff to learn from work problems and experiences. 84% said they would usually or always encourage staff to try new things even if there is a risk of not getting it right first time. Another encouraging sign is that 79% believe that their staff would regard coaching as being primarily for their benefit, not the organisations.

Chart 1: Most Common Characteristics Associated with Coaching



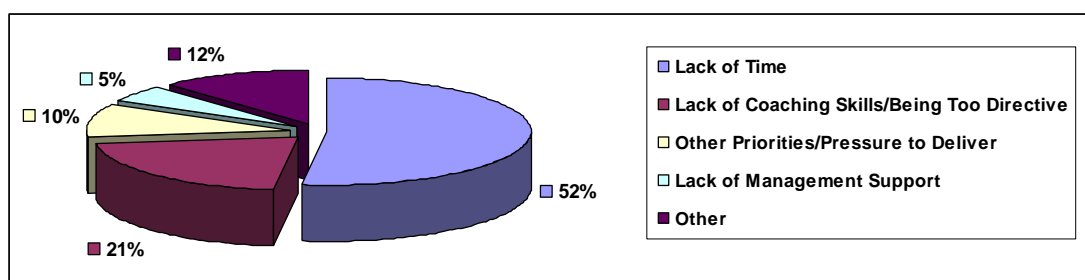
These results suggest that coaching is seen as central to performance management with the emphasis on reviewing and action planning.

The last part of the survey asked line managers to identify what stops them from being a better coach. Tim Gallwey (1974) stated the view that Performance = Potential – Interference.

This part of the survey set out to identify what 'interference' might look like and the answer was perhaps predictable and overwhelming. 52% of responses cited lack of time. A further 21% of respondents were honest enough to say that their own skills probably stopped them from being a better coach – refer to Chart 2.

In other words, the FS manager favours a directive approach and taking much of the responsibility for the coaching. It is also more likely to be seen as a management tool than style and those being coached are likely to be presented with an agenda (rather than agree it jointly).

Chart 2: Obstacles Associated with Becoming a Better Coach



FS and non-FS: the differences

Within financial services, the regulator requires some managers to demonstrate their coaching skills (amongst other things) prior to supervising some staff. The aim of this requirement is, ultimately, to strengthen investor protection.

The survey set out to establish if this regulatory focus had skewed significantly any of the responses. The survey suggests that this is the case in the following areas:

- time was cited by 59% of the FS responses as a factor affecting their ability to coach. The figure for non-FS responses was only 37%.
- the results to a number of questions indicate a general view that within FS, coaching is more manager-led than collaborative.

88% of FS managers sometimes or usually felt the need to use their knowledge with 78% saying usually or always (38% non-FS). Non-FS managers were also far more likely to encourage the staff to take responsibility for their learning and are far more likely to challenge people's assumptions and act as a sounding board (both characteristics associated with collaborative coaching).

- 18% more non-FS managers said they would always use a structured coaching model when coaching.

In a number of other areas, there were surprisingly few differences. For example, both sets of managers:

- seemed equally willing to encourage staff to try new things,
- stressed the importance of having trusting relationships,
- saw work as a source of learning, and
- shared the same belief that staff are able to generally able to identify their own solutions.

This final point raises an interesting paradox – if FS staff can be trusted to generate solutions to issues then why do many FS managers adopt directive coaching traits that tend to stifle this? This is impossible to answer from the research – but possibly time constraints make them feel like coaching is a luxury they don't have enough time for.

Concluding thoughts

- Coaching appears to be a central role for the line manager – a role that seems certain to broaden and grow.
- In the key area surrounding the degree of direction the line manager provides (as a teacher or adviser), responses suggest a range of styles. Whether this reflects the varying needs of the staff or the preferences of the manager is not clear. The one certainty is that FS managers clearly see their role as being more directive.

- Likewise, the FS manager seems more likely to view coaching as a tool to manage performance rather than for developmental purposes.
- However important coaching is, the results indicate that lack of time and the line manager's coaching skills are they key factors that impact on its effectiveness.
- Less than half of line managers surveyed use a coaching model or structure. This suggests that there is plenty of scope to further develop skills and the consistency of approach.
- All line manager's typically have an optimistic attitude towards staff and their ability to develop their own solutions.

Survey on Training and Development, (2004), CIPD

Gallwey, T. (1974) *The Inner Game of Tennis*, New York: Random House

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