

The coaching obstacle course: the association of help and hindrances to coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness

Abstract

Studies on coaching have largely explored effectiveness from the perspective of a coach or employing organization rather than that of the employee or coachee. There has also been a focus on “successful” coaching, but little is known about unsuccessful coaching or the hindrances to achieving coaching success. Many empirical studies on training interventions have found that support and help for employees from managers and others within the workplace enhances training effectiveness and there is an assumption in coaching studies that this will also be true for coaching interventions. This study addresses the gap in academic literature by exploring survey responses from 296 industry professionals in 34 countries who had been, or were currently being, coached. The study found that facing barriers during the period of coaching engagements was common and we present a categorization framework of six barrier categories. Our analysis suggests that three of these barrier categories may be predictive of coachee perceptions of limited coaching effectiveness: difficulties with a coach; coaching relationships; and overall coaching experience. The study also provides empirical evidence that suggests a lack of support from within an employing organization is not predictive of limited coaching effectiveness.

Key Words

Support, barriers, coachee, coaching effectiveness, international, empirical research

Introduction

Articles on coaching in business settings have provided broadly favorable views on coaching outcomes and effectiveness (Ely, Boyce, Nelson, Zaccaro, Hernez-Broome & Whyman, 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Passmore & Gibbs, 2007). The demand for business coaching in organizations is strong (Sherman & Freas, 2004; Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006) with talent management an on-going priority for Chief Executives (CEOs) and Human

Resource (HR) executives (McKinsey, 2012). Coaching is a prominent tool for personal and professional development, and perceived by HR specialists as the most effective activity in delivering talent management (CIPD, 2013) and senior manager development (Reilly & Williams, 2012). Coaching has gained credibility as organizations recognize its benefits when developing employees (Ely, Boyce et al. 2010). As a consequence, organizations are investing time and money by encouraging employees to pursue coaching, creating a strong demand for coaches. A 2012 study by the International Coach Federation (ICF) reported nearly 48,000 coaches worldwide, with roughly 57% engaged in leadership, business/organizations, and/or executive coaching

The coaching-specific literature tends to focus on “successful” coaching, but little is known about unsuccessful coaching behaviors or relationships (Ellinger, Hamlin & Beattie, 2008; Megginson, 2011) or barriers to the achievement of coaching outcomes and effectiveness. Much of the literature is based on coach perceptions or individual coachee cases (Passmore, 2010). One possible explanation for a lack of focus on coaching barriers in the peer-reviewed literature is that professional coaches (as opposed to manager-coaches) may not see them as an issue that needs to be addressed. Barriers may be seen by coaches as “presenting issues” that become part of the coaching dialogue to be used as “enablers”. But this transition from barrier to enabler assumes that barriers can be articulated and understood. For organizations to support their employees and manage their coaching programs effectively, we believe that a greater understanding of help (support) and hindrances is necessary. Further, we felt that employees who have been coached (coachees) would be a very useful starting point for exploring whether or not there were any problems of importance in these areas. This paper focuses on the support provided and barriers that arise during the period of coaching engagements and whether benefiting from specific support and/or facing specific barriers is predictive of coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness.

Many studies have explored the conditions that promote or hinder individual and organizational learning and outcomes from general training interventions. An employee's relationships with their line manager, their team and their peers are frequently identified as factors (Detert and Burris, 2007, Bauer et al., 2007, Bell, 2007). However, there is little research about what specific support is necessary for success (Ogilvy and Ellam-Dyson 2012). There is an apparent assumption that learning and coaching are essentially identical in terms of needed support. We suspected that learning and coaching may not be the same at all in terms of support needed by employees, and therefore sought to explore this issue in more detail. If more (or less) support – or, indeed, different support – is important to those undergoing coaching, then we believed that organizations need to know when planning and managing coaching schemes. Help and support, together with hindrances and barriers, are the issues that we will address in this article.

Literature Review

Coaching in workplaces

Executive coaching is broadly defined in terms of a relationship between a client/coachee and a coach that facilitates the client/coachee becoming more effective in their role (Kilburg, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Positive outcomes identified for organizations include increased leadership (Cerni, Curtis, & Colmar, 2010; Thach, 2002); increased skills (Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2016), increased productivity (Vidal-Salazar, Ferron-Vilchez, & Cordon-Pozo, 2012); job retention and loyalty to employer (Olivero, Bane & Kogelman, 1997); higher profits (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001); changing behaviors (Wasylyshyn, 2003); and ability to address workplace conflict (Gray, Ekinici, & Goregaokar, 2011).

Coaching in business settings can be conducted by external coaches, line managers or specially trained internal coaches who are often HR specialists (Brandl, Madsen, & Madsen,

2009; Teague & Roche, 2011). Internal coaches are usually expected to carry out their coaching role in addition to or as part of their “everyday” job (Hamlin et al., 2009).

There have been many studies exploring the conditions which either promote, or hinder, individual and organizational learning at work and outcomes from training interventions in general. Although many variables have been identified, there has been substantial evidence for the significance that organizational support systems such as the line manager, their team and their peers play in an individual’s learning process (Detert and Burris, 2007, Bauer et al., 2007, Bell, 2007). While an individual’s own cognitive state and their personality traits, such as their learning orientation, inform their ability and willingness to learn (Payne et al., 2007), their environment has been shown to play an equally crucial role.

Support for learning within workplaces

Porter (2005) found that managers supportive of learning in general stimulated the learning ambitions of their direct reports whilst those unsupportive of learning discouraged the learning ambitions of their direct reports. Edmondson (2003) similarly observed that direct reports were less likely to engage in learning behaviours when their line managers were abusive but would increase their efforts when they were supported. Larson et al. (1998) noted that while directive line managers would dissuade direct reports from sharing information and receiving feedback, participative line managers would encourage such behaviour. In each case direct reports, who were supported by their line managers, were more open to sharing information and receiving feedback which effectively improved their own and their team’s performance. Team leaders can also enable the conditions for effective teams and they affect the development and motivation of team members e.g. through a supportive organisational context and the deployment of good coaching skills (Burke et al., 2006).

While some scholars have focused on the relationship between line managers and direct reports, others have explored the effect that a team has on learning. Jehn et al. (1999) found that the degree to which employees engaged in learning depended on the level of emotional conflict within the team, although proposing that task conflict was a source of learning when appropriately handled. Stasser et al. (2000) highlighted that teams dissuaded employees from learning as team members tended to focus on shared information while omitting unshared information which could be more challenging to the team context. Bunderson and Sutcliffe (2003) similarly noted that the success of teams in resolving conflict could affect an individual's willingness to learn. In summary, these studies all suggest that whether employees engage in effective learning behaviours depends on their team's support.

In addition to the line manager and the team, a third focus has been the support from other employees. Some studies have noted the importance of such relationships as a means to enhance learning through transferring knowledge between teams and departments which might otherwise become isolated (Tushman and Scanlan, 1981). Furthermore, several studies have shown that increased commonality between peers can lead to information sharing and feedback seeking behaviours which promote learning (Foldy et al., 2009). Hence, peers may not only offer increased resources but can also offer social support which may enhance employees' perceived learning effectiveness.

Consequently, there has been substantial evidence for the significance that organizational support systems such as the line manager, their team members, colleagues and co-workers play in an individual's learning process. Despite considerable research effort into the organization infrastructure needed to support learning from training interventions in general there has been little research specifically around any necessary support for coaching. There seems to be an assumption that learning and coaching are essentially identical when it

comes to the support needed but Ogilvy and Ellam-Dyson (2012) suggested that they may not be the same at all.

Mediating factors for coaching effectiveness within workplaces

Although there has been an enormous upsurge in papers on coaching in scholarly journals (Grant, 2011), unlike the study of leadership or team effectiveness, the study of coaching is still in its infancy and informed by many academic disciplines (Stern and Stout-Rostron, 2013). In addition to a comprehensive understanding of the underlying theoretical frameworks guiding the research and practice of coaching, which has still not been developed, more research is needed into factors affecting coaching effectiveness.

Aspects of coaching in organizations, including internal systems for support, are an under-researched area of the literature (Stern & Stout-Rostron, 2013). Studies have found the need for organizations to provide support to coachees (Rocereto, Mosca, Forquer Gupta, & Rosenberg, 2011); ensure commitment from senior management (Baron & Morin, 2010, Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas & Kucine, 2003); and share the responsibility for the coaching goals and outcomes (Wasylyshyn, Gronsky & Hass, 2006). Line-managers are a key stakeholder by providing feedback on progress (Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin & Kerrin, 2008) whilst manager support (Olivero et al., 1997) and line management behaviors (Ogilvy and Ellam-Dyson, 2012) have been found to influence transfer of learning.

There are relatively few quantitative studies of executive coaching and most research has been based on retrospective studies, where perceptions of the coaching and progress made were collected mostly from the coaches (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson 2001, Feldman & Lankau 2005). There is a paucity of studies on executive coaching from the coachees' perspective, apart from single coachee accounts (Passmore, 2010). Notable exceptions are Bush (2004) who suggested that coachee perceptions of a supportive organizational culture were important and Hall, Otazo & Hollenback (1999) who concluded that listening and

questioning skills needed to be present alongside integrity, caring and the ability to challenge constructively. Other aspects critical to the client–coach relationship have been identified as rapport and mutual trust (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010) whilst de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, and Jones (2013) found that coaching outcomes were significantly related to the working alliance and the coaching techniques used by the coach.

Further research must examine whether barriers can be defined as an absence of these facilitators or whether they are something over and above this in their own right.

Research questions

Following the review of the literature four specific research questions were developed: What support, if any, do coachees perceive they have received during their coaching? Do coachees identifying more support perceive their coaching to be more or less effective? What barriers, if any, do coachees perceive they have faced during their coaching?; and do coachees identifying similar barriers perceive their coaching to be more or less effective when compared to coachees not reporting those barriers?

Methodology

The present analysis aims to address the paucity of academic literature surrounding sources of support and hindrances/barriers faced by coachees during their coaching.

Survey Instrument

Six questions, on support and barriers, were included in a survey as part of a broader study designed by the first and second named authors to explore the perspective of coachees about their current or most recent, coaching experience. The entire international coaching effectiveness survey comprised 63 questions divided into six sections. Responses to six

questions out of the 63 questions are considered for this article as we sought to delve in-depth into four specific research questions.

The first section of the whole survey, Section 1- Your Coaching Program, was used to determine whether respondents were currently going through the coaching process or when they completed. Sections 2 to 5 were divided into each of the following components, namely, about the Coachee, their Coaching Program, their Coach, the Coaching Process/Experience, and their Work/Organization Context. The last section of the questionnaire was titled Section 6 - About You. This final section of the survey aimed at extracting a general profile of the participants in terms of gender, age, country of residence and education. The survey was publicized via national and international networks, employers and coaching associations and was available to respondents from March 2013 to May 2014. This survey was different from others previously conducted, as it was not limited to programs where all coaches use the same theoretical approach or by the boundaries of a single employing organization or country.

What support do coachees receive?

Employed respondents were asked '*How supportive was/is your organization with regards to you going through the coaching experience?*' A 5-point importance response scale was used for each of the three workplaces sources of support previously discussed from the learning literature (bosses, peers and direct reports). Possible responses were 1 (Not at all supportive), 2 (Generally unsupportive), 3 (Neither), 4 (Generally supportive) to 5 (Very supportive). We also asked '*What types of support for coaching do you receive from your organization?*' A pre-defined list of possible sources of support from the learning effectiveness literature were presented as statements and comprised: My organization pays for my coaching; My organization allows time within my work day for coaching sessions; My organization allows me to make changes based on my learnings from my coaching sessions (I am empowered); My boss encourages me; and Other. As coaching often carries

over into home life it was important to also find out how supportive families were to coachees. Both self-employed and employed respondents were asked *'How supportive was/is your family with regards to you going through the coaching experience?'* The same five-point rating scale was used as above where 1 is 'not at all supportive' and 5 is 'very supportive'. All respondents were also asked *'On a scale of 1 - 5, how much effort do you feel you have put into or are prepared to put into the coaching process? (Please click on the scale to indicate your response).'*" A moveable slider scale was used with a 5-point rating marks indicated and where 1 is labelled as 'no effort' and 5 is labelled as 'a lot of effort'.

As previously discussed, barriers to coaching effectiveness are not well discussed in the literature. A pre-defined list of possible barriers was developed based on in-depth semi-structures interviews conducted in January 2013 with six non-completers from one organization coaching program in UK. The pre-defined list were presented as statements comprising: I had unclear development goals or lacked agreement with my coach on my goals; I lacked commitment to the path of development; I found it difficult to grasp the coaching concepts; My coach was defensive; My organization no longer supported me during the coaching process; My coach was not committed to the coaching process; My emotions got in the way; I didn't get on with my coach; I was defensive; My coach struggled with the concepts of coaching; My coach was no longer supported by their organization; I changed job; My boss was not supportive; My colleagues resented covering my time off for coaching and made things difficult for me; There was no suitable place to meet for coaching sessions; The timing wasn't right for me (e.g. too late in my career, was on maternity leave, etc.); There was nothing challenging I wanted to work on; and Other. Respondents were asked *'The following is a list of possible barriers to coaching effectiveness. Please indicate if you experienced any of these. Please select all that apply'*. In addition there was a free text box so

respondents could use their own words to determine what “other” barriers they felt they had faced during the period of their coaching.

In order to determine coachees’ perceptions about the effectiveness of their coaching, respondents were asked ‘*Overall on a scale of 1 - 5, how effective do you think the coaching you participated in was? (Please click on the scale to indicate your response)*’. A moveable slider scale was used with a 5-point rating marks indicated and where 1 is labelled as ‘not at all effective’ and 5 is labelled as ‘very effective’. For analysis purposes this was split into Limited/No Effect (1 – 3) and Effective (<3).

Six hundred and forty-four coachees responded to the survey with 296 completing to the end of the survey.

Is receiving support predictive of coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness?

All 296 completed survey responses were included in the analysis on support. Multiple response analysis (Williamson, Karp, Dalphone & Gray, 1982) was undertaken initially on survey responses. A hierarchical linear regression analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) then identified support responses that can predict (and if so how strongly) the likelihood that respondents perceived their coaching experience as effective.

What barriers do coachees face?

Two hundred and six respondents identified barriers present in their coaching and were included in the analysis on barriers: those who did not respond to the question or indicated there were no barriers were excluded from the analysis. Multiple response analysis and content analysis (Williamson, Karp, Dalphone & Gray, 1982) was used on the pre-defined responses and open text “other” responses respectively. Thematic analysis was then used to code the barrier results into higher order and sub themes. This process involved

various stages of discussion between two of the researchers. Based on the findings a categorization framework of barriers from the coachees' perspectives was developed. The category names within the framework were slightly refined through subsequent discussion with a wider pool of researchers and practitioners at two coaching research conferences¹.

Is facing barriers predictive of coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness?

A backward elimination stepwise regression analysis (Field, 2009) identified barrier categories that were more likely to predict coachees reporting limited effect from coaching.

Identifying categories of barriers faced in particular should help provide a better starting point for further research and allow HR practitioners in the meantime to focus upon how they might prevent or minimize the barriers their employees and leaders face in their coaching programs.

Sampling Approach

A limitation of previous studies of coachees is that the sample comprises single coachee accounts (Passmore, 2010) or respondents drawn from a single organization, industry sector or leader-only group. These study characteristics raise issues concerning the generalizability of the findings to other types of employees and other sectors. Therefore the authors decided to take an open source approach. The researchers approached personal contacts, included contacts within national and international coaching associations and networks, universities, coaching providers and multi-national employing organisations who were asked to publicise a link to our on-line survey through their newsletters or email correspondence to industry professionals. In some cases these intermediaries sent the request to their mailing list of coaches who were asked to invite their coaching clients (coachees) to complete an on-line 'coachee survey'. The survey was live online from March 2013 until May 2014. No incentives for survey distribution, publicity or completion were offered. Distributing online ensures respondents ease of access and cost efficiency (Neuman, 2003). It was made clear to potential respondents that their responses would be treated in confidence and that no individual respondent or their employing organization would be identified.

¹ European Mentoring & Coaching Council 4th Mentoring & Coaching Research Conference, Cergy-Pointoise University, Paris, 26-27 June 2014; and Institute for Employment Studies HR Research Network, Broadway House, London, 30 October 2014

Six hundred and forty four respondents opened the survey. After removing respondents who did not complete to the end of the survey questions, we obtained a final response of 296 online surveys. There is no way to establish a response rate as snowball sampling was used and the researchers were not allowed to have access to email lists due to privacy restrictions. All procedures were approved by the respective Human Research Ethics Committees of the co-authors.

Results

The sample

Most respondents answered most the demographic questions including those related to their coaching and work contexts. The sample consisted of 83% (N=246) with an external coach, 14% (N=24) with an internal coach. While 92% (N=272) came to coaching voluntarily, for 8% (N=24) it was mandatory. For 26% (N=34) it was their first coaching experience, with 74% (N= 98) having been coached before. In terms of work context, the sample consisted of 50% (N=148) employees and 50% (N=148) self-employed while 57% (N=169) were managers and 43% (N=127) non-managers. Size of organization respondents worked in was 61% (N=170) in SMEs and 39% (N=109) in large organizations. Country of residence of respondents was 31% (N=93) UK & Ireland, 27% (N=80) Other European (incl. Germany, France, Hungary & Greece), 22% (N=66) from Australia & New Zealand, 5% (N=15) North America and 8% (N=23) Rest of the World (incl. Brazil, Russia, China & India).

What support do coachees receive?

Our first research question was what support, if any, do coachees perceive they have received during their coaching? Bosses (M=3.75, SD=1.15), peers (M=3.71, SD=0.96), and direct reports (M=3.69, SD=0.81) were all seen as generally supportive by employed coachees (see Table 1). In terms of the types of support provided, 51 per cent of employed respondents stated their organizations pay for the coaching, 62 per cent are allocated time

during work periods for coaching sessions, 49 per cent stated their organizations allow them to make changes based on what they learn in coaching sessions and 40 per cent participants stated they were/are encouraged by their boss. Allowing coachees to transfer newly acquired skills reinforces their commitment to invest effort into the coaching process reinforcing the working alliance with the coach (Baron and Morin, 2009).

Families were also seen as generally supportive by both the employed coachees ($M=4.14$, $SD=0.85$) and self-employed coachees ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.93$) (see Table 1). The personal effort put in by employees and self-employed coachees themselves on average was high ($M=4.40$, $SD=0.69$) suggesting that coaches felt they were making, or were prepared to make, a lot of personal effort with coaching. Forty-six per cent of respondents were prepared to put in 'a lot' of effort to achieve their coaching outcomes whilst 1 per cent of respondents were not prepared to put any effort into coaching.

Correlations

All measures used in this study were formative. Nevertheless, it was important to test multi-collinearity between the variables, especially with regards to coachees differentiating between support from peers and support from direct reports. Table 1 indicates that the correlation between each variable is below 0.7 indicating that there are no concerns with multi-collinearity between constructs.

<<<Insert Table 1 here>>>

Is receiving support predictive of coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness?

Regression analysis

Our second research question was whether coachees identifying more support perceive their coaching to be more or less effective? Eighty-nine per cent of coaches reported that their

coaching was effective and 11% reported their coaching was of limited effectiveness. Using regression analysis to examine whether accounting for a particular response can predict (and if so how strongly) the likelihood that respondents perceived their coaching experience as effective.

<<<Insert Tables 2 and 3 here>>>

For employed coaches (see Table 2), we found that manager, peer and team support were not significant influences on the perceived effectiveness of coaching for our sample, but personal effort and family support were. The coefficients were positive, indicating that the more effort the coachee put in and the more support they received from their family, the more effective they felt the coaching. This supports the proposition that employee perceptions of coaching effectiveness are associated with support from beyond the workplace, rather than support from within. For self-employed coaches (see Table 3), neither personal effort nor support from families were significant influences on perceptions of the effectiveness of coaching, but the age of the coachee respondent was significant – older coachees felt coaching was more effective than did younger coachees. The gender and level of education of coachee were not significant.

What barriers do coachees face?

Our third research question was what barriers, if any; coachees perceive they have faced during their coaching. Facing barriers that could adversely affect coaching effectiveness was common with 206 people reporting that they faced barriers and nine people reporting no barriers. Those who did not respond may have left the survey at this point or faced no barriers. Analysis showed that those who responded on average faced one or two barriers (N: 206, Range: 6, Min 1, Max 7, Mean: 1.54, SD: 0.96).

“Unclear development goals and lack of agreement with my coach on my goals” was the single biggest issue with 22% of coachees reporting this as a barrier. The use of goals in coaching is an area of controversy. Grant (2014) found that the more the coach-coachee relationship was goal-focused, the more successful the coaching engagement was likely to be. These results lend support to the counter view that focusing on goals and outcomes can derail the coach-coachee relationship (Cavanagh, 2013) or undermine the ability to work with emergent issues in a complex and rapidly changing world (David, Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2013). Other barriers most frequently indicated from the pre-defined list were ‘Emotions got in the way’ (N=32 & 15.5% of cases); ‘I lacked commitment to the path of development’ (N=28 & 13.6% of cases); ‘I was defensive’ (N=26 & 12.6% of cases); and ‘My boss was not supportive’ (N=25 & 12.1% of cases).

From the free-text responses the most prevalent barriers cited were ‘Inadequate coach’ (18% of cases); ‘Content or platform unsuitable’ (15% of cases), ‘Time Poor’ (15% of cases); and ‘Cost/distance’ (12%).

As stated, facing barriers was common among our sample and numerous barriers were suggested in addition to our pre-determined list of possible barriers. Yet barriers are so little discussed in the existing literature. Therefore the authors felt there was an opportunity to explore the responses further to produce a categorization framework which may be a useful starting point for future research on barriers. Based on the results, six categories of ‘higher order’ barriers were identified: Organizational culture; Difficulties with coach; Coachees’ own readiness and engagement; External events; Relationship between coach and coachee; and coaching experience. These six categories are represented visually in Figure 1.

<<<Insert Figure 1 here>>>

The most cited higher order barriers were coachees' own readiness and engagement (N=102 and 50.2% of cases), coaching experience barriers (N=79 and 38.9% of cases) and organisational culture barriers (N=34 and 16.7% of cases). The least cited barriers were difficulties with the coach (N=24 and 11.8% of cases), external events (N=17 and 8.4% of cases) and coaching relationship (N=15 and 7.4% of cases). Respondents were able to select more than one barrier and so the total percentage is greater than 100%. The slight discrepancy between the total numbers of respondents recorded in the thematic coding is a reflection of the fact that 3 people stated they faced an 'other' barrier but failed to state what this barrier was in the open coding.

The barriers presented in higher order and sub themes along with examples of the responses/comments that make up the themes are presented in Table 4. The statements highlighted in italics are the pre-defined responses from the questionnaire and the rest are comments from the open text responses. It can be seen that 'limited resources to participate' was a sub theme developed solely from the open text coding rather than any pre-defined questions. The remaining sub themes were developed using a mixture of the pre-defined responses and the open text responses.

<<<Insert Table 4 here>>>

Is facing barriers predictive of coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness?

The fourth and final research question was whether coachees identifying similar barriers perceive their coaching to be more or less effective when compared to coaches not reporting those barriers? The vast majority of coachees were able to overcome barriers faced since, as previously stated, 89% reporting that their coaching was nevertheless effective and 11% reporting their coaching was of limited effectiveness.

From a cross-tab analysis on higher order barriers and perceptions of coaching effectiveness, there was a suggestion (see Table 5) that those who highlighted the coaching relationship as a barrier were more likely to find the coaching ineffective. 46.7% of those who stated the coaching relationship was a barrier stated the coaching had limited effect compared to only 16.5% of those who did not state this was a barrier. However due to the small sample size it is difficult to assess whether this is significant.

<<<Insert Table 5 here>>>

There was a suggestion (see Table 6) that those who identified barrier of difficulties with coach were more likely to state the coaching had limited effect (41.7%) compared to those who did not identify this as a barrier (15.6%). However due to the small sample size it is difficult to assess whether this is significant.

<<<Insert Table 6 here>>>

The other four higher order barriers when analysed on their own against coaching outcomes did not prove to be significant and have not been presented.

All six of the higher order barriers were included in a regression model. The regression model takes into account all of the higher order barriers together as well as the demographic variable (voluntary or mandatory coaching- as this was shown to be significant during chi square cross tabs) and then highlights the ones which are likely to have greater impact. The regression model in Table 7 shows that three barrier categories had an impact (although very small) and could be considered predictive of perceptions of limited effectiveness from coaching: difficulties with coach, coaching relationship and coaching experience. If there are difficulties with the coach then the odds of coachees reporting coaching effectiveness are reduced by 0.3, if there are difficulties in the coaching relationship

then the odds of coachees reporting coaching effectiveness are reduced by a further 0.26 and if there are difficulties with the coaching experience then the odds of coachees reporting coaching effectiveness are reduced by a further 0.45. The other three barriers are not presented in the model as they did not show any significant impact.

<<<Insert Table 7 here>>>

Although coaching experience did not have a significant impact on coaching outcomes on its own, when analyzed alongside other higher order barriers it then had a small impact.

Coaching experience is therefore not as important as difficulties with coach and coaching relationship in terms of impact on coaching outcomes. In other words, if a coachee is having difficulties with their coach and also has a poor coaching relationship, then the coaching programme and methodologies (coaching experience) is likely to exacerbate the problem and so result in even poorer coaching outcomes. On their own the coaching programs and methodologies (coaching experience) aren't likely to impact on poor coaching outcomes: it is not a strong enough factor.

Conclusions and Discussion

The present study found that organisational support from line managers, peers and teams is not associated with perceptions of coaching effectiveness for employed coachees although one's own effort and support from family are associated with coaching effectiveness. Social support may be more important than organisational support for employees. The results also found that neither personal nor organisational support systems are associated with perceptions of coaching effectiveness for self-employed coachees. It is therefore important that coaching should not be perceived in the same light as other forms of

learning when it comes to the significance of organisational support systems. Further research is required to understand if these findings can be applied to a wider population of coachees.

The findings do not mean that line managers are not important or are not key stakeholders when it comes to coaching. Line managers might for example limit employees from taking time off during their work hours, decline to contribute towards the cost of the coaching, and/or, increase workloads to minimise employees personal time. In all these cases, it is not the perceived coaching effectiveness which is undermined but an individual's ability to take up coaching and their motivation to improve personal and organisational performance in the first. In other cases, poor line management could itself motivate individuals to seek out and sign up for career coaching in order to help them escape their current role. On a similar note, the findings do not mean that the behaviour of work colleagues or staff is not important. Yet, these positive relations may themselves prove distractions if employees, feeling content in their position, are less driven to move on from their current situation.

A significant difference was found in the perceived effectiveness of self-employed individuals and individuals who are employed by organisations. While the latter indicates an association between personal effort and family support and perceived coaching effectiveness, the former does not. Future research may wish to explore whether there are different motivations underlying the desire for coaching between people who choose employment rather than a self-employment, freelancer or interim status. Self-employed individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of self-motivation and self-determination than individuals employed by organisations. While self-employed individuals and some employees come to coaching voluntarily and pay for their coaching, for some employees their participation was mandatory.

The findings indicate that many coachees experience barriers and this is an area in the coaching literature worthy of further exploration. Whilst the vast majority of respondent coachees were able to overcome the barriers they faced and still perceive their coaching to be effective, the findings indicate that three barrier categories had an impact (although very small) and might be considered predictive of perceptions of limited effectiveness from coaching - difficulties with coach, coaching relationship and coaching experience. Coaching experience however was not as important as difficulties with coach and coaching relationship in terms of impact on coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness.

“Unclear development goals and lack of agreement with my coach on my goals” was the single biggest barrier faced by our sample of coachees. The use of goals in coaching is an area of controversy. Grant (2014) found that the more the coach-coachee relationship was goal-focused, the more successful the coaching engagement was likely to be. These results would lend support to the counter view that focusing on goals and outcomes can derail the coach-coachee relationship (Cavanagh, 2013) or undermine the ability to work with emergent issues in a complex and rapidly changing world (David, Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2013). Research on goal-setting practices in particular might usefully focus on whether the difficulties coachees reported are an organization issue (e.g., poor communication between employee and their boss or changing priorities) a coach issue (e.g., poor or rigid goal setting process) or a combination of both.

Further research is also needed into the extent to which barriers might vary based on a wider range of variables. The current study found no differences in the barriers faced by coachees or perceptions of coaching effectiveness according to whether coaches were internal or

externally sourced. A bigger sample of respondents with internal coaches may reveal differences between these groups.

Implications for practice

.The present study has provided the first research from the coachee perspective around barriers to coaching. It has implications for practice in two ways. Firstly, the study has significant practice implications for the management of coaching programs in business settings to improve the coaching experience of employees. Organizations should review any requirement for all coachees to set goals at the outset while line managers should provide clarity and honesty about the reasons for nomination and what they hope the coaching outcomes will be. Offering employees a choice of coach and assessing the readiness of employees for coaching is also indicated.

Secondly, the study has practice implications for coaches allowing them the possibility of greater impact from their individual coaching engagements. Coaches should encourage engagement by coachees' bosses and re-think any rigid reliance on setting specific, measurable, actionable, results –orientated and timely (SMART) goals.

Limitations

We do acknowledge that there limitations with this study. Coaching associations and organisations were contacted by the researchers and then asked to send out to their email lists of people currently or recently undergoing a programme of business coaching. Therefore we cannot establish a response rate as snowball sampling was used and the researchers did not have access to email lists due to privacy restrictions. In addition the researchers do not know who the organisations decided to forward the survey link to. Although we requested they send it to all their coachees, some may have sent it only to those they had good relationships with who might be expected to provide favourable responses.

The majority of the questionnaire contained closed ended questions and rating scales together with some free text response boxes. Questions that are constructed in a closed ended format limit the participant's opportunity for response (Pierce, 1995). Limitations of this include only a selected number of variables being collected and therefore the possibility that some areas are not addressed. Finally, and this is an issue with the responses to the questions on barriers, it is hard to know if respondents purposely did not answer the question due to the given answers not fitting their desired response or if it was missed inadvertently (Pierce, 1995).

This study has focused on individuals both employed in organisations and self-employed who have engaged with coaches. Accordingly, the motivations for individuals who have not sought coaching experiences have not been examined. Further studies, may therefore consider exploring the effect that organisational support systems have on an employee's decision not to seek coaching rather than whether they perceive this to have been effective. While organisational support systems may not be associated with the perceived effectiveness of coaching, it may be that it is associated with an employee's initial intent to engage with coaching.

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