



Focus on Executive Coaching

Contents

Article Summaries

- 2 A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most? (*The Leadership Quarterly*)
- 3 The Dawn of the Robot Coach (*Chief Learning Officer*)
- 4 Executive and Employee Coaching: Research and Best Practices for Practitioners (*Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology*)
- 5 Team Coaching That Accelerates Performance (*Association for Talent Development*)
- 6 How Peer Coaching Can Make Work Less Lonely (*Harvard Business Review*)
- 7 Transformative Executive Coaching: Considerations for an Expanding Field of Research (*Journal of Transformative Learning*)
- 8 Building the Case for Executive Coaching (*Center for Creative Leadership*)
- 9 How Mindfulness Improves Executive Coaching (*Harvard Business Review*)
- 10 Most Managers Don't Know How to Coach People. But They Can Learn (*Harvard Business Review*)
- 11 **Highlights from The Conference Board**

A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most?

By *Andromachi Athanasopoulou and Sue Dopson*

Read this if...

Your organization wishes to refine their coaching evaluation methods.

Summary

The practice of coaching is becoming divorced from the research on coaching creating a dearth in rigorous and scientifically backed practice. This systematic review combines the findings of 110 studies to sort out what works and what doesn't. Among the existing body of literature there are three supported positive outcomes from executive coaching:

- 1) Personal development (e.g., reduced stress, improved resilience, and better time management)
- 2) Behavioral changes towards others (e.g., better management and development of others, improved team building, and better communication skills)
- 3) Work performance (e.g., improved fit, feeling valued at work, and enhanced workplace well-being)

Existing outcome studies have investigated specific factors that affect coaching outcomes. Insights regarding some of those factors are highlighted below:

Coaching Model: Every coaching model studied brought positive outcomes revealing that any coaching regardless of model is better than no coaching.

Use of personality tools: a coach's timely and effective use of assessment tools improves coaching effectiveness.

Job Rank: Coaching has a stronger impact on middle managers and subordinates than executives.

Among the 110 studies, only three examined organizational level outcomes such as coaching culture or leadership effectiveness. Most studies focused on the outcomes for the coachee with only four studies focusing on coaching's effect on all three stake holders (organization, coachee, and coach). This confirms that by focusing on individual level outcomes the coaching process ignores its effects on and how it is affected by larger social contexts.

Note Worthy: It is important not to focus too much on the end goal of coaching, the outcomes and evaluation. Rather, leaders should understand the social contexts in which coaching takes place. To do so would weaken the overall evaluation by not addressing third variables such as coachee personality or other social context factors that affects positive outcomes.

Citation [Athanasopoulou, Andromachi & Dopson, Sue. \(2018\). A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most?. The Leadership Quarterly. 29. 10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.11.004.](#)

The Dawn of the Robot Coach

By Sarah Fister Gale

Read this if...

You want to understand how AI can change executive coaching by personalizing the coaching experience.

Summary

As AI matures, virtual coaches are now possible, using AI driven coaching applications. While AI is still rudimentary, startups in the AI coaching space are democratizing the benefit of coaching.

One startup uses AI to provide feedback to managers on their leadership skills using anonymous employee survey results and past performance data. The AI aggregates this information to provide personalized tips and training to help the managers improve. The startup is already finding results through early adopters, such as a New York based tech company that builds software platforms for local pizzerias. Many of the company's managers, comprised of fresh new hires, did not have prior formal job experience. In one specific case, an AI coach improved a manager's communication style. The manager would not have been aware of this issue without the coaching engagement.

AI coaching can also apply to public speaking training in fact, AI can provide performance assessment in ways humans cannot. For example, a public speaking coach can be programmed to listen to users as they speak, counting filler words and pauses as well as tracking speed, tone, and energy level. The AI can provide users with reports synthesizing this data into metrics and advice on how to improve. While there are fears that AI will replace human coaches, the true value of AI coaching is in providing personalized training to managers and leaders at all levels. This technology can offer coaching to managers who might never get this kind of training. However, its important to note that AI cannot generate its own advice and should be used primarily in an advisory role.

For AI to reach a greater level of complexity, it must be trained on thousands of examples. In addition, human emotional intelligence cannot currently be taught. For example, an impactful speech with a lot of filler words would be rated poorly by a machine. Such issues may be resolved as the AI is continually trained on additional user data.

Regardless of how advance this technology gets, AI should never be considered a replacement for human coaches. This is an ethical boundary that should never be crossed. Home AIs such as Alexa, Siri, and Google Home are intentionally designed to be not quite human to safe guard against this. Future developers should take note of this and follow suit.

Citation: [Sarah Fister Gale "The Dawn of the Robot Coach", Chief Learning Officer, April 9th 2018](#)

Executive and Employee Coaching: Research and Best Practices for Practitioners

By Alison E. Carr

Read this if...

Your company is interested in implementing a coaching initiative.

Summary

Executive coaching is a one on one relationship between an external coach and an executive level employee to facilitate behavioral change such as interpersonal communication, strategic thinking, and/or influencing organizational culture. While the definition of coaching is widely understood, predicting and measuring coaching's effectiveness is slightly complicated. Below are some helpful tips to navigate common executive coaching challenges.

Challenge 1: Finding an Appropriate Executive Coach

Companies should not blindly accept certifications as an indication of quality, as there are large variations in requirements for certification. Instead companies should look at both the requirements for certification attainment and the coach's work history. Within this context work history refers to both their previous coaching and their personal experience in similar roles to the coachee.

Challenge 2: Measuring Executive Coaching Outcomes

Practitioners should be wary of relying on coachee satisfaction reports as the basis for evaluation. These expectations can play a powerful role in how much benefit a person attributes to a program. Self-reported improvements can simply be a placebo effect. Instead practitioners should focus on performance changes through monitoring metrics that they believe will be influenced by coaching, such as competencies on annual performance reviews before and after the coaching initiative.

A key difference to note between executive and employee coaching is the power differential between the coach and coachee. A supervisor as a coach has influence over reward allocations, promotions, and work assignments for the coachee—which may exert undue influence on the quality of the coaching relationship. Below are some recommendations for overcoming common challenges:

Challenge 1: Facilitating the development of Quality Coaching Relationship

Before transitioning existing supervisory relationships into a coaching dynamic, the supervisor must be selected for their ability to be flexible in their development approach, ability to create a positive feedback environment, and their trustworthiness. A lacking in any of these precursors can diminish the quality of the coaching relationship.

Challenge 2: Measuring Employee Coaching Outcomes

Practitioners should consider how large-scale coaching initiatives impact the culture of larger work groups or the organization at large. This can be done by measuring variables like trust and feedback environment, both before and after implementation of the coaching program.

Citation Alison E Carr "Executive and Employee Coaching: Research and Best Practices for Practitioners", *Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 2016

Team Coaching That Accelerates Performance

By *Jacqueline Peters and Steve Gladis*

Read this if...

Your boss has given you a mandate to establish a team coaching practice in your organization.

Summary

Team coaching can help leaders and their team assess and create structures to build effective teams. Team coaching isn't to be confused with team building, such as going out for drinks or completing rope courses, rather a set of conditions that specially set the stage for the creation of a high performing team. A group of Harvard professors found combining leaders, teams, and an able external executive team coach can help leaders effectively design and develop highly effective teams.

Team coaching falls into these 6 phases:

Team assessment: Team coaching must begin with where the team currently is. Surveys and interviews with each team member and stakeholder can help assess how the team is currently doing. Then a review of expectations, culture, rewards, team strengths, and team challenges can help bridge the gap between where the team is and where it needs to be.

Team structure and design: Team coaches assist in assessing and designing a team makeup conducive to high performance. This is done by setting clear boundaries with defined membership and strong interdependent goals, finding the right people for the group in terms of skills, and a compelling purpose to bind the team's work to the overall company impact.

Team Launch: New teams are launched, and old teams can be relaunched to refresh their purpose. When led by a team coach, these launches are mostly held off site to help the team focus on their purpose and its ground rules. A team charter may also be created to keep the team on track for the future.

Individual Coaching: The team leader may also have separate individual coaching to develop their leadership abilities.

Ongoing team coaching: A team coach will continue to monitor and help guide the team's progress after the launch. While sometimes the team leader takes up the mantle of team coach, a coach can provide valuable third party observations. The coach can also train and encourage team members, and become a driver of employee engagement and performance.

Team performance: Monitoring a team's progress during the course and after the completion of a project is a key factor for team success. The team coach will help stakeholders reflect on their personal and group learning.

Citation [*Jacqueline Peters and Steve Gladis "Team Coaching That Accelerates Performance", Association for Talent Development, January 2018*](#)

How Peer Coaching Can Make Work Less Lonely

By *Norian Caporale-Berkowitz and Stewart D. Friedman*

Read this if...

Your employees are struggling with loneliness.

Summary

Workplace loneliness causes burnout, affects job satisfaction, and lowers both performance and retention. Loneliness is a feeling of isolation. Rather than limited coworker interactions or remote working, lack of high-quality and meaningful relationships is the cause of loneliness at work. Employees feel lonely when they are surrounded by colleagues whom they don't genuinely connect with. Influenced by the common idea that who you are is not who you should be in the office employees feel the need to craft and manage a work-safe persona. This persona contributes to the lack of genuine connections creating a feeling of isolation. Loneliness isn't an individual issue but rather a systematic cultural one. Loneliness can be combated when managers make space for vulnerability, allow people to be themselves, and create cultural norms that encourage genuine relationships.

How can peer coaching help?

Peer coaching can help reduce work related loneliness by creating an open, psychologically safe environment, where employees can interact on a meaningful level and be vulnerable. This cultivated network of allies can provide mutual support in creating positive change to improve performance. Employees can gain feelings of connection and trust and develop insights into their own issues through helping others. Specifically, peer coaching can help create the following:

- **A culture that values connection:** Loneliness develops when employees feel isolated, regardless of how much actual social support they have. An organization can reduce loneliness before any coaching begins simply through the signals such initiatives convey.
- **Meaningful dialogues vs. social snacking:** Social snacking is when you communicate mostly through email or chat then turn to social media during breaks. This creates the illusion of social interaction without the meaningful interactions that will satisfy. Peer coaching replaces social snacking with fulfilling meals of real talk. More effective than staged team outings or social events, taking turns talking about work and one's own life contexts serves as the catalyst for deep mutual understanding and can ultimately reduce loneliness.
- **Psychological safety:** Due to the consistent nature of peer coaching, employees can create long lasting confidants that persist over time. Because the participants in peer-to-peer coaching see each other as focused first and foremost on understanding what's on the inside, these dynamics produce psychological safety.

Noteworthy:

Peer coaching can be started by simply having a pair of employees take turns coaching each other for 20 minutes each. Have them listen and not try to fix the problem.

Citation [*Norian Caporale-Berkowitz and Stewart D. Friedman "How Peer Coaching Can Make Work Less Lonely", Harvard Business Review, October 12, 2018*](#)

Transformative Executive Coaching: Considerations for an Expanding Field of Research

By Ian Corrie and Ron Lawson

Read this if...

Your organization has a coachee who is stuck in an unproductive mindset and need to enhance their learning.

Summary

The authors propose a combination of traditional coaching with transformative learning processes to create an adult learning theory based coaching experience to dislodge stuck frameworks. This practice can help an executive who is having issues connecting to the greater purpose of their coaching, bridging the psychological gap between coachee experience and the coaching purpose. This gap is what is referred to as the disorienting dilemma. The authors set out the following stages.

Stage 1 Rapport building and listening: This is where the coach helps develop a safe and trusting space. The coach listens to the coachee's story—allowing for ventilation and honing in on the coachee's disorienting dilemma (the gap between coachee experience and the coaching purpose).

Stage 2 Critical Reflection: This parallels with the assessment stage of the traditional coaching experience. This stage involves critical reflection, by first suspending normality allowing the coachee to not carry on with their old paradigm and then having the coachee hear their own story to make sense of it.

Stage 3 Making meaning from the story: This stage involves testing problematic frames of reference, exploring other perspectives, understanding the coachee's world view, and starting to reframe the coachee's understanding.

Stage 4 Working with meaning: This stage focuses on re-framing new perspectives, skills, and knowledge. It also involves developing a plan for action and is where the coachee will hopefully abandon their old ways of thinking.

Stage 5 Integration and Investiture: This stage is marked by an acceptance of the coachee's new story and integration of it into their new world view.

This combination of theory and practice has found success within the National Health Service trust in the UK. The organization experienced a reduction in staffing resource and a flattening of the company's structure. This created role ambiguity, with managers feeling anxious for the emotional responsibility of the overall staff. This coachee had the limiting belief that they were responsible for the actions of other managers, and to do the right thing they had to take responsibility for the work of other managers not within their department. The coachee, through transformative coaching, was able to see that performance improvements were not entirely their responsibility and that other managers were still held responsibility. This reframing allowed the coachee to get unstuck and find a path forward.

Citation [*Ian Corrie and Ron Lawson "Transformative Executive Coaching: Considerations for an Expanding Field of Research", Journal of Transformative Learning, 2017*](#)

Building the Case for Executive Coaching

By Sarah Stawiski, Maggie Sass, and Rosa Grunhaus Belzer

Read this if...

Your organization will find value in starting a coaching program.

Summary

The CCL conducted a study on the effectiveness of their RACSR model of coaching. The RACSR model consists of the following dimensions.

Relationship: At the core of the coaching dynamic is the relationship between the coach and the coachee. The coach must develop rapport, commitment, and trust for effective coaching to begin. By having this strong foundation, the real work of challenging the coachee's assumptions and biases and pathing the way to development may begin. The role a coach can have is flexible ranging from expert, dialogue partner, feedback interpreter, accountability partner, and role model to fit the coachee's needs.

Assessment: The purpose of assessment is to get a thorough understanding of the coachee to understand who they are, the context they operate in, and opportunities for development. This can be done through interviews, instruments, and observations woven throughout the coaching engagement.

Challenge: Experiences that challenge the coachee are found to have the greatest impact. Challenges move the coachee out of their comfort zone through stretching to new behaviors as well as understanding potential blockages that prevent the coachee from progressing.

Support: Support is needed to help coachee's overcome obstacles and to ease the discomfort inherent in the development process. Coaches can support their coachee's by helping maintain motivation, being patient with performance dips throughout the engagement, and encouraging the coachee to seek continuous feedback.

Results: Results are the measurable or observable outcomes of the coaching engagement. It's when the coach helps identify specific behaviors that allows the coachee to achieve their goals.

The study found the RACSR model to be very effective boasting staggeringly high scores with 95% of the 347 leaders reporting, from a moderate or higher extent, that coaching was worth the time and effort. Throughout the process 98% of the coachee found their coaches clarified purpose, assisted them in finding areas of improvement, encouraged new behaviors, provided practical input, and helped identify specific behaviors that would help the coachee attain their goals.

Citation [*Sarah Stawiski, Maggie Sass, and Rosa Grunhaus Belzer "Building the Case for Executive Coaching", Center for Creative Leadership, 2016*](#)

How Mindfulness Improves Executive Coaching

By David Brendal and Emmie Roe Stamell

Read this if...

You would like to examine the benefits of integrating mindfulness into your coaching practice.

Summary

The synergy of mindfulness and coaching can enrich both disciplines and create more self-aware, grounded, and effective leaders. Mindfulness meditation has helped business leaders manage stress, maintain focus, enhance cognitive performance, increase emotional intelligence, and improve interpersonal relationships. But when paired with executive coaching these benefits can be integrated into more specific leadership development needs.

Coaches and mindfulness specialists can work closely with joint clients to address core issues through an interdisciplinary approach. A coach can engage their clients on how mindfulness techniques are working to aid their leadership development, while a mindfulness specialist can help develop individually tailored meditation sessions to support their developmental goals. These processes work powerfully to reinforce each other.

Through mindfulness meditation, such as controlled breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, a client can reach a state of meditative relaxation. Allowing them to be better attuned to reflect and introspect on any issues the coaching session may want to target. Also, any thoughts that bubble up during the meditation can be valuable for the next coaching session. But this type of joint development can only be achieved if the mindfulness specialist and the coach engage in a healthy dialogue and the client proactively participates in both.

An executive with a successful tech startup experienced a spike in longstanding anxiety, obsessional work style, and health worries. The coaching sessions helped him to reframe his mindset from focusing on problems and roadblocks in front of him to focusing on the interesting challenges and opportunities around him. During meditations, more issues not immediately known, such as his office set up and daily work schedule, were raised when the executive was in a state of relaxation. This information from the meditation sessions helped deepen the coaching process by identifying realistic tasks for him to pursue. Once the executive was able to expand his self-awareness and relieve his anxiety, he became more grounded, focused, and capable of making meaningful changes. Deep breathing and somatic relaxation helped ease his cognitive intensity, allowing him to tolerate and transform stressful thoughts.

Citation [David Brendal and Emmie Roe Stamell "How Mindfulness Improves Executive Coaching", Harvard Business Review, January 29 2016](#)

Most Managers Don't Know How to Coach People. But They Can Learn

By Julia Milner and Trenton Milner

Read this if...

Your organization is seeking to improve coaching abilities among managers.

Summary

Many executives think they are successful at coaching employees, but recent research shows that they often are just telling employees what to do. Coaching is unlocking employees' potential and helping them to learn and improve; however, some managers tend to see it as a form of micromanagement or consulting, offering direct advice or solutions to coachees.

In this study leaders were asked to coach each other on time management. Their coaching sessions were videotaped and then evaluated separately by themselves and expert coaches. What followed was face-to-face coaching training in large groups with breakouts for practice, feedback, and reflection on coaching skills. The whole process was repeated to help researchers compare pre- and post-training results.

This study revealed that not only that the managers thought of coaching as advice giving but also that this form of micromanaging was reinforced as good coaching by other participants.

Drawing upon existing literature and personal practical experience as leadership coaches, the researchers created a list of nine skills that a strong coach needs to have. Among the nine skills, "listening" was rated the highest—as "average" by experts—before training and rose to "average-to-good" after training. Prior to training, the participants were struggling the most with "recognizing and pointing out strengths" and "letting the coachee arrive at their own solution". Interestingly, the participants showed most improvement (among the nine skills) in the latter after training with an average increase of 54.1 percent.

Organizations should clearly define what coaching is and how it is different from other manager behaviors. This shift in mindset lays the foundation for training and gives managers a clear set of expectations. Organizations should also let managers practice coaching in a safe environment before working on their teams. The good news is that managers don't require extensive training to show noticeable improvement—even short courses targeting the right skills can help.

Noteworthy: The nine critical skills are listening, questioning, giving feedback, assisting with goal setting, showing empathy, letting coachee arrive at their own solutions, recognizing and pointing out strengths, providing structure, and encouraging a solution focused approach.

Citation [*Julia Milner and Trenton Milner "Most Managers Don't Know How to Coach People. But They Can Learn", Harvard Business Review, August 14, 2018*](#)

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