# RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at
ray@yorksj.ac.uk

# Motivations of internal workplace coaches: what attracts them to the role? A mixed methods study

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**Abstract**

**Purpose**

Internal workplace coaches are employees who, in addition to their main job, volunteer to provide coaching to work colleagues who are not their direct reports. The purpose of this paper is to explore what motivates these individuals to volunteer to be an internal workplace coach, and to continue carrying out the role.

**Methodology**

To explore the experiences of internal coaches a questionnaire was devised and issued; it attracted 484 responses – the largest survey response to date from this population. Following analysis of the questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 20 internal coaches from private, public and not-for-profit UK organisations. The responses were analysed in relation to motivation theory, principally Self-Determination Theory.

**Findings**

Individuals were motivated to volunteer for the role, and to continue to practise as coaches, in the most part to satisfy intrinsic needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy. The research presents rich information about how coaches perceived these needs were satisfied by coaching. In general, there were only moderate or poor levels of support and recognition for individual coaches within their organisation, indicating limited extrinsic motivation.

**Originality**

Many organisations use internal coaches, but there is very little research into what motivates these volunteers.

**Practical implications**

The practical implications are that organisations can draw on the findings from this study to motivate individuals to volunteer to be internal coaches and to continue to act in that role.


**Key words:** Coaching; workplace coaching; internal coaches; motivation; Self-Determination Theory; individual development

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**Introduction**

Recent years have seen a growth in the numbers of workplace coaches worldwide (ICF, 2023). In order to make coaching available to a wider range of employees, internal coaches have been used increasingly by organisations since 2000 (Ridler, 2016). Internal coaches are defined as employees who, in addition to their main job, provide coaching to work colleagues who are not their direct reports (Jones *et al.*, 2016). Typically, internal coaches volunteer to undertake coaching activities in addition to their main job and they are provided with some training and support by their employing organisation. The recruitment, development and deployment of internal coaches has enabled organisations to provide coaching to a larger number of employees than they could otherwise have done if they used only external, professional coaches (St John-Brooks, 2014).

Although researchers have compared the effectiveness of internal and external coaches (e.g. Baldwin and Cherry, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2016; Schalk and Landeta, 2017) and practitioner publications have discussed how to set up internal coaching schemes (e.g. Clutterbuck *et al.*, 2016) there has been very little research on the lived experiences of internal coaches, including what motivates them to volunteer for the role in the first place, and then to continue to undertake it. This paper aims to fill that gap in the literature. The research question addressed by this paper is: what attracts individuals to volunteer to become internal workplace coaches and what motivates them to continue in this role?

This study is part of a larger piece of research into a number of different aspects of the lived experiences of internal coaches, whilst this study focuses only on their motivation. The study followed a mixed methods research strategy. A questionnaire gathered data from 484 internal workplace coaches on what had attracted them to volunteer for the role and what benefits they found in continuing within it. Following analysis of the questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 20 internal coaches. Theories of motivation were applied to analyse the factors that appeared to attract internal coaches to the role, principally Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Ryan *et al.*, 2021).

The rest of this paper outlines the theoretical context of the research, explains the methodology adopted, presents the findings, and discusses them in relation to relevant theory. Finally, conclusions about motivational factors and recommendations for further research and for practice are presented.

**Theoretical context**

Workplace coaching typically takes place in a one-to-one relationship in which one person helps another to solve problems that face them in the workplace, to improve their performance, to develop relevant skills, and in so doing improve the performance of the organisation (Hamlin *et al.*, 2008). Although there are many styles of workplace coaching (Smith, 2017), academic and practitioner literature generally emphasises a supportive, empowering approach that helps the person being coached to make decisions, rather than a directive approach where the coach issues instructions (Boak and Crabbe, 2019; Boyatzis *et al.*, 2019; Connor and Pokora, 2017; van Nieuwerburgh, 2021).

An internal coach is an employee who has volunteered to coach colleagues outside of their chain of command, as an addition to their main job (Frisch, 2001). This is distinct from the manager-as-coach, where managers are encouraged to use a coaching style of leadership, when appropriate, with their direct reports (St John-Brooks and Issacson, 2024, p. 300). It is also distinct from the mutual relationship of peer coaching, which has been defined as a 'two-way reciprocal process between

people of equal status in an organization' (Jones *et al.*, 2016, p. 250). As noted above, the coaching activity of internal coaches is usually in addition to their main job: in a survey of 123 internal coaches, for example, St John-Brooks (2014) found that 41% coached for less than five hours per month, and 35% for five to 10 hours.

Despite the increase in the use of internal coaches, there has been very little research into their lived experiences. Motivations of internal coaches are seldom identified in the coaching literature; however, one study by Knights and Poppleton (2008, p. 13) found two motives for becoming an internal coach – a strong personal interest in developing others, and the prospect of access to high quality training and development. Feehily (2018) reported that the four coaches she interviewed in her study were motivated to coach in order to address dissatisfactions in their professional lives. Two small studies gathered data on the benefits of coaching to the internal coach: in research that focused mainly on the benefits of coaching for the self-efficacy of the person being coached, Leonard-Cross (2010) found that coaching also appeared to have impacted on the coaches' perceptions of their own self-efficacy, and the development of skills, but the potential impact of this on their motivation to continue coaching was not explored. In another small-scale study of internal coaching, Mukherjee (2012) found that 11 of the 19 senior executives who trained and practised as internal coaches for a six month period reported an improvement in their interpersonal skills, but as with the Leonard-Cross (2010) research, the implications of this for their motivation to continue to act as internal coaches was not explored.

Workplace mentors are somewhat similar to internal coaches, in that the role is often assumed voluntarily and is carried out in addition to existing responsibilities, and therefore this study reviewed research into the motivation of mentors. Kram (1985) suggested that mentoring is both altruistic and also provides benefit for the mentor and a number of researchers have identified 'self-focused' and 'other-focused' factors that motivate individuals to act as mentors (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 1997; Liu *et al.*, 2021) indicating some volunteers are primarily motivated by what they expect to gain from the experience, while others are motivated by what they believe they can contribute to those they mentor. Gains for self may be expressed in terms of personal growth rather than material benefits (Ramani *et al.*, 2022). In addition to these two factors, Janssen *et al.* (2014) suggested that mentors might also be 'relationship-focused' (i.e. focused on the relationship with the person being mentored) or 'organisation-focused' (focused on the benefits to the organisation or team). Intrinsic motivators, rather than the prospect of extrinsic rewards, have been found to be most influential in leading managers to mentor (Malota, 2019) and this has also been found in other volunteering contexts (e.g. Fernandes and de Matos, 2023; Sheldon *et al.*, 2023).

Some studies indicate that prior experience of being mentored is positively related to willingness to volunteer as a mentor (e.g. Allen, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 1997; Malota, 2019). Allen (2007) argues that those who have benefitted from being mentored are more motivated to mentor others, because they have experienced at first hand the value of the process.

A number of studies have used Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2017; Ryan *et al.*, 2021) to analyse the motivation to volunteer to mentor (Rangel *et al.*, 2021) and to volunteer in other contexts (Brumovská and Brady, 2021; Fernandes and de Matos, 2023; Sheldon *et al.* 2023). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that there are a number of types of motivation, from highly external (controlled) to highly internal (intrinsic). SDT characterises intrinsic motivation as 'the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn' (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 70). SDT posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated by three basic human needs:

- Autonomy – the need to be able to decide how to behave and how to organise oneself

- Relatedness – the need to relate to and to help others
- Competence – the need to develop and practise skills and abilities

This encompasses to a large extent the 'self-focused' and 'other focused' motives observed in the studies above, where 'self-focused' concerns developing and practising skills and abilities, rather than gaining material benefits. SDT has been proposed as a useful framework for organising group supervision for internal coaches (Wingrove *et al.*, 2020) but has not been applied to analyse why individuals volunteer to act as internal coaches.

In summary, although internal coaches are being used in a variety of organisations, and despite the fact that internal coaching schemes largely rely on individuals to volunteer for the role, which is then carried out in addition to their main job, very little research has been undertaken into what motivates individuals to volunteer, and what leads them to continue to act in the role. This research draws on theories used to analyse a similar role – the workplace mentor – and other volunteer roles, principally Self-Determination Theory, to explore what motivates internal coaches.

**Methodology**

A mixed methods research strategy was designed. To explore the experiences of internal coaches a questionnaire was devised and issued; it attracted 484 responses – the largest survey response to date from this population. Following analysis of the questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 20 internal coaches from private, public and not-for-profit UK organisations. This is in outline an explanatory sequential design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018) where a largely quantitative component is followed by a qualitative component. However, the questionnaire contained both closed and open questions, which Creswell and Plano Clark describe as a variant of convergent design (2018 p. 74).

An interpretivist research philosophy was adopted. Whilst it is common in mixed methods research to adopt a pragmatist philosophy, Bryman (2016, p. 624) argues that where quantitative research is concerned to 'uncover issues of meaning' it is quite appropriate to take an interpretivist approach to epistemology, a stance usually associated with qualitative research.

As there is limited research on the lived experiences of internal coaches, research on workplace mentors was used to construct the closed items in the questionnaire, designed to be answered using a Likert scale of responses (Allen *et al.*, 1997; Giles, 1977; Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002; Kram, 1985; Newby and Heide, 1992; Orly, 2008; van Emmerik *et al.*, 2005). Prior to launch, the questionnaire was tested by 14 volunteer internal coaches from Poland, Belgium, France, Italy and the UK. As a result of the feedback, several modifications were made to the questionnaire to improve clarity. At the suggestion of the test group, a second open question was added to the questionnaire.

Before any respondents were recruited to the research, ethical approval for the study was sought and granted by the university with which the researchers were associated.

No registers exist of the organisations who employ internal coaches, nor of the coaches themselves. They can thus be considered a hard-to-reach population (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997). Respondents were attracted to the online questionnaire by publicity issued through the researchers' networks and through snowball sampling. The networks included 39 gatekeepers who were thought likely to have connections with internal coaches. These included coaching professional bodies, coaching groups, organisations employing internal coaches, coaching publications, academics in the coaching field, coach training providers and coaching scheme designers. Those who completed the survey

were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview: 234 respondents indicated willingness to do so and provided their email addresses.

Respondents were not asked directly about their location, but analysis of answers to open questions in the survey and of the 234 email addresses indicated that participants came from at least 15 countries (in Europe, North and South America, Asia, Australia and New Zealand) and from at least 67 different organisations. Twenty interviewees were selected from those who volunteered to be interviewed: they were all based in UK organisations, for ease of arranging face-to-face interviews – three private sector, five public sector and one not-for-profit. Over 80% of the survey respondents described themselves as managers (39%) or senior managers (43%), whilst all but one of the 20 interviewees described themselves as senior managers (9) or managers (10).  The majority of respondents had been coaching for three years or more (66% of survey respondents, 70% of interviewees); 92% of survey respondents and all the interviewees said they coached for 10 hours per month or less. Almost all survey respondents had received some training in coaching – 346 through in-company courses and 132 through external courses; 120 had a postgraduate coaching qualification, but 305 had no coaching qualification.

One open question in the survey asked respondents why they had volunteered to become an internal coach. There were written replies from 467 respondents. A final question asked participants "Today, what are your reflections on being an internal coach in your organisational context?": 370 coaches provided written answers. Survey items about continuing motivation sought responses on a Likert scale of agreement, and these were analysed using simple descriptive statistics.

The qualitative data from the survey was analysed thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Codes were identified during multiple readthroughs of the data and a colleague with doctoral research experience of coding written data agreed to test the codes. Using the initial draft of the codes, this colleague independently coded approximately 20% of the data. Coding results were compared, differences discussed, and some codes were modified and several codes combined because it was agreed that they were not sufficiently distinctive to stand alone. The refined codes were loaded into NVivo and the whole dataset of 840 responses to the two questions was coded.

The interviews ranged from 36-73 minutes in length, with an average of 52 minutes. They were audio-recorded, professionally transcribed, and thematically analysed, with cross-checking of codes and themes between the authors and with the colleague who had supported the coding of qualitative survey data.

**Findings**

This section reports the findings of the research. Findings on respondents' motivation to volunteer to coach are mainly gathered from the questionnaire, while the findings on what motivated them to continue to coach are drawn from both the questionnaire and the interviews.

***The motivation to volunteer***
Survey participants were asked "What were your reasons for becoming an internal coach?" Analysis of the 467 responses led to the identification of 22 codes which subsequently were grouped into four themes: For self; For colleagues; For the organisation; Previous experience. Some responses fitted into more than one theme.

*For self*

The largest theme was 'For self', with 72% of respondents (336) indicating they were motivated by the prospect of personal benefit: 52% of coded responses (175) in this theme related to capability improvement - 'to learn or develop skills'; 'to improve as a manager or leader'; and 'self-understanding'. Responses included:

"I wanted to expand my skills" (1132 – note, survey respondents are identified by a numerical code, interviewees by initials that are not their actual initials)

"Personal growth" (9486)

"To help me with my active listening skills" (3098)

"To improve on my ability to lead a team first and foremost" (1272)

"Develop more leadership skills, particularly empathetic ones" (2009)

A smaller number of responses (24%) in this theme were coded as the respondent being curious about coaching and wishing to learn more about it. That their organisation had, or was launching, an internal coaching scheme was seen as their opportunity to satisfy that curiosity. Comments included:

"At first? Curiosity" (6496)

"I had minimal training on a […] course and that really sparked my interest" (1811)

A smaller group within this theme (16% of responses coded - 54) appeared to hope that becoming an internal coach would benefit them professionally: 'Gain qualifications'; 'increase visibility'; 'increase network'; 'increase influence'; 'enhance career'; or 'coach beyond current organisation'.

*For colleagues*

The second largest theme identified was 'For colleagues': 40% of respondents (187) indicated that supporting their colleagues was a motivating factor in becoming an internal coach. The major code, 'support development of colleagues', captured participants' desire to support, help or develop colleagues. Comments included:

"Passionate about developing and helping people grow" (8268)

"help others be the best they can" (1225)

"[helping] others [to] overcome barriers and achieve goals" (5043)

"to support people in being able to see the unseen" (4846)

A very small number of respondents identified sharing their own knowledge or expertise with colleagues as their specific motivation. It is arguable that these participants proposed to act more as advice-giving mentors than as coaches.

*For the organisation*

A smaller number of comments indicated that respondents were motivated to become internal coaches to benefit the organisation: 21% of comments (98) aligned with this theme. Five codes were

identified: 'to improve performance', 'develop coaching culture', 'expected to coach', 'told to coach', and 'give something back'. Comments included:

"I felt that training to become a coach would give something back to the organisation" (3593)

"To make a contribution to improving the organisation" (5686)

"to assist the organisation in becoming high performing" (6985)

"support the company to unleash the potential talent it has" (5579)

Within this theme, 41% of respondents (40) indicated that becoming an internal coach was not their own idea, some stated that coaching was expected of them because of their role in the organisation, and a small number of responses indicated that becoming a coach was suggested or recommended to them. This theme was also evident in a small number of the interviews. For example, the line manager of one interviewee suggested that he consider becoming a coach in their organisation: "her motivation was to influence me to approach things slightly differently, but she also knew it would be complementary to some of the other things I was interested in" (WS). Another interviewee was asked to train to become a coach to support his CEO's initiative to introduce coaching into their organisation.

*Previous experience*

A fourth theme reflected some participants' previous positive experience with coaching: 24% of responses (112) were aligned with this theme. Within this theme three codes were identified: 'previously a coachee', 'previously a coach', and 'complementary to existing approach'. Every participant within the code 'previously a coachee' (64) had been coached, had benefitted from that experience, and had applied to become an internal coach as a result. Almost all stated that by becoming a coach they wanted others to be able to benefit from being coached in the way that they had, and for some it was specifically a way of giving something back for their positive experience. Comments included:

"[I] was previously a coachee and really got a lot out of it" (8549)

"[I] was impressed by the degree to which it changed my approach to my work and my life" (6514)

"[I] wanted to help others achieve the same benefits" (9368)

This theme, of the experience of being coached leading people to volunteer to become an internal coach, was evident in a number of the interviews. One interviewee in an HR role had previously believed that she had been coaching others, but realised when she herself was coached that in reality her focus had been upon solving peoples' problems for them. "I learned that it wasn't about necessarily going into solution mode, it was about helping them to fix their own problems" (JC). This insight led directly to her applying to become an internal coach. Another interviewee had attended a one-day introductory session on coaching. Her expectations were low, but "I just had a lightbulb moment, really. I just saw how powerful it was and I went with a lot of problems and came back with solutions, or a path of where to go" (JP). Another interviewee had been offered a coach from her organisation's first cohort of internal coaches: she approached being coached feeling both "sceptical" and "apprehensive." Yet "I found it really, really useful" (LS) and applied to become a coach in the next cohort.

### The motivation to continue coaching

After the decision to volunteer to become an internal coach, there are motivational factors that will influence whether an individual will continue to carry out this voluntary role. A final open question in the survey asked: "Today, what are your reflections on being an internal coach in your organisational context?" There were 370 responses. The most frequent theme was that coaching was rewarding (159 responses – 43%). Examples of entries were:

"Becoming an internal coach has brought an extra dimension to my professional life and is a source of energy for me" (0874)

"Coaching is, hands down, the most valuable and rewarding part of my job" (6508)

A number of statements in the questionnaire asked respondents to rate benefits they had derived from acting as a coach, as in Table I. As indicated in items A-G respondents on the whole agreed they had benefited from acting as a coach, that they believed they had helped colleagues to develop, and that the role was an important part of their working life. However, responses to the items H and I, with among the lowest average scores of the survey, indicated at the very least an ambiguity about recognition by the line manager and by the organisation itself. This was an issue pursued in the interviews.

INSERT Table I here.

When the rewards of being an internal coach were explored in the interviews, respondents said they felt fulfilled by witnessing how they helped the people they coached, and many also felt that they benefitted personally from improved self-awareness, enhanced interpersonal skills and self-confidence. However, they indicated that they gained little recognition for their work as a coach from their organisation – except from people they coached or fellow coaches – including recognition by their line manager.

*Rewards of coaching: effect on colleagues*

Talking about the satisfaction of seeing the effect of their coaching on their colleagues, one said "That you can help them to get through something that without your help they would have struggled to get to… to make their life better" (JR). Other comments included:

'[… coaching is] another way of looking after people's wellbeing really, which is important to me" (GB)

"If you really do truly believe in it and you can see the benefits […] the individual growing in front of your eyes […] why would you not do it?" (GP)

"To get people to succeed and start to develop and see things, it ticks that box for me on a personal level. I feel good afterwards, I can go home with a bit of a smile on my face" (MW)

One interviewee deferred studying for her MBA so that she could continue coaching: "if I had to choose between helping somebody achieve their goals or getting a piece of paper, I want to help somebody" (JF)

*Rewards of coaching: personal development*

Seventy-two responses to the questionnaire indicated that a reward of coaching was personal development. Responses included:

"I've learned more and developed more than I expected" (5914)

"Being a coach has made me a much wiser person, better listener, less judgemental, more confident" (9834)

"The amount of personal development I've received has been more than equal to the effort of coaching... (0072)

Many of the interviewees said that the experience of coaching had changed their understanding of themselves and the ways in which they interacted with others. They described themselves as becoming much more self-aware and self-confident as a result of their coaching practice.

"[I am] more constructive and more collaborative in the way that I work with people, and I consider a wider range of viewpoints or approaches to problems... So, it benefitted me and probably the people I work with" (WS)

"[I have] more confidence in my ability as a leader in the organisation; to be able to walk out of the building on a night and think, 'I handled that situation well, I did a good job'" (SA)

Some interviewees talked of how they had integrated coaching into their lives:

"for me it's a way of being, and I guess of living" (JF)

"if I didn't have the coaching, I think I would feel like there was a bit missing" (JP)

"I can't see to be honest how I [could] probably live without it" (JC)

"I think it's an integral part of me" (JG)

"it almost becomes a way of life [...] something that becomes part of you, and you're invested in" (RB)

"[my main job] does not satisfy me on the same kind of level as the coaching work does" (WS)

*Rewards of coaching: extrinsic benefits*

The extent to which extrinsic rewards were experienced was pursued in the interviews.

Ten interviewees were employed in organisations where coaching was embedded and valued. These interviewees said they were well supported, with access to a dedicated scheme leader, training, CPD events, supervision, and peer coach meetings. However, these interviewees said that they felt that organisational recognition was of the contribution of coaching to the organisation rather than recognition of the coaches themselves:

"we don't celebrate the coaches" (PG)

"I've never seen one person nominated for an award for their contribution to the organisation [through coaching]" (SA)

Eight interviewees were employed in organisations where coaching was not valued or recognised – in five cases the organisations had originally supported coaching, but this support had been withdrawn as senior managers changed. (The organisational environment of two of the interviewees in relation to valuing coaching was not clear.)

One interviewee said "we suddenly [went] from being a very coachy organisation to being a very dictatorial one" (MW)

However, despite coaching's place in the organisation being overlooked or insecure, these interviewees expressed determination to continue to coach.

One said that a lack of organisation support "wasn't going to stop me coaching. […] I was always going to have a [formal coaching] relationship, if I could, within [the organisation]" (JF).

One said that even if she was told to stop coaching completely, she would find a way to continue: "I think I'd still carry on regardless" (JC).

Most interviewees said their line managers were passive or neutral towards their coaching role. Line managers did not recognise or reward their coaching and the coaching role was not taken into account in performance reviews. Three interviewees independently described their line managers' attitudes as "an absence of barriers" (GB, JF, RB). However, one interviewee said her line manager monitored her activities closely, and appeared to deliberately put meetings into her diary over coaching sessions. As a result, she had to work hard to find a balance between the demands of main job and her desire to coach.

In summary, the factors that motivated individuals to volunteer to be internal coaches were largely intrinsic, involving the desire to help others to learn and develop ('for others'), and also the desire to develop their own skills ('for self'). The factors that motivated individuals to continue coaching were almost entirely intrinsic, with very few extrinsic rewards and little recognition from executives or line managers. Even in the absence of recognition and support, however, respondents expressed a determination to continue coaching.

**Discussion**

This study contributes considerably to an understanding of the motivations of internal coaches, a subject on which there is little published research. The small-scale study of Knights and Poppleton (2008) found that individuals were motivated to become internal coaches by a desire to help others – which this larger study has also found - and by the prospect of high quality training. Other studies of the lived experiences of internal coaches, such as Leonard-Cross (2010), St John-Brooks (2010), Mukherjee (2012), and Feehily (2018), do not directly address the issue of coach motivation.

This research has found some similarities with research into mentoring, in that individuals may be motivated by benefits to self, others and the organisation. This study also found that a positive experience of being coached was a factor in people volunteering to become an internal coach, as was found in studies on mentoring (Allen, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 1997; Malota, 2019).

This study found that the main motivations for volunteering to become an internal coach, and to continue in the role, were intrinsic: the activity of coaching gave interest, enjoyment and inherent satisfaction. The lens of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) has been found useful in this study for understanding the motivation of internal coaches. The three main motivational needs, according to SDT, are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Ryan *et al.* (2021, p. 103) argue that autonomously helping others can enhance the helper's well-being, an outcome that is mediated by autonomy, relatedness, and competence satisfactions.   By voluntarily exercising their skills to help others, internal coaches are undertaking activities that appear capable of satisfying all three core motivational needs, and this study has provided examples that are rich in detail of how the satisfaction of the main motivational  needs are experienced.

Although the main drivers for volunteering and continuing to act as an internal coach were intrinsic, Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 71) observe that 'social environments can facilitate or forestall intrinsic motivation by supporting versus thwarting people's innate psychological needs'. Respondents in this study reported positive reactions from the people they coached, from fellow coaches and (where

they existed in the organisation) from the coordinator of the internal coaching scheme, but they reported a lack of recognition from executives and from their own line manager. Ryan *et al.* (2021, p. 101) argue a negative social environment will diminish intrinsic motivation. Although interviewees expressed a determination to continue their internal coaching, despite a lack of recognition and support from the organisation, SDT indicates that an unsupportive social environment is likely to diminish their intrinsic motivation over time.

### *Implications for practice*

Organisations wishing to attract volunteer internal coaches should emphasise the intrinsic motivators – of helping others and developing valuable skills. Providing opportunities for potential volunteers to experience good quality coaching is likely to motivate people to volunteer. Initial training and support are needed to enable volunteers develop a foundation for the skills they will need. Organisations should consider how to continue to provide support, through networks of coaches, a coaching scheme coordinator and recognition of coaches' achievements by their line managers and senior executives. Line manager support, found notably lacking in this research, could perhaps be engaged by organisations holding line managers responsible for at least some of the coaching activities of their staff who act as internal coaches.

### *Limitations and future research*

One limitation of this study is that it collected information only from individuals who were practising, active internal coaches. Many others who started out as internal coaches may have relinquished the role in the absence of recognition and support: we have no data from people who did not continue in the role after first taking it up, or why they decided to relinquish it. A further limitation is that the sample is unlikely to be representative of all internal coaches – as they are a hard to reach population, we are unable to devise a representative sampling frame.

Further research into this area could usefully gather narratives from individuals who have acted as internal coaches, but then quit the role. Another fruitful area for further study would be to identify organisations where executives and line managers support and recognise the contributions of individual internal coaches, and to explore what processes are contributing to those positive environments, and what effects they have on the coaches.

### Conclusions

In this study, intrinsic motivation played a large part in the desire of respondents to become and to continue to act as internal coaches: respondents described their experience of coaching as fulfilling, and as satisfying needs that can be explained in terms of needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. The study demonstrates that Self-Determination Theory is a useful framework for understanding the motivations of individuals to volunteer to become internal coaches and to continue to act in that role.

Interviewees in this study reported that there was little organisational recognition and support for individual coaches, even in those organisations where coaching was said to be valued. Although they expressed their determination to continue coaching in the absence of further support, SDT indicates that an uncaring or negative social environment is likely to diminish individuals' intrinsic motivation over time.

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**Motivations of internal workplace coaches: what attracts them to the role?**

**Table I Positive effects of acting as a coach: selected items from the questionnaire**

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Average* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | I find coaching very fulfilling | 270 | 153 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 4.62 |
| B | Being an internal coach is not as rewarding as I expected it to be** | 5 | 31 | 32 | 219 | 146 | 4.09 |
| C | My role as a coach is an important part of my work life | 176 | 220 | 24 | 8 | 3 | 4.29 |
| D | My coaching has made a positive contribution to colleagues' development | 178 | 234 | 21 | 0 | 1 | 4.35 |
| E | Coaching has given me new business skills | 200 | 199 | 21 | 5 | 1 | 4.39 |
| F | I use the skills I've developed as a coach to improve my working relationships | 179 | 247 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 4.4 |
| G | Being a coach has not improved my performance in my day-job** | 9 | 19 | 32 | 203 | 164 | 4.16 |
| H | The contribution my coaching practice makes to the success of the organisation is recognized when my performance is reviewed by my line manager | 27 | 136 | 99 | 129 | 43 | 2.94 |
| I | Coaching has increased my visibility in the organisation | 62 | 184 | 112 | 67 | 6 | 3.53 |

Note, these are the statements from the questionnaire that are most relevant to this study. They were scattered across the questionnaire.

*Average calculated from Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Not sure = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1 (unless statements are reverse coded) divided by the total number of responses

** Item reverse coded