

Academic Paper

The Emergent role of the Coaching Manager: an experience of working with IPA

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Abstract

A result of organisational change over the last two decades has been the expectation on managers to coach as part of their roles. However, only the minority of organisations provide training in how to. Consequently, the role of the 'coaching manager' has emerged; a manager untrained in coaching, who uses coaching approaches as part of their daily work. This article provides an account of using IPA methodology to make sense of the lived experiences of coaching managers. It discusses how the role should be categorised in literature and considered as a stand-alone construct.

Keywords

interpretative phenomenological analysis, coaching manager, organisations, reflection,

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Introduction

This paper presents an insight into my experience of conducting an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, study (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2012). As a qualitative approach, IPA aims to provide interpretation of a person's lived experience. The focus of this study was on the experiences of 6 individuals who fitted the role of the coaching manager. The study aims were to explore how they used coaching approaches, how they perceived their position and what role they understood coaching played in the retention and development of employees. Being employed by an organisation which expected managers to coach, their interpretation of having coaching as an organisational competency was also explored. This study aimed to add to the body of research of understanding the lived experiences of such managers.

The findings highlight the participants' self-perception as coaching managers, their orientation towards coaching and experience of coaching as a way of being rather than a process. The findings draw attention to the participants' orientation towards people and the impact experienced due to change in organisational pressure on managers to coach.

This paper provides a critical review of the literature on coaching roles within organisations followed by an account of how IPA methodology was conducted. This is followed by the discussion section where the findings are explored. The conclusion shares recommendations on categorisation of the coaching manager role into a standalone construct. Categorisation would provide a more accurate representation of contemporary business needs. A further recommendation is for stringency in organisational support for coaching managers through training. Additionally, issues on confidentiality and conflict for coaching managers are also tabled in the conclusion as needed debates.

Literature Review

Literature shows that 80% of businesses expect line managers to coach as part of their duties (CiPD, 2015). However, only the minority provide training in how to coach (Deloitte, 2018; Zenger and Stinnett, 2010). Anecdotally, from my own experience as an executive coach, I have noticed organisations develop a greater expectation on managers to retain talent and improve performance through coaching. However, accounts of lived experiences of managers is absent from the literature.

Three types of coaching roles within organisations are present in the literature - the manager as coach, the internal coach and the coaching manager. Whilst similarities exist, each role is uniquely different as I will now discuss.

The manager as coach role is defined as a 'manager or supervisor serving as a coach or facilitator of learning in the workplace setting, in which he or she enacts specific behaviours that enable his/her employee (coachee) to learn and develop' (Ellinger, Beattie and Hamlin, 2014, p.257). The role of internal coach has been growing and is described as 'a one-on-one developmental intervention supported by the organisation and provided by a colleague of those coached who is trusted to shape and deliver a program yielding individual performance growth' (Frisch, 2001, p.242).

A key differentiator between the manager as coach and internal coach roles is the reporting line relationship. With the former, the manager takes on the role of coach to their reports, whereas the internal coach role is assumed by a member of the organisation who may provide coaching to others not necessarily in their reporting line (Ellinger et al., 2014; Frisch, 2001). A key similarity, however, is the organisational support and acknowledgement of the roles being part of the structure of the business.

This similarity is central in understanding what is happening in organisations with no formal manager as coach or internal coach roles. There is broad agreement across the literature that coaching can help improve performance through structured conversations (van Nieuwerburgh and Passmore, 2018). With the consensus that coaching helps improve performance, there are managers who have a coaching style but do not fit into either role of manager as coach or internal coach. This is where a third area emerges and provides a more aligned description of the participants in this study – the coaching manager.

Whilst this study's participants were expected to coach, none had been formally trained in how to. Literature suggests a combination of factors are needed for a manager to be successful in using coaching approaches. These include competencies, cultural alignment, inclination, workload and time and shared values (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002; London, 2003; Beattie, Kim, Hagen, Egan, Ellinger and Hamlin, 2014; St John-Brookes, 2018). Skills alone do not enable the success of a manager to coach and the attitude whilst changeable, is a factor which can enable or inhibit the success of a manager's ability (Beattie et al., 2014). In my experience, coaching managers

without training, work to the best of their abilities with resources available. However, research is scarce on how effective this approach is.

Literature illustrates the move towards organisations expecting managers to coach started in the 1980s (Ladyshevsky, 2010; Grant and Hartley, 2013; Levasseur, 2013), with a growing body of evidence supporting this change (Graham, Wedman and Garvin-Kester, 1994; Joo, 2005). However, with less than 20% of organisations providing training in how to coach, it is unsurprising that literature lacks consensus on what organisations want from their managers (Ladyshevsky and Taplin, 2018). Literature shows how organisations use coaching to develop and strengthen relationships between people, and as a means to share power (Kimsey-House, Kinsey-House, Sadhal and Whitworth, 2018). However, literature also tells us a manager's workload and time impact on their capacity to coach (Beattie et al., 2014). What is not evident from the literature is how organisational cultures align to support managers. Rhetoric is offered on the need for shared values (St John-Brooks, 2018), but literature on the lived experiences of the managers is unknown.

Literature shows that strength in the relationship between the manager and subordinate is needed for coaching dynamics to be effective (Ladyshevsky, 2010); the coach needs self-efficacy, and to be able to build trust (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch and Jones, 2013). The ability to leverage and understand the impact of emotions in the workplace are recognised as attributes of high performers (Goleman et al., 2002). However, the assumption that someone with higher emotional intelligence is more able to influence performance improvement (Gardner and Stough, 2002) cannot be relied upon. Performance measures of improvement as a result of coaching are notoriously difficult to prove, and this is arguably evident due to the lack of longitudinal quantitative studies (Grover and Furnham, 2016).

The question of what enables effectiveness to coach as a manager led to a hypothesis of skills and competencies being a core requirement (Goleman et al., 2002). The acceptance of coaching being based on a set of skills that can be learned and developed whilst relevant, does not facilitate the effectiveness of the manager being able to coach (Silver, Lochmiller, Copland and Tripps, 2009). However, whilst the suggestion that behavioural taxonomies comprised of empowering facilitative factors are needed for effective coaching (Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002), what is not evident in the literature is without these, would a coaching relationship be unsuccessful. Yet, gaining empirical validation is debatably impossible to achieve as not all taxonomies are equal nor can they be quantitatively proven.

There is agreement across the literature that the attitude of a manager whilst changeable, is a factor which can enable or inhibit the success of their ability to coach (Beattie et al., 2014). A coachee's level of willingness and readiness impacts the effectiveness of a successful coaching relationship (Bachkirova, 2011). This need for willingness and readiness could also be applied to the attitude of the manager in the coaching relationship (Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee, 2000). A further addition to the literature are the findings that a manager with an alignment to receiving feedback is considered to be more effective to coach than those with a lower alignment (Steelman and Wolfeldi, 2016). This is corroborated in the literature with the theory that managers believing in personal attributes of staff being malleable are more aligned to human development, versus managers with an entity theory perspective who are less so (Dwekc, 2007; Heslin, Vandewalle and Latham, 2006). Furthermore, the disposition of the manager plays an integral role in their ability to be a coaching manager (Ellinger, 2013; London, 2003).

However, there is underrepresentation in the literature on the ethical issues, boundaries and risks for managers who are coaching (Beattie et al., 2014). For example, a manager may have access to information which they cannot share with subordinates, thus creating tension with perceived hidden agendas and power plays, all of which are underrepresented in the literature (Shoukry and Cox, 2018). Conflicting priorities create pressure for managers and where coaching sits in the coaching manager's list of duties is unknown and changeable dependant on time, inclination and resources (Ladyshevsky, 2010). The debate on boundary management and an understanding of the clear

distinct responsibilities of the manager using coaching is needed, as is the inclusion of contracting in the coaching relationship (Iordanou, Hawley and Iordanou, 2017).

Methodology

As the aims of the study were to explore coaching managers' lived experiences, IPA was considered the most applicable approach (Smith et al., 2012). IPA is concerned with exploring an individual's personal perceptions and accounts of an experience. It allows the researcher to play a central role in a double-hermeneutic stance. The researcher's interpretation of interpretation of experience is core to IPA, as is it being ideographic (Smith et al., 2012). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants. Photo-elicitation was used during the interviews to help enrich the experience sharing of the coaching managers (Harper, 2002). The interviews were transcribed, resulting in 180 pages of transcripts.

As I wanted to go deep into each individual case, an ideographic approach fitted (Smith and Osborn, 2015). Since IPA is commonly used to explore an experience of significance, this was a suitable methodology to support the nuanced aim of engaging with the reflections of the participants (Smith et al., 2012). The approach was phenomenological, involving a detailed examination of the participants' lived experiences of being a coaching manager.

As the research questions were to explore participants' lived experiences, interpretivism fitted ontologically. In an organisational context, individuals create the culture, and meaning may continually change as a result of social interactions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). I wanted to explore the different realities of the participants and to share how each experienced their reality (Seidman, 2013).

The research questions warranted a constructivist epistemological stance to support the exploration of the participants' interpretations of the phenomenon (Fisher and Buglear, 2004). The aim of the research questions was to discover the underlying meaning of events and activities experienced (Smith and Osborn, 2015). However, a limitation must be emphasised. I consider it impossible to completely understand another's perspective as in order to do this, we would need to be sharing their mind and be truly embodied together in a lived experience. In the course of the study, I was striving to understand the participants' meaning making of their experiences and to get as close as I could to their reality (Schutz, 1967). In the belief that knowledge is shaped by our experiences, I adopted the underlying assumption that the data gathered during the study would ultimately tell the reader about the participants' orientation to the phenomenon and how the participants made sense of it (Smith et al., 2012).

Ontologically, IPA fitted, and as the researcher, I'd be engaged in a double hermeneutic approach with both myself and the participants involved in the interpretation of the phenomenon. In conjunction, for me it was important to acknowledge my own interpretation would be secondary as it would be based only on the participants being interviewed (Smith et al, 2012). Furthermore, an IPA approach also supported my view that interpretation of meaning could also be taken from what is not explicitly being shared by a participants in language (Van Manen, 1990). By that I mean what is said can be less important than how it is said - words alone do not do justice to the interpretation of dialogue (Harries, 1972). With this in mind, IPA not only supported an interpretivist ontological stance but also the nuances of exploring language and the communication exchange between myself and the participants.

An additional reflection on selecting IPA was a need for sensitivity relating to the context being researched (Smith et al, 2012). Trust and rapport were vital as was sensitivity to the nature of the role of the participants. As active line managers, it was important they didn't feel assessed or judged. In order to make sense of how the participants interpreted their experiences, I needed to

have sensitivity to the context, allowing the natural surfacing of nuances and undercurrents (Yardley, 2008).

Data Collection

The six participants worked for the same organisation, but in different areas. An email invitation was sent, with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, and participants self-selected. Seven managers who met the selection criteria of managing people in the past two years self-selected. Inherent bias towards coaching was arguably present with these managers and this was acknowledged as a limitation. During the subsequent weeks, a restructure took place resulting in two of the participants unfortunately being made redundant. One of them still took part in the study, but one did not. This reduced the number of participants to six, which is considered to be an optimum number for IPA research (Smith et al., 2012). Names and gender were changed in the data gathering and analysis to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method for data gathering (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012), combined with photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002). The interviews enabled a degree of freedom to explore the interests of the participants (Smith, et al, 2012) and aligned ontologically and epistemologically. I believed the stories and experiences shared by the participants would be of worth and interest to the reader (Seidman, 2013). By combining the interviews with photo-elicitation, I wanted to enable a creative freedom of expression for the participants (Rose, 2016). Participant-led photography involving giving the participants cameras to capture imagery themselves (Vince and Warren, 2012) was also contemplated, but as the interviews were the primary data source and due to time restraints, the decision was made to just use photo-elicitation.

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews matched the aims of the research questions, and reflexivity was needed before, during and after the interviews. Following acknowledged proponents for an IPA interview, the interview questions were open and exploratory, designed to glean rich and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon. The aim was to encourage the participants to talk freely and for me to be able to move the participants through funnelling from more general points to specific areas. The sample size of participants needed to be small enough to enable time to go deep into the experiences and show a full appreciation of each participant's account. However, I acknowledge the limitation of not understanding an experience in the moment, but only reconstructing through language heard in an interview after the event (Van Manen, 1990).

Since the aim of IPA is to gain rich and detailed data, conducting in-person semi-structured interviews allowed a depth of exploration. Having many hours of recruitment interviewing experience, I had a degree of confidence in the skills needed to interview, but I was also cognisant of the difference in proficiency needed for research interviewing. The in-depth research interviews required the participants to reconstruct and explore meaning of their experiences. My interview structure was used as a guide as I needed agility and flexibility to ask questions which built on what the participant had said (Seidman, 2013).

In-person interviews rather than phone or video were the preferred medium. Being able to monitor responses and conduct a meaningful conversation has been evidenced as harder to do when not face to face (Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury, 2013). There was a fluidity and freeness in the interviews which was consciously built through putting the participants at ease, being confident, present, paying attention and being interested as the researcher (Irvine et al., 2013). Periods of silence were honoured as participants took thoughtful pauses as they contemplated.

Each interview lasted between 70-90 minutes, and were conducted within a 10-day time frame. Being audio recorded on a lap-top with participant permission, the structure of the interview started with general conversation then moved into questioning. After the questioning, photo-elicitation was used to help evoke feelings and elicit additional validity, depth and viewpoints (Glaw, Inder, Kable

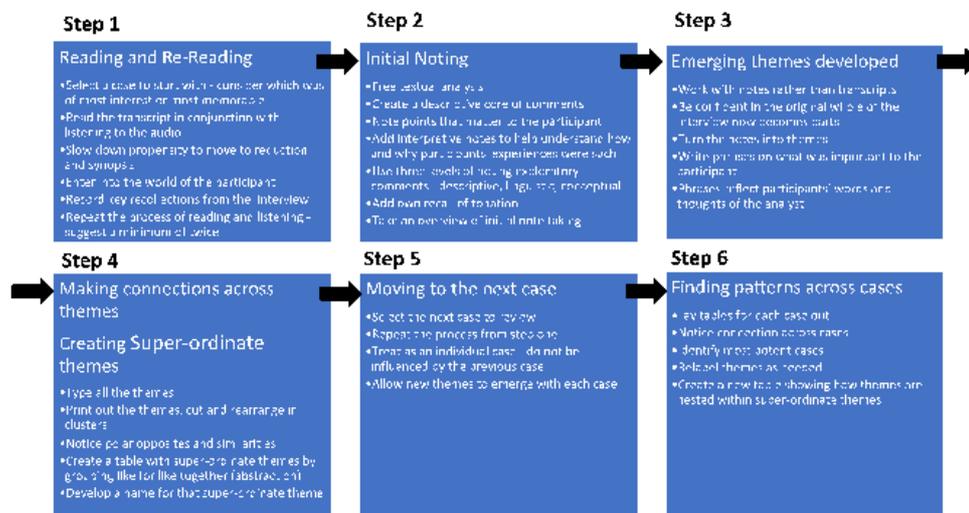
and Hazelton, 2017). The participants were asked to look at a series of photographs and discuss those which represented their interpretation and experiences of managing.

Data Analysis

Step 1 of the data analysis process involved reading the transcripts closely twice, in conjunction with listening to the recording. By listening and reading, I felt a stronger connection to the text, enabling me to recall being in the interview room, recollecting the mood, pace, tone and body language. Step 2 involved initial noting of points of interest followed by a more forensic note taking approach of using colours to code the text. I started with a basic level of coding to describe the content, focussing on words, phrases and explanations used by the participants, taking the transcripts at face value. An additional element of my exploratory note taking was the linguistic elements - recalling changes of pace during the interview, humour, repetition, hesitation. Step 3 was at a conceptual level, where I began to explore the participants' understanding of the matters they were discussing. This prompted questions in my mind which I noted. Figure 1 shows the process of analysis followed.

Figure One

Analysis Process Followed



(Adapted from Smith et al., 2012: 79-107)

The emergent themes were listed chronologically. This list was printed, cut and rearranged in clusters and each cluster was named as an overarching theme (Step 4). The process was repeated with each of the interview transcripts (Step 5) and a table combining themes created. Synthesising further, over twenty emergent themes were identified which were grouped into superordinate themes and emergent themes (Step 6).

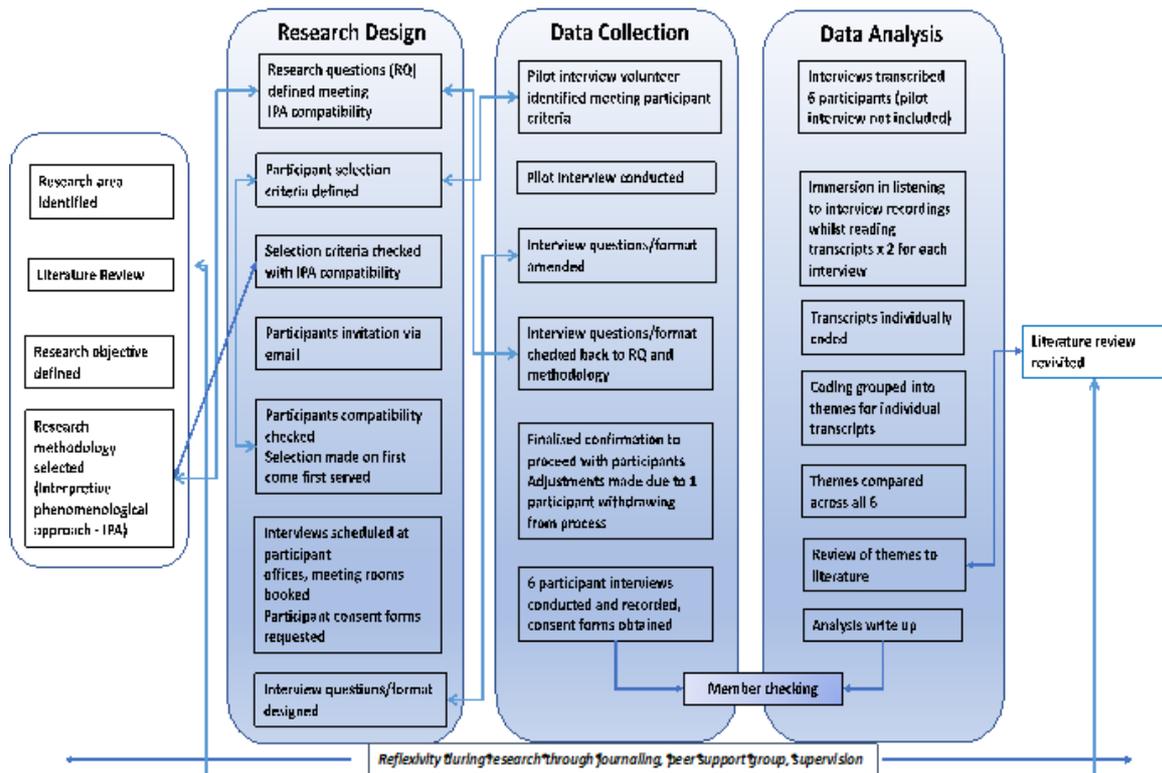
Finally, the three main findings from the study were as follows:

1. Self-perception as a coaching manager;
2. Orientation towards people;
3. Organisational pressures

In summary, using IPA helped uncover the individuals' personal perceptions and accounts of an experience. Involved as the researcher, I was able to play a role in a double-hermeneutic stance.

Figure 2 provides an illustration of the overall method followed.

Figure Two: Overall IPA Method



Reflexivity

I considered my own familiarities of the phenomenon to be a limitation and recognised reflexivity was needed through the study. I contemplated bracketing my experiences in order to fully described those of the participants, and not my own (Husserl, 1977). Whilst this would have helped ensure I didn't contaminate the data (Jasper, 1994), it didn't align with the interpretivist stance I was taking. However, considering hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger Macquarrie and Robinson, 1962), I critically reflected on my own biases and assumptions, and journaled them. Nonetheless, I believe that achieving complete objectivity in qualitative research is difficult. In my opinion, unconscious bias does affect interpretation of findings in a qualitative study, and the researcher should be aware of that. From my experience during this study, being reflexive as a researcher is needed, but doesn't mitigate bias completely.

As the researcher, it was important to act in good faith by demonstrating honesty and transparency throughout (Smith and Smith, 2018). The adoption of this approach led me to reflect on the similarities between coaching conversations I'd had as a practitioner and the interviews in my study. By critically reflecting beforehand, I was able to immerse myself in the interviews and remain present with the participants (Silsbee, 2008). Bringing in my own discipline from my coaching practice, after each interview I allowed reflection time and journaled accordingly (Peltier, 2010).

Ethical considerations

The study was not an assessment of the managers' performance capability. Whilst this was stated in the Participant Information Sheet, it was also re-iterated at the beginning of the interviews. However, had there been any doubts from the managers on their safety in respect of this, I feel the interviews could not have proceeded. It was made explicitly clear that the study was not in

exchange for any resources, work or payment. Furthermore, the objectives of the study were not moulded to meet the needs of the participants' organisation. Maintaining confidentiality was important, and for that reason the names of the participants were changed and any reference to the organisation's name deleted.

Validity and Generalisability

Sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence were used as a guide to help ensure validity and generalisability (Yardley, 2008). An immersion in the literature, the cultural context of the study and an attentive interest in the participants helped ensure sensitivity to context. Selecting IPA as an approach also supported this. Commitment and rigour were maintained through ensuring thoroughness across the study. Perseverance in gaining access to the participants was needed and complete commitment shown by me with communication exchanges. A focus on ensuring a completeness of the analysis was also adhered to.

Transparency and coherence were demonstrated in the detailed accounting of how the study took place, and the methodology and analysis approaches also fitted ontologically. An aim was to engage with the reader and provide a report of interest and usefulness (Elliot, Fischer and Rennie, 1999). Matching the findings back to the research aims, validity was maintained. However, as will be discussed in the limitations section, achieving generalisability was arguably not achievable due to the nature and small size of the study. To help with the trustworthiness of the study, I used a reflective journal to capture my thoughts and to challenge my own biases, aligning more to a Heideggerian approach (Heidegger, 1962). I found bracketing my own experiences wasn't completely possible but, setting aside prejudgments and entering into the research process being unbiased and receptive helped establish a balanced relationship with the participants (Moustakas, 1994). An additional process to help with the trustworthiness of the study was the use of member checking. A selection of participants were sent an extract of their transcript and feedback from them confirmed it was a true representation of their responses (Creswell, 2007).

Findings and Discussion

This study used IPA to gain an understanding of the participants' lived experiences as managers who used coaching approaches. Three main findings emerged from the study: the self-perception the participants had as coaching managers; their orientation towards people; organisational pressures.

Self-perception as a coaching manager

With no formal training, participants had developed an interpretation of what is meant to be a coaching manager. Their lived experiences informed their perception of what was important to them when coaching, resulting in a shared perception that coaching was a way of being, and not a task. As one participant expressed, it was more how they approached people:

I genuinely don't think that everyone knows how to coach. And it's not about going on course. It is about thinking about the individual and what you need to talk to them about and how you need to work with them to get them on the right track.

Another said, "it's just a way of being" which reminded me of Carl Rogers (1995) person-centred approach phrase of way of being. Rogers (1995) used this to describe a nuance in one to one relationships. Several of the managers considered their use of coaching approaches to be just that, a way of being. This arguably supported emerging literature on the topic of bringing one's own humanity to the fore as a manager (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017). They had an inclination towards coaching seeing it as an attitude and mindset, rather than a process.

Their perception was they were using coaching skills as part of their duties, interpreting coaching not as a process but a way of being, as was described by one participant:

I don't put coaching sessions in the diary. Every time you need to meet with someone or you're just at their desk or you're even at the coffee machine, it makes no difference ... you're coaching constantly.

They didn't perceive themselves to be coaches, but did identify with using coaching approaches as part of their management style in line with literature (van Nieuwerburgh, 2015). They experienced most interactions as opportunities to coach.

It doesn't matter if you've got meetings or not, as you shouldn't be going into meeting rooms to coach. You should be doing it every time you have an interaction with an individual so whether they're at their desk, at your desk, or let's say in a meeting ... it doesn't matter.

The perspective of coaching being a form of conversation was apparent but how effective the managers were with using coaching approaches isn't known. Their way of ascertaining how effective they were had been drawn from experiences of making positive impacts on others. They took meaning and purpose from this and believed they were doing the best they could, at times in tricky situations. I sensed this was the first time they'd stopped to reflect on the positive impact they'd made as a result of their mindset and attitudes towards coaching.

Whilst positive intent was present and a motivation and engagement to coach their teams, I questioned whether the managers knew what coaching really was, in my opinion not uncommon amongst managers. 'Mentor' was used by one of the managers when sharing what it meant to be a coaching manager:

It's considered to be part of my job to mentor and bring people on.

When speaking of previous managers they'd valued, the descriptions resonated as mentoring relationships, not coaching. Unsurprisingly, the swathe of labels in our unregulated coaching profession has perhaps impacted on the lack of clarity in language and description used in organisations also (Joo, Sushko and McLean, 2012).

Orientation towards people

A resounding common thread was the participants wanted to form strong relationships with the people they were managing which supported literature on managers coaching (Ellinger et al., 2014; Kimsey et al., 2018). The managers wanted to build trust in the relationships with their teams. This supported research suggesting successful coaching relationships need trust (de Haan et al., 2013). The findings highlighted the managers wanted to understand people. As one participant said:

I think it's much easier to coach as a manager if you have an understanding of what drives people.

Another participant had a similar perspective when talking about their team:

If you don't get to know them at least a little bit, you're never going to hit the right approach with them.

I perceived the managers focus to be on the individual needs and values of those they managed. I wondered how widely they were thinking in terms of generational differences across their whole teams. Whilst limited, research shows that employers must understand the values of generations in order to construct successful interaction strategies amongst teams (Sanner-Stiehr and

Vandermause, 2017. However, the managers did share a willingness to coach not only their teams but people around them, as one participant said:

I think a good manager doesn't just coach the people they're responsible for. You're coaching everyone all of the time sideways, upwards, downward. I would coach other individuals in my department that are at different levels.

I sensed they had a belief that the personal attributes of their teams were malleable, and they were aligned to the concept of human development (Dweck, 2007; Heslin et al, 2006):

Coaching is about getting the best out of people, getting the best potential out of the people that I'm working with. There are times that I think people are holding back. It's about getting the best out of them and building them. It's about growing new people, getting them to the next level.

Additionally, there was an inclination with these managers to motivate others through positive reinforcement and feedback which supported literature (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017). Some of the managers themselves had a high orientation towards receiving feedback, but not all. Steelman and Wolfeldi (2016) reported that those with a higher orientation towards receiving feedback are considered to be more effective as managers who are coaching, rather than those with lower alignment. However, this wasn't consistent across my study findings.

Consistent with the literature, whilst willing and actively supporting others, one manager shared a perception and interpretation of conflict and boundaries being an issue (Iordanou et al., 2017). I sensed he'd reached a wider span of reflection on the ethics involved when operating along the continuum of his accountability to the business, and his want for an individual to grow and develop:

So it's almost a bit of an internal sort of conflict. Sometimes I feel like I've got two personalities. I feel like I've got my corporate hat and my non-corporate hat, and I can't find an in-between.

My interpretation of his reflection on his experience was that his values had been compromised and he'd been left feeling uncomfortable. Confidentiality and boundary management were perceived issues for him. I wondered how a greater awareness of the complexities of coaching through training for these managers might have helped, such as is covered in the literature of the role of contracting in the coaching relationship (Iordanou et al., 2017). As only one manager of the six perceived issues on this subject, I was perplexed as to the seemingly low level of importance this area had for them. On the other hand, I reflected on my own bias as a coach and how this was impacting on my expectations of them to be aware of this area. The lack of conscious awareness of the managers suggested to me it had not been an area previously considered.

Organisational pressures

External forces and cultural change over the last fifteen years have crucially impacted the roles of these managers. This impact has resulted in changed expectations from the organisation on managers being expected to coach. Reflecting on their past experience, one participant shared the following:

I'm much more of a coach than my managers were to me. Management are more open to coaching now and wanting people to be happy in their jobs. ... fifteen years ago nobody was really bothered by that. As long as you got the job done, that was the only thing that mattered.

The participants perceived time to be an issue in general with juggling and managing diverse priorities. I interpreted from their meaning making that because coaching was not a formal action for them, they did perceive they had time to coach:

I suppose the excuse is everyone's too busy and doesn't have time to coach. I am against that because you're not making time to coach, you're doing it all the time.

With complex roles and conflicting priorities, these managers considered their responsibility to coach was high on their lists but what isn't known is how their team members experienced this. My interpretation was the managers were outward looking, not taking time to reflect on what and how they were operating as coaching managers. On the ethical side of coaching relationships, I did interpret from the experiences shared an element of want from the managers to be able to pause more and to critically self-reflect, an importance covered in literature (Iordanou et al., 2017). Whilst their appraisal process gave a formal vehicle to self-assess, until taking part in the interviews for this study, the participants had not self-reflect. One of them thought for a few moments before sharing their thoughts:

There was a change in attitudes, right from the top-down and that helped. If the people at the top weren't saying we need to coach and retain good people, then we wouldn't have the management team doing it ... everyone's being encouraged to do it. It's part of our appraisal process. It's one of the main parts of the job for me.

Whilst literature states it can be difficult to understand what organisations are expecting from their managers in terms of coaching (Beattie et al., 2014), the managers were clear and self-assured in their experience and interpretation of expectations on them to coach. However, there was frustration from several of the participants in the lack of consistency across their business. An interpretation could be that expectations on managers had not been made clear, a factor in the literature as important (Beattie et al., 2014). Alternatively, it could be an indicator that some managers had more of a propensity to coach than others did, as is also covered in the literature (van Nieuwerburgh, 2015).

When considering what the managers actually did when coaching, a shrug of the shoulders by one manager led me to question whether a trivialisation had taken place in underplaying the critical importance of effective coaching skills (van Nieuwerburgh, 2015). The findings did support the widely accepted norms for managers to coach their direct reports (Zenger and Stinnett, 2010) and the participants' experiences and perceptions corroborated reports of organisations having coaching as a core competency (CiPD, 2015).

Literature shares how organisations assume managers have the core skills needed to coach (Milner and Couley, 2014). How organisations know if their managers are adequately equipped and how organisations are supporting their managers accordingly are relevant. Interpretation of the managers' experience highlighted that training wasn't a contributory factor and hadn't featured as an enabler. Perhaps a blind spot for them as they'd not been trained and therefore did not know what is involved. Secondly, the lack of clear understanding in exactly what the organisation expected from their managers supported the literature on this point (Beattie et al., 2014).

Conclusions

A categorisation of the coaching manager role would provide a more contemporary reflection on modern day organisational practices. It is evident from literature that managers are coaching but fit into neither manager as coach, nor internal coach roles. Therefore, there is a need for the coaching manager role to be categorised as a standalone construct. This would add value to organisations, managers and the coaching practice in clarifying conflated definitions of what is currently happening in organisations.

The question of how managers are equipped to coach and a recommendation that organisations provide more stringency in support through training is made. This applies apply to those in

positions of influence and interest, such as human resources, talent development, learning development as well as line managers. As the literature shows, factors of skills, competencies, attitude and environment, boundaries and ethical awareness are needed for successful coaching manager relationships. Robust training and support are needed to enable the coaching managers' success in their ability to coach. An implication also exists with the expectations organisations have for managers who are unwilling or do not consider themselves ready to coach, but are required to as part of their roles. Whilst controversial, identifying who has a propensity and willingness to coach maybe a possibility for organisations to consider.

Literature on managers' experiences on issues of confidentiality and conflict of interest in the working relationship are lacking. The question of conflict of interest, boundaries and ethical considerations for a coaching manager arose as a grey area of understanding for the managers in this study. Whilst the aim was not to explore paradoxical issues for the coaching manager, I suggest these do impact on how a manager coaches. As the coaching manager is accountable to the organisation, they are not afforded the luxury of neutrality in the same way an external coach is. Ethical issues arise with managers in compromised positions as the question of for whose gain coaching interventions are made arises (Iordanou et al., 2017). Additionally, being sensitive to managers' struggles when finding themselves along the continuum of conflict between wearing the corporate and the non-corporate hat, is an implication for organisations to consider. Moving more towards communities of practice within organisations with forums for reflective practice and peer support for managers is a further recommendation for organisations.

For the coaching and mentoring practice, implications exist in how our profession regulates, advises and delivers solutions to organisations wanting to move towards embedding coaching cultures. I consider there is a duty of care held by those of us in positions of influence to guide organisations with what is best practice. Ensuring we educate, thus enabling better informed choices which support the complexities of the role requirements of managers is another recommendation. I also consider there to be implications in how, as a coaching profession, we look ahead to the future generations and consider how they are integrated with understanding difference in generational values.

An additional reflection

This study was conducted in 2019 and at the time of writing this article, April 2020, we are in the midst of lockdown in England due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. This leads me to consider the need for even greater understanding on what organisations expect from their managers with regards to coaching. I argue it to be of paramount importance that the role of the coaching manager is categorised and understood. As a profession, we have a duty of care in how we inform, teach and guide organisations in how they equip their managers to coach. More so now than before, managers will be faced with ethical dilemmas and difficulties not previously encountered as they navigate uncharted waters due to the upset working patterns being experienced. These patterns are predicted to be lasting beyond the confines of 2020 and are likely to change working practices more definitively.

Limitations

I considered it of importance to have avoided interpretation during the interviews and to have remained consciously aware of my own thoughts. Whilst considering my own conscious biases, I was less able to control my own unconscious biases. My prior knowledge, experience and attitudes would have influenced what I experienced and heard in the interview process (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Whilst a relatively equal split between men and women were interviewed, all were from the same UK based organisation arguably limiting the transferability of the study. Additionally, all participants

were self-selecting, as IPA research participants should be. However, this arguably could have meant an inherent coaching bias in the participants. Furthermore, with six participants, the findings are not representative of all managers therefore not generalisable. Finally, only the experiences of the managers were explored, no other accounts, for example, their team members.

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