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**Evaluating the impact of coaching skills training on  
individual and corporate behaviour**

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**Evaluating the impact of coaching skills training on individual and corporate  
behaviour**

**Developing coaching skills for organisational change**

## **Evaluating the impact of Developing coaching skills training on individual and corporate behaviour for organisational change**

### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose**

This paper examines the impact of a training intervention designed to develop and encourage the use of coaching skills in a small arts-based organisation, and assesses the factors that appear to have influenced this impact.

#### **Design/methodology/approach**

The programme, its effects, and factors that influenced its impact, were assessed through ongoing feedback and evaluation, and through information gathered in a focus group and in one-to-one interviews with participants at the conclusion of the programme.

#### **Findings**

The programme had individual and organisational benefits, including improved skills in communication and problem solving, and a better understanding of a range of problems affecting the organisation. Factors enabling these benefits included participation of senior managers in the programme, and coaching practice that focused on real workplace issues. Factors limiting these benefits included a lack of a clear statement about the purpose of the programme.

#### **Research limitations**

This relates to a programme within a single organisation, and the findings may not be generalisable.

#### **Practical implications**

Through training individuals in coaching skills it is possible to improve the skills needed for cooperative working and joint problem solving. A corporate training programme in coaching skills can surface a range of organisational problems, and enable progress to be made in tackling them.

#### **Originality/value**

There is little empirical research evaluating the impact of training in coaching skills. This paper identifies how such training can develop leadership skills, and indicates practical factors that may enhance or limit the impact of the training.

**Keywords:** Coaching skills, development, change

**Evaluating the impact of coaching skills training on individual and corporate behaviour**

~~**Developing coaching skills for organisational change**~~

**Introduction**

This paper concerns the evaluation of a training programme designed to help individuals within an arts-based organisation to develop coaching skills. The research question is: what was the impact of an intervention designed to develop and encourage the use of coaching skills in a small organisation, and what factors appear to have influenced this impact?

Whilst there are many published studies on the benefits to organisations of internal coaches and managers as coaches, which often include calls for training in coaching skills, there is little published literature on the evaluation of coaching skills training. (Milner *et al.* 2018, p.190) note: '[...] there is a paucity of research in regard to the training and support of managerial coaches.' This paper aims to make a contribution to filling this research gap.

The executive team of a regional arts-based organisation decided to enrol its management and senior professional staff on a training programme to develop their coaching skills.

The decision was taken after a period of major reorganisation, which included a large-scale project to renovate and partially rebuild the organisation's premises. In addition to this building project, which signified potential growth and expansion, the organisation had also experienced – in common with many other UK arts-based enterprises at this time - threats to its funding streams, resulting in some cut-backs, uncertainty about future security, and prompting enhanced marketing and sales activities. One senior manager described the staff at this time as feeling 'stretched and strained'.

Previously the organisation had engaged with Investors in People as a means of supporting and developing staff. Now the executive team looked for an alternative approach to development and empowerment, and the decision was taken to enrol 25 management and professional staff – including the CEO and other senior managers -

on a coaching skills [training](#) programme. The organisation was able to attract funding from the Local Economic Partnership to cover some of the course fees.

The programme was provided by a local university. It was based on one module of a postgraduate certificate. Participants met in two groups for five one-day workshops over the course of eight months, with the express expectation that they would also undertake learning activities between the workshops, including practising their coaching skills with each other, and observing, reflecting, and reading.

Participants on the programme undertook a diverse range of functions within the organisation, including marketing, customer service, artistic and production activities, catering, finance, and outreach to schools and colleges. The total numbers employed by the organisation fluctuated, with many part-time and seasonal staff, but there was a regular core of about 60 full time employees: the 25 participants enrolled on the programme, therefore, represented a sizeable proportion of the whole organisation.

This paper provides an account of the programme and an evaluation of its effects on the individuals who took part, and on the organisation as a whole. First, there is a brief review of literature on coaching practices and approaches, [and on coaching skills training](#), and – as the coaching skills programme was applied as means of bringing about behavioural change in the organisation – there is a brief review of relevant [ideas](#) literature on organisational change.

### **Coaching practices, [coaching training](#), and [support for organisational change](#)**

Coaching practice includes a range of different approaches, styles and techniques (Cox *et al.*, 2014). However, most definitions of coaching emphasise that it concerns one person helping another (or more than one other) to learn and develop (e.g. Connor and Pokora, 2017; Rogers, 2012). This learning and development may have a particular focus on improving performance, on acquiring or refining particular skills, or on longer term personal development (Grant and Hartley, 2013), or it may concern supporting the person being coached to make decisions, and thus to develop their decision-making ability (Starr, 2008; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002).

~~Whilst some sports coaches may appear to behave in a directive, instructional manner,~~ ~~There is an emphasis in organisational coaching literature on non-directive behaviour, which both supports and challenges the person being coached (Connor~~

and Pokora, 2017; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002) and encourages that person to reflect (Gallwey, 1974) and to achieve their potential (Rogers, 2012). Non-directive coaching practice thus emphasises listening, dialogue, questioning and reflection.

In recent years there has been an increase in UK companies developing internal coaching schemes (Ridler, 2016) where some staff are trained in coaching skills and techniques, and are available to coach employees in other parts of the business. These internal coaches can be very effective in achieving positive organisational outcomes and individual results (Jones *et al.*, 2016).

As well as their application in formal coaching relationships, coaching skills and approaches can be used by line managers to empower and support individual staff (Grant and Hartley, 2013; Goleman *et al.*, 2001; Ladyshevsky, 2010; McCarthy and Milner, 2013). and to enable and develop teams (Hackman and Wageman, 2005; Rapp *et al.*, 2016). Grant and Hartley (2013) suggest that coaching practice in the workplace may take place on a spectrum from formal, structured coaching at one end, to 'informal, on-the-run workplace coaching at the other' (p105) and that most of the coaching that managers carry out is of the latter kind.

There are affinities between line managers using non-directive coaching approaches to help their team members to make decisions and the practice of participative styles of leadership (McCarthy and Milner, 2013). When a team member approaches the line manager with a problem or decision, the line manager may use a coaching approach to help the team member analyse the situation and make the decision—rather than telling them the course of action they should take (Starr, 2008). The use of coaching skills and techniques can enable the line manager to steer the conversation and support the team member to make the decision. Arguably there are strong affinities between using these coaching approaches and the practice of distributed leadership (Hawkins, 2012) either where the line manager chooses to involve others in leadership responsibilities (Mumford *et al.*, 2012) or where leadership authority is naturally dispersed, and individuals need to liaise with and cooperate with one another in order to create meaningful collective actions (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011).

Where coaching within an organisation becomes so widespread that 'people coach each other all the time as a natural part of meetings, reviews and one-to-one

discussions of all kinds' (Hardingham *et al.*, 2004: 184, cited in Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014) researchers and practitioners talk of the development of a 'coaching culture' (Clutterbuck *et al.*, 2016; Hawkins, 2012).

Hawkins (2012: 21) writes:

*A coaching culture exists in an organization when a coaching approach is a key aspect of how the leaders, managers and staff engage and develop all their people and engage their stakeholders, in ways that create increased individual, team and organization performance and shared value for all stakeholders.*

The skilful application of coaching approaches, it is argued, can thus improve communication skills, problem solving skills, and team working skills that are needed in a range of work situations.

As Milner *et al.* (2018) have noted there is little published literature evaluating coaching skills training. Milner *et al.* (2018) themselves surveyed training and support available to managers as coaches in Australia but did not evaluate particular training programmes.

Research by Grant (2007) focussed more on a comparison of the effectiveness of different delivery models of coaching skills training courses, although in later work he studied changes in coaching behaviours following a leadership development course (Grant 2010). Hunt and Weintraub (2004) assessed an educational intervention designed to develop the coaching skills of MBA students, while McCarthy (2010) evaluated a Master's level programme in coaching skills, and Lawrence (2015) evaluated coaching skills workshops. In all of these studies, self-reporting was used as the main method of evaluation of the courses, through questionnaires.

The introduction of coaching approaches into an organisation is not necessarily straightforward. Change theorists talk of 'planned' and 'emergent' change. Planned organisational changes are those where the initiators of the change have a clear idea of the end state they expect to achieve, and a plan for how to achieve it; emergent changes are those where the end state is not clear, or where a variety of adjustments and accommodations combine to produce a change (Burnes, 2004). Logically, any particular change can be a mix of planned and emergent activity.



~~A complementary perspective on change concerns Theory E and Theory O changes (Beer and Nohria, 2000). In this case, the organisation had been through a series of top-down changes, focusing on structures and systems, and improving economic performance (Theory E changes). Applying coaching skills, and using coaching approaches more frequently, was a behavioural (Theory O) change that required more participation and contribution on the part of those enrolled on the programme.~~

~~Concerning participation and contribution, m~~ Many change theories emphasise the need to gain the understanding and cooperation of those who will be affected by the change, particularly those whose actions are needed in order to make the change successful (Hayes, 2014). ~~Applying coaching skills, and using coaching approaches more frequently, was a behavioural change that required more participation and contribution on the part of those enrolled on the programme.~~ Theories that treat the leadership of change as manoeuvring through a series of stages emphasise the need to prepare stakeholders for the prospect of imminent change (Lewin, 1951; Kotter, 1996; Hayes, 2014). Engaging these stakeholders at an early ~~point in the change stage~~ has also been found to be an influential factor in sustaining behavioural change (Buchanan *et al.*, 2007).

~~To summarise: literature identifies a range of skills that can be used in non-directional organisation coaching. Such skills can be used by line managers in informal coaching situations, and in circumstances where leadership responsibilities are dispersed between a number of people. Whilst studies indicate that coaching practices can be effective for organisations and individuals, there is very little published research evaluating programmes providing training in coaching skills. As the introduction of a coaching skills training programme into an organisation represents a type of change that requires the cooperation of those enrolled on it, there is a value in considering ideas from literature on organisational change concerning gaining the support of stakeholders.~~

### **The programme**

The five one-day workshops in the programme introduced key ideas and techniques relating to coaching, and allocated time to discussion, participation and practice sessions. The 25 participants were divided into two groups, and each workshop was

delivered to each group. Some participants moved between the two groups as diary and scheduling issues dictated.

Ideas and techniques introduced in the workshops included beautiful listening (Kline, 1999), support and challenge (Connor and Pokora, 2017), contracting (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005), questioning, paraphrasing and mirroring (Rogers, 2012; Starr, 2016), the GROW model (Whitmore, 1992; van Nieuwerburgh, 2014), the three stage model (Egan, 2009; Connor and Pokora, 2017), limiting assumptions (Kline, 1999; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002), reframing (Biswas-Diener, 2010), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), reflection for learning and development (Gibbs, 1988; Thompson and Thompson, 2008), action planning (Grant, 2013); positive psychology approaches to coaching (Boniwell *et al.*, 2014; Driver, 2011), brief coaching (Iveson *et al.*, 2012), and team coaching (Hackman and Wageman, 2005; Hawkins, 2014).

In the practice sessions in the workshops, participants were asked to coach one another in twos and threes, [taking turns as coach, coachee and observer](#). In most of these sessions, participants were asked to discuss real issues as opposed to inventing issues for role play activity. It was emphasised that the issues did not need to be large or important, but that they should be real for the participant at the time. Ground rules were developed and agreed by participants at the beginning of the programme, and these included agreements about confidentiality and mutual respect.

It was made clear by the programme designers [and by senior managers](#) that participants would be expected to undertake some practice in coaching skills and techniques between workshops, in order to develop their skills: a design described as a 'spaced learning approach' by Grant (2007, p.257). However, this was raised as a difficult issue by several participants from an early stage, citing lack of time at work to arrange for coaching conversations.

The programme was originally scheduled to run over six months, but this included the busiest period of the year for the organisation; the executive team soon asked for dates to be re-scheduled, and the programme was extended [to run](#) over eight months. The original timing was partly influenced by the availability of funding during the chosen time period.

Of the 25 staff members enrolled, 19 attended four or all five of the workshop meetings. Participants were given the option of undertaking the written assignment attached to the module, and gaining academic credits, and seven people did so. Three of the people enrolled on the programme left the organisation during the eight months, and three more left shortly after the end of the programme.

## Methodology

The research sought to understand perceptions of the impact of the coaching skills programme, on individuals and on the organisation as a whole, and to identify the factors that appeared to have influenced this impact. This type of research enquiry is a suitable subject for a case study (Yin, 2014). The case that is researched is not presented as representative of all such cases, but findings may indicate phenomena which might be found in other settings (Yin, 2014, p. 21). The research approach in this study was interpretivist (Bryman, 2016), as it sought the perceptions of the participants who had undertaken the training.

An established approach to evaluating training is the Kirkpatrick (1994) model of four levels – reaction, increase in knowledge, increase in skilled behaviour, and organisational impact. Information was gathered on all four levels, through feedback sheets (reactions), through the assignments submitted by those who chose to do so (knowledge and skills), and through a focus group and semi-structured interviews (skills and organisational impact). This paper is mainly concerned with findings derived from the focus group and interviews.

The effects of the programme on individuals and on the organisation were assessed through the perceptions of the participants, in common with the limited number of published studies evaluating coaching training programmes. Whereas Grant (2007, 2010), Hunt and Weintraub (2004) and McCarthy (2010) used surveys to gather participant feedback, in this study a focus group and individual interviews were used.

Participants were asked to reflect and comment on the programme and its emerging outcomes throughout the eight months. They also evaluated the programme at the half-way point, through a questionnaire completed anonymously. Over 75% of returned evaluations rated all aspect of the programme as 'very good'. A difficulty raised by several evaluations, however, was lack of time between outside workshop meetings to practise (and thus develop) the coaching skills.

To gather perceptions of the value of the programme for individuals and for the organisation, a focus group of participants was organised two months after the final workshop. All programme participants [still within the organisation \(19\)](#) were invited to attend: seven did so, and spent three hours discussing the programme. All participants who had not attended the focus group were invited to take part in a confidential one-to-one interview to discuss their evaluation of the programme, and six agreed to be interviewed. [Nineteen participants were thus invited to take part in this post-programme evaluation, and 13 accepted the invitation.](#) With the agreement of the organisation, research ethics approval was sought and obtained from the university with which the authors are associated, prior to the focus group and the interviews. Research consent was obtained from all participants in the focus group and the interviews.

[A focus group can be used as a means of engaging respondents in contributing their perceptions of a phenomenon they have experienced in common, and comparing views and ideas \(Gray, 2014\).](#)

In the focus group, participants were [first](#) asked to note individually their perceptions of positive and negative impacts of the programme, for individuals and for the organisation, and were also asked about what else they thought could be done to have a positive impact. This part of the focus group generated 64 separate notes; these were then analysed and grouped [into themes](#) by focus group members, and [then key themes were identified and discussed.](#) The researchers made use of all of this information – notes of individual perceptions and summaries of the analyses by group members, and the key themes that were identified - [and carried out a further thematic analysis of the data \(Braun and Clarke, 2013\).](#) This approach generated a large amount of data, and enabled the researchers not only to analyse points of agreement between the group members, which can be influenced by dominant group members, but also the anonymous individual notes written at the outset of the meeting.

Individual interviewees were also asked about positive and negative impacts of the programme, for individuals and for the organisation, and what else they thought could be done. [A semi-structured interview approach was used, as a suitable method to explore different perceptions \(Bryman, 2016\).](#) The average length of the interviews

was 38 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

The responses from the focus group and the interviews indicated that participants saw a number of positive impacts, and also they identified factors that limited or restrained the positive effects.

Aggregated feedback was shared with the organisation in an evaluation report on the programme, which was accepted by management and reported to the board of directors.

## Findings and discussion

### *Positive impacts: individuals*

Participants identified a number of personal benefits, including a growth in their skills – of listening and asking better questions – and of feeling more self-confident and feeling more valued by the organisation:

‘I feel that I am a better listener’

‘The beautiful listening skills learned have been very powerful for both coach and coachee’

‘I am asking better questions’

‘I feel that the course has empowered me’

One interviewee said that her growth in skills made her feel ‘more like a leader’, another that her participative leadership style had been validated by the programme.

Another said: ‘I feel better equipped to support my team’. A comment in the focus group that attracted the endorsement of other members was: ‘[The course] allowed members of our organisation to find skills they didn’t know they had, skills they can use for self and professional development’.

One head of department said Another reflected: ‘I think I’m maybe just that bit slightly more aware and I’m [more often] thinking whether that thing that is being asked of me is something that I can coach someone through [...] I definitely analyse that more often.’

These skills are central to coaching and it is not surprising that participants reported improvement. The skills were used mainly in contexts other than formal coaching situations – in day to day interactions, in managing staff, in working with colleagues and in teamworking – in other words in situations that Grant and Hartley (2013: 105) have called ‘informal, on-the-run workplace coaching’, but that many managers and professionals would probably simply call working cooperatively.

~~Some p~~ Participants identified benefits they had experienced in tackling work issues and problems more effectively, through talking them through with a fellow participant in a coaching way. One said: ‘it had a big effect. I got to the bottom of some really big problems, and dealt with them so, like, it really worked on me just even doing the practising...’

~~A number of p~~ Participants thought they had improved their understanding of the organisation, by being able to spend time on the programme with people from other departments. Several thought that they had developed better communication and better relationships with other members of the programme, across different departments. *For one, a benefit was that the course: ‘Enabled us to work with other staff members that we wouldn’t necessarily work with on a daily (or ever) basis’.*

#### *Positive impacts: the organisation*

Participants identified better communication, and better understanding, across the organisation as a benefit of the programme. As one interviewee put it: ‘I think it’s really helped our relationships, inter-department relationships, a lot of that’s because we’ve got a greater understanding of each other’s pressures.’ *A focus group member commented: ‘Through the course it was brought to our attention that there needed to be better communication between departments. This has begun to improve’. Another commented: ‘We were able to see that between departments we had shared issues and could begin working towards fixing them’.*

An interviewee ~~other~~ said: ‘I think that everybody started talking to each other. And I think that we were talking to people in departments that we don’t normally talk to [...] I don’t think we realised how other people felt. You could tell that there were particular people [...] who were so struggling with their workloads [...] A lot of that was coming to the surface as we practised and talked...’



Several participants thought that the workshops gave them more space to talk to each other than they had in the workplace, and allowed more thinking and reflection. One interviewee appreciated being able to have 'a deeper conversation' with colleagues. The focus on real issues in coaching practice in the workshops undoubtedly helped this: '[...] opportunity to talk about real issues within sessions was useful and I respected that people opened up and were open to talk about real-life problems'.

Some participants had noticed that their colleagues on the programme were listening more effectively in meetings at work, and thus encouraging communication:

'Maybe we're all taking a little more care when we're speaking to one another, and communicating to each other across the organisation.'

'There have been moments when I've thought we've been listening to each other more as a team...'

'[...] there were definitely instances where people that were on the course were [...] listening rather than everyone talking over each other'.

~~The possibility of creating a bank of internal coaches from among the participants was discussed a number of times during the programme, but it was not taken further.~~

The programme appeared to surface a number of issues about the organisation, and led to a range of proposals about what might be done to improve communication and engagement. In this way, the programme provided a space for people to say things that might not otherwise have been spoken, and this led to some airing of frustrations, which could then begin to be addressed. One interviewee said: 'People were coming up with things that perhaps they'd been holding on to for quite some time.' Sometimes these conversations were quite heated. As one interviewee said: 'I think that [...] the management have had to deal with a lot of flak all at once from a large number of people [...] I found it quite uncomfortable when everyone would turn on whoever it was - the most senior manager in the room...'

As the programme was intended to have a positive impact on the organisation (as well as on individuals) it naturally gave rise to discussions about what improvements to practices and to systems could be undertaken.

One interviewee reflected: 'In terms of positives, I do think it opened up some cans of worms – which were healthy to open up and discuss [such as] evaluation meetings about projects that we do, and more regular network [meetings] across the organisation which had fallen by the wayside were reinstituted, so people started to do what they knew was valuable in the past, but that for various reasons they had chosen not to continue to do'. Another said: 'It introduced a forum for debate across departments, which is positive'.

The appraisal system was modified, with some of the changes clearly influenced by coaching approaches and techniques. Participants thought that, on the whole, this had been effective. One said that staff being appraised appeared to feel listened to, another said that the changes placed more of an emphasis on staff welfare – which she welcomed.

### *Enabling factors*

Drawing on material from the focus group, the interviews, and the mid-programme ongoing evaluations of the programme, the following factors appeared to have a positive influence on the impact of the programme:

- the engagement of senior managers: the chief executive and one other senior manager took part in the programme throughout, as did all the heads of departments (the next level of seniority) sending signals to others about their perceptions of the value of the programme
- the programme content was rated highly by most participants
- the practice sessions within the workshops enabled some development of skills and understanding
- these practice sessions addressed real issues and so surfaced some areas for organisational development
- the programme content and processes were flexible, responsive to perceived needs of participants
- individual engagement of participants varied, but there was a high level of attendance of workshops, and those individuals who undertook more practice in the workplace (and more reading, and in some cases more written work) gained more from the programme



### Limiting factors

Most of the limiting factors that were raised in the focus group and interviews concern matters that were perceived to limit positive impacts on the organisation, but some also limited positive impacts on individuals.

~~Some participants said~~ A common perception was that the intended purpose of the programme had not been clear, and was not explained. Why were they being asked to learn coaching skills? In what settings might they use them?

One senior manager explained in the evaluation interview that she hoped the programme would encourage and enable managers to use a coaching style of leadership more frequently and by so doing would encourage other staff to take more responsibility for decisions, and to help them develop. However, this was not clearly articulated at the start of the programme.

The interviews with the senior managers indicated the notion of coaching being a useful approach had preceded any clear idea of exactly how it might be used. It was only during the programme that ideas developed around how the coaching skills could be used. In that sense, the change was emergent rather than planned (Burnes, 2004).

Some participants expressed frustration about this lack of clarity. One said that the programme 'was presented to us as something that was going to be done. And there was no real explanation of why we were doing the course'. She added that she realised as the programme progressed that it was meant to help the organisation be less hierarchical and more empowered: 'That's probably my biggest frustration with the course, that that wasn't [communicated] up front.'

Some change theories emphasise the importance of gaining the cooperation of stakeholders at the outset of a change process (Hayes, 2014; Buchanan *et al.*, 2007) and some promote the value of propagating a vision of the change to be achieved (Kotter, 1996). Milner *et al.* (2018) argue that when organisations wish their managers to adopt a coaching style of leadership, they should explain why this will be beneficial. It appeared that this could have been done more effectively in this case.

Another limiting factor raised by a number of interviewees was the way in which people were recruited to the programme, and they linked this to what they saw as a negative attitude towards the programme on the part of some participants. One said: 'I just think when it's not a choice and you're just doing this because your manager [tells you to, and for] and no other reason, it's maybe not the best place to start something off. Because all that does is you're getting people turning up with a negative attitude, which like I say makes the people who do want to be there, and do want to get the most out of it, feel awkward about showing that you want to be there.' Another linked this to the lack of a clear statement of purpose at the start of the programme: '[...] so if we had that real articulation about what it was for, and the reasons behind it, you know, that might have helped other people to get their head around it and approach it slightly more positively'. Grant and Hartley (2013) argue that participants in a programme to encourage coaching throughout an organisation should be enrolled through attraction rather than coercion.

However, another one interviewee expressed a different view, suggesting that some difficult and yet productive issues had been raised by reluctant participants: 'I think what would have been interesting would be if it had been an elective thing [but] maybe it would have gone in a different direction, and maybe that wouldn't have been a good thing, 'cos we wouldn't have opened up this whole wasps' nest [and] get some of that stuff aired, which was what we needed to do...'

Throughout the programme a number of participants claimed they did not have enough time to practise the skills and techniques that were introduced (and to some extent practised) in the workshops. The design of the programme had, from the start, explicitly included experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and practice by participants between workshops as a means of developing their skills. The lack of practice time was a strong theme in the mid-programme evaluation. This issue may have been exacerbated by the scheduling of the programme during the busiest time of the year for the organisation. This scheduling was influenced by the availability of funding for the programme. It is clear that practice is necessary in order to develop coaching skills (Grant, 2010; Milner, 2018). Those participants who enthusiastically embraced the concept and made time to engage in coaching conversations between taught sessions developed their skills considerably, and were able to support others in problem solving and decision making, seeing the benefits both for themselves

personally and for their reports, colleagues and the business, as predicted by many researchers in this field (Starr, 2008; Grant and Hartley, 2013; Goleman *et al.*, 2001; Ladyshevsky, 2010).

Some participants expressed a concern that members of staff who had not been enrolled on the programme may have felt left out or excluded, and this could be a factor limiting the impact. One comment in the focus group attracted agreement of all other members: 'Although there's been many staff involved in [the course], little has been done to involve the wider organisation, which could alienate [those who have not been involved]'.

Staff turnover shortly after the end of the programme was also identified as a potential limiting factor on the impact of the training on the organisation. As one respondent commented: 'Lots of change of staff – not sure if training/concept passing on'. Buchanan *et al.*, (2007) have argued that factors limiting the sustainability of a change include departure of staff – with staff turnover, understanding of a change may be lost, and sustainability can be affected in particular if those who initiate a change move elsewhere. In this case, two of the staff who left the organisation were champions of the coaching skills programme, and staff changes included a new senior executive and two new heads of department.

### *Follow up*

Further support from the university was discussed, in the form of short follow up workshops for participants on the programme, short induction workshops for new members of staff, and an ongoing availability of one-to-one support or supervision. Two half-day workshops were provided for new recruits and people who had not been able to attend the original programme, and there were a small number of one-to-one meetings, but no follow up workshops for participants on the programme were arranged. Grant (2010) has argued that the development of coaching skills for workplace application can take around six months: more follow up would have reinforced the learning provided on this programme.

### **Conclusions**

This training programme enabled the development of skills and understanding such that those who agreed to contribute to the evaluation said that they developed their

abilities to listen more effectively and to ask better questions. They felt better able to tackle problems and to help others to do so. They became able to engage in coaching in informal contexts, and better able to work cooperatively with one another in group situations. Those who invested more time and effort between workshops in practising coaching skills and techniques demonstrated development of those capabilities. Individuals also believed they had developed their understanding of the organisation, and had formed better relationships with colleagues in different departments.

There were also organisational benefits, in that better communication enabled more effective dialogue about the continuing changes experienced by the organisation. Those who took part in the evaluation claimed there had been improvements in communication and relationships with others across the organisation. The nature of the programme also surfaced perceptions on ongoing problems in the organisation, and stimulated further changes in systems and processes – including the appraisal system and a number of systems for coordinating work. However, despite several discussions about creating a bank of internal coaches, this option was not taken further, and coaching approaches were not reinforced through follow up meetings and support.

A number of design features appeared to have a positive impact on the benefits of the programme, included the use of time in workshops to practise coaching on real issues, and the active involvement of senior managers in the coaching programme.

The change process was hampered by a lack of a clear statement about the purpose of the training. Ideally this would have been set out at the start of the programme, but a statement could have been made at a later point, as the potential impact of the use of coaching skills and techniques emerged during the training. The change process was also, perhaps, hampered by participants being conscripted onto the programme, and a perception on the part of some participants of a lack of time to practise their coaching skills between workshops.

**This case study demonstrates that** G corporate training in coaching skills and approaches can have a more widespread benefit for an organisation than simply improving the abilities of participants to act as coaches. Such training can enable managers to adopt a more coaching style of leadership with their staff, and it can

also facilitate cooperative team working processes and cross-organisational problem-solving activities. It can create a safe space for participants to raise issues that they perceive to be problems and, by working together, make progress towards addressing them.

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