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individual coaching & coaching development

Currents in Coaching Research Newsletter

A Case Study: The Impacts of Manager Coaching

I chose the focus of this month's article because it differs somewhat from our usual focus in two respects: the researcher examines coaching behaviors of line managers rather than coaching offered by coaching professionals and she offers a well-constructed case study to better understand both the intervention and

In This Issue

[The Impacts of Manager Coaching](#)

[Researcher's Haiku](#)

[References](#)

Researcher's Haiku

*chill morning
the haystacks lean
to the sun.*

*John Brandi (The Unswept Path: Contemporary
American Haiku)*

*(Readers are invited to email their researcher's haiku-
original or otherwise-for inclusion in future issues. Your
feedback on this issue is welcome too!)*

References

[1](#) Louise Wheeler (2011). How does the adoption of coaching behaviors by line managers contribute to the achievement of organizational

the impact. It is often the case that organizations and coaches who are interested in the measure of impact look to quantitative measures and evaluate the benefits of coaching in terms of dollars, work attendance or survey scores. Louise Wheeler chose to engage in a more nuanced examination of the phenomenon in a specific organizational context.

The specificity of Wheeler's study is conveyed in the title: How does the adoption of coaching behaviors by line managers contribute to the achievement of organizational goals?

[i] While the narrowness of the focus may seem to limit the usefulness, of the study, the resulting narrative offers insights which may be useful to organizations seeking to promote a managerial coaching culture and to identify the specific coaching behaviors which contribute to improved sales performance. Wheeler's introduction notes that excellent customer service is critical to organizations where front line staff deliver the services. Thus, the organization which is the focus of the case is an organization which relies on front-line staff to deliver quality services across the United Kingdom. In particular, Wheeler sought to identify day to day managerial coaching behaviors which were perceived to be "facilitative and empowering" to promote team performance.

As the review of the literature notes, while there are a limited number of empirical studies in this area. Some exist which identify managerial

goals? The International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring. V. 9, #1.

Retrieved 3/9/11 from

<http://www.business.brookes.ac.uk/research/areas/coachingandmentoring>

coaching behaviors but do not identify impact. Others measure impact but may not be broadly applicable in differing organizational contexts. One theme from the literature which Wheeler found to be in need of further examination was the importance of feedback coupled with findings that feedback is one of the most challenging coaching behaviors for managers to adopt. Wheeler offers a good summary of gaps in the literature which she applies to shape the focus of her study: evidence in a customer-facing setting; evidence linking coaching behaviors and organizational goals; evidence which draws on multiple data sources; and evidence of the impact of cultural characteristics. Her research questions aim to identify the coaching behaviors of line managers in the case organization; the perspectives of both managers and staff; the impacts of specific coaching behaviors and the cultural characteristics of the case organization as they support or inhibit the achievement of organizational goals.

Creating a Valid Case Study

Wheeler's strategy for creating a valid case study includes the use of data from multiple sources and triangulating data to reduce bias. The author collected interview and observation data from the participating line managers and used a semi-structured questionnaire data from front-line staff. Interviews with managerial staff were recorded and transcribed but those with staff were not in order to offer a greater sense of safety and trust. In addition, she

referred to documentation of sales performance figures, training materials and other organizational reports and memoranda. The unstructured interviews with managers and the staff questionnaires avoided the use of the word "coaching" in order to avoid leading respondents or introducing bias. The respondent sample was selected to ensure a broad representation across work contexts and geography.

The author followed a content analysis method, coding and grouping data to identify recurrent themes and emergent patterns. A spreadsheet produced a summary of breadth and frequency of themes. A concept map identified links between and among themes. Reflection and writing up results enabled the author to "identify meaning and achieve clarity." (p.6)

Coaching Behaviors Impacting Performance

Wheeler found specific coaching behaviors which appeared to have the greatest impact on customer service performance. Staff interviews revealed that managers sharing information about various aspects of the market and other elements relevant to performance was "supportive, helpful and instrumental to them performing well" (p.7). Encouraging staff to take ownership of their performance conveyed a belief in the individual's abilities and also had a positive impact. Role modeling or facilitating role modeling similarly encouraged higher performance. Several specific dialoguing behaviors used by the managers were also identified as

helpful: soliciting feedback, listening, providing feedback, question framing, perspective framing statements and holding back or not providing answers. When these behaviors were examined in the context of work performance, Wheeler found three-question framing, holding back answers and broadening or changing perspectives to be most relevant.

Conclusion

Wheeler concludes her case with observations about these three coaching behaviors in particular and the connection with the coaching-cultural norms she found they seemed to engender between line manager and front line staff in comparison with the directive and hierarchical norms of interaction between senior managers and site teams. The former was identified as motivating: the latter was identified as frustrating and disempowering. She does not the limitations of the case study while suggesting recommendations for further study of the limited use of challenging feedback behaviors.

[i] Louise Wheeler (2011). How does the adoption of coaching behaviors by line managers contribute to the achievement of organizational goals? The International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring. V. 9, #1. Retrieved 3/9/11 from <http://www.business.brookes.ac.uk/research/areas/coachingandmentoring>

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