

Academic Paper

# The Manager as Coach and Facilitator of Development for Employees in Information Technology (IT)

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explored managerial coaching to facilitate employee development within the Information Technology Department of a large UK Higher Education Institution. Its implications, however, are relevant to a variety of industries and organisations. A grounded theory approach explored employee lived experience. The findings both confirm and build on extant research, including desired managerial behaviours and characteristics. A coaching taxonomy is suggested that offers a way to provide adaptable, individualised support. Potential new insights into practical, collaborative, systematic promotion of workplace learning are offered through the creation of the Higher Education Development of Information Technology Staff (HEDITS) Framework, which proposes the centrality of a 'living' coaching ethos to underpin employee development.

## Keywords

Manager, Coaching, Employee development, Information technology, IT,

## Article history

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## Introduction

The manager as coach and the responsibilities of this role in terms of facilitating employee development have been of interest for over two decades (Graham, 1993; Ellinger, 2003; Ellinger, 2014; Cox & Jackson, 2014; CIPD, 2017; Hunt, 2017). However, there is little evidence of published research that has looked in depth at the manager as coach and facilitator of employee development within the specific context of Information Technology (IT) in Higher Education (HE). Given the fast-paced changing world of IT and the consumerisation of HE (Fazackerley, 2018), now is a good time to review and enhance the ways in which institutions are supporting, building, and continually reviewing IT employee development in UK HE in order to enhance job satisfaction, retention, and staff well-being.

Some of the current priorities in UK HE are focused on (1) improving local National Student Survey (NSS) scores, (2) developing a policy that supports universities in maximising their positive impact on the economy, society and students, (3) tertiary education funding in England and (4) the new regulatory framework and the Office for Students (Grove 2018). It is probably fair therefore to assume that employee development is a lower priority when compared to the ever present need to make savings, where possible, in a competitive marketplace.

This article shares research into practical ways in which managers can utilise a coaching approach and facilitate employee development. The importance of mutual respect and an environment where individuals are treated as equals are highlighted to promote effective workplace relationships. Practical support on how to respect each individual is suggested by raising awareness of how peoples' differences impact workplace development such, as their learning preferences, and how they feel valued. A coaching taxonomy offers a practical way for managers to address and adapt their support according to the holistic changing development needs of each employee. The Higher Education Development of Information Technology Staff (HEDITS) Framework illustrates and suggests a practical way of promoting workplace learning by highlighting the interrelationships and interdependencies between 'The Learner', 'The Facilitator' and 'The Institution', underpinned by a 'living' coaching ethos.

Employee development in this article is defined as new learning, often tacit and 'pre-reflective' (Cox E., 2013, p. 13), not just in terms of professional and career development but also in terms of personal outlook and attitudes that change over time because of life experiences and the social working environment.

## Literature Review

The literature review was divided into two distinct parts. The first explored the known challenges of the development of IT professionals and the potential additional challenges that might affect IT in HE employees' development (Newell, 2002; Kumar, 2007; Joseph, 2010; Ahmed, 2012; Parente, 2012; Rao, 2013; Ibrahim, 2017). What emerged was that a successful IT professional is expected to have a complex set of skills. These comprise of managerial and interpersonal skills, generally referred to as 'soft skills,' in addition to the more traditional 'hard skills' (Newell, 2002; Joseph, 2010; Parente, 2012; Rao, 2013). Hard skills include: analysis, critical thinking, decision making, organising, planning and problem solving, while soft skills are more concerned with motivating and influencing people; they include but are not limited to: communication, conflict resolution, feedback, leadership and mentoring skills (Lorenz, 2009; Parente, 2012, p. 1005.).

IT employee development in HE also needs to be considered in terms of employees keeping up with technological innovation that enhances student learning, for example through blended learning. In addition, IT managers in HE are increasingly tasked with translating the Human Resource (HR) and strategic policies into day-to-day practices and therefore require regular training on the organisation's people management policies. The Learning and Development teams' role within this HE relationship, as in other sectors, has become one of 'upskilling' managers in terms of coaching and passing these new skills on to their teams (CIPD, 2017b). Research also mentions the crucial role of senior management support and their impact in reflecting the culture of an organisation through managerial behaviour.

It is implied that IT professionals must continually be on a journey of intentional change – for which they must stay emotionally connected, flexible, authentic and inspirational (McKee, 2009). This means high levels of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004) and concerns helping people break old behavioural habits to achieve lasting results. To support such development, organisations must include training that focuses on the limbic systems and requires an individualised approach to

development. Such an individualised approach was previously carried out by a professional coach (*ibid.*, 2004).

The second part of the review explored the potential benefits and challenges of managerial coaching through the lens of facilitating learning and development in the workplace. Potential positive outcomes of managerial coaching are said to include achieving work goals (Fillery-Travis, 2006), self-awareness development (Ellinger, 1999), increased employee satisfaction (Ellinger, 2003), increased satisfaction with work and manager (Ellinger, 1999; Bass, 2009), increased career commitment (Kalkavan, 2014), improvement in employee job performance (Ellinger, 2003), organisational commitment and improved understanding of employee role clarity (Kalkavan, 2014).

Research suggests that key to effective developmental managers are their facilitative behaviours and skills, summarised as: listening, interviewing, questioning, observational, analytical, communicative and motivational (Ellinger A. , 2013). In addition, constructive behaviour, such as giving feedback, has been positively identified for developmental purposes (Agarwal, 2009). More recently the 'coaching mindset' has evolved, outlining common characteristics of effective coaches (Hunt, 2017). Role modelling is frequently mentioned as a typical behaviour that can be applied to coaching to promote learning and development (McComb, 2012). A number of taxonomies have been developed, evidencing effective facilitative behaviours (Ellinger, 1999; Beattie, 2006). Ineffective managerial behaviours, in contrast, have also been documented and are generally associated with the 'traditional bureaucratic management paradigm' and to be avoided (Ellinger A. D., 2008).

Appropriate commitment, enthusiasm and attitudes of managers, are also said to be critical in terms of affecting learning and development in the workplace (NSTF, 2000). Managers' attitudes are believed to be linked to their awareness of the importance of continual self-development for others and themselves (Beckett, 1999). Self-awareness (Ellinger A. D., 2011) and occupational self-efficacy (OSE) are also believed to be important variables (Nielsen, 2009). It has been argued that 'the capability and commitment of managers and key workers throughout an organisation's hierarchy are the most important factors in determining the provision and effectiveness of workplace learning' (NSTF, 2000). In contrast, demographic factors such as age, gender, seniority, experience and level of formal managerial qualification do not seem to affect propensity to coach (Anderson, 2013).

It is also recognised, however, that managers' capabilities are largely dependent on whether the managers themselves receive ongoing appropriate development and support (Garrick, 1998; Thomson, 2001). Beckett referred specifically to the need for managers to understand adult learning theory, in particular, 'learning arising from affective experiences (feelings, emotions), and on the particular context .... of those experiences' (Beckett, 1999, p. 97).

Despite the many potential benefits of managerial-led workplace learning, the literature mentions a number of concerns. There is a relative paucity of resources, for example, aimed specifically at 'helping managers coach people better' (Peterson, 2005) although it has been acknowledged that coaching in this context is a potentially challenging activity (CIPD, 2017b). Further concerns are related to both formal and non-formal learning (Beattie, 2006). Woodall, for example in her research found little evidence of systematic promotion of workplace learning; it was more of an expectation, that the manager was just meant to make a reality, even though the workplace was deemed the most important place for learning at the time (Woodall, 2000).

Finally, despite its potential benefits in terms of employee development, the Chartered Institute of Personal Development (CIPD) recently highlighted that coaching is only one of a range of options and that it may not suit everyone (CIPD, 2017a). It warns that an individual's attitude can interfere with the coaching effectiveness, for example if 'the individual is resistant to coaching or lacks self-insight.' (*ibid.*, 2017).

This article builds on this extant literature by shedding light on the lived experience of the IT employees within a UK HE institution. It uncovers and makes explicit within a framework the environmental and organisational factors that are deemed conducive to supporting and enhancing the development of the whole individual, including: how people learn collaboratively and the kinds of resources that they access; and the skills and approaches that managers need in order to support employee development to generate a coaching approach.

## Methodology

This qualitative study is underpinned by an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. The Corbin and Strauss (Strauss A., 2015) systematic inductive approach to grounded theory was selected as the preferred approach, because organisational improvement was a desired outcome of the study (Symon, 2012, p. 410). Due regard was given throughout in terms of ethical considerations, particularly with regards to participant personal and emotional data (Creswell, 2007, p. 44) as well as criteria of quality.

There were two sources of data collection, an initial questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the questionnaire was to (1) gather initial factual demographic information online in a fast and efficient way, (2) to allow sufficient thinking-time to respond to the questions, (3) to sensitise participant thinking about their development and (4) to hopefully arouse participant interest in the follow-up interviews. The interviews involved more in-depth discussions about individual development journeys.

The 20 participants represented all areas of an IT Department in a UK university and comprised of both direct-reports (DR), which means that they were not in managerial positions at the time of the study, and middle and senior managers (M), who have employee development as one of their responsibilities but also the dual role of being a direct-report to their own managers. Theoretical sampling determined the need for 20 participants, at which point the theoretical saturation point was sufficiently achieved to develop a theoretical framework.

Although the participants were professional services employees in an IT Department at a UK university, they were encouraged to draw on their developmental experiences throughout their working lives. This provided useful insights into the similarities and differences of working in IT in the private and voluntary sectors compared to the public sector and also suggested differences in terms of employee development and the role of the manager in supporting workplace development.

Participants were selected and clearly determined from the outset (Patton, 2002). They were chosen to represent the broad cross-section of employees in all operational areas of the IT Department, which deliberately included both non-managers and managers (Saunders, 2009, pp. 233-240). This was because a key aspiration of the study was to provide a dynamic and comprehensive multi-dimensional, multi-layered picture of employee development and interrelationships in the IT Department.

## Data Collection

All participants completed the questionnaire which comprised 12 questions. Questions were about demographics, career paths and about working in IT in HE. The purpose of the questionnaire was to help inform and focus the later interviews on specific aspects of development and coaching, based on the initial literature review and participant responses, to ensure some consistency over the breadth and depth of concepts to be covered.

The questions for the interviews were underpinned broadly by three key areas of interest: 1) (adult) learning and development, 2) the manager (including managerial coaching, desired managerial

behaviours to facilitate and support development in individuals, the managers' growing responsibilities) and 3) the technical specialist within the context of Higher Education. The questions were essentially the same for everyone, but managers were asked 6 additional questions (30 in total) to facilitate more perspectives on the emerging themes.

The questions were predominantly open-ended, and consequently only served to initially guide participant thought processes, allowing for further prompts. The responses to these semi-structured interviews, provided rich and more detailed data that have also informed the findings.

## Data Analysis

The data was analysed using grounded theory coding for initial concept identification, concept development and elaboration and finally for context, process and integration. Constant comparisons and several analytic strategies (Strauss A., 2015) were applied to identify the key themes of developing IT employees in HE.

Initially each question and the follow-up questions were analysed to identify emerging concepts in an abstract sense. These were then further developed in terms of properties and dimensions (Strauss A., 2015, p. 71). Line-by-line analysis took place at a later stage, predominantly to check that concepts had not been missed earlier.

The answers to the questionnaire were split to provide the demographic information in the participant profile, while the remaining answers were used for the core data analysis. As per the grounded theory approach, participant in vivo words or phrases were used as concept labels whenever possible during abstraction to stay close to the data.

Once all transcripts were collated and anonymised there were several stages of analysis. Table 1 below illustrates this process and summarises one particular section of the analysis. Ongoing thoughts were mapped throughout as memos, for example on potential emerging patterns in the data as well as questions as they arose.

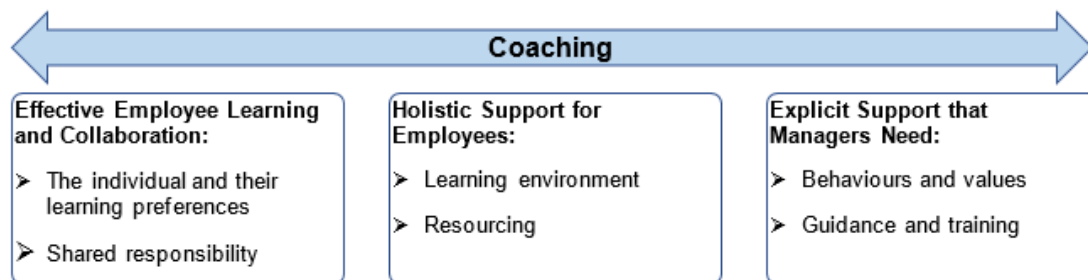
**Table 1: Stages of Analysis**

Stages	Detail	Example
<b>STAGE 1</b>	Open coding for concept identification to inform emerging BASIC LEVEL CATEGORIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner preferences</li> <li>• Individual approach</li> <li>• Personal influences and experiences</li> <li>• Inspirational behaviours</li> <li>• Curiosity – learning something new</li> <li>• Taking an interest in the individual</li> <li>• Understanding of what constitutes professional development</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE 2</b>	Further concept development to identify emerging HIGHER-LEVEL CATEGORIES	The individual as a learner
<b>STAGE 3</b>	Identification of emerging key conceptual dimensions in form of LINKING CATEGORIES	Collaboration: links 'The individual and their learning preferences' and (later) learning as a 'Shared responsibility'
<b>STAGE 4</b>	Line-by-line analysis of all transcripts and review of memos to ensure all key concepts had been identified	

## The Findings

After several iterations of analysis as shown in Table 1 above, seven categories were identified that denoted the emerging major themes (Strauss A., 2015). Most significantly, the findings suggest that Coaching interconnects all of the categories, in other words all aspects of employee development. Figure 1 below shows how the six remaining themes were collated into pairs that divided into three emerging linking categories (Strauss A., 2015), defined as (1) Effective employee learning and collaboration; (2) Holistic support for employees; and (3) Explicit support that managers need.

Figure 1: Key Linking Categories



### Effective Employee Learning and Collaboration

The findings indicate that participants felt that the following are key to effective employee development: for learning to be a collaborative process and, the importance of a good relationship between the direct-report (the learner) and the line manager (the facilitator), for example where both parties believe that they have a *shared-responsibility* in the learning process and mutual respect.

Building on extant research, the data revealed that participants had varied levels of self-awareness (Ellinger A. B., 1999; Ellinger A. D., 2011) and different preferences as learners. For example, they discussed different contexts for learning, different attitudes towards learning, and different learning methods, including the use of e-learning tools. Significantly, participants highlighted that self-awareness and learning preferences are apt to change, according to each individual, depending on the context and time in their careers and lives.

The significance of this is that managers, as coaches and facilitators of learning and development, need to be sensitive and respect and appreciate changing individual needs that may exist within their teams at any given time.

Equally significant was the reoccurring theme of *shared responsibility* as part of a collaborative learning process. Participants seemed to be saying that this was dependent on a reciprocal, interpersonal relationship, one consisting of a 'two-way flow' and based on mutual honesty. Many commented on the importance of regular communication. Others felt it was time employees realised that their development was their responsibility. Line managers were perceived to spend the majority of their time on day-to-day tasks and significantly less time on employee development. This led to some findings about the need for manager development, building on previous research (Beckett, 1999; Peterson, 2005; CIPD, 2017b), and is covered in the following two sections below as well as in 'Investment' in the section below on 'Coaching and Relationships' and integrated into the HEDITS Framework which is explained in the 'Discussion'.

## Holistic Support for Employees

The findings indicated that the learning and development environment within HE, compared to employee development for IT staff in other sectors, offers much more holistic support. At the same time there were mixed perceptions, sometimes opposing opinions, in relation to the speed of technological change in the HE institution and the impact of this on employee development. Experiences showed that employees in IT in HE have more freedom to choose from a variety of learning courses to develop both personally and professionally. A counter argument, however, would be that this individual approach in HE could result in potentially spending a lot of the limited resources on a diverse range of areas that are not always linked to strategic or team objectives.

The accessibility of in-house employee learning resources was perceived as beneficial and distinct to the HE environment. These included courses provided by the institutions' staff development team but equally learning opportunities such as work shadowing or mentoring schemes. New managers, in particular, seemed to feel that the internal courses they had attended on personal development or leadership and management, had been informative and worthwhile and suggested that they be made mandatory. Senior managers, in contrast, particularly those that had joined the institution as experienced managers already, seemed to be more sceptical in terms of learning programmes for managers, feeling that they were already competent in this respect.

## Explicit Support that Managers Need

Participants, especially managers, frequently talked about a lack of knowing 'what good looks like' from the organisation's perspective, in terms of desired behaviours and characteristics that are needed by, or expected of, managers. The participants, however, were very clear about which behaviours, characteristics (Ellinger A., 2013) and implicit values best facilitate learning and development from their perspective. This indicated a need to raise manager awareness that people feel valued in different ways in the workplace.

Some participants, though mostly managers, used umbrella terms such as 'coaching behaviours', 'good people skills', while non-managers talked more about 'someone who is not afraid to talk about areas that need developing' and, a 'good adviser' to describe the type of managerial behaviours and characteristics they felt were conducive to facilitating the development of others. The majority of ideal behaviour and characteristic terms have been summarised in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Behaviours and Characteristics that Managers Need**

Term	Number of responses
Honesty	12
Interested, positive, proactive about development	12
Open-minded	11
Approachable, available	9
Understanding of individuals	8
Willing to listen	7
Empathetic	6
Positive, friendly, cheerful	5

'Honesty' was mentioned in terms of being direct, clear and honest, in relation to giving constructive feedback to identify areas to improve as well as highlight an individual's strengths. 'Understanding of individuals' was in relation to appreciating the individual learner and the different stages of their career in terms of the type of support required. It is worth noting here that

participants often mentioned mutual 'trust' and 'respect' as being fundamental to good relationships between a manager and a direct-report, perceptions which echo those that were mentioned and implied in relation to the individual and their learning preferences.

The findings suggest that what makes one person feel valued at work may be entirely different to the person sitting next to them in the office. The majority indicated that feedback, and/or some form of managerial interaction or recognition and a sense of independence were most important to them. What was noticeable, was that only one or two participants, both of whom were managers, mentioned remuneration. The implications therefore for managers, support Beckett's and others' previous suggestions (Beckett, 1999; NSTF, 2000), that there is a need to raise their awareness to the significant impact their attitudes and behaviours have on the individuals in their teams and to the different ways that people feel valued. The latter, summarised in Table 3 below, are similar to Agarwal's 'constructive behaviours' (Agarwal, 2009).

**Table 3: The Different Ways in which Participants Felt Valued**

Category	Number of responses
Feedback and approach	11
Management	10
Independence	8
Through the Team/ Colleagues	6
Social / informal interactions	5
Work related, output	4
Helping others	2

A key finding for IT staff – relevant in public sector organisations like a university - is the lack of appropriate, alternative technical developmental pathways, which can result in considerable challenges such as losing valued employees and not being able to attract talented new IT staff: It was felt that in IT in HE one size just does not fit all. The only way to progress is to become a manager of people, which many IT professionals do not want, the implication being that this could lead to a number of dissatisfied managers and/or de-motivated, disengaged employees. It was suggested that there was a need for more transparency and clarity in existing systems in relation to career progression and developmental pathways.

Similarly, many managers felt that there was a lack of transparency and clear guidance from the institution in terms of making explicit what constitutes a good manager and how to carry out specific aspects of their role. Expectations to run regular team meetings, for example, are there but guidance regarding the purpose and actual execution of how to run an effective team meeting, are left to the interpretation of the individual.

The perception in terms of employee development and training, was that there is no systematic approach for developing people and that in practice the institution is not people-centric. Participants, who had worked in other sectors in IT, remembered that development is more target driven and much more directed, where the organisation decided who will have training and the environment was far more cut throat. Equally, the direct-reports were said to have behaved differently in a driven corporate culture, motivated by different priorities, predominantly promotion and higher salaries.



## Coaching and Relationships

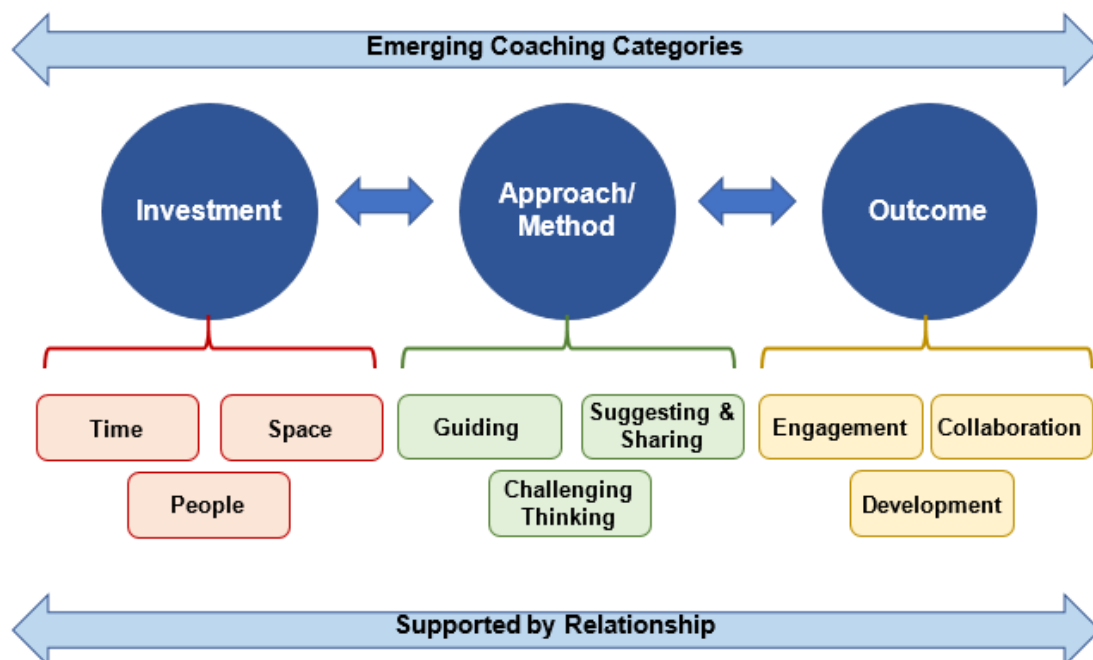
The motivation of the study was to explore participant general perceptions of coaching in terms of supporting employee development, as well as coaching facilitated by managers. As their perceptions were the crucial point of interest, participants were deliberately not provided a definition for coaching. Furthermore, it is important to stress, that participants were only asked 2 questions each that were directly related to coaching.

Initial findings revealed considerable variation of personal experiences and understanding of coaching. Managers had received at least an introduction to coaching as part of their induction to the institution, and some had also been coached themselves and/or undertaken some formal coaching training. The majority of these felt that coaching was invaluable, many described it as an 'essential tool' in a manager's general toolkit. In contrast, while most were aware that coaching was something offered to employees at the institution from introductory to more formal accredited courses and felt it sounded positive, they were unsure what the term really meant. What was most striking, therefore, throughout the interviews, was the unanimous sense that coaching as an integral part of employee development, could potentially lead to a number of benefits. The overriding perception seemed to be that coaching could make a significant positive difference and, interestingly, that it is something 'good' managers *just* do.

## Investment, Approach and Outcome

After several iterations of analysis, the data was conceptualised into three higher-level categories, each with three-lower level categories that looked at coaching in terms of developmental support, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Coaching as Development Support



## Investment

Participants indicated that coaching in terms of development support is a worthwhile investment. It was perceived that coaching means *TIME* is invested in each employee. The facilitator aids development at the most basic level just by taking an interest and getting to know them as individuals. It was felt that such a one-to-one opportunity provided the learner with the benefit of manager experience, to help talk through goals for example, or identify their next developmental steps. The importance of genuine, authentic, selfless interest in the individual was a common perception and/or personal experience, reiterating earlier research regarding the importance of appropriate commitment, enthusiasm and attitudes of managers (NSTF, 2000).

*TIME* and the right *SPACE* to learn was also highlighted in terms of giving people some autonomy, for example, to choose to attend internal or external training outside the office or to utilise flexible working hours in order to balance work and learning. It was furthermore suggested that managers could facilitate internal training by buddying colleagues up with each other, for example to teach each other new skills.

There was the reoccurring perception that there was need for *INVESTMENT* in *PEOPLE* in appropriate coaching training (Goleman, 2004; Peterson, 2005) for existing managers for them to have the capabilities to fulfil this part of their role and again, most significantly, that such training should be made mandatory. Recruitment, it was felt, should be about employing the right people as managers.

The majority claimed that there are currently few managers who coach within the IT Department or wider organisation, despite its perceived significant value to individuals and teams. Many talked about the need for a cultural shift at an institutional level for that to change, particularly underlining the need, as extant research also suggests (NSTF, 2000), for the most senior management to be on board and to integrate it at a strategic level with appropriate support mechanisms in place.

## Method

A variety of perceptions of what coaching is in terms of practical methods of support for IT employee development emerged. These were divided into: (1) Guiding, (2) Suggesting and Sharing, and (3) Challenging Thinking. What emerged seemed to correspond to a coaching continuum that is skills-based at one end, performance-based in the middle and developmental at the other end (Cox & Jackson, 2014, p. 216). The breadth of support suggested, is perhaps indicative of the many different roles participants collectively represented, and more significantly of the different developmental needs, within an IT Department.

Table 4 summarises the different types of development support that emerged in the form of a taxonomy of coaching approaches for IT in HE employee development. The 'Method of Support' represents the different categories of support that emerged from initial open coding. The 'Type of Coaching Approach' links these different types of support into broader higher-level categories which make explicit the type of approach suggested and required by 'The Learner'. Consequently, there is 'Guiding' at one end, for those who need more skills support and 'Challenging Thinking' at the other end, which was deemed most useful, particularly by aspiring senior managers. The taxonomy suggests a way of accommodating the needs of each learner and each learning scenario, depending on the individual's situation at any given time. Interestingly, there was an overriding perception that coaching should also happen naturally, in daily interactions. For some this was about having regular one-to-ones with their manager. Others seemed to be describing specific manager attitudes and behaviours.

**Table 4: Taxonomy of Coaching Approaches**

<b>Method of Support (in addition to daily interactions)</b>	<b>Type of Coaching Approach</b>
Challenging assumptions/decisions/preconceptions	Challenging thinking
Reflective thinking	
Constructive criticism/feedback	
'Opening doors' to opportunities	Suggesting and sharing
Sharing expertise/experience	
Involving others in decision making	
Bringing into awareness/perception/drawing out skills	
Suggesting	
Guiding versus directing (through processes)	Guiding
Upskilling by demonstrating/mentoring/working on weaknesses	

GUIDING suggested skills-based coaching (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), where specific skills are explicitly demonstrated and passed on, gradually building the learner's confidence. These could be technical or related to people-skills. What was particularly striking was that a number of examples indicated the manager being involved in facilitating the learning but not necessarily being the direct facilitator. This could, for example, include observing another colleague, work shadowing. Significantly, it was also about consciously not directing.

SUGGESTING AND SHARING is about managers being sensitive to individual needs. It is about sharing their experience, expertise and thought-processes, similar to the role modelling mentioned above (McComb, 2012), as well as enabling suitable learning opportunities. An alternative that emerged, for example, was that managers share their work plans so that individuals not only gain insight into their way of thinking but also to allow them to engage actively, critique, make suggestions and potentially learn to expand their own thinking.

Managers, particularly aspiring senior managers, talked about the value of coaching in terms of CHALLENGING THINKING. At one level this was about reflective thinking, but ultimately it was about having assumptions, decisions, preconceptions, actions, even mindsets challenged, similar to the facilitative behaviours and skills identified by Ellinger (Ellinger A. , 2013).

## **Outcome**

Participants identified many potential positive outcomes from coaching, several of which have been implicitly mentioned, but are summarised briefly below, using in vivo expressions and divided into three separate categories: (1) Engagement, (2) Collaboration and (3) Development. These outcomes were predominantly suggested by managers, as a result of their personal coaching experiences.

In terms of ENGAGEMENT coaching was perceived to encourage 'richer conversations' (M10), 'retain creative, talented people despite the instability of the HE sector' (M8), 'make the learner feel involved in their development and take ownership' (M10).

At the heart of COLLABORATION is an organisation that is underpinned by a 'living' coaching ethos, synonymous with a 'people-centric organisation' (M10). Collaboration is perceived and encouraged through:

- sharing the responsibility of development (M5),
- transparency (M6),
- inclusivity (M3) and
- working across teams within IT (DR5).

Finally, coaching was perceived to enhance DEVELOPMENT in terms of different forms of learning, for example:

- 'skills-based' learning (M5), or aspects of the individual ('confidence, self-esteem') (DR6),
- 'autonomy' (M2),
- 'uncovering the unknown' (M3),
- 'broader thinking', (M7) and in terms of
- 'understanding people and understanding what your role is' (M10).

## The Coaching Relationship

Throughout the interviews, participants stressed the importance of relationships to support their development in the workplace. The relationship between the manager as the facilitator of learning and the employee as the learner was perceived to be of utmost significance. This was reflected in often emotive language and imagery. Professional development without the coaching support of the manager, for example, was likened to 'a battle'.

The dynamics of the manager: direct-report relationship were often raised, in particular, participants mentioned the importance of it being one of equals, as this participant mentioned and then elaborated for example:

*'they [managers] may by virtue of the position they've reached – have achieved more, they may have been more successful in some aspect of their working life ... but that doesn't make them a better person ... (DR10).'*

Participants further suggested that the coaching approach, as a shared responsibility takes the pressure off a manager to be a controller, the expert or always having to be right.

Alternative relationships to the manager: direct-report to facilitate learning were mentioned, such as pairing up with a peer to develop a specific technical skill or learn about other roles through work shadowing. Senior managers were deemed to be in better positions to facilitate broader, strategic thinking or to 'open doors' to new learning opportunities. Group and internal and external classroom-based learning were further alternative suggestions. It was stressed, therefore, that the manager is by no means always the best person to facilitate learning, or may indeed be unsuitable, the latter being a concern that has previously been raised by others (Woodall, 2000; CIPD, 2017a; CIPD, 2017b).

## Discussion and HEDITS Framework

What emerges strongly from this work is that coaching is unanimously regarded in a positive light in terms of employee development. As set out in Figure 1 coaching was considered to be a worthwhile 'Investment', that enables adaptable, individual support through different 'Approaches' with a number of potential positive 'Outcomes.' However, the findings also revealed that a coaching approach cannot be left to the inclination of the individual manager, nor is it suitable for everyone

and the suggestions is that managers also need support to understand, learn and hone these skills through training.

The importance of the manager: direct-report relationship has been highlighted as a fundamental aspect of employee development. Findings have drawn particular attention to the benefits of the manager utilising a coaching approach, in terms of preferred behaviours and characteristics. A 'good coaching manager' will work collaboratively to decide how best to support development, recognising and appreciating each team member as individuals, equals and self-aware adult learners. Managers need to be aware of the significant impact they have on their team members, especially when it comes to feeling valued at work. Furthermore, findings have shown some practical ways to respect each employee – by being sensitive to the individual's holistic development needs, by considering not only their learning needs but also their personal outlook and attitudes, that change over time. Consequently, the coaching approach needs to be adapted according to the type of support required at any given stage.

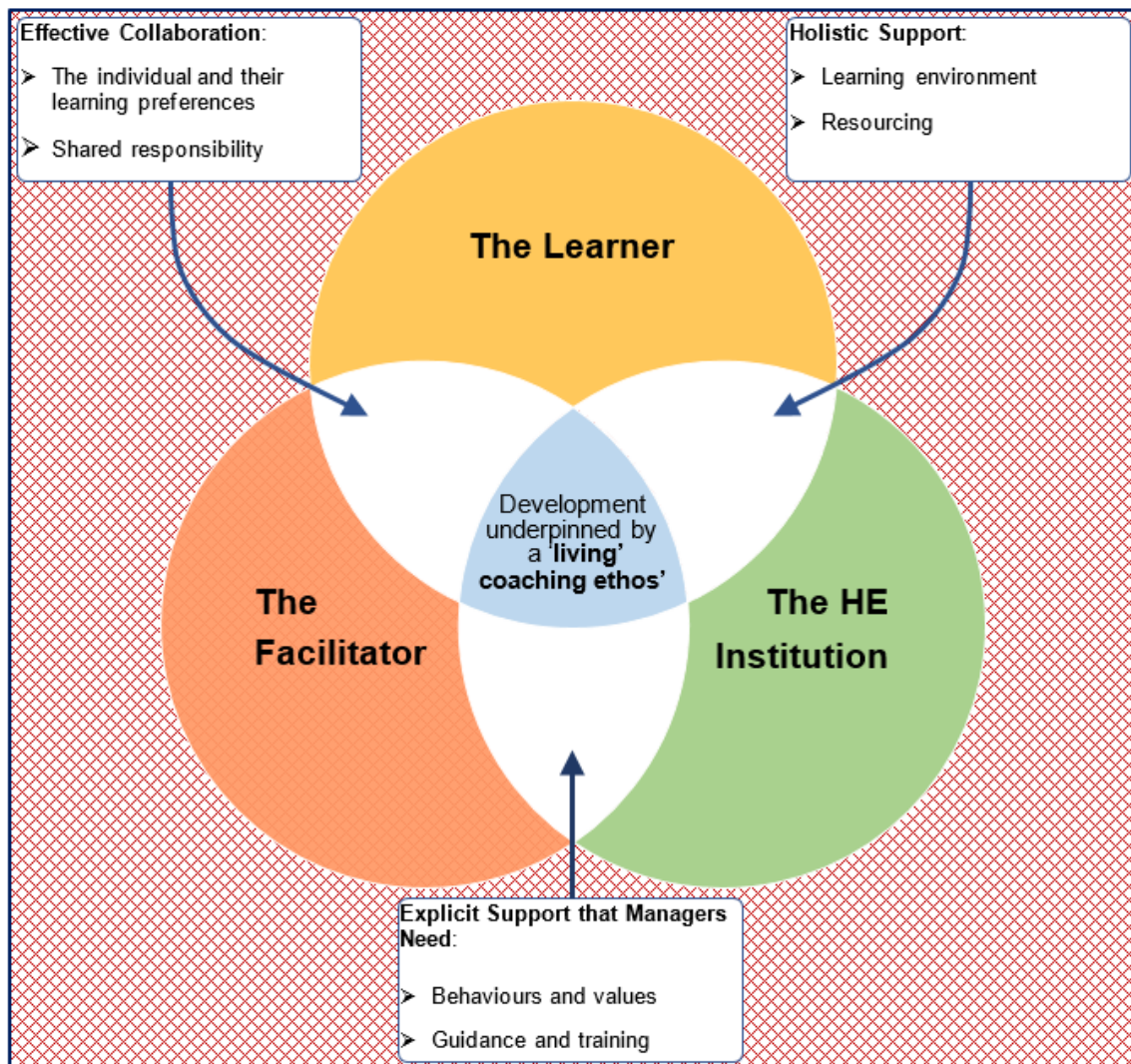
Employee development as suggested by the participants is a collaborative process that is built on a 'living' coaching ethos, where everyone in the institution plays a part and is actively involved and responsible in breathing life into an adaptable coaching culture. Senior management would need to integrate this ethos at a strategic level to create the necessary organisational climate with appropriate support mechanisms in place (Reynolds, 2002). These should include ongoing training and make explicit managerial expectations. Additionally, the review of the literature revealed the need for the systematic promotion of workplace learning (Woodall, 2000).

Informed by the data, and in order to synthesise the findings and significantly place coaching at the heart of successful employee development, a new framework is proposed. The HEDITS (Higher Education Development of IT Staff) Framework, shown in Figure 3 below, provides a practical systematised way to bring about effective workplace development and learning and integrates the key elements of Figures 1 (key linking categories) and 2 (coaching as development support). The implications spill over to other organisations and industries. The first and perhaps most significant observation is that the HEDITS Framework represents a synergy – the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The choice of a Venn diagram is significant as its intersections best highlight the interrelationships and responsibilities between *The Learner*, *The (HE) Institution* and *the Facilitator*. Moreover, these interrelationships are positioned in a relationship space, shown by the hatched background in the Venn diagram – in other words all of the interactions shown in the diagram involve some form of relationship.

The findings highlighted that the line manager is not always necessarily the best person to facilitate the learning. The term *The Facilitator* should therefore be considered in its broadest sense and in this context can include peers such as induction buddies, other managers, even virtual and remote mentors. *The Facilitator* supports *The Learner* but is in turn supported by *The (HE) Institution*. *The (HE) Institution* supports both *The Facilitator* and *The Learner* by training managers, peers and buddies appropriately, which includes the need to acknowledge the individual learner and provide holistic support as well as optimise the diverse learning environment.

Figure 3: The HEDITS Framework



Underpinning this development and connecting these relationships centrally within the HEDITS Framework is a 'living' coaching ethos. At its most rudimentary level it sets the expectation of how employees should behave and interact with one another, simultaneously building a safe and supportive environment for employee development to flourish. It is supported formally through annual performance reviews and ongoing training at all levels, making managers aware, for example of the potential *Investments, Approaches and Outcomes* of coaching in this setting (such as in Figure 2). Ideally it would also include, as is the case at the institution involved in this study, access to external coaching or to a group of internal coaches outside the IT department for further support. In addition, there are *interlinks* between each overlapping pair of elements, informed by the findings summarised in Figure 1.

## Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this research and the review of the literature suggest the need for a systematised approach to promoting employee learning and development in the workplace. A potential coaching solution is provided in the form of the HEDITS Framework. The framework not only provides a platform for effective managerial coaching approaches, it also emphasises the crucial role of the

institution in defining and supporting a coaching culture. The centrality of the 'living' coaching ethos is such that it must be championed by the senior management within the organisation, setting the tone and explicitly stating its importance for the university.

The HEDITS Framework deliberately highlights the interdependencies between *The Learner* and *The Facilitator*. This is a relationship built on mutual respect and *The Learner's* development is a shared responsibility. This idea, not only informed by the findings of this study, also necessarily support adult learning theory, as suggested by Beckett (Beckett, 1999). The notion being that 'people tend to feel committed to a decision or activity in direct proportion to their participation in or influence on its planning and decision making' (Knowles, 2015, p. 58).

Furthermore, managers are encouraged to recognise the crucial role they play in facilitating effective employee development. Equally, however, the HE Institution cannot expect managers to behave in specific ways without making the behaviours and values explicit and setting them out as an expectation of the role. It is recommended therefore that appropriate training of managers should be mandatory; it cannot be up to the individual manager's interest and inclination.

Training would include making the desired outcomes and appropriate behaviours clear – not as an aspiration but as an expectation. The HEDITS Framework provides a systematised way of enabling the coaching approach to become the norm, touching 'every person, every relationship and every decision in the organisation in a real and sustainable way' (HRGrapevine, 2018). Specifically to IT HE, The Institution would need to incorporate appropriate 'soft skills' training (Lorenz, 2009; Parente, 2012), to become part of every IT HE employee's skillset. In addition, it would also explore alternative developmental pathways that address current retention challenges in alignment with other sectors, where technical career routes for example (not just managerial routes) are also offered.

Whilst the focus of this study involved one IT Department in a UK HE institution, the Framework itself is not so limited. In other words, the implications could have relevance for other IT organisations, whether in HE or in other industries. Therefore, further research could build on the findings of this study by investigating the applicability of the HEDITS Framework in other IT (or IT in HE) departments. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine existing alternative IT developmental pathways in other sectors and any relevance for their possible adoption in the IT HE environment.

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