



Research insight

Coaching in organisations

Introduction

This report summarises the initial findings of CIPD research into coaching provision in UK organisations undertaken in collaboration with the Ashridge Centre for Coaching. The research was launched in April 2007 and will conclude in spring 2008 with the publication of the final 'research into practice' report.

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This report outlines:

- the story of the research:
 - why this research and why now
 - the research approach
- the initial findings:
 - an overarching challenge
 - key themes raised by the research so far: some challenges
 - coaching in practice: case studies highlighting how two organisations structure their internal coaching offers
- some early conclusions about good practice: structuring coaching services.

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The story of the research so far

Why this research and why now?

Coaching is used by a majority of UK organisations – 63%, according to the CIPD's 2007 learning and development survey – and has become a widely used and valuable learning and development tool. However, results from the same survey indicated that efforts to develop coaching capability are still in the early stages in most cases and there are wide variations in practice. This can make it difficult for HR professionals to make judgements about how best to use coaching and how to manage coaching services.

Building on CIPD guidance in the other important areas of procuring and managing coaching services, the aim of this research is to explore the place of coaching in organisations' learning and development strategies, effective configurations of coaching services and current practice in the evaluation of coaching services.

The main areas covered in the research include:

- how the objectives of coaching interventions are identified in practice
- how coaching initiatives fit with other learning and development initiatives
- how the best configuration of line manager, internal and specialist coaches is identified
- what coaching skills line managers are being given in their organisation, how they're expected to use these skills and the best way to use line managers' coaching skills in the organisation
- what roles internal coaches hold in organisations, what skills they have and how these are used, and the effects of asking line managers to be internal coaches on top of their day jobs
- when it's useful to use external coaches
- how the contributions of internal coaches, external coaches and line managers are most effectively brought together
- how the benefits of coaching initiatives to organisational performance are identified and assessed.

The research approach

Coaching is a highly relational and contextual practice. For this reason, the study of this practice, even from the organisational perspective, lends itself to qualitatively based research, which allows the context to fully inform its conclusions. We're therefore using a multi-method approach that's heavily oriented towards case study and inquiry-based approaches. These include:

- detailed case studies based on a series of structured interviews in six organisations with well-established coaching practices
- 'field of knowledge' research drawing on the current literature and face-to-face interviews with a number of coaching experts
- a collaborative inquiry group involving 20 organisations at different stages of using coaching. This group has met three times over six months and conducted in-depth inquiries into their own approaches to delivering coaching services
- a discrete set of questions as part of the CIPD 2008 learning and development survey.

This has given us a broad and deep exposure to many organisations and enabled us to identify trends, patterns and helpful practice. The research process will be completed towards the end of 2007 and the final results will be launched in April 2008 at the CIPD HRD Conference.

Early in our research, it became clear that the definition of coaching was important and that we could quite easily engage in significant dedicated research simply to discover that definition. For the purposes of this research, we understand coaching to be an activity where an individual meets with a coach on a one-to-one basis to work on a range of work-related issues, some of which may also include personal factors.

Initial findings

An overarching challenge

It has emerged from our research so far that there's a clear overarching tension that challenges organisations fundamentally in all aspects of their chosen approach to coaching, from objective-setting to structuring services and evaluation.

Rebecca Prideaux, Learning and Development Manager, Cadbury Schweppes, raised the subject early in the collaborative inquiry process:

'There is a tension between the personal and organisational dimension. How much structure is enabling?'

At the centre of this dilemma resides the fact that, as many empirical studies, coaching experts and most practitioners would stress, *the quality of the coaching relationship* is the single most important determinant of success in coaching.

Therefore the most significant challenge for organisations is that of determining the appropriate level of structure and support to enable coaching relationships to be as effective as possible in the organisational context. In short:

- What support – in the form of systems, structures and processes – can be provided to best support that critical relationship?
- How can we ensure that this work delivers results for the wider organisation as well as for the individual?

Another member of the collaborative enquiry group, Carol Magnus, Head of Learning and Development, Alzheimer's Society, summed up this challenge:

'Coaching needs some managing/framework/best practice but is too personal to be controlled. What's needed is a framework that's open and flexible enough to allow organic growth.'

How the research organisations respond to this challenge

We found several approaches to delivering coaching in organisations – all of which can be successful. There are some centralised, highly structured approaches but at least as many are organic, decentralised and emergent.

The level and type of structure deployed by the case study and inquiry organisations varies significantly. At one end of the continuum, there's a deliberate 'hands off' approach where, in the words of one participant: 'there is a conscious avoidance of formalising coaching as a specific strategy.' These organisations allow coaching to emerge as a learning solution where it's appropriate or useful. At the other end of the continuum, some organisations have made an explicit investment in a formally articulated approach, a launch with senior management sponsorship and formal support structures and processes.

Often organisations build some structure around some coaching need or practice that has developed organically. This is often in the form of co-ordination, skills development, accreditation and integration into other learning and development processes, such as appraisals, personal development planning and talent management. Often the motivation for this co-ordination comes from a lack of perceived control, budget concerns, or particular groups such as senior executives or HR/learning and development teams. Many of these concerns are expressed as questions of evaluating impact or of business improvement rather than considering the subtler benefits of coaching.

Other organisations seem to have concluded that it's not necessary or even desirable for them to control coaching too centrally. They work from the premise that expertise that provides guidelines, support, development and supervision appears to work better than prescriptive policies and policing. This approach seems to recognise that coaching is a personal and relational activity.

Working with an organic and emergent model

Martin Howe, Group Training and Development Manager, Cega Group (a privately owned company that provides medical screening, travel assistance, emergency medical assistance, cost containment and claims-handling services to travel insurance underwriters), describes his change of strategy as he sought to develop coaching in his organisation:

'I encountered varying understandings of coaching and grew impatient knocking on the front door, so I went round the back and started watering and nurturing what was growing in the garden. Part of my solution has been to not get in a sweat about having a formally ratified policy but to work with my training team. To turn "my part of the flywheel", to quote from Jim Collins's *Good to Great*.'

'This has involved training the trainers to be coaches. First of all giving them coaching-type skills to use as part of their toolkit and then, effectively, to become coaches, without any formal announcement of "a strategy". Take-up is low because it's not a formal offering, but a subtle intervention growing in reputation and respect. This is what I mean by watering the back garden. In addition, where team leaders were displaying coaching-like behaviour, I've encouraged and nurtured this patch of garden. We've also now put all the "new starter" induction "buddies" through a coaching skills course so that each team now has a champion skilled in peer coaching to enhance our "new starter" experience.'

'This doesn't sit comfortably with those wishing to take the "front door" approach by adopting a systematic, fully embedded strategy. However, coaching is, by nature, relational, organic and emerging and may not lend itself to being squeezed into formal corporate structures. This may not be a popular approach, especially with those keen to evidence return on investment, but it works for us.'

Many of the collaborative inquiry group participants came to the research with concerns about their organisations' coaching work not being structured or centralised enough, especially compared with other learning and development interventions. Through the process of their own research within their own organisations and the inquiry process with their co-collaborators in other organisations, many have experienced organic approaches that, using many of the 'good practice' indicators discussed below, can also deliver exceptional individual and organisational results.

Key themes arising from the research so far: some challenges

Setting meaningful objectives at an organisational level

Most organisations we researched set organisational/business as well as personal objectives for each coaching contract and tended to monitor them on an individual relationship basis. This seems to work best when this activity is carried out as a three- or four-cornered contract involving line managers and learning and development/HR staff working together. When each of these 'corners' trusts the others and is supportive of learning, this creates a 'magic' combination that organisations strive for. There are many situations when this is difficult or impossible, but in those circumstances, careful management and support from learning and development to create the best contract possible, coupled with close ongoing management, seems to be good practice.

In a very few cases, objectives were set for coachees. This kind of objective-setting was more common in situations where coaching was used for remedial or corrective purposes. But this was widely recognised to be far less effective than working with objectives decided jointly with the coachee.

Many participant organisations expressed an aim that coaching should help to deliver the current organisational objectives and business priorities. It was rare, however, to discover a clear set of overarching objectives held at the senior management level.

It seemed much more helpful to organisations to be able to state a clear purpose for coaching (for example, 'to help our managers in times of change and challenge and to develop their ability to manage performance in the organisation', Liz Macann, BBC) and then to set objectives at the individual level in line with that overall purpose.

Positioning coaching within the learning and development strategy

Regardless of which approach – structured or organic – is used, coaching is part of the wider learning and development portfolio, whether explicitly described in the strategy or not.

Coaching is generally recognised as an incredibly useful intervention. It's a very tailored and personalised intervention and seems to be valued highly for those qualities by coachees, line managers and learning and development professionals alike.

Therefore coaching is often used for individuals or teams in transition, change or with new challenges in relatively short timeframes. It can be organised quickly and put in place with relatively low levels of co-ordination and overall budget compared with programmatic interventions. It can also be changed, redirected or stopped relatively easily in response to changed requirements, with little peripheral impact on the wider organisation or the reputation of the learning and development function. So coaching lends itself to smaller, more experimental interventions that can be steered and evaluated at the immediate level relatively quickly through working directly with the coach, coachee and their colleagues.

Everyone we talked to during the research recognised coaching as an important part of the learning and development portfolio for their organisation. Responsibility for the coaching remit sits with a learning and development team, HR, or sometimes other functions such as talent management or even business improvement. The formal organisational structure seems less important – what appears to matter is how those proponents of coaching are able to influence and support it within their organisation. This is dependent on how well learning and development processes are supported, especially by senior management in the organisation.

In some organisations, such as the BBC and Cadbury Schweppes, learning and development teams have successfully led explicitly articulated strategies for coaching involving centrally organised processes. In others, such as M&G, no centralised programme is required, but coaching is run through the high-value learning and development relationships that work throughout the organisation.

In other organisations, learning and development teams experience a higher degree of scepticism about learning and development initiatives. These teams have often adopted a more covert strategy, introducing coaching without being explicit and not using formal sign-off processes. Instead, coaching has gained gradual acceptance and momentum through personal experience and word of mouth. All three approaches seem to work when they match the organisational context.

Defining the most effective role for HR/learning and development in delivering coaching services

The HR function, often in the form of a learning and development department/team, plays, or can play, an important role in creating and delivering a successful coaching offer.

The CIPD guide to coaching and buying coaching services suggests that this role includes choosing appropriate coaches, managing relationships and evaluating success. HR can also provide ongoing support throughout the process and ensure a positive climate that enables individuals to sustain long-term changes in behaviour and performance.

In participant organisations, we found that there were a number of common areas of activity across organisations with flourishing coaching services. The approach to these activities was different depending on the approach to delivering coaching – yet the fundamental areas of activity appeared reasonably consistent.

These activities include:

- maintaining a clear sense of the purpose and role of coaching in the organisation
- weaving coaching into relevant organisational activities such as wider development programmes and performance management

- developing the organisation's understanding of coaching: what it is, what's available and what type of environment supports it
- providing enabling frameworks and structures that are congruent with the chosen approach to coaching and the organisation's culture
- identifying external coaches and paying attention to the quality of their practice
- supporting objective-setting and evaluation of the coaching relationship
- managing relationships within and potentially beyond the four-cornered contract
- understanding and communicating the impact of coaching in the organisation.

In an organisation with a highly organic, emergent approach to coaching, some of these activities are undertaken in a subtle way, whereas one might expect more formal, overt approaches in organisations that have opted for a structured approach.

For example, contrast the 'watering the plants in the back garden' approach taken in Cega to Orange, where the learning and development team undertook a relatively high-impact approach to the launch of their structured 'career coaching' offer.

Clarifying the role of line managers in coaching

The role of line managers in coaching has many variants and what is called 'coaching' in a line manager context differs across organisations. However, line managers hold broad distinct roles in relation to coaching.

Firstly, where there is a formal coaching offer, line managers play a key role in supporting the coaching process as part of the three- or four-cornered coaching contract. Here, they're often the most important voice of the organisation, setting business-related objectives for the coaching. They also almost always have a direct role in assessing how the coaching is delivering benefits to the coachee in their job or function, and therefore how useful the coaching is to the organisation. In the collaborative inquiry research, it appeared that many of the most supportive line managers have been coached themselves or had had training in coaching and such 'early adopters' were often used to pilot coaching in the organisation using internal or external coaches with their staff.

Secondly, many organisations have invested time and energy in developing line managers' coaching skills so that they use a coaching style of management with their own staff. Skills training usually includes skills practice around a structured coaching model (such as GROW). Managers are then encouraged to use an informal coaching approach with their staff when appropriate as an integrated part of their management style.

Thirdly, an increasing number of organisations are developing line managers to act as internal coaches. Some organisations, such as the BBC, Orange and Cega, seem to have used line manager coaches very successfully in other business areas, while others have struggled. This appears to be linked to how supportive the organisation is to coaching overall and to the way that coaching is positioned and supported (see 'Generating take-up of internal coaching services' below).

There appeared to be a consensus within the HR teams setting up development opportunities for line managers that the psychological boundary issues for line managers formally 'coaching' their own staff are very difficult to manage. Even if organisations begin with the intention of having 'coaching' as a separate activity for line managers with their teams, we haven't yet found any organisations that have done it successfully. This supports the conventional wisdom and professional standards which say that the roles and responsibilities of line management make formally 'coaching' your own staff very difficult. However, it's clear that much benefit is gained by supporting a 'coaching style' in line management, and many organisations are investing in this, often alongside their use of internal and external coaches.

Generating take-up of internal coaching services

An increasing number of organisations are developing internal coaching services, using either learning and development resources or developing line managers to work as internal coaches to people outside their teams.

In many cases, this has arisen out of a desire to offer formal coaching more widely than could be afforded using expensive external resources. Internal coaches, when effectively selected, trained and developed, are seen by learning and development professionals as offering effective coaching in the areas of performance and behaviour change. Internal coaches are considered

particularly effective where an understanding and knowledge of the organisation's culture, systems and expectations is helpful – for example, where a coachee has changed role. In some organisations, very senior managers prefer to continue to be coached externally, whereas in others a special cadre of coaches for very senior executives has been developed.

A key challenge facing many organisations is how to generate confidence in and take-up of internal coaching services. In some organisations, these programmes are enthusiastically taken up and used with notable success. In others, take-up is felt to be less than it might be.

There appear to be a number of common factors in those organisations where take-up is high:

- The internal coaching programme is actively promoted both to potential coaches and coachees.
- Coaching is perceived as a development opportunity and not a remedial intervention designed to deal with a performance gap.
- Application to become an internal coach isn't restricted, but must be supported by the line manager.
- There is a selection process to become an internal coach and not everybody is selected.
- Programmes are run by a dedicated (usually quite passionate) HR resource.
- There is a good-quality training programme often run and/or accredited by an outside organisation.
- There's a clear set of common competencies or standards for internal coaches.
- Internal coaches are offered as part of structured coaching programmes rather than on an occasional basis.
- There is ongoing support for internal coaches, including some elements of peer networks, regular networking, continuing professional development (CPD) events, web-based discussion forums and supervision.

Other organisations offer internal coaching services that are often promoted outside the formal system and are encouraged to flourish on an emergent basis. While take-up in these organisations is lower, in some cases this approach has enabled coaching to develop organically where it had previously been rejected when introduced through formal channels and processes.

The significant majority of organisations offering internal coaching services ensure the quality and therefore the reputation of the coaching by offering ongoing support to coaches. For example, coaches who coach on internal programmes tend to participate in a peer network that's supported to some degree by a learning and development resource.

Activities include:

- a coaching network that connects up coaching practitioners in a number of ways such as shared web spaces, email groups and support groups
- regular practitioner meetings or forums from monthly to twice-yearly
- CPD-type activity to continue to build the skills of the coaches
- supervision, either on an individual or group basis, though this still seems to be relatively rare for internal coaches.

Making the most of external coaches

The research so far has generated few surprises about the use of external coaches. In most of the participant organisations, external coaches are called on to coach senior people. Important factors in this choice are:

- the perception of confidentiality and neutrality, which seem more critical for senior people where very sensitive or political situations may be discussed. This is important both in terms of independence from the culture and politics of the organisation and freedom from preconceived ideas
- a lack of internal resources with the skills to coach at the senior level
- difficulties relating to differences in status between the coachee and internal coach which, at senior levels, seems to be more acutely felt
- the attraction of one-to-one coaching as a more appropriate type of learning support than group-based interventions for very senior people
- the potential for an external coach to offer a broader, more strategic or more informed perspective borne out of coaching in a number of organisations.

External coaches are also widely used as part of leadership development programmes or in support of an organisational change effort. This is often a useful way for organisations to 'experiment' with coaching

and establish its value by using trusted suppliers, a hand-picked cohort and processes to evaluate the impact of coaching.

In many organisations, the selection of external coaches is based on personal relationships, with senior appointees in some cases bringing their coaches with them. Increasingly, organisations are seeking to actively manage the provision of external coaches, with framework agreements and preferred supplier lists becoming prevalent.

External coaches tend to feed themes to learning and development, but we found no instances where internal and external coaches met to share learning or develop common skill-sets beyond the three- or four-cornered contract for an individual coaching relationship.

Evaluating the impact of coaching at an organisational level

Evaluation of coaching effectiveness is typically carried out close to the coaching relationship, so medium- or long-term tracking of organisational benefits is rare.

Most people concerned with leading coaching services in organisations pay much more attention to the effectiveness of the coaching relationship close to the relationship than to the medium- or long-term evaluation of coaching services at an organisational level. Most organisations offering a formal coaching programme undertake a structured review process. Objectives set between coach and coachee (or including line manager and HR in the three- or four-cornered relationship described above) are reviewed at the end of the coaching contract.

Processes that involve 360-degree feedback are a popular means of informing objective-setting and of evaluating changes in behaviour as a result of coaching interventions via a test and retest approach.

Some organisations measure changes in behaviour and staff morale through staff surveys. Participants recognised the potential limitations of this approach, given that there may be a number of factors influencing changes in performance. This was also felt to be true of improvements in functional or organisational performance.

Some early conclusions about good practice: approaches to structuring coaching services

Several common themes are emerging from initial analysis of our findings so far:

- Many organisations feel that they're finding their way by trial and error and would like more assurance that they're on the right path.
- There are many different approaches to providing coaching services that are successful when they're matched well to the organisation's needs and context.
- Learning and development professionals play a key role in guiding this process by being in tune with their organisation and understanding and sometimes protecting the value coaching can offer.

In the organisations participating in our research, we encountered three broad approaches to structuring coaching services:

- centralised and structured
- organic and emergent
- tailored middle ground.

These approaches appear to differ in terms of organisational context and rationale, structure and approach and the nature of coaching service provided. Each of these approaches appears to flourish under different organisational conditions.

We expect our understanding of these different approaches to develop as we continue this research.

Centralised and structured

Organisational context and rationale

These approaches work well in organisations where learning and development has a high level of senior support or where formal structures are the norm, and in situations where consistency is seen as important for the organisation. The aim of this approach is to provide a structured, standard and consistent service across the organisation.

Structure and approach

In this approach, formal structures and processes are used to launch coaching within the organisation. To be successful, coaching needs to have senior management support and to be visibly adopted at the highest levels.

Nature of coaching service provided

There's often a focus on developing a cadre of internal coaches, standardising coaching competencies, processes and/or models, developing line managers and using a formal structure to create a 'coaching culture' to improve management/leadership style in the organisation. These approaches work best when they're well integrated with wider organisational objectives. Without this linkage, well-thought-through centralised coaching programmes often expend large amounts of time and energy without sufficient focus.

External coaches may be bought from one or two coaching providers for consistency and ease of management or may be required to take a particular approach, work to specified timescales or be part of a management process. They are often procured only for specific groups such as senior executives, high-potentials or internal coaches.

Organic and emergent

Organisational context and rationale

These approaches work well in organisations where variation in processes and ways of working is accepted and valued – perhaps because of the existence of different businesses, geographies or styles within the organisation – but where uniformity of approach isn't necessary or doesn't provide value. Learning and development teams need to be self-confident enough to trust different practices and individual coaches. The principle aim of organisations using these approaches is to be responsive to specific needs and preferences within the organisation.

Structure and approach

Typically, coaching emerges in various parts of the organisation, often in different ways, for different purposes and with varied levels of success because of differences in experience and localised practice. Structure is allowed to stay organic and decentralised to enable local differences to be met more effectively. Sometimes a light-touch structure develops, usually from an emerging need, for example an informal network of internal coaches, to develop professional practice and skills, for supervision purposes or to share common issues in the organisation. Informal and personal networks prevail. Any allocation of coaches by learning and development/HR is done using the same informal and personal approach.

Organic approaches may be low-key but may also have a great deal of informal power in the organisation due to close coaching relationships and expertise of coaches.

Nature of coaching service provided

Coaches may be internal, external or both, with boundaries between them being less important. The emergent approach works well when coaching is interest- or need-driven rather than prescribed, so those who are coached have asked for coaching, which may well improve results for individuals and the organisation.

Tailored middle ground

The tailored middle ground seeks to find a combined approach for coaching, which combines aspects of the centralised control and organic approaches. This approach seems to emerge because a blend of the first two approaches is more palatable to the organisation generally and to senior management and/or learning and development teams specifically. The aim in deploying the tailored middle-ground approach is to provide some consistency in service, while responding to specific organisational context or needs.

Aspects of the other approaches are combined in a number of different ways including: starting formally and then allowing interest to continue the process further; bringing together many organic activities to develop a coherent training programme and centralised service or enabling both formal and emergent processes to live alongside each other.

There are many possible combinations of pieces to borrow from the other approaches including: starting formally and then allowing interest to continue the process further; bringing together many organic pieces to develop a coherent training programme and centralised service or enabling both formal and emergent processes to live alongside each other. The exact combination will be unique to each organisation and may at times tend towards a more centralised or organic model only to switch again later as they learn from the development process in their organisation.

In the tailored middle-ground approach, often internal and external coaches are used. The numbers and quality of each may vary over time. The particular interest of the guiding learning and development people may be the most significant factor.

This combination of approaches works well in organisations that are able to adapt to their changing circumstances or as interest in coaching and coaching capability develops.

Most organisations seem to fit this pattern, but there are still many variations. For example, centralised development processes for internal coaches, but local, personal relationships prevail on choice of coaches; internal and external coaches are brought together for supervision and formal development of the coaching model, but otherwise operate locally.

One size clearly doesn't fit all in relation to organising coaching services. What's important is having a clear understanding of the organisational context for coaching, then establishing enabling processes that are congruent with that understanding and intent.

Coaching in practice: case studies

Coaching in practice: the coaching offer within M&G

M&G is the third largest fund manager and one of the longest-established retail fund managers in the UK. It is the investment arm of Prudential plc, with £165 billion under management and offices in the UK, Europe and South Africa. M&G is one of the most respected fund management groups in Europe, with equities teams specialising in UK and European stocks for retail, institutional and internal funds, supported by dedicated research and retaining a market-leading position in global equities. It has the largest fixed-income team in the City, together with industry-leading teams in a number of specialised financial areas. M&G Group also has leading property investment groups, PruPIM and a highly successful hedge fund business.

Talent-led business

M&G has developed its coaching approach as a fundamental part of its talent management strategy. As a fund management house, it is a 'talent-led business' in which its highest-profile players' performance is scrutinised on a regular basis by the fund league tables and the financial press. In this industry, the flows of funds often follow individuals, who can attain very high-profile status but can just as quickly lose this prestige, and the resulting outflow of investment money can quickly bring long-term damage to the business.

At M&G, its response has been to create tailored interventions that respond to individual needs and situations, of which coaching is a key part. However, there is also a strong culture of teamworking and acknowledgement. Even the most individually talented fund managers need to be supported by an excellent team of analysts, technicians, marketeers, distribution and functional specialists and management in order to perform in the medium and long term.

M&G's approach is investment-led. Development of individuals and teams is done in the context of the objectives of the individual businesses within M&G and the overall corporate benefit of strengthening investment culture and sustaining performance.

Coaching as part of talent development

The training and development team has created the coaching strategy by working with the different businesses separately to develop solutions to specific talent, potential, individual and team issues. There is no corporate 'manifesto' or policy that the individual businesses must adhere to. But there are some common principles combined with close working relationships built up over several years. The training and development team works directly with individuals, line managers and the HR team to determine development needs on an ongoing basis. They provide an internal coaching team of just two or three individuals who focus on initial development diagnosis using their professional experience and psychometric diagnostics.

(continued)

Coaching in practice: the coaching offer within M&G (continued)

Development needs can range from personal qualities and style to transition support and developing technical skills. From this initial series of conversations, the internal coaching team recommends some options, which may include training, shadowing, new roles to develop skills or experience, mentoring or coaching. The internal coaches have various levels of experience and some of the more junior situations enable those with less experience to develop their own coaching style and capability. The coaching process is roughly 15–20% of their role in training and development.

Internal mentors as informal ‘coaches’

At M&G, they believe that, for many of the technical capabilities such as fund management, developing talent beyond a certain level of knowledge and skills means working with ‘experts’ and role models or exemplars. This is understood to be the only real way to transfer such unique qualities in order to develop potential into real capability (‘almost by osmosis’). But such exceptional mentors are rare.

Apart from technical skills and knowledge, there’s often much to be gained from hands-on coaching, learning the ‘arts’ of the job from acknowledged talents in their field. In other situations an external coach may be suggested, for example when no appropriate internal resource is available or when an external view or capability can bring something to the organisation that’s not available internally. Very occasionally, this work is remedial, but it’s more often an investment in key people.

External coaches are frequently used to support people seen to have potential and placed in new roles to stretch and develop their capabilities – sometimes in ‘crucible’ roles where the stakes are high. This is, firstly, to support them in their successful transitioning into the new role and, secondly, to help boost them up to the ‘inflexion point’ in their new role when they’re able to operate well on their own. In this instance, coaching can be a very important intervention. The initial matching and then the development of a close working relationship between the coach and coachee, as well as working with others in the line, team and business, are critical to success.

An eclectic group of external coaches

The external coaches are an eclectic group of very experienced coaches with a variety of skills, background and expertise. They include professional or technical coaches, who have themselves had similar roles such as industry specialists, and others who are more psychologically oriented, or outcome-focused. Each one has their own particular style and approach.

They all share depth of experience as coaches and are trusted to work with individuals or teams as a result of their relationship with the training and development team. They’re not ‘managed’ as a single group in a formal way but are selected against a very high standard.

The critical intervention is the three- or four-cornered contract between the coach, coachee, training and development/HR person and the line manager or mentor that defines the purpose and objectives for the coaching contract. This is often discussed in an open way between all parties so that everyone is clear about the contract and the role each person plays in supporting the coachee. Sometimes the briefing is more sensitive and therefore isn’t discussed openly among the group, but the coach will always have a clear set of needs and objectives to respond to without having any working methods prescribed.

The training and development expertise in the selection process is done according to a combination of ‘feel’ and proven track record, providing a ‘matchmaking service’ between the coach and the coachee

Coaching in practice: the coaching offer within M&G (continued)

that meets both the overt and the more subtle needs that have been identified. This 'matching' skill is highly valued but ultimately the coachee chooses the coach. This ensures ownership of the coaching relationship by the coachee – and it seems rare that the relationships don't work.

Valuing difference in coaches

The coach's capability with any specific coachee is evaluated but, most importantly, its impact is understood from conversations with the coachee, those working with the coachee and the coach themselves, and ultimately the business results. Due to the close relationships within the business, changes are often evident through anecdotal evidence and performance in the role, and progress is checked against clearly defined outcomes.

One rationale for this eclectic and highly personalised approach is that the different businesses that make up M&G vary in their maturity, longevity and the style of the key people running them, so the HR team and their coaches need to be well briefed and adaptable to each business's circumstances. The eventual goal is improved business performance in coachees and, to that end, coaching is a highly tailored and close way to work with significant individuals for specific periods.

The coaching relationship is finite in that, although a time limit isn't necessarily fixed at the beginning, the relationship will finish once the coach and coachee acknowledge that the objectives have been reached, along with any others that have emerged as important in the process. This is a highly mature approach in which the coach is trusted to advise the HR team when the work is done. Sometimes another coach with a distinct approach will be recommended once the objectives set for the initial coaching have been met, for example when moving from business capability objectives to developing personal style.

Corporate commitment to people investment is crucial

M&G prides itself on investing heavily in the development of its people and guarding closely the team-oriented and high-loyalty culture it has developed. Its prioritising of talent development at executive board level down means that its commitment to building its business around its people, rather than just buying them in, has real meaning.

Consequently, in the market for talent, M&G enjoys a reputation for investing in people and providing multiple opportunities throughout their career, with employees often moving to very different parts of the organisation, having the chance to stay within the same organisation but having several careers.

Having such a group of eclectic, but consistently high-quality, coaches is a conscious philosophy to create more options and be more responsive to needs within the organisation. It helps to provide a lot of diversity that supports M&G by bringing in a variety of external perspectives and counters the potential impact of developing internal talent in too introspective a way.

Many people who have been the beneficiaries of this investment in them through coaching are strong advocates of M&G and the support they received for their careers. It seems to have created loyalty for the organisation and developed potential talent into mature and capable people helping to deliver investment and business results.

Career coaching at Orange

Orange is part of the France Telecom Group and offers mobile, fixed-line, Internet and TV services to home and business customers. Orange was named best mobile operator at the World Communication Awards in 2006 and employs 13,000 people in the UK.

In the UK, Orange has undertaken a number of initiatives intended to develop a culture of coaching within the organisation. A core programme is the Career Coaching Programme, developed and co-ordinated by Sarah Kenyon, Career Development Specialist and a member of the Orange Talent Team. The programme is running for the first time this year and draws on a pool of internal coaches.

Overall objectives of the programme

France Telecom, Orange UK's parent company, has an overarching people development strategy in support of its business strategy. The aim of the Orange UK Career Coaching Programme is to support this strategy by:

- exciting employees about their career planning, bringing energy and commitment into their approach to working at Orange by providing career development opportunities to all employees
- encouraging and supporting employees to proactively manage their own careers
- providing further development opportunities for employees who become internal career coaches.

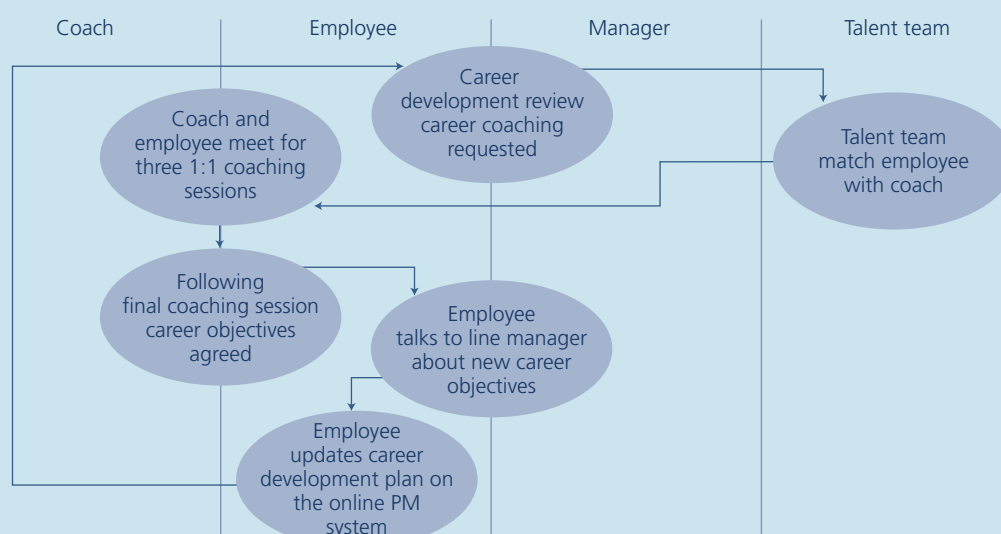
Integration with wider learning and development activities

Employees at Orange are encouraged to complete a Career Development Plan through the online performance management system. This is reviewed twice a year with the line manager. Participants in the Career Coaching Programme are asked to meet with their line manager after the career coaching sessions to discuss outcomes and agree development objectives to add to the career development plan.

Structure of the coaching offer

Employees nominate themselves to join the programme by completing an application form, which is subsequently signed by their line manager. Participants in the programme have three one-and-a-half-hour sessions with an internal career coach. Figure 1 illustrates the process.

Figure 1: Coaching process at Orange UK



Career coaching at Orange

Selecting and developing coaches

Staff can self-nominate to become a career coach, but must gain the agreement of their line manager. They complete an application form and then go through a telephone assessment process with the talent team. Their line manager is asked to indicate on the application form what the applicant would bring to the career coaching process. So far, while coachees have been from all levels in the organisation, from junior to senior management, most applications to be coaches have been from junior to middle managers who are not necessarily managers of people themselves. If selected, potential career coaches attend a two-day workshop run by the Business Coaching Foundation using coaching tools with a career focus.

Once up and running, career coaches are able to join the network of Orange career coaches and have the opportunity to share learning through twice-yearly peer-to-peer support sessions organised by the talent team, as well as being given informal support throughout the year.

Sarah calls each coach after their first session with a coachee to review the session. After the third session, she asks the coachee for feedback on the programme, the coach and the process.

Allocating coaches

Each of the 60 trained coaches (the number is growing) has two coachees, equating to three to four hours of coaching per month. Matching of coaches to coachees is undertaken on the basis of level in the organisation (looking to match more senior coachees with more senior coaches), directorate (the aim is to ensure that coach and coachee are in different directorates to aid relationship-building across the organisation) and location.

Evaluating the programme

The programme is evaluated in a number of ways. Coach and coachee review each session and provide feedback to the career development specialist. As the programme develops, Sarah plans to use the network of career coaches to provide feedback on the programme and to gain ideas for its further development. She also plans to implement a broader evaluation process later this year using recent research such as the KPMG white paper on evaluation of coaching.

Reflection on the programme: what works well and less well

The career coaching tools, which were originally based on the Orange career self-help workbooks and the Business Coaching Foundation are very well received. Another factor is the high level of commitment to the development of others by the internal career coaches. Sarah reflects: 'All of the internal coaches are totally enthusiastic and this is evident from the glowing feedback we're receiving from the coachees as they come to the end of their sessions.'

But it can be hard to predict how much interest is likely to emerge at a particular location and therefore how many coaches should be trained in each area. So far, though, Sarah believes that they've managed to get the balance right.

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