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CIPD's tenth annual survey shows how coaching within organisations has moved beyond being 'the latest fad' – to adding real benefits

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Coaching is increasingly popular as a means of promoting learning and development, according to this year's learning and development survey, from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Initial findings show, that almost three-quarters (71%) of UK employers currently use coaching in their organisations, compared to 63% in 2007 and a similar proportion (72%) of respondents find coaching to be an effective tool.

However, the purpose of coaching would appear to vary according to whom it is offered. Within organisations that offer coaching to all their employees, general personal development (79%) and helping poor performance (74%) are both cited as the most common purposes for which coaching is used, whereas with organisations that only offer coaching to managers the emphasis shifts towards its positioning as part of a wider management and leadership development programme (61%).

The survey finds more than two fifths of organisations now offer coaching to all employees, 39% offer it to directors and senior management and a third offer it to senior managers and line managers/supervisors.

Dr John McGurk, CIPD Learning, Training and Development Adviser, says:

"Coaching is not just a popular technique but an immensely powerful one for supporting personal development. There is no doubt that coaching is having a significant impact both on individual and organisational performance. As coaching helps people to develop, it's a perfect fit for the fast moving knowledge economy in which we operate."

The survey highlights that the bulk of the responsibility for delivering coaching lies with line managers coaching those who report to them (36%) and to HR and/or learning, training, and development specialists (30%). Over half of organisations (53%) believe that coaching by line managers is the most effective learning and development practice and nearly half (49%) anticipate that even greater responsibility will fall onto line managers in the next five years.

Dr McGurk adds: "The key issue is that coaching is a technique used by managers with other parts of the management toolkit not just by itself, therefore boosting the skills of line managers. Coaching is a win-win solution to workforce development, offering the scope to help employees reach their potential, while improving the competitiveness and productivity of the business as a whole."

Worryingly, however, only eight per cent evaluate the effectiveness of coaching via a formal annual (or other regular) evaluation process. Two in five (42%) respondents feel that the effectiveness of coaching is gauged by reviews of objectives conducted with line managers, coaches and coachees.

Dr McGurk continues: "We have been working with the coaching industry to improve standards and to help HR directors make the right decisions about coaching. Organisations face significant challenges in drawing up frameworks that ensure value for money and that are aligned with their organisation's strategic objectives. The challenge will be about how best to evaluate the effects of coaching, in light of the current emphasis placed firmly on anecdotal, rather than 'hard' measures. Unless coaching is managed and designed effectively, the results may not measure up to expectations."

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