



Event report September 2005

# DOES COACHING WORK? A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE COACHING AT WORK CONFERENCE

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# Introduction

I think we can now safely say that coaching isn't just another HR fad, despite its explosive growth in the last few years. It seems that coaching has arrived and is set to stay. CIPD research certainly suggests that coaching is a growing trend rather than a passing fashion. It's slowly but steadily diffusing through UK organisations and becoming an essential and valuable feature of their learning and development strategies.

It's an exciting time to be involved in coaching. The industry has reached a crossroads and is at a new stage in its maturation. There has been considerable progress in our understanding of how to effectively manage and deliver coaching. And people are starting to accept that coaching isn't just a 'nice to have' learning initiative – it's something that has the potential to make a significant contribution to their business.

Now that the initial hype and excitement is dying down, we must ensure that coaching doesn't become another flash-in-the-pan HR activity that fails to fulfil its potential. Most notably, we need to demonstrate that coaching is having a significant impact both on individual and organisational performance.

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## The meteoric rise of coaching

Before we take a closer look at organisations' use of coaching today, we should remind ourselves of its progress to date. Those of us who've been monitoring the rise of coaching over the last few years are well aware of the hype and self-promotion that has frequently surrounded it. And we've seen the problems caused by people entering the market calling themselves coaches but lacking the necessary training, experience and knowledge base. Both of these issues have marred the reputation of coaching and have led to a degree of wariness and cynicism from the business community. There has also been a degree of 'in-fighting' between related professional bodies and associations as they vie for status and position. Without a leading industry body and a clear voice of authority, there are few objective sources of information, guidance and advice for practitioners.

HR practitioners have been on the receiving end of this, trying to make sense of it all. Because of the relatively recent emergence of coaching, few HR professionals

have in-depth expertise of managing coaching activities and few understand how to make the best use of it. The CIPD surveyed its members and found that they're finding it an uphill struggle. The vast majority report that finding high-quality coaches is 'a difficult task', the lack of regulation 'worrying' and the terminology confusing and off-putting. All in all, HR practitioners are battling with a variety of issues that stop them gaining full value from their coaching activities. Among the problems reported are a lack of agreement about what a good coach is, engaging different stakeholders in coaching relationships, and evaluating the impact of activities. All of these are significant challenges for HR professionals as they work to draw up a framework to ensure value for money and alignment with their organisation's strategic objectives.

The problem has never really been with the concept of coaching itself. Few people would deny the value of one-to-one consultation and support for an individual's development. This approach has a long and successful history in organisational training and development,

being a key feature of a wide array of activities including personal effectiveness programmes, 360-degree feedback, career counselling and, more recently, mentoring schemes. The scepticism that has plagued coaching has probably come about because of its rapid rise and the consequent flurry of excitement. Coaching has become the largest growth area in HR development activity and sceptics are still waiting for it to falter.

But, gradually, coaching has started to shake off some of its negative press. Those in the industry have been doing their bit. Coaches are keen to raise the reputation of their industry and weed out practitioners who operate unethically. And professional bodies and associations have been working enthusiastically on codes of practice, ethics, guidelines and standards to raise levels of practice. From the demand side, organisations have realised that they need a more discerning and educated approach to managing their coaching activities and dealing with the still fragmented and confusing coaching industry. By setting themselves high standards – of practice, expectations and outcomes – at procurement, they've helped to improve levels of practice. A lot has been learned and progress has been made, but there's still a long way to go.

### The current snapshot

So what is the picture today? As the pace of coaching has moved so rapidly, it's been a challenge to keep track of its progress and use in organisational settings. In the last few years, the CIPD's annual training and development surveys have given us a rich source of information about the coaching marketplace. In particular, the 2004 and 2005 survey reports have provided significant evidence about current trends and issues. The research from the 2004 survey was reported in the CIPD guide, *Coaching and Buying Coaching Services*, but this information has now been updated and extended for this event report, taking in the latest 2005 findings. The evidence paints an unequivocal picture of the progress of coaching in UK organisations and identifies a number of underlying issues.

### Use of coaching now and in the future

The survey findings highlight the undeniable growth of coaching and illustrate its increasing role in contemporary learning and development strategies. Coaching is no longer the preserve of a small minority of organisations. Table 1 shows that coaching by line managers is used by almost nine in ten respondent organisations and coaching by external practitioners is used by almost two in every three.

Table 1: Percentage of organisations using coaching

Type of coaching	Percentage of respondents reporting using it
Coaching by line managers	84
Coaching by external practitioners	64

And the use of coaching is not yet at its peak. Respondents to the CIPD survey indicated that coaching activities, with e-learning, represent the largest growth areas in training and development activities. Coaching by line managers looks set to increase significantly over the next few years, with almost three-quarters of respondents (74%) reporting that they expect to increase their use of these activities and only 1% expecting to reduce their efforts in this area.

### **Does coaching work?**

When asked about effectiveness, 84% regard coaching by line managers as 'effective' or 'very effective', while 92% judge coaching by external practitioners to be effective (CIPD 2005). Interestingly, although coaching by line managers is more widespread, coaching by external coaches is considered to be more effective as a means of learning.

The 2005 survey evidence supports the high level of belief in coaching reported by the HR community in the previous year's survey. But in spite of the widespread usage and belief in coaching, there's still a lot of work to be done if the positive beliefs about its potential contribution are to be realised. Few organisations have a strategy for their activities – only 5% of respondents claim to have 'all' their line managers trained to coach their team members – and, worryingly, very little evaluation is taking place (CIPD 2004). Unless coaching is managed and designed effectively, the results may not measure up to expectations. If we let this happen, coaching could become increasingly bedevilled by accusations of hype and false claims of success.

### **Looking for answers: does coaching work?**

Few organisations today, if any, would claim that they've already successfully embedded coaching, but clearly many are investing heavily in order to head in that direction. What are their expectations about what coaching will deliver? And what are those expectations based on?

Coaching isn't a cheap option. There are significant costs involved in implementing coaching initiatives, not least in terms of the time and effort of the people who get involved. However, if we have substantial evidence to suggest that the gains from coaching far outweigh

the costs, organisations won't be deterred from investing in coaching. But this is a big 'if'. Is there reliable evidence to support the belief in the effectiveness of coaching and to encourage organisations to invest?

A number of significant questions remain unanswered about the contribution of coaching to individual and organisational performance, the most significant one being whether any hard evidence exists that it actually works. Until coaching can answer its critics by revealing evidence of the value it delivers to organisations, such questions are unlikely to go away. The continuing success and belief in coaching will probably be determined by its ability to deliver demonstrable value.

To counter criticisms and avoid being labelled 'cowboy coaches', coaching professionals are increasingly asking searching questions about the theoretical foundation of their services. Consumers of coaching services have grown progressively more sophisticated and have started to use more rigorous coach assessment and selection processes. They're also requesting facts and data about the effectiveness of coaching. As a result, there has been a significant push for coaches to ground their services in evidence-based approaches and a call for more research on the impact of coaching in a variety of organisational settings.

With pressure to prove the value of coaching coming from all sides, practitioners working with or for organisations are now strongly committed to exploring how, and how much, coaching impacts on individuals and the organisations that employ them. They know that the extent to which coaching becomes a mainstream component of organisational practice is dependent on the degree to which it can be shown to improve business performance.

This is the starting point for the new CIPD book, *The Case for Coaching: Making evidence-based decisions on coaching*, which will be published later this year. What does the research evidence that exists today tell us about the impact and power of coaching in organisational settings? We want to know how organisational coaching affects the lives of individuals. What do individuals who have been coached say about the impact of coaching on their work, relationships and

personal development? And what evidence is there that any success at an individual level filters down to produce positive benefits at an organisational level that can be seen to alter performance and results?

### **Reviewing the evidence**

Although worldwide interest in coaching has been high, research into the practice and impact of coaching in business settings appears to be lagging behind the practice itself. There is a broad base of research about coaching more generally, particularly from the sports world and in educational settings, and this tends to suggest that coaching is effective in improving aspects of an individual's behaviour. There's also a wealth of research relating to specific elements of coaching, such as the use of specific techniques/tools (for example, goal-setting). But much less is known about the impact of coaching in business settings. Rigorous research data are surprisingly hard to find; the specific literature on coaching in organisational settings being particularly sparse.

If coaching is to be taken seriously, it's essential that it's based on sound research evidence and theory. This isn't just something for 'ivory tower' academics working in universities. It should concern everyone who's involved in coaching as it's crucial for their credibility. Examining the current research base offers far greater opportunities than just attempting to assess effectiveness or calculate a figure for return on investment. It allows us to examine the factors and processes involved in understanding 'how coaching works'. What are the features inherent in the design of coaching interventions that help to create and sustain real behaviour change, and how can this be mined to result in positive benefits for individuals and organisations as a whole? The answers we gain to this important question can help us to determine what effective coaching practices look like, or at least give us some pointers in terms of what factors are likely to support or hinder the impact and effectiveness of coaching initiatives.

### **A step in the right direction**

The new CIPD book, *The Case for Coaching: Making evidence-based decisions on coaching*, gathers together the research evidence we've collated and the practical experiences of those who've been implementing coaching activities in organisations. More than 25 organisational case studies have been undertaken. They're all described in the book to provide a flavour of how organisations of different sizes and in different industrial sectors are using coaching, and to give an insight into what those organisations learned about the effective implementation of coaching.

The remainder of this event report is extracted from one of the chapters of the new CIPD book. It aims to provide some preliminary answers to the question: does coaching impact on individual and business performance? It's based on an analysis of information provided by about 30 organisations that have introduced coaching and which kindly agreed to share their experiences for this project. Given the relative scarcity of research about the impact of coaching in business settings, their data have proved to be a valuable mine of information about UK organisations' current experiences and use of coaching.

# Reviewing the evidence from our case study organisations

Before taking part in telephone interviews, most of the organisations (29) filled in a questionnaire designed to gain information about their coaching activities and their views on the effective use of coaching. The case study organisations were chosen to represent a wide range of sectors, sizes and types of ownership. Table 2 provides a list of the organisations that took part in the research. Some of these organisations have worked with us to produce detailed case studies that will be published in the new CIPD book.

Table 2: Organisations involved in the CIPD research project

BBC	Glenmorangie plc	Panasonic Europe
Blackrock International	Greater London Authority	Perkins Shibaaura Engines
BPB Paperboard	High & Mighty	Pertemps Recruitment Partnership
Bovis Lend Lease	Glasgow Housing Association	Regal Fish Supplies
Boxwood	Kwik Fit Financial Services	Rugby Cement
Canada Life	London School of Economics	Selfridges
Courtenay HR	Lloyds TSB	Shell
Castle Cement	Loughborough University	Stephenson Harwood
Dixons	Midland Area Housing Association	Surrey and Sussex Strategic Health Authority
Everest Limited	Nationwide	Tate
Exeter City Council	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire Strategic Health Authority	United Utilities

The core research questions we wanted to address were:

- 1 Does coaching work?
- 2 Is there any hard evidence that coaching impacts on individual and organisational performance?
- 3 How does coaching work?
- 4 What helps or hinders the success of coaching initiatives?

In-depth and high-quality data were shared with us by the organisations and this has enabled us to provide some initial answers to our core questions, which are reviewed in turn in this chapter.

### Question 1 Does coaching work?

Our case study organisations were asked to specify the types of coaching used in their organisation and to rate them in terms of effectiveness. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Which types of coaching are currently used in your organisation, and how effective have they been?

	Percentage saying this form of coaching is ...				Percentage using this form of coaching
	Very effective	Effective	Not very effective	Ineffective	
Coaching by line managers	13	54	33	-	96
Coaching by external coaches	39	52	9	-	92
Coaching by internal coaches	16	84	-	-	76
Coaching by members of the HR department	10	74	16	-	76

All of our case study organisations were using a mixture of different coaching practitioners to deliver their coaching activities. Ninety-six per cent used coaching by line managers, and coaching by external coaches was the second most common form (92%). Coaching by internal coaches and members of the HR department was less common, but was still used by about three-quarters of our organisations. Coaching therefore tends to involve internal and external practitioners, with organisations choosing to use a complementary selection to deliver their coaching requirements.

But on to the crucial question: do they think it works? The results of our ‘mini-survey’ paint a positive picture. The vast majority believe that coaching does work. However, there are some differences in how effective the different types of coaching are thought to be. External coaching received the highest endorsement (with 39% rating it as ‘very effective’). But some organisations also reported situations where external coaching hasn’t delivered the anticipated results (9% of organisations rated it as ‘not very effective’). Coaching by internal coaches also received a very positive endorsement, despite it barely featuring in the research literature to date. Coaching by line managers is generally considered to be effective, but a significantly higher number of organisations reported problems with this type of intervention (33%). Finally, the vast majority of organisations felt that coaching by members of the HR department (a form of internal coaching) was ‘effective’, but a small proportion were less impressed – almost one-fifth rated this as ‘not very effective’.

Looking at these results together, there appears to be a very high level of belief in the effectiveness of coaching from our case study organisations, although there were some indications of ‘teething problems’ – particularly when using manager-coaches and internal coaches from HR.

We wanted to get beyond generalised beliefs in the overall effectiveness of coaching and identify whether the organisations felt that coaching interventions had specifically resulted in improved organisational and individual performance. The results of the responses to this question are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Overall, have the coaching initiatives you’ve implemented had an impact on the performance of (a) the individual and (b) the organisation?

	Percentage answering ...		
	Yes, overall, a positive impact on performance	Yes, overall, a negative impact on performance	No, overall, no impact on performance
Individuals receiving coaching	96	4	-
Organisation	87	-	13

Again, the results are very positive. The vast majority of people firmly believe that coaching creates improvements in the performance of individuals, which translate into results for the organisations they work for. However, it isn't a miracle intervention. While coaching was almost always considered to deliver improved individual performance, this didn't automatically translate into visible benefits for the organisation. For 13% of our case study organisations, coaching hadn't had an overall impact on business performance.

So, does coaching work? Well, according to our case study organisations, the initial answer appears to be 'yes' – not a single organisation described any form of coaching as ineffective. However, there are clearly some instances when organisations struggle with using the different forms of coaching to their full advantage. There therefore appears to be a caveat to the answer 'yes, coaching works': coaching can work, but we need to explore this further in order to understand the limitations and barriers to coaching activities that organisations are currently experiencing.

## Question 2 Is there any hard evidence that coaching impacts on individual and organisational performance?

Rather than solely relying on participants' perceptions about the impact of coaching, we also asked our organisations about how they were measuring and assessing its impact. The results show that organisations are making considerable efforts to assess the impact of coaching, understanding that this is vital for the long-term sustainability of their activities. Respondents reported undertaking a wide range of evaluation activities, as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Use of different evaluation techniques

	Percentage of respondents using this technique
Asking for feedback from individuals receiving coaching	89
Asking for feedback from participants' line managers	75
Assessing changes in individual performance or career progress	64
Assessing achievement of goals set at the beginning of the coaching	57
Assessing changes in employee attitude survey ratings	39
Assessing changes in the culture of the organisation	36
Assessing changes in organisational performance	32

Unsurprisingly, asking for feedback from participants and their managers is the most common activity. Some may argue that this is simply because it's the easiest option. But, given the individual focus on coaching, whether the individual feels that it has helped them learn and develop has to be one of the most important indicators of success – as are the views of their manager, colleagues and direct reports about whether the individual's behaviour has changed as a result of coaching. The most disappointing finding is the fact that only just over half of our organisations reported assessing whether the goals set at the beginning of the coaching had been achieved. It's likely that this is because goals weren't set at the outset or because time wasn't made for reviewing whether they had been achieved. Either way, it seems that organisations may be missing a trick in gaining some important data about whether coaching is actually achieving the goals it was introduced to address.

However, it's pleasing to see that some of our organisations are trying to assess changes in individual and organisational performance, even if it's only a small minority. Organisations that are attempting to measure the impact of coaching on performance are trying to adopt meaningful measures that are aligned to the business area or context in which the coaching is taking place. This results in individuals being coached in relation to targets that are meaningful for the organisation.

This attention to careful measurement was a feature of many of the case study organisations. Overall, the types of measures used can be grouped into three types of data: targets, performance ratings and success stories.

### Targets

Targets are used when the organisations think that coaching will result in clearly identified changes that directly relate to measurable outcomes valued by the business (see Figure 1 on page 12). Examples include:

- increases – sales, revenue, profitability and productivity
- decreases – cycle times, absence, down time and quality failures
- instilled practice – employees using a defined procedure or a new skill.

Figure 1: Targets used by our case study organisations

- Achievement of business key performance indicators/goals
- Measures of increased skills
- Quantifiable business improvements
- Increased sales per full-time employee
- Time taken for new recruits to reach minimum performance levels
- Productivity levels
- Product quality levels
- Reduction in absence through sickness measured through days lost at work
- Revenue generated
- Market share
- Cycle-time improvement
- Cost reduction
- Profit from sales
- Number of team members who set objectives and development targets

#### Performance ratings and survey results

Performance ratings and survey results are often assessed when coaching is aimed at achieving changes in behaviour that result in measurable changes in aspects of an individual's job performance. They're also used when coaching is used to collectively change behaviours and attitudes at the department or organisational level. Activities to gain this kind of information typically include data to support changes in customer feedback, 360-degree assessments, ratings of competence/skills, organisational cultural indicators and employee satisfaction scores (Figure 2).

#### Success stories of quantitative business improvements

Success stories are commonly used by organisations when they're trying to encourage and build visible evidence of the results achieved via coaching. The stories can help organisations to gain support for coaching and illustrate when it has helped to bring about a cultural change or achieve business improvements. These can include:

- stories about changes in customer perceptions
- accounts of individual or departmental successes

Figure 2: Examples of performance rating measures used by the case study organisations

- Performance rating from coach, coachee, mentor and manager
- 360- or 180-degree feedback
- Mystery shopper/customer feedback
- Cultural survey scores
- Performance ratings
- Ratings of competence
- Employee satisfaction survey scores
- Quality percentage improvement
- Achievement of Investors in People (IIP) status
- Customer survey results
- Skills matrix – percentage of key tasks covered by the teams
- Position in surveys such as '100 best companies'
- More focused management style leading to greater compliance and better outputs

- stories of significant improvements in performance or results due to coaching
- vision statements and events to publicise achievements.

So organisations are making significant attempts to gain quantitative information about the impact of coaching by using a wide range of measures. Notably they're trying to use measures that specifically relate and are meaningful to the individual and the organisation.

Alongside these activities, organisations also reported a whole host of informal activities aimed at gaining 'a feel' for how their coaching activities were working. This includes talking to managers and senior managers on an informal basis about their views on how coaching is working in the organisation, as well as talking to coaches working with the organisation to gain their feedback. Satisfaction with coaching and the impact of coaching behaviours in the organisation are also assessed during wider business or HR processes, such as employee attitude surveys and employee consultation activities.

#### **What results have been achieved?**

Organisations are making in-roads with the measurement and evaluation of their coaching activities, but what are they actually finding? Overall, they report

seeing a wide range of improvements at both individual and organisational levels. Some of the positive results that have been achieved are illustrated in Figure 3 on pages 14-15. You'll find more detail in the case studies in the forthcoming book.

It seems that coaching can result in improved performance, positive behaviour change, more effective leadership and improved confidence and motivation. These collectively contribute to positive changes to the organisational culture. This is seen in terms of greater employee engagement, better working relationships, a more effective environment and a more positive attitude towards development and change.

#### **Question 3 How does coaching work?**

Looking broadly at our first two questions, we can conclude that in our case study organisations there's a perception that coaching works and there are some identifiable measures that evidence its success. But we were also interested in finding out what our organisations thought was responsible for the improvements that coaching delivered within their organisations. How does coaching work to create improvements in individual and business performance? There are considerable differences in the types of coaching being used, the level of training considered adequate, the presence or absence of supervision,

the breadth and variety of coaching models and techniques being used, and the behaviours to which it's applied. Coaching therefore can work differently (and successfully) in many different situations. This makes it more awkward to draw straightforward conclusions about the conditions for effective coaching.

Nevertheless, a number of common themes emerge about how coaching works to drive performance improvements. The process of coaching appears to have some specific characteristics and attributes which, in combination, help to support learning and change.

### Figure 3: Examples of the reported results seen from the use of coaching in case study organisations

#### Performance

- Improved performance by the individual and the team
- Less 'human' errors and thus less time spent correcting work and/or mitigating the effects of incorrect actions
- Increase in visible performance noted by line manager or coachee
- A decrease in managerial time required to monitor and check team members' work due to increased confidence in the individuals' performance

#### Confidence and motivation

- Individuals have become more proactive as their confidence levels increase
- Improved confidence and performance at work
- Early feedback is mainly positive. Those being coached are motivated by the levels of support provided and attitudes towards self-directed progress are enhanced

#### Behaviour change

- Re-engagement with role and organisation, greater clarity and perspective, increased proactivity and capacity for addressing issues, increased confidence, greater awareness of management/leadership styles, more effective management of challenging people and greater awareness of career options and choices
- Change in some managers' work styles – higher commitment and more focused on actions
- Behavioural changes in targeted individuals – improved performance in specific areas
- There have been behavioural changes such as leadership development, confidence, resilience and greater coaching skills

#### Culture

- Increased two-way communication
- Improved employee engagement scores
- Achieving IIP status from zero starting point within 12 months
- Surveys indicated organisational values are better embedded
- Results seen so far include benefits for the coachee, such as improved relationships, promotion, greater responsibility and new roles

### Figure 3: Examples of the reported results seen from the use of coaching in case study organisations (continued)

#### Leadership

- More confident and effective leadership being demonstrated
- Improved leadership from team-leader level
- Decision speed improved at senior levels
- Management committee and general managers 'singing from the same song sheet'
- Improvements in confidence and motivation among the individuals being coached and a general impression from line managers that the individuals are more engaged and enthusiastic in their day-to-day work

#### Attributes of coaching relationships that help to explain how coaching works

Several characteristics of coaching as a form of development were felt by our case study organisations to help explain 'how' coaching works. These are described below and illustrated by direct quotes from our case study organisations:

- **A focused form of development** – Respondents provided examples of how coaching enabled individuals to take time out and maintain focus on an issue:

*'If you want to get the best out of people you have to invest time in their development. Coaching focuses on the individual. It is about taking the time to listen to what individuals want to achieve and what stops them.'*

- **Support for change** – Respondents mentioned that the one-to-one coaching relationship enabled individuals to develop a positive perspective that change would occur and was possible. This encouraged individuals to stick with their goals and not give up:

*'We use coaching to develop personal effectiveness in our managers, encouraging them to move away from reactive management to proactive management and thinking more about high-leverage activity. By stepping back with them and then supporting them as they experiment with their "ideas" we can give them a pat on the back as they start to see and feel the positive difference they are making.'*

*'Improving basic skills and knowledge is covered by conventional training interventions and management practices. Coaching is the vehicle used to achieve a behavioural change that can eventually change the culture within the organisation.'*

- **Support for other learning and development initiatives** – Coaching was considered to be an intervention that could easily align with and support other learning and development initiatives and therefore didn't operate as a stand-alone developmental intervention:

*'As a group we are keen to make coaching a development tool that is available to employees at every level. In a lot of cases coaching is given in conjunction with a specific development course to give the delegate support whilst change takes place.'*

*'It takes the learning from the broad brush of the Management Development Programme through to the specific aims of the individual in terms of their continuing work with their line manager and team.'*

*'We work with key players addressing change to coach them to lead and manage change effectively, considering the business results required as well as the 'human' results. We coach those affected by change to make the transition.'*

- **Tailored, flexible support for the learner** – We all have different learning styles and preferences and one of the chief benefits of coaching was considered to be the fact that it can be tailored

specifically to align with the individual's learning style and the particular issues or development areas they're seeking to address:

*'Coaching has impact because it can be delivered flexibly, it is 1:1, tailored to the individual's needs, and confidential.'*

*'Coaching is a very flexible breed of training, where the syllabus or agenda is informal and changes with the mood or circumstances of the moment.'*

- **Evidence of an organisation investing in their staff** – Being offered a one-to-one focus on their development was interpreted as a commitment to participants' success. This helps to build motivation and commitment to the organisation:

*'Formal coaching can represent a positive experience for individuals seeking development as they are given "special attention" to grow through a series of pre-arranged coaching sessions demonstrating a commitment from the business to work with an individual to the required level of competency.'*

- **The ability to address a broad range of interconnected issues** – The fact that coaching can cover multiple areas of development was felt to be an important part of 'how coaching works', as well as the fact that it's highly flexible. The agenda in a coaching relationship is continually reviewed and sessions can respond to issues that arise over the course of the relationship. Other forms of development were considered unable to achieve this:

*'Coaching covers a wide range of issues that could not easily have been addressed by a training course.'*

*'Coaching is valuable in addressing specific issues such as: dealing with career plateau, career transitions, refocusing, redesigning job role, work-life balance, interpersonal relationships, understanding own management styles and others', managing conflict and dealing with change. However, it is the potential to take a more holistic view of issues and the individual's needs that differentiates it from many traditional training courses.'*

- **Confidentiality and trust** – The confidential environment of a coaching relationship was felt to be a critical part of the success of coaching as it enables the coachee to explore the issues they face over a series of sessions:

*'During the course of a coaching conversation, many kinds of issues may arise. What is actually dealt with is agreed between the coach and the client.'*

*'It is so valuable to have an impartial, no-strings and confidential sounding board.'*

*'The confidentiality and objectivity to the organisational situation offered by an external coach allow people to be more open and honest about their issues in a way that would not be possible within the line management relationship.'*

### **Mechanisms that form part of the coaching process that help us to understand how coaching works**

Coaching is believed to encompass a series of activities and exercises that work in combination to result in positive outcomes for the individual. These include:

- **Goal setting** – Setting and monitoring targets that hold the coachee to account for their behaviour were frequently mentioned as important in ensuring that coaching worked:

*'It is about establishing goals to work towards and building a sense of achievement. The more people achieve the more they feel they can achieve.'*

*'I now have a plan and a goal to address some areas around personal performance that had been frustrating me.'*

- **Opportunities for reflection** – Coaching provides 'time out' for people to actually think about what they want from their jobs and how they can improve their performance and relationships at work:

*'Coaching has provided an opportunity for individuals to reflect on their contribution to and impact on the organisation, along with the support to enhance and improve their position.'*

- **Questioning and challenging** – Coaches can challenge and question participants about their attitudes and experiences so that they reflect and think carefully about their behaviour or about what they want to achieve:

*'Questioning skills are such a key factor in the success or failure of coaching in order for the individual to maximise the time with the coach.'*

*'Coaching skills lie at the foundation of higher-performing leaders and teams. A skilled coach can help managers think differently about what they do and how they do it.'*

- **Increasing self-awareness** – Coaching combined with a 360-degree feedback process is an effective way of increasing an individual's self-awareness and identifying any development issues or blind spots. Coaching offers a supportive environment for encouraging individuals to act and change their behaviour in the light of feedback they receive from the 360-degree process:

*'Coaching helped the senior team to agree a common purpose, develop confidence as a team, identify how to recognise, modify and develop self-awareness and to better understand the team dynamic.'*

*'The questions helped me look beyond my own frame of reference.'*

- **Structured exploration of options and decisions** – Coaching promotes individual ownership for learning but in an environment where they're both challenged and supported. Alternatives and different options can be explored before decisions are made. This combination was felt by many of our case study organisations to result in a highly effective climate for learning:

*'Through coaching, other alternatives may appear that have not been considered before. The principle is that if alternatives and action plans can be developed and owned by the individual, then supported through the line manager and coach, they are more likely to be effective.'*

*'When carried out well, it can be a very powerful tool.'*

*However, all too often, it is just carried out as if it was 1:1 training as opposed to getting the coachee to explore the solutions for him/herself.'*

*'Coaching helps us to get people to think about solutions, being smarter about work issues. We have seen changes put in place where staff apply the ideas to their normal work tasks and standards.'*

- **Encouragement of feedback from various sources** – This was enhanced when it included a supervision process for the manager as coach (usually through HR and other internal coaches) and supervision for the supervisors (usually through external coaches). This 360-degree process enabled the coaches, and *their* coaches, to stay on track and feel confident that help was available when uncomfortable issues arose.
- **A deeper form of development** – Coaching is also seen to offer a more personal and deeper form of development for individuals. Because of this, many people felt that coaching had a greater impact.

*'We just felt that traditional development programmes did not go deep enough. Many development courses or programmes require learning or absorbing stuff. Coaching requires a lot of immersion and experience review. It's deeply personal and, as a result, people tend to take it more seriously and it has a more lasting and profound effect on the individual.'*

- **Structured, regular meetings** – Coaching meetings help to pin the learning down for the individual as the coach guides the process and keeps it on track. Triad meetings with the line manager were also felt to help ensure learning was fully transferred back to the workplace.
- **Individual ownership of learning** – Because the focus (and often the agenda) is chosen by the individual, a greater sense of ownership is generated and this often results in a higher level of commitment from participants:

*'Coaching does not offer me the solution, but facilitates my own thinking so I can make sense of it.'*

In summary, our coaching case study organisations seem to believe that coaching works by providing a process to analyse issues faced, gain feedback, select options, plan approaches to deal with them, enact change and adapt in the light of feedback. All of this is discussed within a confidential and supportive relationship which ensures that the coachee feels fully supported throughout the process.

#### **Question 4 What helps or hinders the success of coaching initiatives?**

It's still early days for the world of coaching. We're still trying to understand the conditions that result in coaching having maximum impact. We're not there yet, but our case study organisations were asked to identify the barriers to effective coaching as well as activities that can help to embed and support it. Our analysis of their comments indicates that organisations are currently facing six major barriers to the effective use of coaching (Figure 4).

In particular, it seems that the main barriers concern gaining buy-in for coaching and building understanding about what it can help the business to achieve. The lack of understanding of the value of coaching seems to translate into other barriers such as a lack of resources and managers failing to make time for coaching. Some organisations felt that elements of their organisational culture also acted as barriers to coaching, while others felt that the lack of skills and experience of managing and delivering coaching within the organisation was a major barrier.

Barriers to coaching are to be expected. It's unlikely that any organisation's implementation of a coaching initiative goes completely smoothly – there will always be sceptics and people who think it's 'just another HR initiative'. When coaching is first introduced, it also often represents a significant change in the organisation in terms of the culture or management/leadership style. This can invoke feelings of resistance to change, particularly if people lack understanding about how it can help them in their role. As with any other organisational change, it needs to be effectively managed and communicated, and barriers must be identified and tackled.

There was similar clarity about the factors that helped to generate success with coaching. And unsurprisingly, many of these reflect the barriers discussed above. Figure 5 on pages 20-21 illustrates the main factors that are believed to support coaching activities.

## Figure 4: Barriers to effective coaching (quotes from case study questionnaires)

### Lack of understanding of the value of coaching

- Lack of understanding of what coaching can achieve
- Perception of validity of coaching and cost-effectiveness by senior managers
- Initially, confusion over what coaching was about, for example the role of the executive coach versus the role of the line manager as a coach
- Lack of listening to individuals who attempt to implement coaching activities and see this as possibly time-wasting
- Perception that there are no real benefits

### Not seen as a priority for the business

- Lack of coaching being seen as a priority activity to be implemented as part of the overall learning and development strategy
- Organisational buy-in to coaching. It is not seen as a valuable business process (yet!)
- Ensuring it is positioned as part of a wider culture change process rather than an isolated development activity
- A belief that coaching is a 'nice to have'

### The organisational culture

- Lack of integrating coaching as part of the overall culture that tends to be 'tell and sign' rather than letting individuals work issues out for themselves
- Organisational culture which tends to be driven by 'red tape'
- Existing leadership culture is the single biggest barrier to implementation, in other words mainly dictatorial non-supportive leaders who 'tell' or manage by threat to improve short-term performance levels, rather than seeing the benefit in using more directive and supportive behaviours that result in longer-term sustainable performance
- The nature of the remuneration and commission culture which rewards individual achievements and does not reward those that might help underperformers or good performers to improve further
- Ensuring that the business is in the right place to embrace such a change in culture

### Overcoming resistance

- Overcoming initial resistance. Coaching seen as something only for underperformers
- Receptivity of coachees; good coaching example set from top down; consistent follow-through of relationship and actions
- Senior executives initially reluctant to use internal coaches
- Coaching by line managers tends to get a lower priority than other tasks and therefore tends to be intermittent and not always effective

### Low levels of skills and experience in the organisation

- Line managers' coaching skills have been shown to vary greatly. An underlying issue is the recognition of coaching as a core leadership skill
- Educating established managers in using a coaching style. This takes time and education and must be embedded and maintained
- There needs to be expertise and ownership of the process within the organisation and it does require ongoing management, promotion, communication, refreshing the pool of coaches, and so on, and this has resource implications

#### Figure 4: Barriers to effective coaching (quotes from case study questionnaires) (continued)

- Accepting the outcomes can be a real challenge for those managing the team. Coaching gives you a healthy dose of reality, when many do not have the strength of character as managers to manage and address

##### **Time and resources**

- Coaching needs to be properly funded. Resource is needed to support the whole process
- High workloads are the main barrier
- 'I don't have time' is a common comment

#### Figure 5: Factors that help to promote effective coaching (quotes from case study questionnaires)

##### **Providing support for coaches**

- Make sure there are support groups of coaches, formed of employees who have been through the training to support each other
- A buddy system for 'new' coaches with those who attended early on
- Managers must take responsibility for coaching and development
- Encourage participants to identify opportunities for coaching from the start and use the support group to discuss their experiences
- It works best with an effective sponsor for the learner. Individuals who have experienced coaching are keen supporters of it, make excellent sponsors and are keen to do so
- Opportunities must exist to support experiential learning

##### **Internal expertise and training**

- Qualified personnel undertaking and supervising coaching
- Learning about coaching ourselves and not 'contracting out' the whole process to another organisation
- Set up universal framework of coaching/mentoring so that we could clarify what we mean and our approach, explain structures and processes and how strands interrelate
- Establish local ownership with local co-ordinators, set up tools and resources for support
- Coaching needs to be designed to address the underlying issues that impact on personal performance
- A clear training process
- Coaching/training must be in line with the individuals' abilities and expectations
- Getting a critical mass of people through the coaching programme

## Figure 5: Factors that help to promote effective coaching (quotes from case study questionnaires) (continued)

### Communication

- Communication of the benefits and allaying the fears of the possible negative aspects of coaching which individuals tend to perceive is a very important starting point before coaching or any other 'soft skills' initiative can be implemented
- Sell it, case studies, stories, results and so on.
- Be prepared for change to take place over time. There are no quick fixes. We would put more effort into communicating about coaching and its benefits if we were starting again
- It takes time to change from direct management styles to a coaching style and this time must be allowed for when seeking results

### Evaluation

- There need to be clear business measures, formal accreditation and evaluation of benefits for the organisation
- Quantifying the benefits
- Evaluation, as in any other intervention, needs to have clearly defined outcomes

### Senior management buy-in and support

- Senior executives have to be willing to make the necessary investment without 'cast iron' guarantees or immediate payback
- Having a senior management champion was critical to the impetus to introduce coaching in a more structured and systematic way
- Coaching first needs to be recognised as a key tool to achieve business goals and given the necessary priority when it comes to role descriptions, tasks and targets and therefore performance appraisal and development
- Always keep department managers and directors involved. This keeps buy-in high on the agenda
- Needs support from top down – managers must buy into and support coaching
- Buy-in from the top may appear genuine but if their own leadership style does not model what they want and expect from their subordinate line, then the whole change is in jeopardy or at least may be short-lived

### Forming part of wider change or strategy

- The introduction of coaching is most effective when introduced as a part of a 'bigger picture' of organisational and cultural change
- Cascading a coaching culture

### Preparation

- Before the coaching intervention starts, think through *all* possible outcomes, not just the positive ones you hope to achieve
- Sessions need to be properly managed and outcomes agreed at the beginning of each session
- Clear objectives must be set for the coaching
- Expectations must be managed

### Rewarding and recognising coaching behaviours

- Leadership behaviours that support continuing improvements via coaching need to be measured and rewarded or at least recognised as contributing to successful businesses in order that the link between the two is apparent and understood

### **Summary conclusions**

Our case study organisations firmly believe that coaching works. There are measurable impacts at the individual and organisational levels and the factors that help and hinder effective coaching are identifiable and consistent across a wide range of different organisations. However, while measuring the impact is achievable at the individual level, many organisations are still struggling to gain meaningful data at the organisational level, particularly in determining return on investment. But it's early days and organisations are still learning how best to demonstrate the impact of coaching by experimenting with a range of different measures. Respondents have already learned a great deal and are increasingly understanding the factors that help and hinder coaching activities. We can conclude that the results from our case study research indicate that coaching is a valuable intervention as long as it's well targeted, appropriate to the issues faced, properly supported and that those undertaking it have the skills to be successful as coaches.

### **Some final words about the forthcoming CIPD research**

We hope that you've enjoyed this 'taster' for the forthcoming CIPD book, *The Case for Coaching: Making evidence-based decisions on coaching*. In addition to more detail about the experiences of the participant organisations, including full case studies, the book contains a review of existing UK literature on coaching. It's reviewed in several chapters, including those looking at manager-coaches, external coaches and internal coaches. We also draw together the data examining the organisational conditions for effective coaching, as well as what good coach training looks like. Towards the end of the book, we review the implications for coaching practitioners and organisations that use coaching, including an examination of evaluation and how to make the case for coaching in your own organisation.

*The Case for Coaching: Making evidence-based decisions on coaching* will be published in June 2006. To order an advance copy of the book, please visit [www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore](http://www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore)

# References

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