COACHING AS A METHOD OF SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES' DEVELOPMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS: POLISH EXPERIENCE

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Stanisław Brzeziński, Waldemar Jędrzejczyk

Introduction

The ongoing transformation of organizations as a result of a technological progress entails the need for significant changes, primarily in organizational structures, leadership mechanisms, organizational culture and competences, both organizational and individual. The „demand” for new competences is growing. Finding and retaining employees with desired competences is and will be one of the biggest problems that organizations have to deal with, both now and in the future. The problem is essential since the „demand” for key competences in organizations is already high, whereas there is their „deficit” in the labor market (Jędrzejczyk, 2019, pp. 19–21). Therefore, it is extremely important for the necessary competences to be developed by organizations in the internal labor market through development of their own staff. Organizations should actively support employees in their professional development. One of the relatively new methods of improving employee competences is coaching.

Coaching is generally understood as a process aimed at helping people to achieve better results. Using the coaching idea by managers in organizations contributes to changing the style of human resources management – a manager/supervisor ceases to be a „source” of solutions for employees and becomes a „source” of inspiration for them. Over time, employees should become more independent and find solutions to problems or tasks related to their roles in organizations.

The main aim of the article is to define the prime methods and objectives of employees' professional development in organizations, which is a contribution to the assessment whether it is justified to support this process by coaching.

The idea of coaching in human resources management

The idea of using coaching in human resources management was initiated in the 60s of the 20th century. J. Whitmore and T. J. Leonard are considered pioneers of this trend. J. Whitmore (2011, p. 18) perceives coaching as a skill of great potential, which requires extensive knowledge and experience. He is assigned the greatest individual influence on the coaching development as a professional role Whitmore. T. J. Leonard, on the other hand, was the founder of the first coaching school, Coach University, which was established in 1992 in the United States. He contributed to increasing the importance of coaching in practice (Vickers, Bavister, 2007,

pp. 30–31). Currently, coaching is second in the ranking of the fastest growing professions in the world – first is information technology (IT) (Czarkowska, 2018, p. 290).

In the Polish business practice coaching is only just beginning to gain in importance. Interest in the coaching practical application in organizations is slowly increasing – on August the 7th 2014 the coach profession was entered by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy on the list of professions and specializations¹.

In order to use the coaching potential, it is necessary to understand what coaching really is: for what purpose it can be used, when and to what extent, as well as who is able to use it properly. „Coaching is a process which helps people achieve better results” (Parsloe, 1998, p. 10). „It focuses on future opportunities, not on foregone mistakes” (Whitmore, 2011, p. 16). „Coaching is a relationship between two people sharing a purpose” (Thrope, Clifford, 2004, p. 21). International Coach Federation (ICF) defines coaching as an interactive process which helps individuals or organizations accelerate their development pace and improve their performance. It also determines coaching as improving a client's performance results as well as improving their way of learning. Coaching was created to provide clients with an opportunity to increase their ability to achieve their dream results and build confidence in their natural skills. It is important that clients do not feel they can only work effectively when they have the coach's support (*What is coaching ...*). Coaching finds practical application in organizations, in human resources management in particular. It is perceived as a teaching process (Parsloe, 1995, p. 18). It is based on conversation, asking questions, active listening and a partnership that actively supports the search for good solutions and achievement of goals. The effect of using coaching in an organization is providing employees with an opportunity to optimize their activities and make good use of their potential. It is about eliciting strengths from people. It helps them overcome their personal limitations in reaching their goals and facilitating better teamwork. The use of coaching supports in achieving an optimal solution and not in searching for the roots of the problem. It creates new ways of thinking and acting (Dilts, 2006, p. 23). Coaching enables to go beyond the level on which an individual taking part in the coaching process is at a given time.

Coaching in the business area concerns employees' competence development, necessary to achieve organizational

goals (Wilson, 2010, p. 24). It can be implemented in organizations in three basic ways. It can be run by professional coaches – external (1st way) or internal (2nd way). It can also be conducted by a direct superior – a manager with appropriate coaching knowledge (3rd way) (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2012, p. 8). The first way – involving specialists from external training and consulting companies – is applied incidentally or periodically, usually in relation to top and middle levels of management. The aim is to support the leadership, communication and motivational skills development. The second way – a professional coach permanently employed in an organization – applies to all employees. The aim is to support employees in their individual development, competence improvement and achievement of their goals. Such a practice is usually used in large international corporations. The third way – coaching conducted by managers/direct supervisors – can be applied in current activities in all organizations. Using the idea of coaching in the relationship between the superior and subordinate is also referred to as a coaching management style. This style is based on a belief that each employee has potential (knowledge and experience), which can be developed on the basis of one's own self-fulfillment needs. The employee knows the solutions to his own problems and the coach's role is to help him in reaching these solutions. Coaching management style consists in asking questions, not giving orders and determining the implementation ways. It is to encourage employees to solve problems on their own and not to wait for ready-made solutions provided by their supervisor (Wójcik, 2010, p. 13). Coaching can be conducted both in individual and group/team dimensions.

The issue of coaching in management can also be found in the following works: S. Graham, J.F. Wedman, B. Garvin-Kester (2008), Ch. Bond, M. Seneque (2012), J. Milner, G. McCarthy, T. Milner (2017).

Manager as a coach

A coach plays a very important role in the coaching process. His task is to achieve the set goal by the person participating in the coaching process. He is responsible for supervising the entire process but its content is shaped by the customer (Wilson, 2015, p. 38). Coach does not judge nor give advice, he listens and asks questions. Listening is usually the first skill that a potential future coach acquires (Wilson, 2015, pp. 202–203). No less important are: asking the right questions, giving feedback and setting goals (Rogers, 2010, p. 68). Additionally, a coach should be patient, positive, trustworthy and honest. He should respect others and believe in people's potential (Thorpe, Clifford, 2004, p. 44).

One of the foundations of cooperation between a coach and his client is co-creation of relations – it consists in creating a safe, trustful and respectful space necessary for learning and change (Starr, 2015, p. 139). Coach and client should be partners in coaching (Hargrove, 2006, p. 94). In order for a partnership to exist, the customer usually has to „grow” into such a relationship. For many people it is difficult and takes time.

Using coaching as a method of supporting employees' development in organizations requires from a coach appropriate predispositions, knowledge and experience in the field of the method itself. It can be assumed that professional coaches are characterized by appropriate competences. In Poland, the Coaching Chamber is an organization representing the interests of the coaching community and taking care of the high quality of the coaching profession. It consociates entities operating in the coaching area (Izba Coachingu, 2019). However, such an assumption cannot be made for managers in organizations, who are primarily focused on tasks in the domain. Managers not only lack proper practical experience in coaching – which is a prerequisite for effective use of the method – but often do not have any knowledge about the subject. In order for managers to be more successful in building a stronger involvement of their subordinates and increasing their motivation – and consequently their effectiveness in working with the coaching management style – they should have and systematically develop their own skills, such as (O'Neill, 2005, p. 23):

- be able to ask questions, listen and receive comments from employees, respond to their remarks,
- have the ability to put personal authority before formal authority,
- be able to indicate openly their concerns about the activities carried out by the team,
- provide feedback on an ongoing basis, both negative and positive,
- submit ideas and ask employees to evaluate them,
- be able to manage a conflict and constructively try to find a mutually acceptable solution,
- show trust in their subordinates and discuss problems with them,
- take care of the set goals achievement,
- assign responsibility for performing particular tasks to individual employees,
- provide support and assistance when problems arise,
- be familiar with issues related to the individuals and groups development,
- support and motivate subordinates in difficult situations related to problems in achieving professional goals.

There are numerous examples in the literature which prove that the use of coaching management style can bring measurable results in organizations. For example, the research conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers shows that coaching enables (*Czy warto inwestować ...*):

- improvement of interpersonal relations and communication in the organization – by more than 70%,
- to increase employee's productivity – by 70%,
- more effective business management – by more than 60%,
- to use working time better – by almost 60%,
- to increase team productivity – by more than 50%.

There are also several opinions that in some situations coaching does not work – it is an ineffective method. Usually, however, low effectiveness or lack of coaching results is a consequence of incorrect diagnosis of the organization's needs or improper people selection, both coach and

clients (Wójcik, 2010, p. 17). A well conducted coaching should be based on reliable preparation of the entire process, in which the following stages can be distinguished (Fornalczyk, 2007, p. 92):

1. Choosing the right coach.
2. Customer selection – checking the readiness to participate in the coaching process.
3. Planning, monitoring and evaluating the coaching process activities.
4. Implementing the process in compliance with high ethical standards.

Coaching management style is slowly beginning to be appreciated and used more and more often in Poland. This is driven by a large number of foreign companies that have emerged on the market. In these companies, coaching methods have long been actively used in the human resources management process and the coaches' roles are taken over by managers.

Professional development of employees in organizations – research results

The main goal of our own research in the field of coaching is to establish development factors and barriers of coaching management style implementation in organizations as well as to develop a reference competency model for coaching management style. This model will define the competences that should be distinguished by a manager-coach so that the coaching process carried out by him in the organization was qualitatively similar to the process conducted by a professional coach².

The research method

The aim of the research presented in this article is to identify main ways and objectives of employees' professional development in organizations. The obtained results will contribute to the assessment whether it is justified to implement professional development processes in organizations using the coaching method.

Two basic stages were distinguished in the described research process:

Stage 1: Defining the main ways and objectives of employees' professional development in organizations – from the managers' perspective;

Stage 2: Defining the main ways and objectives of employees' professional development in organizations – from the employees' perspective.

The research was conducted in the period from June to September 2018. It was of a quantitative nature. The diagnostic survey method was applied with the use of standardized questionnaires. The research was carried out using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method. Managers and executive employees of companies with different business profiles posed the target groups. In total, 115 people took part in the survey (45 people – research population of managers; 70 people – research population of executive employees). Stages 1 and 2 were carried out in parallel.

Professional development of employees in organizations – managerial perspective

In the research part which aimed to identify the main ways and objectives of employees' professional development in organizations from the managers' perspective, the answers to the following questions were sought-after:

1. How do managers impact subordinates in organizations – what are the most common management styles?
2. Which forms and methods of employees' professional development are the most effective in managers' judgement?
3. How do managers most often support employees in their professional development process?
4. By whom is an individual form of employees' development most often implemented in organizations?
5. Do managers want their employees to develop their potential as much as possible?
6. How should managers behave towards their subordinates – should they instruct, judge or relieve them at every step?

The research results have been presented graphically in figures from 1 to 5.

The key:

- a) Each employee's opinion counts (The most characteristic sentence of such style is: *what do you think about it?*)
- b) Focusing on employees, building harmony and understanding in a team (The most characteristic sentence of such style is: *first of all - people*)
- c) The most important is the vision that guides the employees' actions. Mobilizing a team to achieve specific strategic goals (The most characteristic sentence of such style is: *follow me*)
- d) Focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of each employee and supporting their development (The most characteristic sentence of such style is: *try this*)
- e) Focusing on a continuous control of employees and giving them instructions, which must be carried out in accordance with the manager's requirements (The most characteristic sentence of such style is: *do as you are told*)
- f) Teaching by showing how to achieve a goal. If necessary, the manager performs the task himself to prove to the employees the effectiveness of the chosen method (The most characteristic sentence of such style is: *do what I do - immediately!*).

Figure 1. Respondents' answers to question 1
Source: own study

The conducted research results analysis showed that the majority of respondents (55.6%) identify themselves with a management style based on creating a vision that directs employees towards achieving strategic goals and mobilizing them to achieve those goals in an effective way. Every fourth respondent declared that he/she focused on the strengths

The key:

- a) Studies/courses
- b) External training
- c) Internal training
- d) Mentoring (assistance of a more experienced person with a longer job seniority)
- e) Individual coaching performed by a superior
- f) Employee's periodic assessment

Figure 2. Respondents' answers to question 2

Source: own study

The key:

- a) Sending on trainings to enhance employee's competences
- b) Setting small targets to be met
- c) Teaching commitment
- d) Teaching self-confidence and improving self-esteem
- e) Strengthening motivation
- f) Giving ready-made solutions

Figure 3. Respondents' answers to question 3

Source: own study

The key:

- a) Direct superior
- b) Trainer/instructor employed in the company
- c) External trainer/instructor
- d) Individual processes of employees' professional development are not implemented

Figure 4. Respondents' answers to question 4

Source: own study

Figure 5. Respondents' answers to questions 5 and 6

Source: own study

and weaknesses of each employee and tried to support his/her subordinates in their professional development (Fig. 1). However, the most effective methods of support and employees' professional development indicated by managers are mentoring and coaching performed by a superior – 66.7% and 26.7% of respondents respectively (Fig. 2). Most managers support their subordinates in their professional development primarily by strengthening their motivation and teaching them commitment – 80% and 40% of respondents respectively (Fig. 3). The individual process of employees' professional development is usually carried out by a direct superior – 20.5% of respondents. However, a vast majority of managers (61.4%) answered that individual processes of employees' development in organizations are not implemented (Fig. 4). The conducted survey shows that managers want their employees to develop their professional potential – 95.5% of respondents. Most of respondents (88.4%) did not agree with the statement that instructing, judging or relieving are characteristics that managers should have (Fig. 5).

Professional development of employees in organizations – labor perspective

In the research part which aimed to identify the main ways and objectives of employees' professional development in organizations from the employees' perspective, the answers to the following questions were sought-after:

7. Do all organizations support the professional development of their employees?
8. Which forms and methods of employees' professional development are most commonly used in organizations?
9. What are the main objectives of employees' professional development in organizations?
10. Are individual processes of employees' development implemented in organizations?
11. What are the main effects of individual processes of employees' development?
12. What elements dominate in relation between the superior and his subordinate: questions, orders or instructions?

The research results are presented graphically in figures from 6 to 11.

The analysis of the conducted research results showed that not all organizations support their employees in professional development – 22.9% of respondents. However, the majority of organizations support the professional development of their employees to some extent – 77.1% of respondents (Fig. 6). The most frequently used methods of employees'

Figure 6. Respondents' answers to question 7

Source: own study

The key:

- a) Studies/courses
- b) External training
- c) Internal training
- d) Mentoring (assistance of a more experienced person with a longer job seniority)
- e) Individual coaching performed by a superior
- f) Employee's periodic assessment

Figure 7. Respondents' answers to question 8

Source: own study

The key:

- a) Improving employees' skills
- b) Better organization of work
- c) Improvement of labor productivity
- d) Improvement of work efficiency
- e) Improvement of interpersonal relations
- f) Creativity enhancement
- g) Acquisition of new skills by employees
- h) Increase in employees' motivation
- i) Improvement of relations between employee and superior
- j) Establishment of a well-functioning information system

Figure 8. Respondents' answers to question 9

Source: own study

Figure 9. Respondents' answers to question 10

Source: own study

The key:

- a) Skill improvement
- b) Acquisition of new competences
- c) Increase in work efficiency
- d) Improvement of relations with colleagues
- e) Improvement of relations with superiors
- f) A balance between private and working life
- g) Self-confidence enhancement
- h) Increase in job satisfaction
- i) Improvement of mental well-being
- j) Promotion

Figure 10. Respondents' answers to question 11

Source: own study

Figure 11. Respondents' answers to question 12

Source: own study

professional development include: internal trainings, external trainings and mentoring – 60%, 48.6% and 30% of respondents respectively (Fig. 7). The main objective of these measures is to improve employees' qualifications (51.4%), productivity (44.3%) and work efficiency (37.1%) as well as acquire new skills by employees (34.3%) (Fig. 8). Professional development processes are usually implemented in the form of group trainings rather than individual trainings – 37.1% of respondents indicated that professional development processes are also of individual character in organizations they work in (Fig. 9). The measurable effects of the individual professional development formula are above all: increase in job satisfaction (37.1%), skill improvement (35.7%), increase in work efficiency (35.7%), improvement of mental well-being (30%) as well as improvement of relations with superiors (28.6%) (Fig. 10), which is based primarily on questions, not instructions and orders – 61.4%, 27.1% and 11.4% of respondents respectively (Fig. 11).

Discussion

The main aim of the article was to assess whether it is justified to support the processes of employees' professional development in organizations by coaching method. The answer is clear. The conducted analyses and empirical research show that the use of coaching in employees' professional development is justified. Coaching as a method of supporting employees in their professional development is predestined from its very definition – it is a relationship between two people, which helps in achieving better results of actions, improves the learning process, increases involvement and enables to overcome limitations. In order to be commonly used in organizations in relations between a superior and subordinate, appropriate coaching knowledge should be possessed by managers or at least HR specialists delegated to coaching tasks. In addition, appropriate „maturity” of subordinates to such relations with superiors, where the superior poses a dominant factor – it is primarily up to him whether the use of coaching in professional development processes will be effective, is also a necessary condition.

The validity also results from the conducted empirical research. In many organizations, the developed organizational culture enables the use of coaching in the processes of employees' professional development. Managers concentrate on their employees' strengths and weaknesses and are focused on their development. They perceive mentoring and coaching as effective methods of supporting employees' professional development. Their own role in this process primarily comes down to strengthening the employees' motivation and involvement. They appreciate the advantages of individual training and engage themselves in it. They try to base their relationships with their subordinates on questions rather than orders. This translates into a great deal of positive measurable effects, such as increased work efficiency in an organization, increased job satisfaction and improved interpersonal relations.

Still, there are plenty organizations in which the developed organizational culture makes it impossible to apply coaching quickly in the processes of employees' professional

development. The research has shown that a significant portion of organizations do not support their employees in their professional development, and if they do – the methods used so far do not always ensure that the objectives for which they are being implemented are achieved. The dominant method is development in the form of group trainings. In many organizations, there is no individual support for professional development at all. In such organizations, in order to be able to use coaching, it is necessary first to introduce changes in the processes of professional development.

The presented results refer to the Polish reality.

Conclusions

Coaching as a training method is a process of extracting hidden capabilities of a person undergoing it. It usually takes form of individual sessions, during which the coach helps the person being coached to find the best solutions to his/her problems related to work thus supporting his professional and personal development. At the same time, the trainee learns how to deal with similar situations on his own in the future.

The aim of the article has been achieved. It has been shown that the use of coaching in employees' professional development is justified, which results from both theoretical and empirical premises. The fundamental theoretical premise – the validity of using coaching in the processes of employees' professional development arises from the very definition of this concept. Fundamental empirical premises: 1) The processes of employees' professional development, in which the coaching method could be successfully used, are carried out in plenty of organizations – the introduction of coaching will expand the number of professional development methods; 2) The processes of employees' professional development, in which the coaching method cannot be used, are carried out in many organizations – then the use of coaching requires the introduction of changes in the professional development processes.

Coaching in an organization is aimed primarily at improving the competences necessary for employees to perform tasks at a given position effectively.

The considerations presented in the paper are not exhaustive and require further research. The study limitations are:

- A problem regarding reliability of answers included in the questionnaire. In this case, anonymity was ensured to the study participants in order to reduce the error in the responses;
- Sample's selection method and size. The research was conducted in one country on a relatively small research population. A larger sample could give a better generalization of the results.

In the next stage of the research, it is planned to expand the research sample, increase the time horizon and conduct panel studies. Long-term research will enable the verification of respondents' views, showing how their opinions change over time and which factors have the greatest influence on them. The proposed research tool also provides an opportunity of its wider use. In further research, the research area may be extended to include the involvement construct.

Prof. Stanisław Brzeziński, Ph.D., D.Sc.
Częstochowa University of Technology
Faculty of Management
ORCID: 0000-0002-7887-1290
e-mail: stanislaw_brzezinski@wp.pl

Waldemar Jędrzejczyk, Ph.D., D.Sc.
Częstochowa University of Technology
Faculty of Management
ORCID: 0000-0001-7820-8352
e-mail: waldemar.jedrzejczyk@wz.pcz.pl

Endnotes

- 1) Klasyfikacja zawodów i specjalności na potrzeby rynku pracy oraz zakres jej stosowania, Rozporządzenie Ministra Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, Dz.U.2018.227 t.j.
- 2) The research is conducted by a research team headed by Waldemar Jędrzejczyk, co-author of the present study. The main research stream concerns the competence issue, both currently desirable and prospective, in relation to sectors, kinds and types of organizations, professional groups and key positions in organizations. In the area of coaching the main contractors are Artur Marszał and Dorian Pitera.

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Coaching jako metoda wspierania rozwoju pracowników w organizacjach – doświadczenia polskie

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono zagadnienie coachingu w zarządzaniu zasobami ludzkimi jako jednej z metod wspomagania rozwoju pracowników w organizacjach. W części teoretycznej wyjaśniono ideę coachingu w zarządzaniu zasobami ludzkimi. Ponadto syntetycznie scharakteryzowano proces coachingowy. W części empirycznej problematykę zawężono do rozwoju zawodowego pracowników w organizacjach. W artykule bazowano na analizie literaturowej oraz wynikach badań wtórnych i pierwotnych. Część empiryczna dotyczy polskiej praktyki biznesowej. Głównym celem artykułu jest określenie zasadniczych sposobów i celów rozwoju zawodowego pracowników w organizacjach, stanowiących przyczynek do oceny, czy zasadne jest wsparcie tego procesu metodą coachingu.

Słowa kluczowe

menedżer, coaching, rozwój zawodowy