

The third 'generation' of workplace coaching: creating a culture of quality conversations (Anthony M. Grant, Coaching Psychology Unit, School of Psychology, University of Sydney, Australia)

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Aim of study (from Abstract)

Workplace coaching is increasingly used in organizations. Workplace coaching is conducted internally within an organization for the purpose of helping employees, managers and leaders attain work-related goals. Workplace coaching methodologies have evolved overtime. The first 'generation' (1990s) focused on performance management. A hallmark of the second-'generation' (2000s) approach is structured step-by-step proprietary 'Leader as Coach' performance-focused coach training programs. Such mechanistic approaches do not meet the challenges of the contemporary organizational context where uncertainty and rapid change are the norm. This paper describes the third-'generation' approach to workplace coaching that is increasingly apparent in the workplace. This is an approach that explicitly focuses on enhancing both the performance *and* the well-being of individuals and organizations in ways that are sustainable and personally meaningful. A case study example of how to integrate 'Leader as Coach' programs into an organization is presented. This developmental approach aims to create the culture of quality conversations needed for the challenges faced by contemporary organizations.

Background

Workplace coaching, simply said, is coaching in a workplace. It is "internal" (the focus of this article) when managers and leaders provide formal (i.e. "sit-down") or informal (i.e. "on-the-run") coaching to their employees and peers or "external" when coaches are hired to provide formal coaching to the organization.

The origins of coaching in organizations can be traced in the 1950s, but, according to the author, its real foundations were laid by the **Human Potential Movement** of the 1960s, which was based on the concept that if humans can develop their potential and experience happiness, creativity and fulfillment they can assist others to do the same and therefore benefit society at large. Workplace coaching went on primarily as external coaching in group-based activities with mixed results until the 1980s, when "Leader as Coach" approaches began to appear as managers were trained to be internal coaches.

The 1990s were characterized by the idealization of the ruthlessly competitive Jack Welch (chairman and CEO of General Electric for about 20 years) style of management. Widely spread, even if not universal, this style led to the **first generation of workplace coaching** where managers were taught to focus on "difficult" lower performance employees (Graham, Wedman, & Garvin-Kester, 1993). This approach was good for short-term profitability but produced a culture of fear, anxiety and burn out (O'Boyle, 1998). Its limitations began later to appear (Wheatley, 1997) and concepts like **Emotional Intelligence** (Goleman, 1998) started to gain influence to recognize the need to produce engaged and self-aware managers with good social and communication skills.

The **second generation of workplace coaching** emerged in early 2000s from the need to recruit and retain talented employees from an increasingly competitive employment environment. Consultants and companies offered proprietary "Leader as Coach" training programs that were successful in formal executive coaching, but while their highly jargonized language and complex models tended to create small "in-groups" of followers and believers they also created antagonizing "out-groups" of less than enthusiastic employees who resented being told how to think and rejected a language perceived as stranger to the organization. In all, this approach failed to instigate and maintain changes in the culture of the organization.

Acknowledging this situation, from 2010 on, organizations shifted their focus on "attraction not coercion" as **third generation workplace coaching**. Its model is moving from a rigid time-bound performance review towards a more flexible conversation (Adler et al., 2016) better integrated with the

organization's language, brand, culture and values. Nevertheless, many organizations approaches are still mainly directed to enhance performance.

Well-being Perspective

Well-being is a state of equilibrium in terms of life satisfaction (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders, 2012). "It is achieved when the resources available to an individual are sufficient to deal with the challenges being faced". Its importance in the workplace and its relation to business outcomes is well recognized (Harter, Schmidt, & Keys, 2003). Solely focusing on performance runs the risk of pushing people towards distress and dysfunction. Thus the need to direct the **third generation workplace coaching** on the development and **well-being** of leaders, managers and employees *as well as* on performance-enhancing coaching skills, which cannot be done without recognizing and understanding the problems associated with first and second generations approaches. Within this perspective organizations are shifting from the annual performances review towards more frequent performance-oriented conversations while adopting models of greater coaching agility.

Case Study

The Commonwealth Bank of Australia, an organization with over 52,000 employees, before 2012 used a diverse range of propriety coaching models that led to confusion and ineffective coaching. Senior leadership then decided to create a specific CBA model based on third generation principles and **Solution Focused Cognitive-Behavior** (a goal directed approach focused on the present and the future). The model included the organization core values such as collaboration, accountability and its language as well as a strong emphasis on well-being principles. As at August 2016 over 3000 employees went through the program that was rated highly successful.

Key Findings

- Unpleasant experiences have a far stronger impact than good ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001); third generation approach may have the potential to minimize disagreeable emotions, anxiety and uncertainty associated with change
- A positive coaching impact on individuals in organizations may start a "coaching ripple effect" and promote systemic changes (O'Connor & Canavagh, 2013)

Conclusions

- Second generation workplace coaching is no longer enough to face the challenges of an organization
- Workplace coaching training needs to focus on well-being as well as on performance

Limitation

- Not strictly a research study; only one case study is reported; more supportive evidence on the advantages of third generation coaching might have reinforced its supposed effectiveness
- Although it appears almost obvious that well-being cannot be separated from performance, there is little reference on how to measure it in relation to the performance and how to achieve it in the workplace

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