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RESEARCH INTO LEADERSHIP

Literature review: coaching effectiveness – a summary

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Introduction

This literature review demonstrates the importance of coaching relationships and provides practical examples of how effective coaching can be established, ranging from individual requirements to organisational needs. However, an extensive review of this area has revealed that there is limited empirical evidence available and the literature is almost entirely based on authors' experiences of delivering coaching programmes and their personal and professional experience of coaching relationships. Models of coaching do not take account of the diversity inherent in organisations that seek to employ coaching as a management development strategy. For individuals and organisations to create and sustain effective coaching relationships a wide-ranging non-linear model is required, which is based on heterogeneous rather than homogenous methods of development. Establishing effective coaching relationships requires an in-depth examination of the needs of individuals, as it is necessary to determine exactly what is required from a coaching relationship in order to ensure that the intervention is designed effectively and appropriately. Whilst it is essential to examine the effectiveness of coaching it is also equally important to examine dysfunctional coaching relationships. Examining the impacts of dysfunctional relationships will help to highlight where potential problems can occur and how such problems can be overcome.

Coaching has a long history, which can be traced back to Socrates, who believed that individuals learn best when they have ownership of a situation and take some form of personal responsibility for the outcome. In more recent times, coaching has played a crucial role in sports. But the potential of coaching as an organisational development approach has only been recognised in the last few decades. The NHS Leadership Centre commissioned this review as part of its *Research into Leadership* series.

The aim of this literature review was to provide a detailed analysis of the literature and empirical research addressing coaching, with particular focus on the literature available from the UK. It establishes what is already known about effective coaching and the various forms of coaching currently in operation and provides an evaluation of these approaches in terms of their success. The review then addresses the requirements for effective coaching, including, the process of coaching, the organisational requirements and the individuals involved. Finally, a conceptual framework for understanding the current approaches to coaching is presented, with the gaps in current knowledge highlighted.

What is coaching?

A recent CIPD survey of more than 500 respondents demonstrated that organisations are now moving away from classroom-based training and placing increasing importance on other forms of learning and development, such as coaching. The survey highlighted:

- a 51 per cent increase in the use of coaching over the last few years
- a 47 per cent increase of e-learning
- a 42 per cent increase in the use of mentoring and buddy schemes
- and 96 per cent of respondents agreed that individuals required advice and support if they were to take on more responsibility for their own learning. (Source: Parsloe and Rolph 2004)

Coaching is centred on unlocking a person's potential to maximise his or her own performance. A focus on improving performance and the development of skills is the key to an effective coaching relationship.

There are generally two accepted forms of coaching: directive and non-directive. Directive is a form of coaching whereby the coach teaches and provides feedback and advice. In contrast, non-directive coaching requires the coach to listen, ask questions, explore and probe and allows the person coached to find solutions to problems. In practice, this means that some coaches merely assert their expertise, whereas effective coaches enable individuals to go beyond their previous boundaries.

Coaching can be applied to a variety of areas, such as motivating staff, delegating, problem solving, relationship issues, teambuilding, and staff development. It focuses on what people being coached want, what their goal is and how they can achieve it. Coaching is a collaborative relationship which encourages people to know their values and live them while achieving their goals. Effective coaches challenge limiting beliefs and reinforce positive beliefs by providing tasks followed by feedback.

The reasons for the increasing popularity of coaching

Features of the modern organisation, such as flatter organisational structures and lower job security, often results in employees, particularly newly promoted individuals, having to progress and develop quickly, adjusting to substantial changes in terms of skills and responsibility (Jarvis, 2004). Coaching can help to support these individuals, as it has the adaptability and flexibility to support a range of individuals with different learning styles. The development needs of individuals are diverse and the 'one size fits all' model of development is often inappropriate. Thus, coaching has the potential to provide a flexible responsive development approach that can used to support an increasing number of individuals within the organisation than traditional forms of training (Jarvis, 2004).

Over recent years, there has been an increasing trend of individuals taking greater responsibility for their own development (Parsloe and Rolph, 2004). If individuals are to do this they need support and advice and the coaching relationship appears to provide employees with the appropriate support they need in order to achieve their developmental aims (Whitmore, 2000). Individuals are also now demanding different types of training and development and people tend to be more motivated when training is increasingly relevant to their job and responsibilities (Jarvis, 2004). Coaching focuses on particular work issues and improving job performance, thus it can be tailored to relevant aspects of work. Coachees ideally receive direct advice, assistance and attention which fits with their own time schedules and objectives and, unlike one off training activities, coaching can provide continuing support for personal development plans (Jarvis, 2004).

A study conducted by Arnott and Sparrow (2004) of 1,153 organisations across the UK, found that organisations used coaching for three main reasons: supporting a strategic initiative, supporting leadership development, responding directly to individual request. This is further supported by a recent CIPD Training and Development survey (2004), which demonstrated that organisations are now placing increasing importance on creating and fostering cultures that support learning and development. Encouragingly, more than 70% of organisations rated this among the three most important factors when supporting effective learning. The survey findings also showed that respondents felt that it was imperative for line managers to play a significant role in advising on and supporting development activity. However, the survey concluded that 66% of respondents claimed that there was no formal written strategy for their coaching activities taking place in their organisation, and only 6% claimed to have one that covered all staff. Furthermore, only 5% claimed to have line mangers who had been trained to coach their team members, and a worrying 49% only had a minority of trained line managers which were usually as part of a wider management training programme. These findings suggest that, whilst organisations claim to recognise the importance of coaching, they do not necessarily develop the appropriate culture that is required for coaching to be effective.

Coaching and mentoring

While the functions of mentoring and coaching relationships invariably overlap, they are separate types of developmental work relationships. Coaching is directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and skill by a form of tutoring or instruction. Mentoring is, in effect, one step removed and is concerned with the longer term acquisition of skills. Effective coaching requires both the coach and the person coached to fulfil their relative roles. The degree to which this is achieved depends on a number of variables, including the experience of both parties in coaching relationships, their interpersonal skills, motivation and commitment.

Table 1 – Differences between Coaching and Mentoring relationships

Coaching	Mentoring
Relationship generally has a set duration	Ongoing relationship that can last for a long period of time
Generally more structured in nature and meetings are scheduled on a regular basis	Can be more informal and meetings can take place as and when the mentee needs some advice, guidance or support
Short term (sometimes time-bounded) and focused on specific development areas/issues	More long-term and takes a broader view of the person
Coaching is generally not performed on the basis that the coach needs to have direct experience of their client's formal occupational role, unless the coaching is specific and skills focused	Mentor is usually more experienced and qualified than the mentee. Often a senior person in the organisation who can pass on knowledge, experience and open doors to otherwise out of reach opportunities
Focus is generally on development/issues at work	Focus is on career and personal development
The agenda is focused on achieving specific and immediate goals	Agenda is set by the mentee, with the mentors providing support and guidance to prepare them for future roles
Coaching revolves more around specific development areas/issues.	Mentoring revolves more around developing the mentee professionally

Source: Jarvis (2004: 20)

The main differences between the functions of a coach and a mentor are outlined in the following table:

Table 2 – Comparative Coach and Mentor Roles

Coach	Mentor
Protégé learning is primarily focused on abilities	Learning is focused on attitudes
Technical or professional focus	Technical, professional and political focus (e.g., introduction into influence networks)
Effective use of the protégés existing competencies	Helps the protégé to realise his/her potential
Professional interaction with the protégé	More interaction with an affective component
Coach usually guides a team	Privileged relationship with one person
Inspires respect for his/her professional competencies	Is a role model
Short-term training	Long-term development

Source: Benabou and Benabou (2000:2)

Being an effective coach

The coaching relationship

A coach has several roles to perform. The main objective is to develop the person being coached. This can be achieved through increasing self-confidence, identifying suitable topics for coaching and developing planned tasks as part of job knowledge. Coaching is not, however, telling someone what to do and how to do it. Occasionally, it involves overseeing what is being done and advising how to do it better.

Coaches need to be patient, detached, supportive, interested, perceptive, aware, self-aware and attentive. They must also have knowledge, credibility, experience and authority. They require various core skills: the ability to create rapport; paying attention to content and process; keeping an open mind; paraphrasing and reflecting; asking probing questions; identifying limiting assumptions and beliefs; and giving and receiving feedback. However, research shows that coaches feel it is not necessarily the skills that are important, but rather the way the skills are used.

Being an effective coachee

People being coached also have an important role to play in establishing a positive coaching relationship. They must: participate in the identification of suitable topics for coaching; jointly set realistic performance targets and creative methods of achieving them; take responsibility for their own development; undertake comprehensive preparations before coaching meetings to maximise the development process; be open and direct in discussion with coaches; and accept constructive feedback on skill acquisition and development progress.

Benefits to coachees

They can gain a huge amount from an effective coaching relationship. It not only helps to improve their performance and their effective use of skills and abilities, but it can also help to increase job satisfaction and motivation. However, this relationship is not one-sided and has advantages for both parties. There are many advantages of an effective coaching relationship for the coaches, such as improved communication, increased staff involvement, more effective delegation and teams, and higher levels of achievement.

Boundaries in coaching

In the initial stages of the coaching relationship it is imperative that the coach and the coachee establish boundaries. This requires the coach and coachee to work together to determine exactly what the coaching relationship is and what the objectives are. Research conducted by Kenton and Moody (2001) found that there was a mixed response when asking whether coaches saw a distinction between mentoring, counselling and coaching. Some coaches were very clear when specifying to their client (coachee) that this was not to be a counselling relationship, as they did not have the relevant skills or experience. However, other coaches stated that they would allow the discussion and relationship to be directed by the coachee. It is evident that before a coaching relationship begins the coach and the coachee must establish exactly what is expected and define the boundaries of the relationship.

Types of coaching

There are a number of different approaches to coaching that have been developed over the last few years, mainly derived from the sporting model.

Individual approaches

Goal orientated coaching

Coaching is an important tool to support organisational change. When developing strategies to manage change, coaching is now viewed alongside facilitation and training implementation. Many organisations still believe that coaching is really counselling within the workplace, although there are many fundamental differences between counselling and coaching. One of the main differences is the use of goal setting within coaching. Within goal orientated coaching there are fundamental questions that need to be addressed, such as who is setting the goals, what type of goals are of most value, how the goals can be achieved and how feedback can be incorporated.

Executive coaching

Executive coaching is centred on developing fast-track and high-performing leaders and focuses on technical issues and psychological considerations. It is based on the dynamics of being near or at the top of an organisation and fully recognising the need for constant improvement. It is important that executives have a neutral, objective individual with whom they can discuss opportunities and challenges.

Transactional and transformational coaching

Coaches need to go beyond the transactional model, which is primarily concerned with competencies, learning skills and techniques, and move to a transformative model, which is focused on shifting individuals' views, values and sense of purpose. There are three core skills for facilitating effective transformational coaching – building awareness, building commitment and building practice.

Self-coaching

Self-observation is a fundamental aspect of self-coaching. It is necessary for coaches to ask themselves questions regarding their experience, views, opinions and beliefs regarding coaching.

Team approaches

During times of organisational change, coaching can provide the impetus for building and motivating teams. Team coaching establishes a group of individuals into a functioning business network. The team is then asked to brainstorm the options available to them and agree an action plan formulated by the group. Developing a set of ground rules which are acceptable to all team members is vital, because this will ensure that the group is working to the same agenda. Regular meetings are needed, and team members may also want to structure social time together.

The six-step model for team coaching

Source: (Zeus and Skiffington, 2003: 143)

Step one – management meetings

It is essential that the team coach sets the coaching within the context of the organisation's circumstances, agenda needs and available resources. To do so, they must establish with the management team a number of factors: is team coaching an appropriate format, are there sufficient resources to support this approach, and is the organisation able to support change? They must also establish assessment, benchmarking, reporting and feedback procedures. The size of the team is also important, with six to eight the preferred number.

Step two – individual meetings with each team member

An individual briefing session of 20-30 minutes with each team member can enable the coach to allay any fears or reservations, hostile behaviour or barriers.

Step three – first team meeting

During the first team meeting, it is essential that the coach fosters a culture of trust, and openness. The coach needs to define his/her role and set objectives for the coaching sessions.

Step four – second meeting

The coach should provide feedback from assessment, and review and encourage the commitment of the team to the agreed visions and goals, and explore any resistance to proposed goals.

Step five – begin formal coaching sessions

The workshop format is regarded as the most effective. These workshops will include groups of six to eight (one coach) or 10 to 12 (two coaches).

Step six – management feedback

The performance and progress of the team needs to be regularly reviewed, and management feedback provided as agreed.

The 14-step process to team coaching

Many organisations and their leaders face a dilemma – they need to build effective teams, but the time available to build such teams is decreasing. A parallel approach to building effective teams has been shown to enable leaders to build teams without wasting time. In essence, the process revolves around identifying behavioural changes and implementing them, with monthly progress reports. The 14-step process model can be found in the full report.

Selecting a coach

One study (Arnott & Sparrow 2004) found a number of selection criteria for choosing a coach, including coaching experience, track record, personal style, culture fit, structured approach, costs, professional standards, knowledge of organisation, issue fit, evidence of CPD, line management experience, experience of the industry, coaching qualifications, scalability, supervision of coach, presentation and materials, and geographic coverage. The study also found that building an effective coaching relationship rested on hard factors, such as expertise, and soft factors, such as trust and relationship fit.

When deciding on a coach, the organisation and the person coached must assess the individual's development needs and, from this, develop a desired coach profile that will include both organisational and individual requirements. A shortlist followed by interviews will give the person to be coached some insight into the coach's experience and skills. The matching of individuals in a coaching relationship is critical to its success. [Source: Jarvis 2004]

Internal versus external

The coaching process can support a key facet of leadership – the requirement to be engaging beyond the boundaries of the organisation. However, an organisation that simply views coaching and particularly executive coaching as a process provided by external consultants can have problems when attempting to establish a climate of leadership. Today's leaders must not set themselves apart from the rest of the organisation but should seek to replicate their best leadership practices and behaviours in those working around them. A coach internal to the organisation does not require any learning curve to absorb and understand the culture.

Two international studies, however, provide empirical support for the use of an external coach and have demonstrated that self-coaching achieves greater performance compared with peer coaching. They concluded that an external coach was superior and the findings highlighted the importance of coaching by a credible source.

Yet another study suggests that internal coaches are superior when a quick intervention is needed and when detailed knowledge of the corporate culture is required. External coaches are most effective when there are highly sensitive or confidential issues that need to be addressed within the relationship, or when extensive or diverse experience is required.

Table 3 – External and internal coaches

External coaches are preferable:	Internal coaches are preferable:
For providing sensitive feedback to senior business leaders. For political reasons, this can be difficult for an internal coach	When knowing the company culture, history and politics is critical
For bringing specialised expertise from a wide variety of organisational and industry situations	When easy availability is desired
When an individuals are concerned about 'conflict of interests' and whether confidentiality will be observed	For being able to build up a high level of personal trust over a period of time
For providing a wider range of ideas and experience	For not being seen to be 'selling' consulting time
For being less likely to judge and being perceived as more objective	For keeping costs under control – and may be less expensive

Source: Jarvis (2004: 45)

Forms of coaching delivery

Coaching can be delivered in numerous forms, such as face to face, via telephone and online.

Face-to-face coaching

This is the traditional form of coaching delivery, reminding both parties that words are only one aspect of communication. Unspoken issues can be accessed through a face-to-face encounter, for example through body language. However, there can be disadvantages. This form of coaching can be immensely impractical when considering busy schedules and locations.

Telephone coaching

Telephone coaching is now used extensively. It is more cost effective for the client/coached as they only have to pay for the focused coaching session and not for travelling. However, there is a loss of appearance, facial expressions and gesticulations when conducting telephone coaching. One researcher believes individuals communicate at about 40 per cent of their ability when on the telephone because facial expressions and gesticulations cannot be seen. However, anecdotal evidence has suggested that people find other ways of communicating effectively, for example by using vivid descriptive language. Telephone coaching also enables individuals to become much more effective listeners.

Online coaching

There are many advantages to online coaching, such as cost and time savings and increased flexibility when choosing the time for learning. It can all be organised through email, discussion groups, chat rooms and visual tutorials. It is essential that organisations have a strategy for e-learning to ensure that online coaching is effectively implemented. Creating a learning environment is important. Many organisations find the best way to motivate employees and achieve the best results is by enabling learners to choose where and how they learn. Programmes such as e-coaching are more widely accepted when the organisation has a culture of trust and empowerment. In a command and control style culture, managers do not feel comfortable allowing employees to use the internet freely and organise their own work schedules, responsibilities, learning and development.

The coaching relationship

Phases of coaching

In general, the process of coaching includes four distinct phases. Firstly, the coach and coachee must establish some form of contract. Secondly, action plans need to be formulated so to ensure that the coachee is meeting their objectives. Thirdly, live action where the coach and coachee begin the coaching process and finally, debriefing, whereby the coach and coachee reflect on performance and evaluate effectiveness.

The coaching structure

A coaching structure has been developed that demonstrates how the coach and coachee work together throughout the coaching process, exploring not only tasks but attitudes and behaviours. The use of a structure provides a clear direction for the coaching relationship and the various tasks and objectives which need to be achieved at each distinct stage.

The coaching framework

A framework has been developed which further explains the various elements of the coaching process and coaching relationship. The model is primarily non-directive, whereby the coachee/client has the potential to achieve more and takes responsibility for their own actions. It provides the coach and coachee with a toolkit and structure which can be applied to any individual coaching relationship. The framework can be found in the full report.

The phases, structure and framework provide the coach and the coachee with direction to ensure that the coaching relationship is both effective and efficient. Ensuring that the coaching relationship is based on effective communication and commitment will help the two parties to understand the key objectives of the relationship. It is important to understand the needs of both individuals in the coaching relationship before it begins. One study by Hardingham et al (2004) identifies three types of social needs that should be noted and attended to in order to ensure that the coaching relationship is effective:

Belonging

The focus here is on whether the person being coached feels the coach is sufficiently 'like' him or her.

Controlling

In a one-to-one coaching relationship, the control needs are less intense than they would be in a group. But they still make an appearance. Having some form of control enables an individual to feel competent and able to deal with responsibilities. So it is important that there is a sense of 'power-sharing' in the coaching relationship.

Closeness

Coaches must consider whether they prefer to have 'close and personal' relationships or to keep some distance.

A coaching model for leadership development

Developing leaders and their capabilities is crucial in any organisation. There is a wealth of literature pertaining to the desired personal attributes of a leader, various leadership style, and the competencies, skills and abilities of an effective leader. The framework advocated by Goldsmith et al (2000) is modelled on the cycle of continuous improvement, where the coach assists and supports a leader through the process of development, once the coach believes that the leader has an understanding of the process and the cycle of continuous improvement the coach will allow the leader to take full responsibility with regard to their development. However, as with many of the models and frameworks outlined in this review, it is not based on empirical research but on consultancy experience. Although the model does advocate the assessment of leadership skills and then basing the development plan on these skills and competencies, it does not clearly illustrate the different approaches which need to be taken when accounting for differences in leadership styles.

There are four phases:

Assessment: leadership skills are assessed to obtain a benchmark of current leadership abilities to determine whether progress has been made.

Developmental plan: the leader chooses focus areas and the goals to be achieved. The coach assists the leader, particularly if the leader receives feedback he/she does not agree with. The coach provides validation, support and 'tough love'.

Public announcement: making the goals public. This increases the leader's commitment to the announced course of action, and it lays a foundation for follow-up conversations with observers on the progress towards the goal.

Implementation: comprised of developmental activities and informal follow-up. The coach may take on the role of tutor and provide useful tools and tips to enable the leader to achieve the developmental goals. A culture of continuous leadership development begins, with informal feedback every couple of months in an informal conversation. Finally, the leader begins the cycle once again with another assessment process. The results are reviewed and the coach must encourage the leader to identify new areas that require development. (Source: Thach and Heinselman (2000: 224))

There is a wealth of research and literature relating to gender differences in leadership styles and the evidence suggests that female leaders tend to be more transformational, whereas male leaders take a more transactional approach (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1994). In contrast, there is a dearth of research examining gender differences and coaching. It is widely acknowledged that men and women have different learning and leadership styles and therefore, this needs to be understood when embarking on a coaching relationship.

Organisational requirements

For effective coaching to be achieved, organisations must foster a culture that supports this relationship. There needs to be a clear strategy and focus on how effective coaching can be achieved. This strategy must be understood and adopted by all staff at all levels. The organisation needs to be aligned to the success of the coaching process.

A recent survey demonstrated that organisations were now placing increasing importance on creating and fostering cultures that support learning and development. More than 70 per cent of organisations rate this among the three most important factors when supporting effective learning. The survey findings also showed that respondents felt it was imperative for line managers to play a significant role in supporting development activity. However, the survey concluded that 66 per cent of respondents claimed there was no formal written strategy for their coaching activities taking place and only six per cent claimed to have one that covered all staff. Furthermore, only five per cent claimed to have line managers who had been trained to coach their team members, whereas a worrying 49 per cent only had a minority of trained line managers.

There are several ways of establishing a coaching culture. One study lists a number of tips, such as building experience of, and a belief in, coaching among leaders of the organisation. This may be achieved, for example, by ensuring that the leadership/executive team members receive coaching themselves. Employees and employers should be motivated to talk about coaching and their experiences and how it has helped them achieve their goals. It is important that the leaders in an organisation clarify exactly what a 'coaching culture' actually is, for example what would people be saying and doing that they are not doing now?

Culture alignment

In order to foster a culture of coaching, it is essential that the organisation is aligned to the success of the coaching process (Whitmore, 2002). The organisation must be supportive of the process and provide the necessary support and resources required to ensure that the coaching intervention is successful (Zeus and Skiffington, 2003). This is further enhanced by the role of the coach, who ensures there is support and enthusiasm for coaching within the organisation.

Blending training with coaching

Blending training with coaching is particularly important and can produce very powerful results. Using a mix of training and coaching can be particularly useful when an organisation is going through change because it can help individuals to change their behaviour and leadership styles.

Individual coach/coachee requirements

The success of a coaching relationship/intervention is dependent, to a certain extent, on whether or not the stated goals have been achieved (Zeus and Skiffington, 2003). It is essential during the initial stages of the coaching process to establish how the coachee defines success. The coach must also make it clear from the outset his or her expertise, for example, they may not necessarily be an expert who provides answers to questions, but an individual who provides support, direction, guidance encouragement and resources, whose function is to inspire and evoke answers from the coachee. It is essential that the coach clearly states his or her limitations (Edwards, 2003). It is also imperative that the coach does not respond to self-imposed or perceived pressure from the coachee and their organisation to achieve quick results. Coaching is centred on change and change can often be slow, difficult and at times resisted, therefore the coach may need to educate the coachee and indeed the organisation. Perhaps the most critical problem in coaching relationships identified in the literature is that the coach and/or coachee may be lacking in self-awareness.

Coaching is centred on change, and change involves learning. It is essential that the coach is aware of the level of confidence in the person being coached and his/her fears regarding new learning opportunities and challenges. Challenges that seem too great can result in anxiety, which can ultimately lead to resistance.

Unsuccessful coaching

An effective coach draws on his/her experience to accelerate individual learning and development. A coach can help unlock potential and maximise performance. The person being coached may define success by: how he/she is stimulated to think, feel and explore new attitudes; whether the coach provides a supportive relationship; the coach's ability to provide resources and expertise from industry experience; the coach's skill in encouraging a resistance to change; and how the coach deals with paradox and contradictions.

The literature tends to focus on 'successful' coaching relationships but little is known about unsuccessful coaching relationships and the detrimental effect these can have. Coaching sessions can prove to be unhelpful for both parties.

Coaching may fail for a number of reasons:

- The coach may have a tendency to prescribe simplistic solutions to complex organisational or life/balance issues. (This can be avoided if the coach makes his/her expertise clear from the outset and explains that he/she may not be an expert giving answers but an individual who provides support, encouragement and resources.)
- People being coached may have major interpersonal difficulties. (It is essential for the coach to determine at the outset why this relationship is unproductive. The reason may be, for example, the coaching style.)
- The coach may share his/her opinion too early. (Coaches need to remember that coaching is 80 per cent listening and 20 per cent talking.)
- The coach may fail to follow through on monitoring and homework. (It is vital that the monitoring process is established at the start of the process. It is also important to review goals and development during each session. Many individuals can be quite dismissive of the so-called 'soft skills'. To overcome this, the coach must clearly relate the outcome of coaching to job performance.)
- The coach may respond to self-imposed pressure or perceived pressure from the person being coached and his/her organisation to achieve quick results, and the outcome will be superficial rather than sustained behavioural change. (A major part of a coach's role is to educate not only the person he/she is coaching but also the organisation on the nature of the coaching process.)
- Even apparently successful relationships where the two parties like and respect each other may still have a negative impact if the relationship is not achieving the desired goal. Both parties may enjoy their discussions but the reality is that nothing is being achieved. Perhaps the most critical problem in coaching relationships identified in the literature is that either party or both may be lacking in self-awareness.

Benefits to organisations

Effective coaching can have a positive impact on an organisation. It can produce improved relationships and teamwork between staff at different levels. Employees have increased job satisfaction, which improves productivity and quality, and there is an overall improved use of people, skills and resources, as well as greater flexibility and adaptability to change. Organisational coaching can help to align individual performance with team and organisational objectives, maximise strengths, enhance communication between managers and teams, help individuals take ownership and responsibility for their behaviours and actions, and encourage individuals to stretch beyond their assumed constraints.

A CIPD survey in 2004 found that 99 per cent of 500 respondents agreed that coaching could produce tangible benefits, both to individual and organisations.

Additionally:

- 93% agreed that coaching and mentoring are key mechanisms for transferring learning from training courses back to the workplace
- 92% agreed coaching can have a positive impact on the bottom line
- 96% agreed coaching is an effective way to promote learning in the organisation

Some researchers believe that the benefits of coaching can be broken down into strategic benefits and interpersonal benefits.

Strategic

Coaching can: help attract more business; improve customer service; provide structure, guidance and focus; help monitor and evaluate actions; guide individuals and streamline processes; promote initiative and accountability; encourage people to take responsibility; motivate people and improve skills, including the ability to communicate better; help retain staff; provide objective advice on business decisions; increase awareness of resources; broaden the scope of information, ideas and solutions; and show the organisation is socially responsible towards its staff.

Interpersonal

Coaching can: unearth and tap potential and creativity; co-ordinate career and personal life; increase the ability to cope with and welcome change; improve concentration, confidence, relaxation and decision-making; remove performance fears and anxieties; and eliminate unhealthy stress at work.

There are four key benefits which are explored in detail in the full report:

Retention of staff

Investing in training programmes can impact on employee's feeling of self worth within the organisation. Employees are more likely to remain in an organisation which they feel has an interest in them and their developing career.

Investment in, and modernisation of, learning and development methods are essential to ensure that care is provided by competent, supported and skilled professionals. The *"HR in the NHS Plan: More staff working differently"* (DOH, 2002), clearly states that lifelong learning and development opportunities for enhancing and progressing employees careers are key objectives for improving the working lives of NHS staff. Improving staff morale and ensuring good human resource management are also key objectives to achieving this goal. The plan calls for more flexible and innovative methods of providing learning and development, which suits the needs of staff. To do this it will be necessary to design more accessible methods of learning to support patient focused care and service change.

Creation of a pool of future coaches

It is reasonable to suggest that those who have been in coaching relationships are more likely to coach others. This has important implications for the organisation, as investing in coaching programmes is likely to create a pool of effective coaches for the future.

Increased communication

In the current social and economic climate, the need for companies to have an up-to-date understanding of staff and customer needs is vital. Through coaching relationships, senior managers acting as coaches can communicate organisational decisions and ideas to coaches.

Cost effectiveness

Coaching relationships are a cost effective way for the organisation to foster and develop talent. The UCE (2004) study, found that there were three main benefits and key outcomes of coaching:

- Business performance
- Individual performance
- Coaching process itself

Barriers to coaching

One researcher states that the greatest barrier to coaching is difficult people. Some people find that coaching questions can be intimidating and therefore the coach may face some resistance. He lists a number of barriers to coaching expressed by participants – for example: the company culture is against this kind of approach; people won't understand what I'm doing; they'll think it's just a new management gimmick; it takes too long; they'll think I have gone nuts; I'll lose my authority; I already use a coaching style – I don't need to change anything; I don't believe in these new softly, softly approaches; it's nothing new – I've done it for years; I won't do it well.

There are two main forms of resistance to coaching identified – blatant resistance, where the person being coached displays evident hostility; and less obvious resistance, where the person being coached appears to be compliant but in practice does not change behaviours, so the goals are never achieved. There are recommendations for dealing with negativity, mostly based on confronting and discussing it, with the coach explaining the benefits of coaching and management's support for it.

Diversity within coaching

As today's society becomes more diverse, leaders and coaches will need to become more effective at fostering a culture of diversity and responding to diversity appropriately. If this is not achieved, organisations risk missing opportunities and potential for success. Diversity can have a huge impact on developmental processes, such as coaching. Most research work has focused on gender, but race, age, disability and sexual orientation can also influence the coaching process.

Numerous researchers have suggested that initiating a mentoring relationship is particularly problematic for women. This is largely because there is a disproportionate amount of women compared with men occupying senior level positions in organisations, resulting in a shortage of potential female mentors. Women are invariably faced with approaching mentors of the opposite sex. This is likely to be the same in coaching.

A study in 1991 concluded that women perceived more barriers to gaining a mentor than men. Women were more likely than men to report a lack of access to mentors, that mentors were unwilling to enter into relationships with them, that supervisors and co-workers would disapprove of the relationships and that either the mentor or others in the organisation would perceive an approach as evidence of sexual intention.

Again, this situation is likely to be of direct relevance to women being coached.

Women are often not presented with the same opportunities as men to develop a mentoring relationship. Women are not privy to many of the informal networks that involve potential male mentors. Because women tend to be concentrated in lower level positions in organisations, they may be less likely than men to become involved in projects that have the potential to lead to mentoring relationships. Many of these issues are reduced with the implementation of formal programmes, sanctioned by the organisation. Here, too, the same applies to coaching.

In summary

This literature review provides a detailed analysis of literature addressing coaching with particular focus on available literature from the UK. A definition and detailed description of coaching is provided, highlighting the differences between coaching and mentoring and the reasons for the increased application of coaching over recent years. Coaching is a developmental intervention that is increasingly being employed in organisations. Targeted development interventions such as coaching enable individuals to adjust to major changes in the rapidly evolving business environment. Coaching can help to support individuals in making the necessary steps to advance in their careers and perform at optimum levels in roles that require large step-changes in skills and responsibility.

This detailed literature review documents the importance of coaching relationships and provides practical examples of how effective coaching can be established. This ranges from individual requirements to organisational needs. An extensive review of this area has revealed that there is limited empirical evidence available. Rather, practical examples and tool kits provided in the literature tend to be based on the author's experience of delivering coaching programmes and their personal and professional experience of coaching relationships.

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Literature review: coaching effectiveness – a summary is one of a series of '*Research into Leadership*' projects commissioned by the NHS Leadership Centre. Each project is designed to take a piece of significant human resources-related research and consider how it can be best adapted to support the development of human resources management practice in the NHS.

To obtain a copy of the full research report that underlies this summary please visit: www.leadership.modern.nhs.uk/researchandevaluation or contact the NHS Leadership Centre:

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