



Research Article

The Development of Sellers' Potential through a Coaching Approach

Zuzana Birknerová and Eva Benková

Faculty of Management, University of Prešov in Prešov, Slovakia

Correspondence should be addressed to: Eva Benková; eva.benkova@unipo.sk

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Abstract

Coaching is an innovative method of developing the potential of sellers. It represents one of the possible tools of development focused on awareness and behaviour. In the presented research, the perception of coaching was identified on the basis of three factors, namely Behaviour, Emotions and Cognitions. The results of the experiment confirmed the fact that 121 salespeople who attended working meetings with coaching elements scored higher in Cognitions and Behaviour factors compared to 166 uncoached sellers. After completing the coaching approach, the coached sellers showed a higher degree of self-reflection and empathy. The coaching meeting is perceived more positively compared to the working meeting, where the superiors set fixed tasks.

Keywords: Coaching, corporate training, sellers

Introduction

Coaching as a method of human capital development

The development of human capital through coaching is one of the main methods helping people utilize their potential (Thorne and Pellant, 2007). It is necessary to listen to people if we want to manage them (Nejedlý, 2015). By asking questions, listening, and learning, managers acquire answers on what is inevitable to change to

be successful. Successful people become great leaders when they learn to shift attention from themselves to others (Goldsmith et al., 2012).

Haberleitner et al. (2009) claim that coaching means developing the potential of all workers according to their current level of development to optimize their performance while considering their aims, interests and needs. It involves revealing potential, developing and formulating tasks and goals, exchanging mutual expectations

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and providing a reciprocal feedback. Suchý and Náhlovský (2007) add that coaching can reveal not only our existing potential but also develop it.

The results brought by coaching are based on a supportive relationship between the coach and the coached person and on the communication style the coach uses. A coach has to have a strong personality. He/she has to be mature and positively oriented, eager to work on himself/herself and is willing to develop. A coach needs to be well experienced and enthusiastic so that he/she has the energy to give it to others (Suchý and Náhlovský, 2007). The coached one requires facts not from a coach but from inside of himself/herself (Whitmore, 2009).

A coach shares his/her knowledge and skills to improve the performance of those he/she coaches. A coach gives a part of his/her time, effort, and ability to help others improve (Clegg and Birch, 2004). A coach is primarily a person who, through continuous work on himself/herself, enables the development of others.

Each qualified coach should be able to demonstrate the skills defined by the International Coach Federation (ICF, 2009; 2011). A coach can be a manager at all levels of management.

Coaching can be described as an aid to the development, learning, and performance of the other person. Developing potential is a common element for all coaching approaches. It provides a certain form of "accompaniment" for the coached ones in their personal lives as well as working situations and issues. Coaching helps people learn something rather than teaches it (Crkalová and Riethof, 2012).

The process of coaching allows people to discover and use solutions that are the most appropriate for themselves personally. It is used as an effective approach in corporate training of managers, and also for sellers who make up this research sample. Coaching is carried out in a form of a dialogue enabling the coached people to see new perspectives,

acquire greater clarity in terms of their ideas, emotions, deeds, situations, and the people around them (Wilson, 2007). According to Downey (2003), coaching is an art, practical inspiration, energization, facilitation, performance, learning, and development.

Critical thinking, feedback and coaching are reflective methods used in the process of learning. They are used to support the development of managers, sellers, and other professions, and improve their ability to individually analyse situations and subsequently make a decision based on an appropriate solution (Hudec, Suhányi and Urbančíková, 2014).

The issue of supporting the development of the potential of individuals in different areas is addressed by several authors in their research. Kot and Pigoń (2014) talk about verifying the level of competence of individuals' potential. Gavurová et al. (2018) focus their attention on performance related to loyalty. Kubák et al. (2019) describe efficiency improvement. In this context, Kot et al. (2017) stress the need for self-education.

Corporate training

As already mentioned, coaching can be applied as an effective approach to corporate training. In their research, Savery and Luks (2004) claim that corporate training is a highly profitable, and thus the most important, investment for an organization.

The primary goal of corporate training is to provide conditions for the effective fulfilment of the organization's assignments through the intentional and constant development of labour potential. Investing in human resources results in increased performance of people, their self-fulfilment, satisfaction, and loyalty to their organization, as well as saving time and costs in placing the working force (Kachaňáková, Nachtmannová and Joniaková, 2008).

In the development of people through coaching, it is necessary to comprehend the

fundamentals of human learning. Learning is a process of gaining experience, knowledge, attitudes, and habits based on which people change their behaviour. In a broader sense, learning can be perceived as the adaptation to gradually changing conditions (Koubek, 2014).

The goal of corporate training is to provide an organization with the prerequisites so that it can manage the tasks coming from the internal environment and that arise from the external environment. It is learning in the process, learning through experience, and searching for new options. If an organization wants to learn, it needs to be operated as an open dynamic system. It needs to be open to external and internal incentives (Hroník, 2007). This can be also reached through coaching.

Training can help organizations solve problems that hinder them from reaching their objectives (Babić and Boljanović, 2013). In analyzing needs, training determines the current gaps in skills and knowledge that affect managers' performance.

As Vodák and Kucharčíková (2011) state, corporate training is targeted on creating working capabilities in a broader sense, allowing for the development of social competences of individuals which is significant for making good interpersonal relationships among people employed in an organization.

As already mentioned, the main goal of corporate training is to create a suitable environment for the successful fulfilment of organizations' assignments. Investing in human resources results in their appreciation. One of the main goals of any organization is to offer conditions in which the hidden potential of individuals will be revealed and their loyalty to the organization will be assured. This hidden potential can be developed through coaching. It must be seen as an ability to gain and apply new knowledge and skills as well as the so-far unused number of thoughts and suggestions for better operation of an organization (Armstrong, 2007).

Coaching offers particular capabilities (knowledge and skills) that are directly related to participants' actions. However, under completely changed conditions, the procedures learned by participants in the reality-oriented programmes can be unusable. In such a case, it is necessary to believe in the ability of people to generalize the knowledge they have gained (Plamínek, 2008).

Coaching can be described as a training process used at a workplace that aims to increase and enhance the potential of people (Belcourt and Wright, 1998). Kachaňáková, Nachtmannová and Joniaková (2008) explain coaching as a long-term, planned instigation, heading towards initiative and desired results. It takes place in the working environment and involves fulfilling special assignments, specifying personal responsibilities, etc. These activities are recorded in a long-term plan and are in compliance with the long-term objectives of one's career development.

Corporate training of sellers

Bass and Vaughan (1967) describe corporate training as a permanent change in behaviour that is acquired through practice or experience. Information, skills, and knowledge of sellers are inevitable in business today. Brum (2007) claims that the business environment is changing rapidly, and that the most successful sellers are those who are most capable of adapting to such changes effectively. Armstrong and Taylor (2005) present that corporate training means investing in sellers to achieve their better performance and to make the most of their natural abilities.

Vodák and Kucharčíková (2011) claim that work ethics and general satisfaction among employees, including sellers, are considered very important. Satisfied sellers are more responsible, increase their productivity, and improve the quality of sales. Heyes and Stuart (1996) found that sellers are more involved in trade when they approach their lifelong learning responsibly. Support and evaluation create an environment in which sellers are more

involved and able to achieve better sales results (Bartlett, 2001).

Čopíková, Bláha and Horváthová (2015) describe the benefits of corporate training that can be applied to the area of trade (Horváthová et al., 2014), such as improving sellers' qualifications, knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, work performance and labour productivity. Increasing their productivity will increase the overall performance of the company, and according to Krueger and Rouse (1998), this should be reflected in higher wages and career growth opportunities.

Armstrong (2007) claims that corporate training can take the form of coaching. This method is mainly used because it is possible to achieve a high quality of sellers' potential development through coaching.

Research project

The main goal of the research was to enlarge the state of knowledge in the field of corporate training of sellers through coaching.

The data were acquired using the questionnaire method of AC-BEC – Assessment of Coaching based on three factors, namely Behaviour, Emotions, and Cognitions (Birknerová and Benková, 2021). The methodology includes 23 statements related to the assessment of coaching. Each statement has 6 possible ways of responses to the level of identification and agreement with the given statement (1-definitely no, 2-no, 3-rather no than yes, 4-rather yes than no, 5-yes, 6-definitely yes). The following statement can be used as an example: "I am willing to try new things or different ways of doing things at work". In looking for and evaluating different dependences and differences of coaching assessment and its three attributes, the lowest value 1 means the lowest degree of agreement with a given statement of the coached persons and the value 6 means the maximum degree of agreement with the statement.

287 sellers were addressed, out of whom 166 did not undergo coaching activities

and 121 participated in coaching activities. The group of respondents included 167 women and 120 men aged from 24 to 61 years. Their average age was 29.8 years (standard deviation was 5.155).

By factor analysis using the Principal Component method with Varimax rotation, 3 factors of coaching perception were extracted. Birknerová and Benková (2021) named and described them as following:

- F1: Cognitions. The respondents who scored higher in this factor are willing to change their usual behaviour, try new manners of behaviour at work, develop their potential, perform in a more effective way, and alter their conventional working procedures. Their aim is to acquire better outputs at work (Cronbach's alpha 0.818).
- F2: Behaviour. The respondents who scored higher in this factor realize their own responsibility for themselves and their lives, show higher degree of self-reflection, and think about their behaviour and relationships with other people. They show a higher degree of empathy and reflect the acquired knowledge on their private lives (Cronbach's alpha 0.940).
- F3: Emotions. This factor is connected to how individual persons experience coaching. It is aimed at the satisfaction from the relationship between the coach and the coached person, in terms of their expectations before coaching, the balance and relaxation during the coaching session, and positive emotions after it. It also focuses on whether they like to work on themselves through coaching and perceive it as a way that helps them work more effectively. This factor is saturated with eight items (Cronbach's alpha 0.931).

Results

The selection of mathematical-statistical procedures for the analysis of the data obtained was based on the verification of the normal distribution of the data obtained. Based on skewness and kurtosis values, the normal distribution of data was confirmed (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of data – testing normality

	Cognitions	Emotions	Behaviour
Skewness	-0.334	-0.239	-0.149
Kurtosis	-0.164	0.312	0.236

The results of the research confirmed the fact that coached and non-coached sellers perceive the coaching working meeting

differently. This differentness was reflected in the assessment of the factors of Cognitions and Behaviour (Table 2).

Table 2: Assessment of coaching by coached and non-coached sellers

Factors	Coached sellers	Non-coached sellers	T- test	Significance
	Average values			
Cognitions	5.42	5.13	3.032	0.002
Emotions	4.79	4.58	1.842	0.095
Behaviour	4.18	3.80	2.352	0.043

Coached sellers are more willing to change the established manners of behaviour, develop their potential, and behave more effectively. Their aim is to achieve better results at work. Coached sellers are more aware of their own responsibility for themselves and their lives, show a greater degree of self-reflection, reflect on their own behaviour as well as their relationships with other people, and show a greater degree of empathy compared to non-coached sellers. It should be noted that both coached and non-coached sellers rated each coaching attribute positively. Interpreted statistically significant differences were found only in the degree of positivity of the assessment of Cognitions and Behaviour.

Discussion and conclusion

Coaching can be seen as a useful managerial tool for the development of human capital because it is aimed at awareness and behaviour (Emerson and

Loehr, 2008). This concept was also reflected in the presented research, in which the perception of coaching was identified on the basis of three factors, namely Behaviour, Emotions and Cognition (Birknerová and Benková, 2021).

The results of the conducted experiment confirmed the fact that the sellers who have had working meetings with coaching elements scored higher in the factors of Cognitions and Behaviour. Compared to the control group of the non-coached sellers, these coached sellers showed higher self-reflection and empathy after completing these meetings. These competencies are essential for improving the quality of seller's behaviour (Bass and Vaughan, 1967; Brum, 2007; Heyes and Stuart, 1996; Bartlett, 2001; Armstrong, 2007; and others).

In relation to the information gathered, it can be said that the coaching session is perceived more positively than the

working meeting where the supervisor gives feedback, recommendations, and fixed tasks. Thus, coaching can have a significant impact on the performance of individuals and consequently on the success of the organization (Shaw and Linnecar, 2007). Self-reflection and empathy are important attributes of the quality of the work environment which is related to the performance of the individual and the whole organization (Fleming and Taylor, 2004). Coaching is the key to creating an open and friendly organization that can appreciate the skills and ideas of its people.

As already mentioned, currently, coaching is an effective method of developing human capital and the potential of individual sellers. According to Green and Grant (2003), coaching improves communication among employees, enhances performance and reduces fluctuation.

The results achieved are another contribution to the theory, methodology and practice of human capital development with the use of coaching methods. The necessity to accept a holistic theoretical and methodological approach to the research and application of coaching techniques was confirmed. At the same time, the presented methodology of finding out the feedback on coaching respects the individual specifics of the coached persons. Limitations of the interpretation of the results obtained are related to the specific sample of respondents as well as their number. With regard to limiting the level of the generalization of knowledge, it should be emphasized that the presented concept of coaching assessment is one of the possible concepts that can be discussed in this context.

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