

## **How does the adoption of coaching behaviours by line managers contribute to the achievement of organisational goals?**

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### **Abstract**

Provision of excellent customer service is critical to the success of organisations relying on sales and patronage to survive. There is an abundance of theory suggesting a link between the adoption of a coaching style of management and enhanced performance. However, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the application of coaching in a customer-facing setting. Further, little attention has been given to understanding how the cultural characteristics of organisations play a part in supporting, or otherwise, the success of coaching's contribution to improved performance and achievement of organisational goals. Using an organisational case study, this research seeks to address these knowledge gaps by exploring the question of how the adoption of coaching behaviours by line managers contributes to the achievement of organisational goals. The research focuses on a case organisation that relies on front-line staff, across the UK, to deliver excellent customer service, thereby helping to increase sales and patronage.

**Key Words:** coaching; customer service; performance; organisational goals

### **Introduction**

A quote from Heskett et al crystallises the well-supported notion that provision of excellent customer service is critical to the survival of organisations delivering their services through front-line staff:

*Profit and growth are stimulated by customer loyalty. Loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is largely influenced by the value of service provided to customers. Value is created by satisfied, loyal and productive employees.* (Heskett et al (1994, p.164-165)

In addition, there is an abundance of theory acknowledging the link between a coaching style of management and enhanced performance (Whitmore, 2004; Zeus and Skiffington, 2005a & b). However, there is a lack of empirical research focusing on the application and efficacy of coaching in a customer service setting.

This study focuses on the relatively informal application of coaching by line managers in the course of their daily interactions with staff. Drawing on a number of sources, for example, Rich (1998) and Ellinger et al (1999), the following definition of coaching has been identified for the purposes of this study: Interactions that involve a line manager using facilitative and empowering, as opposed to directive and prescriptive techniques, to help team members improve their performance against organisational goals, through personal learning and development.

## Current Research Literature

A literature search confirmed a scarcity of empirical research in this area but a number of sources from related fields were identified. Three themes emerged:

### 1. Coaching behaviours by line managers

Various studies provide an understanding of the coaching behaviours being used by line managers, what they involve and the extent to which they are being adopted. Graham et al (1994) conducted a study involving sales representatives rating their managers on the use of eight coaching skills identified by Schelling (1991). The study proposes that the skills that most significantly represent good coaching include clear communication of expectations, providing accurate feedback, offering suggestions when working alongside staff and developing warm relationships with employees. However, attention was not given to measuring the efficacy of the behaviours from a sales performance perspective. Further, the research focused on capturing views of employees only. This begs the question of whether the managers had a similar or different take on how the coaching behaviours should be rated.

Rich's study (1998), supports and extends the learning from Graham et al's work (1994) by identifying three key constructs for effective sales coaching: firstly, role modelling, complimenting Graham et al's findings (1994) that highlight the value of a manager working alongside an employee; secondly, supervisory feedback, also linking to Graham et al's work; and thirdly, trust, which it could be argued is a characteristic of a relationship rather than a behaviour and so has limited relevance to questions around how coaching behaviours impact on performance.

Based in a sales context, Rich's study (1998) helps to explain the use of coaching behaviours at the customer service 'coal-face'. It focuses on respondents who travelled around a geographical territory of clients. This raises questions about how results would compare for those in a more static, location-based sales team. The effect on performance of the interaction between the three constructs is not explored, leaving a gap in understanding of how different coaching behaviours are 'mixed' to best drive sales performance. Rich's research was conducted outside the UK potentially limiting its cultural applicability to the current study.

Ellinger et al's study investigates "the multiple ways exemplary managers facilitate their employees' learning in organisations" (1999, p.752). Whilst not made explicit, the research suggests that respondents were office-based executives rather than customer-facing sales people. They identified a number of behaviours that fell into two clusters: empowering and facilitating. These findings support themes emerging from Graham et al (1994) and Rich (1998), although role modelling did not feature specifically. This suggests that role modelling may be more relevant to sales than executive, environments. This study could be limited by its reliance on data sourced from one perspective.

A strong theme across the literature is that feedback plays an important part in coaching by line managers. Zeus et al (2000b) and Jaworski et al (1991) underline that feedback between managers and their team members is of primary importance to staff development. Despite this, evidence suggests that feedback is one of the most difficult coaching behaviours for line managers to adopt (Marsh 1992, Walker 2002). Drawing on her own experience as a management consultant and executive, Walker suggests that this is linked to a natural human tendency to avoid confrontation. This presents an important avenue for enquiry.

## 2. Manager as coach

Since the late 1980s, the concept of 'manager as coach' has received much support (Evered et al 1989). Zeus & Skiffington (2005b), Whitmore (2004) and Parsloe (1999) all present coaching as an integral part of a manager's role; one that demonstrates a progressive and contemporary approach to leading a team.

However a debate is emerging which raises some questions about the practicalities of putting the concept of manager as coach into practice. For example, O'Connor & Lages (2004) and Ferrar (2006) identify issues such as conflicts of interest and confidentiality as potential barriers to effectiveness. Further, Harris (2005) presents a manager's personal characteristics in terms of personality, relationships and self-confidence as potential barriers to their willingness to coach. This dichotomy of evidence led to the need to view the 'manager as coach' debate from two angles: the enabling aspects of the line manager adopting coaching behaviours and the relevant barriers.

Supporters of the idea of 'manager as coach' propose that it helps organisations in many ways. Whitmore (2004), an ambassador for coaching in the workplace, devotes a chapter to the subject of manager as coach. He defines coaching as

*... unblocking a person's potential to maximize their performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them* (Whitmore, 2004, p.8).

## 3. Coaching and the achievement of organisational goals

There is a scarcity of empirical research in this area with most relevant material concentrating on theoretical best practice. Much of the theory is based on personal experiences of seasoned practitioner-authors, such as Whitmore (2004) and Zeus and Skiffington (2005a), so is of substantial value. Willis & Britnor Guest, (2003, p.1) suggest that:

*Coaching can be one of the most effective interventions for development at all levels – and crucially for helping to align or balance personal employee development and organisational goals.*

Their discussion relates to the use of a formal coaching programme, as opposed to coaching behaviours by line managers. Nevertheless, it illustrates the popular concept of linking coaching goals to organisational goals.

Anderson and Anderson (2005) further support the argument for linking coaching goals to organisational goals. Again, the coaching they discuss is part of a formal programme involving executive coaches, highlighting an opportunity to explore this concept in a less formal coaching environment. This literature builds a case for aligning coaching goals with those of the organisation. Further inquiry into how this could be applied to less formal applications of coaching would be of benefit.

In her research involving computer consultants in the UK, Marsh (1992) aims to provide an understanding of the factors affecting coaching success. She highlights the fact that there is little research available to show "...that the preferred models had any relationship to improved results and what good coaches actually did". She goes some way to address this by identifying six characteristics of good coaching style, which have much in common with the empowering and facilitating behaviours identified in Ellinger et al's work (1999). However, the study does not explicitly link these good coaching behaviours to the achievements of organisational goals; it merely implies that the link exists.

The literature review revealed the following gaps which helped to shape the focus of the study:

- Evidence specific to a customer-facing setting
- Evidence linking the adoption of coaching behaviours and achievement of a specified organisational goal
- Evidence that draws on more than one source of data
- Evidence demonstrating the impact of cultural characteristics of an organisation

### ***Objectives***

The research aimed to focus on one particular organisation to investigate how the adoption of coaching behaviours by line managers contributes to the achievement of organisational goal. The following research questions were identified:

- What does coaching by line managers look like in the case study organisation?
- How do the perspectives of the managers and staff compare / contrast and what can be learned from this?
- What coaching behaviours do the line managers use? Are some used more than others? If so why and does this have an impact on the sales performance?
- What cultural characteristics of the case study organisation support or inhibit the achievement of organisational goals?

### **Methodology**

#### ***Research Strategy***

Drawing on the work of Yin (1994) and Robson (2002) a case study methodology was identified as the most suitable research strategy. As defined by Yin, case study involves “researching contemporary phenomenon within its real life context” (Yin, 1994, p.13) As such it presented the opportunity to focus on the organisational subject without unduly interfering with it.

The case study organisation is well established and operates in the UK visitor attraction sector. During 2005 a sales development programme was launched. This tasked front-line staff with delivering customer service in such a way as to drive a pre-determined increase in sales. In 2006 this organisational goal was achieved. As part of the sales development strategy, line managers of front-line staff attended coaching skills training with the aim of encouraging staff to take ownership of improving their sales performance. With these characteristics, the organisation provided a highly suitable case for this research.

#### ***Data sources and collection***

In order to obtain a broad view of how the coaching had contributed to the increase in sales, data was collected from both line managers and their corresponding front-line staff. This facilitated data triangulation (Robson 2002; Stake 1995 and Yin 1994), increasing validity and reducing bias. Some useful documentation was also made available including training materials, sales performance data and internal communication bulletins. Table 1 shows the three data sources along with their method of collection:

Method	Data Source
<u>Unstructured interviews</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prepared topic guide</li> <li>○ Face-to-face, in-depth</li> <li>○ 30-40 mins</li> <li>○ Recorded &amp; transcribed verbatim</li> </ul>	Line managers (x 6)
<u>Semi-structured questionnaires</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Face-to-face, researcher-led</li> <li>○ 15-20 mins</li> <li>○ Completion by researcher, pen &amp; paper</li> <li>○ Spreadsheet data entry</li> </ul>	Front-line staff (x7)
<u>Document Review</u>	Existing documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sales performance figures (expressed as strike rates)</li> <li>○ Training materials / outputs</li> <li>○ Reports &amp; memorandums</li> </ul>

**Table 1 – Data sources and methods of collection**

Face-to-face data collection was favoured above the use of the telephone as it allowed for a deeper understanding of respondents via the observation of non-verbal behaviour (Gillham, 2000b). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with line managers with an emphasis on open-ended questions. These were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. A shorter survey-style questionnaire was used to interview front-line staff. These were not recorded because it was decided that staff could feel uncomfortable with this, given the potential for them to be talking about their line manager. This, along with strict data management and generic referencing, ensured complete anonymity of all respondents and individual sites.

Questions focused on asking respondents to identify factors that had contributed to the increase in sales achieved in 2006. In order to avoid leading respondents and introducing bias, the questions were purposefully designed not to include the word “coaching.” For example:

- All – “What factors do you think enabled you to improve sales during 2006”?
- Front-line staff – “What, if anything, did your manager do differently with you/the team that helped you to improve sales?”
- Line Managers – “What skills did you use when working with team members to help them perform better?”

### ***Sampling***

Respondents were selected in such a way as to reduce contextual and geographical variation, as well as to focus on staff who were able to recall experiences specifically relating to activities during the year. This was necessary due to the transient nature of the seasonal workforce. By including respondents from sites demonstrating different level of sales performance, it was possible to broadly

compare findings by performance level. Six line managers and seven front-line staff from four different sites took part, as shown in Table 1 above.

The number of managers operating at each site depended on site size, visitor footfall and range of facilities. These factors also determined the number of staff working at each site. Exact numbers were not available and there was some overlap as staff were sometimes shared across local sites. However, Table 2 gives a broad indication of population of managers and staff by site and also shows the performance level as determined by the sales data provided.

Site	Managers	Staff	Performance Level
A	2	4-6	Low
B	1	4-6	Medium
C	1	2-4	Medium
D	2	5-7	High

**Table 2 – Numbers and performance level of managers and staff by site**

### *Data Analysis*

Content analysis (Gillham 2000a) was used to analyse the data for the interviews with line managers and also to analyse the open-ended responses provided by front-line staff. The data were coded and grouped under thematic headings which helped to identify recurring themes and emergent patterns.

The data sources were brought together in three ways to compare, contrast and draw out relevant conclusions (Yin 1994). The first involved merging information from different spreadsheets in order to produce a summary of the breadth and frequency of the themes. Secondly, a number of concept maps were produced, based on Buzan's mind mapping approach (2004) which allowed links between themes to be identified. Thirdly the process of reflecting on and writing up the findings provided further opportunities to identify meaning and achieve clarity.

### **Findings**

The findings focus, firstly, on the types of coaching behaviours used by line managers to improve performance and how or to what extent they were used. Secondly a comparison of performance levels across participating sites for the relevant year provides an indication of which coaching behaviours were most effective in achieving organisational goals. Thirdly, findings relating to culture of the organisational case study are presented and discussed in the context of the research objectives.

#### **1. Coaching Behaviours**

Overall, the findings indicated that the line managers had been adopting coaching behaviours, to some extent, during 2006 and adoption of the following behaviours appeared to have contribute to the increased sales in that year.

### **i) Providing information / being resourceful**

Most managers helped their staff perform through information provision. Front-line staff saw this as supportive and helpful and instrumental to them performing well. Information fell into two categories. Firstly, sales performance figures (expressed as 'strike rates'): "*It is good that the manager keeps us informed, it is good to hear about us achieving our strike rates*" (Staff Member); "*It's good to know our average performance figures – where we are against our target*" (Staff Member). Secondly, information was provided about current marketing offers that could help increase sales, for example, 'kids go free': "*I support the team by providing them the materials they need to perform*" (Line Manager).

Ellinger et al (199, p.759) define providing information and resources as an empowering behaviour that involves "... *removing roadblocks and obstacles they [staff members] perceive to be in their way*". Therefore, it is suggested that, through the provision of sales performance figures, teams could see where they stood in the bigger organisational picture, thereby removing a key obstacle.

### **ii) Transferring ownership**

The majority of front-line staff indicated that their managers encouraged them to take ownership of their performance in some way. The following staff member was encouraged by the line manager's belief in his/her abilities: "*My manager definitely encourages ownership - shows confidence in me*" (Staff member).

Feedback from the corresponding line manager confirmed this level of confidence, declaring that there were "no non-performers" in her team. This suggests that the level of ownership given to the front-line staff helped empower them to perform well. This concurs with Ellinger et al's support for coaching within an empowering paradigm (1999) to improve performance: "*We are allowed to get on with it [work] in our own way if it works*" (Staff Member)

As with provision of information, front-line staff recalled the adoption of ownership transferred more readily than the line managers recalled it themselves. This compliments Graham's theory (1994) that managers often fail to recognise what it is they do that helps their staff to perform well.

### **iii) Role modelling**

Three of the seven managers described situations where they had used role modelling to help front-line staff with their performance. The managers did not always do the role modelling themselves, sometimes choosing to facilitate it through the observation of other high performing staff members.

One line manager explained the value of pairing people up in the workplace so that team members could learn from each other. She suggested that through this, with reference to selling skills, they "*pick it up subconsciously*." Other line managers highlighted the value of role modelling: "*They can listen to other staff. If I say 'can you listen to people and get your own idea of how to do it?'*" (Line Manager)

Staff members rarely described role modelling behaviours when recalling what helped them improve their performance, suggesting that coaching behaviours were often adopted without the front-line staff being aware of it. This supports information provided by the organisational sponsor who warned against asking front-line staff questions directly about their line managers' 'coaching

behaviours' because this would be fruitless due to a lack of familiarity with these terms. This was supported by findings in the pilot study.

Rich's work (1998) helped categorise the data in respect of role modelling. This was pertinent as his study concentrated specifically on sales coaching proposing that: "the successful sales coach is a role model who proactively sets a positive example through his or her own behaviour." Rich (1998, p.58)

#### **iv) Dialoguing**

Coaching is about having a conversation or dialoguing (Zeus and Skiffington, 2005a). Within this conversation, questions are asked and answers provided (Rogers, 2004; Flaherty 1999 and Zeus and Skiffington 2005 a & b).

Dialoguing occurred to some extent between most line managers and their team members. Evidence of this primarily originated from the line managers rather than front-line staff. The above discussion highlighted the 'covert' nature of the coaching and this may explain why staff members would be less likely to identify dialoguing as an activity that was distinguishable from general everyday communication in the workplace. Whereas, managers were consciously having coaching conversations.

Several line managers made reference to dialoguing. One manager explained how she helped her staff to improve sales performance: "*I just talk to them [team members]; how they feel about it, because not everybody likes to think that they have to sell something over the counter*". Some of the dialoguing was conducted in a group rather than one-to-one: "*When we have our cup of tea in the morning we sit and talk about things, or at the end of the day. Then we have a talk about it [performance]*". (Line Manager).

Ellinger et al do not identify dialoguing as a distinct coaching behaviour. Rather, they identify relevant "*micro-behaviours*" (1999 p.752) that promote learning. Zeus and Skiffington (2005a) devote a whole chapter to dialoguing when discussing coaching in the workplace. Specific dialoguing behaviours were evidenced as follows:

***Soliciting feedback:*** Three out of seven line managers gave examples of how they solicited feedback. One said: "*I encourage them to talk about things - that is my personal management style*". Ellinger et al's study (1999) suggests that this behaviour involves soliciting feedback about the individual staff member's progress in a particular area. However, data from this study suggested that the feedback solicited related more to the team's performance as a whole and that line managers were less inclined to work with individuals on a one-to-one basis in this respect.

***Listening:*** Listening behaviour was in evidence in statements from line managers such as: "*I try and listen to what they are saying a lot*". This demonstrated that they valued listening as a behaviour that helped them to develop their staff, echoing findings related to the use of listening by line managers identified in the preceding pilot study within the same organisation. In her discussion about listening in coaching, Rogers suggests "*genuine listening is rare*" (2004, p.42) but that it is essential to building rapport and confidence in a coaching relationship. Whilst listening was mentioned, the data does not provide much understanding of the quality of the listening behaviours in respect of genuineness. However, when prompted, four out of seven front-line staff confirmed their line

manager's willingness or ability to listen, and confirmed that it was a factor that helped towards performance improvement: "[My] manager is very approachable, a good listener."

**Providing feedback:** Ellinger et al (1999, p.762) define provision of feedback as: "*Providing observational, reflective, and third-party feedback to learners.*"

Six out of seven front-line staff confirmed that the provision of feedback was a factor that contributed to performance improvement. However, as opposed to being adopted as a coaching behaviour, it appeared within annual or six monthly performance review meetings. Other examples evidenced feedback being provided in a group setting, and being peer led, where team members compared actual sales performance to targets and reflected on this.

There was limited evidence of line managers providing feedback specifically, day-to-day, about sales performance although one member of staff mentioned the provision of on-going informal feedback from their manager to help with their career development. Therefore it seemed that, whilst front-line staff saw the provision of feedback as useful, line managers rarely adopted this behaviour outside the performance review process.

The literature suggests that providing feedback individually is one of the most effective coaching behaviours (Ellinger et al, 1999; Marsh 1992). Indeed, Jaworski et al's study (1991, p.190) proposes that, in the context of sales management, "*Positive output feedback is found to have the strongest total effect on performance*".

Ironically, sales-related research suggests that providing feedback is an activity managers find particularly difficult and are least likely to engage in (Marsh, 1992). Conversely, Ellinger et al's study (1999) suggests that providing feedback is the most frequently adopted coaching behaviour. This suggests a difference in the use and relevance of role modelling between sales executive and work environments.

**Question framing /changing perspectives:** Comments from line managers suggested that some used question framing to help staff with their performance. Ellinger et al discovered that the managers they interviewed demonstrated this behaviour by "*Posing outcome, results oriented questions, or context specific questions to encourage learners to think through issues themselves.*" (1999, p.759).

One manager, describing a situation where they were helping a staff member to improve their technique of engaging with visitors, said: "*I just sort of say 'do you think we could do it a different way? Would it help you to do it a different way?'*"

When referring to situations where performance needed to improve, another manager explained how they talked to their front-line staff and encouraged them to think through issues: "*[I say] 'have you got any ideas? What can we do about it?'*"

Another manager evidenced how question framing was used to broaden perspectives to allow staff members to get a feel for the visitor's perspective. They would say, "*Look around you, what do you see?'*"

They further explained that this led into opportunities for staff to suggest ways in which they could improve the environment to enhance the visitor's experience. This demonstrated how the behaviours over-lapped because, not only was the manager framing a question to encourage staff to think things through, but they also challenged them to see things from a different viewpoint.

As with other dialoguing behaviours, the adoption of question framing behaviours appeared limited and, when used, questions were very general involving a low level of challenge and engagement. Whitmore (2004) identifies the importance of gaining new perspectives explaining how coaches need to have a clear picture of their current situation in order to identify their options or alternative courses of action. Therefore, it could be argued that, by increasing their use of perspective-broadening dialogue, line managers helped their front-line staff to learn and improve performance.

***Holding back / not providing answers:*** These behaviours appeared to be even less commonplace than the others discussed. Just two out of six of the line managers provided evidence of this behaviour and front-line staff made no spontaneous mention of it. One line manager remarked: "*All I had to do was listen and ask a few questions, they worked it out for themselves.*"

It is possible that, by adopting this behaviour to a greater extent, line managers could improve staff performance through empowered learning. Marsh (1992) illustrates this by evidencing the importance of managers being open to ideas. However, it is misleading to conclude, due to the lack of evidence from front-line staff that 'holding back answers' did not happen. This behaviour differed from the others as it involved not doing something, as opposed to doing something, albeit consciously. Having asked the front-line staff to identify factors and behaviours that contributed to performance improvement, it is suggested that they would be unlikely to identify what did not happen as being positively helpful. That said, the supporting literature (Rogers 2004) suggests there is value in encouraging line managers to develop their skills in this area.

## **2. Performance Levels**

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, it was not the intention to quantify the extent to which coaching behaviours were adopted at each site. However, it was useful to make a broad site-level comparison of 2006 sales performance versus the adoption of coaching behaviours by line managers. Whilst no strongly conclusive themes emerged, Table 3 below shows that there may be a link between adopting the following dialoguing behaviours and higher levels of sales performance:

- Question framing
- Holding back answers
- Broadening / changing perspectives

Site D, where all three behaviours were evident, shows the highest strike rate (8) and the highest increase in performance (2). The data for Site B also suggests that this link may exist although the figures are less pronounced. Conversely, Site A shows the lowest strike rate (3), with no increase for 2006 and no evidence of the said behaviours. Site C achieved a small increase in performance in 2006 but shows no evidence of the three behaviours.

	2006 Strike rate	2005 VS 2006 (+ / -)	Coaching Behaviours		
			Question Framing	Holding Back Answers	Broadening / changing perspectives
Site A	1	0	No	No	No
Site B	3	+1	Yes	Yes	Yes
Site C	3	+1	No	No	No
Site D	8	+2	Yes	Yes	Yes

**Table 3 - Selected Coaching Behaviours versus Sales Performance**

These findings are indicative rather than conclusive. However, given that they support themes emerging from other literature such as Rogers (2004) and Ellinger et al (1999), it is suggested that further research, examining the contribution that particular coaching behaviours make to high performance, would prove valuable.

The more confrontational and challenging behaviours were more evident at higher performing sites, suggesting their particular value in this context. However these behaviours also emerged as the least adopted behaviours overall. This might have been due to a lack of line managers' willingness to confront their team members (Marsh 1992; Walker 2002). The reluctance to provide feedback may also have been linked to maintaining the positive morale and cultural status quo discussed below.

### 3. Organisational Culture

*“Organisational culture refers to the pattern of beliefs, values and learned ways of coping with experience that have developed during the course of an organisation’s history, and which tend to be manifested in its material arrangements and in the behaviours of its members”.* Brown (1998, p.9)

It was clear from participants across the sites that coaching behaviours had been adopted against a cultural backdrop of collaboration, support, encouragement and praise. It was also clear that the non-hierarchical, inclusive culture evident on-site was in stark contrast to type of relationships existing between senior management and their on-site teams. Table 4 below summarises the relevant themes, provides example findings and references relevant literature.

#### **Collaboration**

As shown in Table 4 site managers and staff provided evidence that a collaborative culture existed at the ‘coal-face’. Marsh (1992) asserts that coaching success, in a sales context, is partly dependent on the ability of the line manager and staff to work well together. This supports the proposition that the collaborative culture on-site provided favourable conditions for the success of the coaching activities.

References to collaboration, in respect of how senior managers engaged with on-site staff, were markedly different to those referenced between managers and staff on-site. Again, Table 4 summarises the evidence of these cultural differences. It can be seen that there was an emphasis on command and control (Whitmore, 2004) by senior managers contrasting with the collaborative approach evidenced at on-site. The over-arching argument for the latter approach lays in the assertion that empowerment promotes learning by drawing on one’s own resources whilst the former promotes dependency, thereby limiting learning to what the ‘commander’ knows or wishes to impart (Whitmore, 2004; Ellinger, 1999).

Cultural Theme		Amongst Site Teams (managers and staff)		Between Senior Managers and Site Teams	Importance to Coaching and Performance
	<u>Level</u>	<u>Example findings</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Example findings</u>	<b>Identified by</b>
Collaboration, working together	High	<p><i>“it is all about doing it together, everyone has their say” (Manager)</i></p> <p><i>“As a team we meet and discuss how we are doing” (Manager)</i></p>	Low	<p><i>“We are constantly told ‘we are going to do it this way .. if you do it this way .. it won’t work etc’ but there is nothing going back the other way. It is them and us really.” (Manager)</i></p> <p><i>Higher management don’t help and support us, they just nag. (Manager)</i></p>	<p>Ellinger et al (1999)</p> <p>Marsh (1992)</p>
Support, praise & encouragement	High	<p><i>“I try to get the best out of people by encouraging them to do what I know they are capable of” (Manager)</i></p> <p><i>Management support and encouragement is very much a factor [that helps sales performance] (Staff member)</i></p>	Low	<p><i>“We are left out when it comes to praise”. (Staff member)</i></p> <p><i>“Staff need to feel more valued by higher management.” (Manager)</i></p> <p><i>We only get negative feedback [from senior management] so it is not effective. (Manager)</i></p>	<p>Jaworski et al (1991)</p> <p>Graham (1994)</p>
Non-hierarchical, inclusive	High	<p><i>We are all friends here (Manager)</i></p> <p><i>The manager helps with the workload (Staff member)</i></p>	Low	<p><i>“The organisation is very bureaucratic.”</i></p> <p><i>“We have been completely ignored by higher management when they have visited the site”</i></p> <p><i>When a new local site was opened by the chief executive, we were not even invited to attend which was awful.</i></p>	<p>Whitmore (2004)</p> <p>Zeus &amp; Skiffington (2005a)</p>

**Table 4 - Coaching and Cultural Contexts**

### ***Support, Praise and Encouragement***

Behaviours that involved support, praise and encouragement were clearly evidenced on-site (see Table 4). These behaviours are consistent with Ellinger et al's empowering paradigm for coaching by line managers (1999) in that it highlights a willingness to give the member of staff responsibility for their own performance development. It also adheres to Whitmore's coaching style of management (2004). This theme also links to the concept of ownership transferral discussed earlier. That is, line managers used support and encouragement to motivate front-line staff to take ownership of their performance.

A high level of care and respect between line manager and staff was evidenced through some of the coaching behaviours relating to support, praise and encouragement. When asked to give an example of how she would deal with a situation where performance needed improvement, one manager said: *"If I think there is a problem then I'll do it [that is talk] one-to-one, I don't like to embarrass people, I literally just talk to them."*

This emphasis on respect helped to provide an environment conducive to successful coaching. The significance of trust in this context is supported by a plethora of literature including Flaherty (1999), Rogers (2004) and Rich (1998). It is proposed that the coaching behaviours that demonstrated support, encouragement and praise contributed to the evidence that a culture of equality existed amongst site-level line managers and team members.

In respect of the behaviours and attitudes of senior managers, summarised in Table 4, the on-site teams said that they found this unhelpful and demotivating as well as counter-productive in terms of bringing about improved sales performance. Jaworski et al's research (1991) asserts that feedback on positive results appears to be the most effective way to improve performance of salespeople. This suggests that if senior managers adopted behaviours involving the provision of positive feedback, as opposed to negative, further improvement in sales performance could result.

In addition to the positive aspects of collaboration in respect of the adoption and effectiveness of coaching behaviours on-site, it is suggested that the cultural clash summarised in Table 4 may have had a limiting effect on the positive impact of adoption of coaching behaviours had on improving sales performance. The limiting factors could be twofold. The line managers, as a result of receiving little or no support, praise and encouragement from their senior managers, were unable to develop and gain confidence in their own coaching skills. This may explain why some of the coaching behaviours that were more difficult to adopt, such as providing feedback, were less commonly adopted than others.

Secondly, the collaborative environment that existed at site-level may have meant line managers kept confrontation to a minimum, helping to counteract the behaviours of the senior managers, which resulted in frustration. Whilst this maintained the status quo on site, it may have further contributed to the line managers' reluctance to engage in the more confrontational coaching behaviours, thereby limiting performance improvement opportunities (Walker, 2002).

### ***Values***

There was an overwhelming sense that respondents strongly supported the values of the organisation: *"what the organisation does is brilliant."* (Line Manager). Staff members echoed this sentiment explaining that to perform well it helped to *"believe in the product. It is a good product, a good cause, a legacy. It has good values and ethics."* (Staff Member)

The majority of managers mentioned a number of changes that had been made in recent years in relation to their roles and the way the organisation functioned. As such, this raised issues relating to the matching of employees' personal values and those of the organisation. In general, the changes mentioned related to increasing focus on income generation.

Like most others, the case organisation has a set of values that shape its overall goals. There is a consensus throughout the coaching literature that successful coaching relies on the alignment of the coaching goals with those of the organisation (Zeus and Skiffington, 2005b). This suggests that the positive support the staff members had for the organisation's values helped the efficacy of the coaching in respect of improving sales.

## Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the adoption of coaching behaviours by line managers, in a customer-facing setting, can help contribute to the achievement of organisational goals.

A variety of coaching behaviours is particularly useful on the customer service front-line. These include information provision, transferral of ownership and role modelling as well as the backbone activity of dialoguing. Amongst the dialoguing behaviours are some which challenge and confront the front-line staff. These behaviours, such as providing feedback, question framing and holding back answers, can be particularly effective in helping to improve sales performance but are less likely to be adopted by line managers if they lack confidence in their own coaching abilities.

The efficacy of adopting coaching behaviours, in this context, depends on a number of factors relating to the immediate and wider organisational culture. To summarise, this research demonstrates that, within the case study organisation:

- The adoption of coaching by line managers does contribute to the achievement of organisational goals
- Coaching can form part of the 'how to?' toolkit of customer service improvement
- The following factors could increase the efficacy of the coaching activities:
- Alignment of personal and organisational values
- Increasing line managers' confidence in their coaching abilities
- Improving the consistency of management culture across the organisation

These results are indicative of the value of coaching at the customer service 'coal-face'.

Recommendations for further research include:

- Comparing the application and efficacy of role modelling as a coaching activity across different work environments.
- Exploring the use of coaching behaviours that involve challenge and confrontation and their relative efficacy in relation to increased performance.
- Understanding the reasons that managers under-using coaching behaviours involving challenge and confrontation and how they might be supported to implement them more fully.

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