

A Coaching Culture Definition: An Industry-Based Perspective From Managers as Coaches

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Abstract

Despite increasingly common references to “coaching cultures,” little empirical research has been conducted to understand the nature of coaching cultures. Our study aims to address this gap with a study of Australian managers. In their responses to open-ended questions, managers gave us insight into their experiences of coaching cultures. The elements needed to create a coaching culture are consistent use of different types of coaching across the organization, a formalized process, provision of appropriate training and resources, the involvement of top management, transparency of benefits, and the alignment with organizational values such as ownership, empowerment, collaboration, and respect. Managers should take a proactive role in the creation of coaching cultures within their organizations, including acting as coaching role models, actively engaging in training themselves, and promoting the benefits of such a culture.

Keywords

coaching, organizational culture, empowerment, managerial coaching, leadership

Introduction

Coaching is a powerful approach to human resource (HR) development when implemented at an organizational level (Ellinger & Hamlin, 2016). This is particularly important given the devolution of HR responsibilities to managers noted by Bainbridge

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et al. (2018) and Trullen et al. (2016). Significant benefits have been reported for the outcomes of executive coaches coming into organizations (de Haan et al., 2016; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Otter, 2017) and also for the outcomes of individual managers adopting a coaching approach to individual coaching interactions, whether external coaches coming into an organization (de Haan et al., 2016; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Otter, 2017) or coaching managers (Ellinger et al., 2018; Lawrence, 2017; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Milner & McCarthy, 2015). While significant benefits have been reported for the outcomes of individual managers adopting a coaching approach to leadership, including enhanced performance (Agarwal et al., 2009), creativity (Herrmann & Felfe, 2014), empowerment (Fong & Snape, 2015), and engagement (Crabb, 2011), there is as yet comparatively little research into the emerging phenomenon of coaching cultures, a term used increasingly over the past 15 years for organizational deployment of coaching practices (Clutterbuck et al., 2016). However, there is already some evidence linking coaching cultures with positive results (e.g., Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Leonard-Cross, 2010).

Managers have been identified as an important group with regard to establishing a coaching culture, demonstrating their commitment to coaching and acting as role models (Campbell & Evans, 2016; Rahim et al., 2014; Turner, 2010). This article will focus specifically on managers' perceptions of coaching cultures, sharing insights from a wide-ranging survey of 580 Australian managers. It thus seeks to address part of the gap identified by Ellinger et al. (2018) in their call for research that "examines the antecedents or contextual factors that influence the provision of managerial coaching, the intervening mediating and moderating factors that might influence the managerial coaching process, and the outcomes that emanate from such coaching" (p. 273) and also for more comprehensive research that explores "the benefits to the manager and managers' development, and what enables the managerial coach and coachee relationship to be effective" (Ellinger & Hamlin, 2016, p. 481).

Coaching Culture

There is a small but growing literature relating to coaching cultures, exploring the organization-wide deployment of coaching practices. In this review, we first consider the definitions in the literature, followed by a discussion of implementation of coaching cultures.

Broadly speaking, a coaching culture is one in which members of the organization use coaching skills with each other. A number of definitions of coaching culture can be found in the literature as summarized in Table 1.

The key points that arise from these definitions of a coaching culture are that coaching is a dominant theme that runs across the organization and is a fundamental manner in which people engage with each other. Furthermore, coaching is not seen as a dyadic interaction but rather as the widespread deployment of a coaching approach to workplace relations and employee engagement. Vesso (2014), for example, claims,

In a coaching culture, coaching flows in all directions from all parties, making a networked web across the organization consisting of many connections between people

Table 1. Definition of a Coaching Culture.

Author(s)	Definition of a coaching culture
Clutterbuck et al. (2016, p. 9)	“The principles, beliefs and mindsets driving people’s behavior in the workplace are deeply rooted in the discipline of coaching”
Vesso and Alas (2016, p. 308)	“An organizational development model that provides the structure that defines how the organization’s members can best interact with their working environment, and how the best results are obtained and measured”
G. Jones and Gorell (2014, p. 16)	“Where people are empowered and where coaching happens at every level. And not only does it happen at every level, but it adds to bottom line performance. It is the recognized development tool that touches every part of the employee lifecycle”
Hawkins (2012, p. 21)	“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 organizational performance and share value for all stakeholders”
Lindbom (2007, p. 102)	“A coaching culture is one in which the regular review of performance and just-in-time feedback is expected”
Clutterbuck and Megginson (2005, p. 19)	“Coaching is the predominant style of managing and working together, and where a commitment to grow the organization is embedded in a parallel commitment to grow the people in the organization”
Hart (2003, p. 2)	“An organizational setting in which not only formal coaching occurs, but also, most or a large segment of individuals in the organization practice coaching behaviors as a means of relating to, supporting and influencing each other”

in the same departments, across departments, between teams, and up and down and across the hierarchy. (p. 112)

The importance of team coaching in addition to individual coaching is underscored by Seemann et al. (2019) in their case study of implementing organizational coaching in Slovakia. Coaching culture can be seen therefore to emerge from organizational coaching, defined by Turner (2010) as a “multi-level leadership strategy supported by systematic, results-focused performance management, aligned HR processes and relationship driven leadership coaching behaviors designed to achieve an engaged, committed workforce and a high performance culture” (p. 27).

A coaching culture shows similarities with some previously identified types of organizational cultures, such as an “organizational culture which amplifies training and learning” (Figgis et al., 2001, p. 7), an “organizational culture which supports learning” (Dawe, 2003, p. 7; Walton, 1999), a “learning organization” (Walton, 1999), or a “learning culture” (S. Jones, 1996). Indeed, Garvey et al. (2018) suggest that a coaching culture may be best seen as similar to a learning organization, rather than as an entity with a separate ontological and organizational status. Similarly, Hunt

and Weintraub (2016, p. 89) observe that in a coaching culture, “learning is taken for granted as an important, if not always explicitly discussed, ingredient of both personal development and business performance.” Organizations with an innovation-friendly culture also have similarities with a coaching culture—for example, people’s ideas are heeded (McCarthy, 2014). Both learning and innovation-friendly organizational cultures share with a coaching culture an emphasis on increasing employee ownership and empowerment (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Heslin, 1999) and thus align naturally with the values of many contemporary organizations. Furthermore, Hawkins (2012) counts “organizational learning” itself as a key indicator of a coaching culture. Hence, coaching can be seen as a process enabling implementation of a learning/innovation culture. In addition, when creating a coaching culture, it is important to recognize that the values held by an organization are also related to its culture (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005).

Implementing Coaching Cultures

The determinants of a coaching culture have been identified by Mansor et al. (2012) as manager commitment, a link between business strategy and developmental focus, recognition and reward of coaching behaviors, training for coaches, and learning and development opportunities. Other authors characterize implementation of a coaching culture as an evolutionary process, where the number of steps required for full implementation varies according to different authors, from four (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006; Vesso & Alas, 2016) to five (Underhill, 2018) or seven (Hawkins, 2012). The labeling of these phases usually aligns with “none” to “little,” to “more,” to a “fully integrated” coaching culture. Depending on the authors, the focus in earlier phases seems to be on sporadic coaching (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006; Underhill, 2018), developing external and internal coaching capacity (Hawkins, 2012), or investing in team coaching (Vesso, 2014). While a coaching culture may obtain a foothold in an organization, Megginson and Clutterbuck (2006) suggest that when the organization is faced with other pressing issues, such coaching efforts are given a much lower priority if the organization is still in the early phases of implementing a coaching culture, before a coaching mindset has been established or coaching behaviors have become a routine part of enacting leadership. The implementation of a coaching culture may take different paths depending on the extent to which coaching by managers is already embedded in an organization and on whether the organization wants every manager to coach or to have a cadre of internal master coaches (Garvey et al., 2018). If significant change is required (e.g., if the existing culture uses a command and control form of leadership), then in addition to specific recommendations for implementing coaching widely in an organization, recommendations for implementing change should be taken into consideration (e.g., Kotter, 1995).

In the intermediate phases of a coaching culture, team coaching plays a role, although Hawkins (2012) and Vesso (2014) disagree about the point at which different components, such as team coaching, become relevant. Indeed, Vesso (2014) argues

that “the fulcrum for achieving a coaching culture is, in reality, at the level of the team” (p. 114), whereas Hawkins (2012) sees team coaching as a step that is undertaken after the development of internal coaching capacity. Furthermore, in the intermediate phases, the significance and benefits of coaching are starting to be seen, but there is not enough coordination of coaching initiatives (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006). To promote a coaching culture, coaching needs to be integrated into HR systems such as career development and performance management reviews (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Hawkins, 2012; Rock & Donde, 2008). This may be measured through employee surveys and 360-degree surveys, as well as through improved performance of the employees being coached. Recognizing and rewarding coaching behaviors help promote a coaching culture (Mansor et al., 2012).

Finally, in the latter phases of establishing a coaching culture, the focus is on training (Vesso, 2014) and more formalized processes (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Hawkins, 2012; Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006). Where a coaching culture has been established to a greater extent and more coaching capacity has been built via training, the application of coaching skills will be found across the organization and more informal coaching may be prevalent (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005). To demonstrate the contribution of coaching to an organization’s effectiveness, organizations need to measure the success of coaching efforts through ongoing evaluation (Leonard-Cross, 2010). Such evaluation may incorporate various elements, for example, the effectiveness of application in a work context and business results (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005) and demonstrating the link between coaching and the organization’s strategy (Mansor et al., 2012). Underhill (2018) notes that the level of evaluation varies according to the maturity of the coaching culture, from no measurements at all when only casual coaching is taking place to company-wide coaching dashboards where a coaching culture exists. Hawkins and Smith (2006) emphasize the importance of understanding what a coaching culture is intended to achieve and of measuring its effectiveness in relation to that purpose rather than as an end in itself, which they say “will not be sustained beyond the energy of its enthusiastic creators” (p. 111). This view is reinforced by Lawrence and Moore (2019) who stress the importance of ongoing evaluation and adaptation of the coaching culture program and advocate that “the senior leadership team must align around a purpose for any coaching culture programme” (p. 109).

Despite the key role of managers throughout an organization in implementing a coaching culture, there is little research relating to the perceptions of managers specifically in relation to a coaching culture, rather than in relation to coaching per se. This is an important perspective to consider, given the importance of the attitude and actions of managers in successfully establishing coaching cultures (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Rahim et al., 2014).

Furthermore, although coaching and coaching cultures are linked with positive outcomes, there is still a knowledge gap with regard to the elements of a coaching culture, with Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) noting that we do not know if some elements need to be in place before others, and if so, which ones.

Both of these gaps lead to our research questions:

- How do managers experience coaching cultures?
 - What elements compromise a coaching culture?
 - What, if any, sequencing of elements of a coaching culture can be seen?

Methodological Framing

Our aim was to ascertain a wide selection of views from managers in organizations. We were keen to hear their voice and not only to gather quantitative data. Our choice was an online survey allowing free text comments to gather in-depth answers for a larger group of participants. This form of research, which is conducted with many participants and is not focused on individual coaching sessions, is classified by de Haan (2019) as field research, a form of qualitative research that “seeks to map out and investigate aspects of coaching, including perspectives on the dynamics between coach and coachee, interaction patterns, and active ingredients according to various parties involved” (p. 235). Qualitative research, according to de Haan, can provide “a detailed, nuanced, coherent, and well-founded answer,” although not necessarily generalizable. However, de Haan goes on to say that “with sufficient measurements based on a representative sample, one can turn any qualitative exploration into a sustainable and generalizable quantitative research result” (p. 228).

The online survey offered room for respondents to state their answers in specifically designed “free text” boxes. This free text approach was innovative as it is unusual to get comprehensive answers with a survey design reaching a large number of managers, which would not be possible to achieve with interviews. Furthermore, compared with methods such as interviews, the hurdle of participating in an online survey might be lower as participants can fill out the survey in the anonymity and convenience of their own environment (Diekmann, 2008; Wright, 2005). Responses may also be more honest as there is less likelihood of social desirability bias, where participants try to please an interviewer, which has been noted as a risk in coaching research using self-reports (de Haan & Nilsson, 2017).

We used an existing commercial email database to gain access to the emails of HR managers and general managers in Australian private and public organizations in diverse sectors and in all states in Australia who had agreed to be contacted for research purposes. All HR managers and general managers who worked in companies with 200+ employees were invited to participate in the study. As de Haan (2019) notes, in coaching research, it is important to specify the perspective of the research participants.

An email invitation was sent to the HR managers and general managers on the database, requesting them to participate in the online survey. We received responses from 580 participants, a response rate of 6.6%, which were collated anonymously, excluding any details that could identify participants. More than 80% of the responses came from the services sector, with more than 70% employing 500+ people. While this represents a low response rate, we received extensive free text responses received from hundreds of respondents, which we analyzed using Mayring’s thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mayring, 2004, 2010). Our focus here was to understand the

themes emerging from the data, rather than tease out sectoral differences, which given that the majority of responses came from the services sector would add little contextual variation to help understand the nuances of coaching cultures in different sectors. Two researchers started to independently code the material. Going through the material, we created content categories (a word that summarized the description of the participant). Each answer of a participant was assigned to a category—by either creating a new content category or allocating it to an existing one. In some cases, one answer matched two categories, which we then coded accordingly into both categories. We followed this procedure until approximately a third of answers were categorized as new categories stopped emerging, which is in line with the recommendations by Mayring (2004, 2010) to undertake this step after 10% to 50% of the material has been reviewed. We then compared the coding to check for overlaps. Once an agreement was reached for our categories, we then started again to code all the answers. Two researchers were involved in the initial process to ensure compatibility of results, a third researcher was used to cross-check and validate the results of the two initial thematic analyses. As a next step, we quantitatively examined the material (how many times a category was mentioned) and qualitatively interpreted the material, which we have summarized in the Findings section (Mayring, 2004, 2010).

Our study, while eliciting responses from experts/interested parties, may introduce a positive bias into the findings as those who responded were more probable to be those with an interest in coaching. However, we have no information about the reasons for nonresponse, which may simply reflect the busy lives of today's managers rather than their interest or lack of interest in coaching. Nevertheless, the respondents' background in coaching provides the requisite experience in content matter, and the responses deliver interesting insights into coaching cultures that will be discussed in the following section.

Findings

When asked if they would describe their organization's culture as a coaching culture, approximately half of the participants said "yes" (46.1%) and half said "no" (53.9%). While participants were limited to answering either "yes" or "no" to the question of whether they would describe their organization as a coaching culture, in their free text responses participants further elaborated on what makes a coaching culture. Approximately a quarter of participants noted that their organization was moving toward developing a coaching culture or sits in between "yes" and "no," for example, "It's probably somewhere in between yes and no (. . .)."

An indication of a shift toward a coaching culture is the fact that several participants mentioned that their organizations had recently implemented this type of coaching culture or planned to do so. In this context, a link between managers using coaching skills and establishing a coaching culture was apparent. Some managers were not sure if their organization has a coaching culture or not, illustrated by comments such as "not sure" and "unsure." This suggests that there is lack of consensus even among managers who are familiar with coaching, as to what defines a coaching culture.

Table 2. Key Components of a Coaching Culture.

Component	%
Consistent use of different types of coaching across the organization	75.4
Provision of appropriate training and resources	38.8
Involvement of top management	23.0
Alignment with organizational values	10.9
Transparency of benefits	9.8
Formalized process	5.5

Note. Qualitative responses ($N = 216$).

Participants rated consistent deployment of different types of coaching across the organization, top management support, training, and resources as the most important elements required in establishing a coaching culture. Other elements were also suggested, including alignment with organizational values, transparency of benefits, and formalized process. While small numbers of participants mentioned these elements, it should be remembered that these elements emerged from the analysis of unprompted free text responses and not from pick lists of predetermined items. In other words, these elements were thoughtfully considered.

The key components with their contributions and examples are listed in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. These categories are then discussed in detail in the ensuing sections.

External, internal, and managerial coaching were mentioned as examples of providing a broader range of coaching opportunities across the organization. While external coaching opportunities appears to be valued by employees, some participants mentioned the need for more internal coaching capacity as opposed to relying solely on external coaching. “There is a reliance on paying others to do the difficult stuff and not recognize the benefits of internal provision and support at all levels (including the Executive!).” It was highlighted that a coaching culture depends on the managers in an organization using a coaching style. However, performance of the managers as coaches can vary greatly. “It is generally what the majority of managers and supervisor do. However, there is always room for improvement and different individuals have different level of skill.” Participants also reported that in some cases, managers are required to use a coaching style, despite not wanting to work in this way. Furthermore, managers may think that they are coaching but, in reality, adopt a directive style. Hence, to move toward a coaching culture, participants suggested that coaching needs to be part of the (formal) duties of the manager.

Overall, the availability of differing coaching environments, whether external coaches, internal coaches, and/or managers coaching their subordinates, is seen by managers as essential for coaching to be ingrained in the culture.

To move further toward a coaching culture, participants suggested that it was important for all levels of an organization to be involved. “It is actioned at all levels and is supported from the top, down through the executive.” Participants, however,

Table 3. Sample Coding Examples.

Component	Examples
Consistent use of different types of coaching across the organization	“(. . .) there are a suite of professional coaches that people can engage if they wish to, or an in-house person can be found if a ‘no cost’ solution is preferred.” “It is generally what the majority of managers and supervisor do. However, there is always room for improvement and different individuals have different level of skill.” “Only some people are encouraged and supported to do this.” “It is actioned at all levels and is supported from the top, down through the executive.”
Provision of appropriate training and resources	“All employees in our corporate office attend a coaching program within 12 months of commencement and learn GROW etc. and how to coach themselves and others if applicable to achieve results.” “Although we provide coaching training, there isn’t follow-up on how it’s working for the manager.” “Because of constant cost cutting and increasing pressures to perform most managers barely get to keep their heads above water let alone spend the time to provide staff with a coaching experience.”
Involvement of top management	“Commitment by CEO and senior management to a coaching culture, supported by training for staff at all levels.” “It is in parts . . . the higher up the organization its lip service. Have worked for very few managers in my career who I would regard as coaches. Current executive who I report is definitely not a coach.” “Greater levels of support and encouragement within the senior levels for this to be a recognized methodology.”
Alignment with organizational values	“(. . .) It is inherent in our values (inspire each other).” “(. . .) it is a culture that encourages support, guidance and assistance, and in particular approachability—‘the only dumb question is the one not asked’ type approachability.” “But again depends, the values of the company support coaching; however the translation into the workplace isn’t always there.”
Transparency of benefits of a coaching culture	“I think that we have frameworks in place, but due to continual change management distractions, employees often cannot see long term benefits in improving themselves—job security becomes an issue.” “It’s getting there, a lot of engineers, so communication is not necessarily their strength, but they understand the value in it once they do it.”
Formalized process	“(. . .) with a coaching framework that enables managers to put in place true coaching practices.” “Managers are expected to coach and their people leadership is included as one of their annual KPIs.” “Reduce the obsession with reward for measurable performance. Much of coaching involves improvements in areas that are very difficult or impossible to measure. Modern HR teams are obsessed with the view that everything valuable is measurable so if it’s not measurable there’s not much point coaching for it.”

Note. KPI = key performance indicators; HR = human resource.

also reported that in their organization, coaching endeavors were more focused toward a selected group in the organization. Indeed, the opportunity to be coached by internal or external coaches seems to be more common for the upper levels of an organization. The most successful coaching cultures then would be those that have support for coaching in both vertical and horizontal directions, rather than being concentrated at the executive level. To establish coaching on a horizontal as well as a vertical level across the organization, it is crucial to have willingness to engage in the process, not only from the perspective of the coach but also from that of the coachee. If willingness or proactive engagement is absent, a coaching culture might be difficult to establish.

Training was one of the more prevalent mechanisms cited by participants as helpful in instigating a coaching culture. "All management training beginning at the lowest level is in the 'coaching' style." Training can send a signal to demonstrate the seriousness with which a coaching culture is regarded within an organization as well as being essential to help managers understand what coaching is and how to use coaching as a management style. However, training alone is not enough. Continued learning and development as well as support in the form of follow-ups or peer support are needed. "Although we provide coaching training, there isn't follow-up on how it's working for the manager." In addition, it seems important to allow time to develop a coaching competence and not expect somebody to be capable to coach after one brief training intervention. Furthermore, training needs to be continuously improved, and changes in the environment must be taken into consideration.

Resources were also important to develop a coaching culture. "Need to commit resources to it currently viewed as useful hobby work." The two key resources that were frequently named were time and money. Time is not only linked to having the time to coach but also to ongoing training on how to coach. When these key resources are in place, the organization was seen as signaling its seriousness with regard to the development of a coaching culture. Money, in terms of investing in training resources, was also frequently mentioned by participants. However, in reality, an organization's resources are limited. Thus, in practice, it might be quite challenging to devote time and money to coaching. When there was pressure on time or finances, managers reverted back to other styles of leadership, and coaching was pushed aside.

Participants also highlighted the importance of having top management support for creating a coaching culture. "Greater levels of support and encouragement within the senior levels for this to be a recognized methodology." This involvement includes executives supporting the idea of a coaching culture, for example, through making training resources available. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, the top managers themselves need to demonstrate coaching skills. "It is in parts . . . the higher up the organization its lip service. Have worked for very few managers in my career who I would regard as coaches. Current executive who I report is definitely not a coach." The top management also needs to proactively promote coaching throughout the organization and provide encouragement for managers to use a coaching style as well as to demonstrate their belief in the capability and capacity of managers as coaches.

To create a coaching culture, some participants stressed the importance of alignment between the key values of the organization and those of coaching. However, even

when these values were inherent in an organization, it did not mean that a coaching culture is automatically in place.

The values conducive to coaching emerged from this research as follows:

Empowerment: “It has the aspiration we’re just not there yet—too much power in managers, not enough empowerment.”

Inclusiveness: “(. . .) respecting all individuals’ views rather than imposing the organization’s expectations on people.”

Ownership: “Where employees are encouraged to take ownership and be accountable for themselves and their teams.”

Collaboration: “Leaders who are approachable and who work with team to shape solutions to issues in a manner that is collaborative and transparent.”

Innovation: “People are allowed to explore their knowledge and skill boundaries and make ‘growing mistakes’. Innovation is encouraged and rewarded.”

Learning: “We are very much devoted to be a learning/coaching organization. We believe that a person’s success is measured by the success of those who they are responsible for.”

Managers stated that benefits of a coaching culture must be made clear and transparent to organizational stakeholders. If benefits cannot be seen, it can be challenging to convince employees of the need to shift toward a coaching culture. Sometimes, through applying a coaching approach, the possible benefits proved more tangible, at the personal level. “It’s getting there, a lot of engineers, so communication is not necessarily their strength, but they understand the value in it once they do it.” Organizations were starting to see the benefits associated with a coaching culture, for example, the attraction and retention of individuals with high potential.

As another indicator for a coaching culture, participants mentioned that it was important to formalize coaching within an organization. “In my organization we would need a coaching policy!” This process of formalizing coaching can be related to establishing a structured approach within appropriate frameworks. For example, a formalized and communicated strategy is seen as a positive building block for creating a coaching culture. Managers pointed out that it was helpful if coaching was part of their key performance indicators and performance reviews in order to promote a coaching culture; however, others cautioned that it might be counterproductive to link coaching to key performance indicators.

In summary, our findings shed light on how managers experience coaching cultures, specifically with regard to the different elements needed to constitute a coaching culture and their sequencing. Our data show that a coaching culture needs to include different stakeholders as evident in the use of various types of coaching across the organization, which three quarters of the responders highlighted. Thus, coaching is moving further away from being something for a selected “elite” group of people but rather a mechanism for everyone within the organization who is willing to engage in coaching. This change in coaching perspective calls for managers to be or become “good coaches” as it will not be feasible to rely only on external coaching sources.

Having good leadership coaches in an organization links to the second highest answer, namely, to ensure that coaching training starts at the lowest level of management as well as involves top management as role models. Furthermore, from the answers of the participants, an indication for sequencing the different elements could be drawn with some functioning as base elements, such as alignment of values as well as clear communication of the benefits of and rationale for coaching. We will further discuss and contrast these findings with other studies and literature in the next section.

Discussion

Our study adds value to the field of coaching by eliciting and analyzing managers' perceptions of a coaching culture. Our study contributes to the body of knowledge by further expanding on our understanding of the fundamental building blocks of a coaching culture, which has been developed from small sample studies and case studies. Based on the reporting of a large sample of managers across a wide range of industries and sectors, the key components found by our study warrant a new definition of a coaching culture.

A coaching culture can be defined as the consistent use of multiple types of coaching across and at all levels of an organization, using a formalized process that includes provision of appropriate training and resources, involvement of top management, clear communication of the benefits of coaching, and alignment with organizational values such as ownership, empowerment, collaboration, respect, innovation, and learning. This is consistent with Underhill (2018) who includes a wide range of types of coaching in mature coaching cultures, namely, executive coaching, manager as coach, internal coaching, peer coaching, team coaching, group coaching, and incorporating coaching in leadership development programs.

Importantly, the study sheds light onto two largely undocumented aspects: alignment with organizational values and transparency of benefits. Aligning corporate/coaching values as well as communicating "why" a coaching culture is needed in the first place were considered vital to the success of a coaching culture.

Previous research regarding the elements that need to be put in place and at which point in time in order to create a coaching culture is contradictory, as pointed out in our earlier discussion of implementing coaching cultures. Our study indicates that some of the key components of a coaching culture do need to be in place earlier than others.

First, as organizational cultures have certain traits (Azevedo, 2018), the alignment of coaching-conducive organizational values as well as the transparent communication of coaching benefits and the importance of executive involvement are foundational features of coaching cultures. If the values clash, if the benefits of coaching are not made clear, and if the top management hinders coaching efforts, it is unlikely that other initiatives such as training and different types of coaching will unfold.

Second, while it is clear from our study that training is an important component, we could not match training to a certain stage of coaching culture phases as other authors did in linking training coaching initiatives to the latter stages of creating a coaching culture (Mansor et al., 2012; Vesso, 2014). However, in our study, executives are

already receiving training in the early stages. In line with Heslin et al. (2006), our study indicated a need for clear communication of the benefits of and rationale for coaching—otherwise, the coaching training remains separate and hence coaching does not become embedded into daily routines. There exists a range of training opportunities for managers in coaching (Milner et al., 2018; Milner & McCarthy, 2014); for example, managers can seek out an executive coach for themselves in order to learn more about coaching and to enhance their own coaching skills (D. E. Gray et al., 2011). Contrarily, it has been argued that formal training programs provide better outcomes than learning coaching skills via observation (Agarwal et al., 2009). Regardless of the training vehicle, our study found that it was important that enough time was provided to develop coaching competence. While long-time training might be the ideal choice, Milner and Milner (2018) showed an increase in coaching skills competency already with a 15-hour face-to-face training workshop on key coaching skills such as listening and identifying strengths in others.

Third, Megginson and Clutterbuck (2006) describe one sign of moving toward a coaching culture as the shift from formal coaching to informal coaching. Megginson and Clutterbuck (2006) are thus contrasting formal coaching sessions with adopting a coaching style, whereas participants in our study seem to see coaching as part of the organization's day-to-day operations, not necessarily requiring formal coaching sessions between manager and employees. Formalizing coaching—for example, introducing policies and processes—was regarded in our study as a sign of moving toward a more pervasive coaching culture. Our findings indicate that a formal approach was associated with receiving more support from the organization. For the establishment of a coaching culture, managers in our study saw a need for role models within organizations, as well as for formal processes and frameworks and for different levels of coaching interventions.

Implications for Practice

Managers need to realize and take on a proactive role when it comes to creating a coaching culture in their organizations. A proactive role includes educating themselves on “what coaching is” and learning how to apply it. Clearly, a coaching culture is unlikely to unfold if executives themselves are either not displaying effective coaching skills or not actively promoting coaching as an organization-wide style. In other words, executives merely stating that they want a coaching culture does not make one happen. Executives need to remember that changing any organization's culture is not likely to succeed without continuing change management efforts (Graetz & Smith, 2010). If a new culture is imposed on employees from the top of the organization in a top-down manner (Hodgkinson, 2000) and without consideration of possible reservations, there is likely to be resistance toward change by employees (Deetz et al., 2000). Looking at the elements we identified, reiteration and consistency are important over a longer time period for several reasons such as alignment with organizational values. Values cannot change overnight if they are to be perceived as authentic. Nor can values be implemented simply by being displayed on posters but rather need to be lived, role

modeled, and experienced in day-to-day interactions. Furthermore, consideration needs to be given with regard to retention and transition of key players who are the champions driving coaching culture as well as onboarding new staff and helping them to understand and participate in the organization's coaching culture. The credibility of such employees is vital at various levels of the organization. Losing such key staff before a coaching culture is fully embedded risks wasting the investment the organization has made in coaching prior to this point.

Limitations and Further Research

To further define a coaching culture, research should combine the viewpoints of different stakeholders, including employees at all levels of organizations to ensure a holistic perspective using multiple longitudinal studies, in line with D. Gray et al. (2014) and de Haan (2019). Future studies should also further shed light on what inhibits, stops, or promotes the development of coaching cultures and the role of the HR department in championing and supporting such cultures (McCarthy & Milner, 2020). Understanding these mechanisms will allow us to arrive at a common definition. As seen in our study, those participants who did not have a coaching culture in their own organization identified important elements that were missing in their view and hence prevented their organizations achieving a coaching culture, namely, alignment with organizational values and transparency of benefits. The themes we identified relating to different components that constitute a coaching culture should be further researched in quantitative and statistically representative studies as well as through the robust implementation of all four types of qualitative research relevant to coaching identified by de Haan (2019), namely, action research, case studies, field research, and process research. While our study focused on managers working in Australia, our findings show similarities to studies on coaching cultures in other countries, such as Malaysia (Mansor et al., 2012), Estonia (Vesso, 2014), Slovakia (Seemann et al., 2019), or the United Kingdom (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006). Future studies could further compare and contrast organizational coaching cultures across different national cultures in order to determine whether the same elements are important in different cultures, whether these elements are equally important in different cultures, and if the order of implementing these elements is different in different cultures. Also as the majority of our respondents were in the service sector, it will be important to understand whether there are differences in how coaching cultures are perceived and enacted in manufacturing organizations. Finally, and also in line with previous research on the value of observing and coding recorded coaching sessions (de Haan, 2019; Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015), we suggest that interesting findings could be obtained by comparing observations of coaching in organizations with a coaching culture with observations of coaching sessions in organizations without a coaching culture, in order to determine whether the existence of a coaching culture has any observable effect on the coaching process, the working alliance between manager and employee, and the effectiveness of coaching in the workplace.

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