

Review Article

Coaching to Tackle COVID-19 Crisis: A Critical Review for Management Practitioners

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Abstract: The current paper is an attempt to refresh the concept of coaching in the minds of scholars to help them address major issues affecting performance, psychological well-being, and behaviors of employees due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The paper serves as an effort to help organizational researchers recall the concept of coaching and its benefits for people and their organizations during the current times. The work also aspires to encourage researchers to consider investigating coaching to provide objective results for policy and implications. The article provides information on the idea of coaching and the various explanations given by management and organizational practitioners. The paper also provides information on the purpose of coaching and why organizations need to understand the concept of coaching and the different types that are available both within and outside of the organizations. Important to state that the paper also discusses the benefits of coaching, which spotlights the need for coaching to be utilized by organizations. Lastly, the paper discusses how coaching can be particularly important in crises like COVID-19 Pandemic followed to guide and recommend organizations to make the use of it to overcome employee, organization, and performance-related issues.

Keywords: *Coaching; COVID-19; Pandemic; Performance; Management Decision Making*

1. Introduction

COVID-19 Pandemic has brought devastating effects to businesses across the globe (Buheji & Buheji, 2020). Ranging from employee outcomes to corporate goal achievement, the world witnessed tragic results. Particularly in connection to employees, the Pandemic affected them in many ways (Darwish et al., 2020), which also made it difficult for organizations to improve their performance and productivity. Although organizations are attempting to take initiatives that could help them overcome these crises (Rehman et al., 2020), yet still, these efforts are nearly negligible. Based on the review and appraisal of scholarly work on handling crisis and related issues, we outlined that employee coaching have had been used across organizations to help guide and facilitate employees during times of crisis. However, it appears that organizations are not doing much in this regard (Qui et al., 2020). Therefore, the current review paper is an attempt to refresh the concept of coaching in the minds of scholars to help them address major issues affecting performance, psychological well-being, and behaviors of employees due to COVID-19 Pandemic. The paper serves as an effort to help organizational researchers recall the concept of coaching and its benefits for people and their organizations during the current times. The work also aspires to encourage researchers to consider investigating coaching to provide objective results for policy implementation.

Coaching can be a great tool to help guide employees in the time of crises, which organizations have forgotten these days. Apart from the features, promises, and benefits of coaching discussed above, one very important contribution of coaching is its facilitation during times of crisis. Studies have reported that coaching in organizations can help deal with managing transformation occurring during the time of crises, both financial (David et al., 2016) as well as non-financial (Hall, 2015). Coaching programs in organizations can be a great source of guidance and support to maneuver employee behavior and overcome the crisis period effectively (Simola, 2005). Since employees and organizations globally are facing a severe crisis due to the recent COVID-19 Pandemic (Qiu et al., 2020; Darwish et al., 2020; Rehman et al., 2020), we propose that coaching can proactively help in resolving many work-related issues. Through utilizing coaching, organizations can actively help and facilitate their employees to overcome issues they are currently experiencing from work or personal life due to the COVID-19 crisis. Notably, what scholars have recently asserted also supports our claim, encouraging organizations to utilize coaching during COVID-19 Pandemic (Utterback et al., 2020). Furthermore, Buheji and Buheji (2020) also indicated that coaching alongside training could help cope with the changing demands and situation during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

2. What is Coaching?

According to the coaching and mentoring factsheet (2020) recently released by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), coaching is slowly gaining the spotlight for organizational learning, which has been further confirmed by prominent research studies (CIPD, 2020). Recently, many professional bodies have been interested in using coaching in a different context, and the demand for coaching continues to grow. International Coaching Federation (ICF), one of the most prominent governing bodies for coaching professionals, defines professional coaching as “Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” Moreover, ICF elaborates on coaching definition as an interactive relationship towards reaching a mutually agreed set of goals between the coach and the client (ICF, 2020). Furthermore, it describes coaching as a process of revealing the unexplored areas that can help to inspire a client’s innovation, productivity, leadership capabilities to support them to achieve their goals and objectives (CIPD, 2020).

The professional coaching highlights that coaching starts with acceptance of conducting the coaching service, which is formed in a relationship of partnering to maximize client potential across different areas. CIPD, being a professional association for human resource management professionals, explains coaching from the HR perspective as an employee development tool used to enhance employee’s performance. The tool works towards improving employees’ skills and knowledge by recognizing the current employee performance level and put a target to reach a higher performance level supported by using coaching. The CIPD expects coaching to lead employees towards achieving organizational strategic objectives by using coaching as a leadership development tool. Although CIPD mainly defines coaching from an organizational perspective, it also believes that coaching positively impacts employees’ personal life outside the work context (Gaddis & Foster, 2015). Roshia and Lace (2016) consider coaching a useful managerial tool used by managers as coaches towards employees being the client for performance development purposes (Grant, 2017). Coaching has also been defined as an essential leadership and management activity that help leaders deal with employees in a more effective way to generate financial profit by driving employees and teams to targeted outcomes. (Hagen et al., 2017). Coaching from an organizational perspective is a useful tool for employee learning and development and is more widely used to fulfill organizational goals and objectives.

Cox (2015) has presented coaching as a knowledge transformation process regardless of the context of transformation. This definition focuses on supporting individual and team learning and development to achieve personal and/or organizational goals. However, coaching is not anymore, a tool used for a person

only since it can be customized to be fit client needs towards developing individuals or a team in a diversified context. As per Peng et al. (2019), coaching is a form of help directed to individuals or groups to assist them in reaching the transformation of the current position into a desired future state. This explanation puts coaching in the center that can be used by individuals or organizations. Moreover, in a coaching relationship, there are two primary components (client and the coach). The client or the coachee could be any person or group of people willing to be coached and experience a coaching journey with commitment through working with a coach. The coach must have essential skills to provide coaching (Klestadt & Langenberg, 2014). In line with all of the above coaching definitions in the literature, we can refer to coaching as the partnership between two or more parties that to develop, support, motivate the client/s to perform better, achieve goals. There is no single process to proceed coaching effectively as each client is unique and has different needs; however, all process actively engages the clients to ends with a transformation that makes client's life better lived.

2.1. Purpose of Coaching

Coaching for organizations or workplace coaching is a tool that aims to fulfill learning and development needs. Coaching helps individual employees to set their job-related targets to achieve strategic targets for respective organizations by adopting the required behavior and competencies to support their performance. In addition, they strive to seek feedback and evaluation towards their progress to achieve the set goals (Grant, 2017). Consequently, the concept of using coaching well connects with performance improvement through fulfilling learning needs (Hagen et al., 2012).

As underlined in the meta-analysis by Jones et al. (2015), coaching influences individuals and organizations. The study also underscored that coaching by managers or supervisors improves subordinate performance. In addition, it enables employees to learn and develop continuously on both behavioral and skills aspects that are valued by the employee and the employer. Subsequently, coaching aims to help clients in self-development, whether by increasing motivation, improving performance, overcoming undesirable behaviors, or limiting beliefs. The purpose of coaching could also be learning new skills or finding one's strength to capitalize on (Ladegård, 2011). Whatever the perspective of using coaching being organizational or individual, solving client or coachee's problems is not the focus of coaching. Instead, the coach may work with the client for development and learning or performance purposes. During the coaching journey, both the coach and the client may encounter some problems, limiting the efficiency of coaching, and in such a case attempting to eliminate the limitations could be done well before they become complicated problems.

2.2. Type of Coaches

Bennett and Bush (2014) identified in more coaching types, (1) internal professional coaches, (2) coaching by manager or supervisors, (3) external professional coaches, (4) group coaching (5) peer coaching. An organization could use one or any mix of coaching types to their employees. (Bennett & Bush, 2014). Generally, internal professional coaches are employees from within the organization. They may be staff in the Human resources department with professional certification to provide coaching to employees and executives. (Mihiotis & Argirou, 2016). Bigger organizations commonly use internal coaching in order to make it cost-effective. Manager as a coach refers to practicing coaching informally with subordinates to help them become more productive and produce better workplace behavior (Ladyshevsky, 2016). Managers are also considered as a type of internal coaches in the organizational context (Mihiotis & Argirou, 2016). Although, managers, at times, may not happen to be equally seasoned as dedicated internal coaches (Ladyshevsky, 2010).

Accordingly, external professional coaches are individuals hired by the organization to deliver coaching to their employees (CIPD learning and development annual survey report, 2015). Typically, senior

executives prefer being coached by external coaches for several reasons, such as maintaining trust, confidentiality, etc. (Mihiotis & Argirou, 2016). Another type of coaching which is considered attractive to organizations is group coaching, whereby the coach and two clients or more form a collaborative group. Group coaching is primarily used for employees and not executives due to the nature of the coaching process being a cost-effective alternative for one-to-one coaching. However, group coaching has proved to be a useful tool across many organizations (Kets de Vries, 2012).

Furthermore, peer coaching is another type of coaching but less frequently used. Peer coaching follows the same coaching process in which two or more professional colleagues within the same job level in an organization coach each other, mostly for learning purposes. Peer coaching is a means of development through employee relationships to facilitate problems and challenges with an excellent opportunity to receive feedback to help each other grow. Bennett and Bush (2014) also suggest that it is also essential to facilitate the peers in the relationship and make sure they are in the same authority level and experience (Ellinger and Kim, 2014).

2.3. Coaching Formats

Typically, different formats are used in professional coaching. Importantly, confidentiality and privacy lie at the core of coaching, which is why these sessions are generally conducted at remote locations on one to one basis. However, due to current developments, coaching also happens via telephone, internet, and other live video applications (Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2015).

2.4. Benefits of Coaching

Coaching benefits are becoming apparent and more likely noticed by clients. To emphasize coaching benefits, Rosha and Lace (2016) identified coaching benefits from two perspectives. First, for individuals since they are the primary entities in any coaching relationship. Second, for the organizations as they are the context where a group of individuals operates. Although individual benefits are evident, however, organizational benefits are usually a challenge as they vary. Typically, organizations are more interested in the financial benefits out of coaching. Therefore, research studies indicate tremendous efforts towards identifying financial benefits of coaching for organizations such as Return on Investment (ROI) as forwarded by Kirkpatrick extension model for evaluating training programs (Rock & Donde, 2008). ROI is complicated and may not be representative; however, Return on Expectation (ROE) is easier to use and measure by setting goals and measuring their achievements. ROI is still an argument compared to the substantial general employee wellbeing and engagement benefits researchers identified (Grant, 2017).

One of the best-recognized coaching benefits is self-awareness, which refers to being insightful and fundamental for the learning experience and personal growth (Grant, 2017). It is a deeper understanding and knowledge of the client's analysis of one's strengths, weaknesses and underlining available opportunities that the client may not have been aware of. Importantly, self-awareness is incomplete without the client's social awareness. For instance, employees with high self-awareness will comprehend and assess the reflection of different emotions and behaviors in the family or working environment. They can differentiate between what could work better. It is also important to highlight that the development of self and social awareness through coaching also develops client self-confidence to manage emotions, feelings, actions and behaviors (Thompson & Cox, 2017).

Likewise, coaching helps clients to have a higher level of self-confidence, giving them the ability to freely express themselves and their ideas (Maltbia, Marsick & Ghosh, 2014). Furthermore, another benefit of coaching is learning and personal development for specific skills, behaviors, or knowledge. Human Research practitioners often promote coaching to enhance and enrich learning and development activities in the workplace. As a result, coaching has proved to be a tool for skills and knowledge development, to enhance employee understanding of job-related skills and activity (Grant, 2017).

Moreover, clients' clear purpose, personal goals, and objectives are also well-recognized as the benefit of coaching. Coaching helps employees to understand and find a greater purpose of learning at work, in life, and in other activities of concern. Coaching also induces self-motivation, whereby individuals strive to improve themselves. Notably, this motivation for self-improvement also helps organizations to improve their end performance. According to some studies, coaching can help employees to find real meaning in their life and work, which plays an enormous role in harnessing individual and organizational goals (Losch et al., 2016).

In recent years, organizations have been increasingly using coaching to increase employees' job performance and productivity due to the dynamic and agile work environment to increase organizational performance (Kim et al., 2013). Scholars also report that coaching can have a tangible impact on productivity, quality (Grant, 2017), and customer satisfaction (Maltbia, Marsick & Ghosh, 2014). Therefore, managers consider coaching crucial for performance improvements and employees' organizational engagement (Mihiotis and Argirou, 2016). In consent, this means that there is a positive relationship between coaching and employee productivity and performance. According to Rosha and Lace (2016), coaching can help establish a positive relationship between employees and managers. Therein, managers who also serve as coaches are often seen as trustworthy (Mihiotis & Argirou, 2016). Coaching also bridges communication gaps amongst people in the working relationships to bring effectiveness and efficiency.

2.5. A Comparison between Coaching, Therapy, Consulting, Training and Mentoring

Coaching significantly differs from therapy, consulting, mentoring, or training, even though all of them aim to help people. Therapy is a relationship between a doctor called a therapist and sick patient to get the patient cure for the ailing condition based on a deep observation and analysis of the past emotions, behaviors and actions. Therefore, therapy starts with the history and ends in the current scenario (Maltbia, Marsick and Ghosh, 2014). Coaching however, examines the present and what is happening in the current situation to help move forward and create the future (Bluckert, 2005). Coaching is not therapy, and the client in coaching is not necessarily ill but the clients receiving therapy sessions are considered under treatment for an illness (de Haan, Culpin & Curd, 2011). Clients attending therapy treatment can still be coached and vice versa.

Consultants work with the context and environment to improve or solve a problem, where they serve as experienced individuals who know what is need to be done in terms of defining the problem, recommending and advising a solution, setting the plan for the solution and implementation (Maltbia, Marsick & Ghosh, 2014). On the other hand, as per previous studies by Brooks and Wright (2007), coaches deal with the client or person directly, follow their agenda and consider the client as the most experienced and powerful person to deal with their own lives. The coach facilitates whatever the client brings in as agenda, and the client can take ownership of their answers and decisions towards what matters to them. In other words, consultants give advice; coaches ignite self-awareness and self-control.

Training is a pre-planned and systematic approach that has a specific syllabus and material delivered by a professional trainer specialized in the area of training in a specific number of hours (Mihardjo et al., 2020). The training is ideally conducted by a trainer that has mastered the knowledge, skills, and abilities for the specific area/topic to improve trainees' performance (Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger & Smith-Jentsch, 2012). All Training should have a focused curriculum and tailored learning outcomes. In comparison, coaching is a client-focused, and the client is responsible for his learning and necessary actions (Losch et al., 2016). Coaching competencies are different from training competencies since ICF recognizes eleven core competencies divided into four groups, which are setting the foundation, co-creating the relationship, communicating effectively, facilitating learning and results. The Association for Talent Development (ATD), however, considers six foundational competencies, which are business skills, global mindset,

industry knowledge, interpersonal skills, personal skills, and technology literacy. Besides all differences, setting the agenda of the session is what drives coaching to be different from training in the initial stages.

Correspondingly, a mentor is an experienced person providing advice and recommendation or suggestions to a less experienced person. The mentoring relationship usually is an organizational and career-focused perspective (Maltbia, Marsick & Ghosh, 2014). Mentoring and coaching both serve the client's needs for development, and both the mentee and coachee should be intrinsically motivated to commit to this relationship. The most important difference between coaching and mentoring is that coaches do not give advice rather facilitate and raise the client's awareness of where they are currently standing, and the client will make the decision (Clutterbuck, 2008). In the coaching relationship, the client and the coach are co-reactors of the relationship as per ICF coaching core competence. However, in the mentoring relationship, the mentor is the leader, and the mentees are the follower. The researchers also have differentiated coaching from mentoring as coaching does not depend on the organizational hierarchy or career expertise of the coach versus the coachee. Therefore coachee's work-related achievement may not be the primary concern; however, the job knowledge is (Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2015).

2.6. Coaching and COVID-19 Crisis

Coaching can be a great tool to help guide employees in the time of crises, which apparently organizations have forgotten these days. Apart from the features, promises, and benefits of coaching discussed above, one very important contribution of coaching is its facilitation during times of crisis. Studies have reported that coaching in organizations can help deal with managing transformation occurring during the time of crises, both financial (David et al., 2016) as well as non-financial (Hall, 2015). Coaching programs in organizations can be a great source of guidance and support to maneuver employee behavior and overcome the crisis period effectively (Simola, 2005). Since employees and organizations globally are facing a severe crisis due to the recent COVID-19 Pandemic (Qiu et al., 2020; Darwish et al., 2020; Rehman et al., 2020), we propose that coaching can proactively help in resolving any work-related issues. Through utilizing coaching, organizations can actively help and facilitate their employees to overcome issues they are currently experiencing from work or personal life due to the COVID-19 crisis. Notably, what scholars have recently asserted also supports our claim, encouraging organizations to utilize coaching during COVID-19 Pandemic (Utterback et al., 2020). Furthermore, Buheji and Buheji (2020) also indicated that coaching alongside training can help cope with the changing demands and situation during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper serves as an attempt to refresh the concept of coaching in the minds of scholars to help them address major issues affecting performance, psychological well-being and behaviors of employees due to COVID-19 Pandemic. The paper serves as an effort to help organizational researchers recall the concept of coaching and its benefits for people and their organizations during the current times

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