



Academic Paper

Empowering Managers: A Framework for Developing and Sustaining Manager-as-Coach Competencies for Long-Term Impact

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Abstract

Despite the benefits to individuals, managers and organisations, and the investment organisations make to develop managers to coach, the number of coaching managers remains limited. Regrettably, those who coach, coach infrequently, as many do not possess the requisite skills, receiving little training that is often designed and delivered by external coaches who lack managerial experience. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study explores the lived experiences of nine managers and makes sense of their rich coaching narratives to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based manager-as-coach framework to educate managers to coach and sustain coaching as a practice. The framework provides a flexible scaffolding to customise manager-as-coach educational programmes for organisations and individual managers.

Keywords

Management development, managerial coaching, sustainable management, employee empowerment, manager-as-coach education

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Introduction

In the contemporary workplace, characterised by rapid and disruptive change, innovation has become a fundamental driver of organisational dynamics. The ability of organisations, managers, and employees to adapt to constantly shifting macro and micro contexts is not merely advantageous but essential for survival (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019; Veldsman & Johnson, 2017). The demand for employees who are committed, empowered, and self-directed has intensified,

reflecting the critical need for individuals who can collaborate effectively and navigate the complexities of the modern work environment (Anguelova, 2020; Pousa et al., 2018; Veldsman, 2017). The emergence of Millennials and Generation Zs in the workforce has further disrupted traditional paradigms, introducing novel challenges that necessitate a re-evaluation of existing workplace practices (Clifton & Harter, 2019).

The manager-as-coach

In this disruptive context, organisational success hinges on the capacity of managers to engage and develop their teams in ways that enable rapid adaptation to evolving customer demands (Mason, 2019). The outdated 'command and control' leadership style, once effective in more stable and predictable environments, is now a liability. Managers must reinvent themselves by adopting a non-directive, developmental, and empowering leadership style, one that fosters innovation and experimentation among employees (Fatien & Otter, 2015; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). Modern managers must integrate coaching into their repertoire, transitioning into roles as managers-as-coaches (Veldsman, 2017). This shift is crucial, as coaching equips employees to think critically, experiment with new approaches, and drive innovation within the organisation (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).

Thus, the imperative for contemporary managers is clear: to thrive in an era defined by constant change, they must abandon outdated management paradigms in favour of approaches that empower and develop their teams, ensuring that organisations remain competitive in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

The global demand for managerial coaching has surged, with an extensive body of literature underscoring its importance within organisations (Ellinger et al., 2018; Lyons & Bandura, 2021; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). As cited in Lyons and Bandura (2021), empirical evidence from a 2015 survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development indicates that 80% of organisations in the United Kingdom expect their managers to engage in coaching activities. This trend is not isolated to the UK; McCarthy and Milner (2020) observe that the expectation for managerial coaching is becoming a global norm. The positive correlation between managerial coaching and improved personal and professional performance is well-documented, with significant findings demonstrating that such coaching leads to sustainable, long-term performance and developmental outcomes (Barry et al., 2020; Ellinger et al., 2018; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018; Turner & McCarthy, 2015).

Coaching by managers consistently ranks as one of the most effective learning and development strategies, often yielding better results than external coaching (Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Managers are uniquely positioned within organisations, giving them a direct understanding of on-the-job requirements (Landsberg, 2002). This vantage point allows managers to develop their subordinates' competencies more effectively. This proximity not only enhances skill development but also strengthens internal relationships and networks, thereby fostering a more cohesive organisational environment (Chong et al., 2016). Managers who coach have an intrinsic understanding of the organisational context, enabling them to address issues immediately, an advantage over external coaches who must first acclimate to the organisational culture and build rapport with clients before they can intervene effectively (Chong et al., 2016).

Moreover, managerial coaching is significantly cost-effective, noting that it can be up to 90% more affordable than hiring external coaches (Turner and McCarthy, 2015). The financial burden of external coaching is particularly pronounced when considering mid-level employees, where the cost of a single external coaching intervention can equate to the individual's entire training budget for three years (Chong et al., 2016). Consequently, the integration of coaching into managerial roles not only enhances organisational performance and development but also emerges as a more economically viable solution for organisations.

Front-line managers are increasingly assuming responsibilities traditionally held by Human Resources (HR), particularly in the areas of employee development and performance management. This shift reflects a broader trend within organisations where the role of managers is expanding beyond operational oversight to encompass the holistic development of their direct reports (Barry et al., 2020; Ellinger et al., 2018; Fatien & Otter, 2015; Ladyshewsky, 2017; Lawrence, 2017; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018). The traditional reliance on annual performance appraisals is being supplanted by a preference for continuous feedback and coaching, a shift that underscores the evolving nature of performance management in contemporary workplaces (Clifton & Harter, 2019; Lyons & Bandura, 2021; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018).

Employees themselves are increasingly recognising the value of coaching, perceiving it as a critical mechanism for both professional and personal growth. Despite this recognition, there is often a gap between the amount of coaching employees desire and what they receive, indicating a pressing need for more robust coaching practices within organisations (Steeleman & Wolfeld, 2018). Coaching is not merely a beneficial tool but an essential strategy for enabling employees to navigate the complexities of today's adaptive work environments (Chikampa, 2018; Fatien & Otter, 2015; Grant & Hartley, 2014; Ibarra and Scoular, 2019; Odendaal, 2017).

Manager-as-coach education

A study conducted by McCarthy and Milner (2020) in Australia, confirmed that managers receive little training in coaching and the training they do receive is not tailored to address manager-as-coach issues. Managerial coaching training is over simplistic, boring, academic, theoretical and at times too psychological (Simpson, 2019) and most manager-as-coach training programmes are designed and delivered by external coaches (Lawrence, 2017) who lack experience and competence to offer contextually relevant training to managers and insight into the complex relationship between managers and their direct reports (Fatien & Otter, 2015). As a result, managers are not applying what they have learned in coaching skills training in the workplace (Grant and Hartley, 2014).

The skills required of a manager-as-coach are both similar and different from those required of an external coach (McCarthy & Milner, 2020). Managerial coaches are required to be more flexible than external coaches, adapting to the demands of the situation and switching hats accordingly (Lawrence, 2017). Coaching by managers should be viewed as its own discipline, since skills such as giving feedback, 'switching hats' fittingly between supervisory and facilitative roles and managing issues such as time and power are not required of the external coach (Lawrence, 2017).

Participating in supervision is recommended for professional business coaches (Hawkins, 2018; Kahn, 2014; Stout-Rostron, 2014; van Nieuwerburgh, 2020) yet managers-as-coaches receive little or no supervision (Wingrove et al., 2020). Organisations have a responsibility to provide managers with training, peer coaching and supervision to empower them to embrace coaching in their role (Beattie et al., 2014) and being coached by their manager is another effective method to develop coaching skills (Hawkins, 2012).

Developing managers to coach is a transformative learning process that fosters shifts in mindset, values and thinking and extends beyond once-off training interventions to ongoing on-the-job application of skills and support in the form of peer coaching and supervision (Beattie et al., 2014; Fatien & Otter, 2015).

Manager as coach competencies

Coaching starts from the inside with a managerial mindset that recognises the unique potential, strengths, skills and talents of each team member (Simpson, 2019) and a manager who has a coaching mindset values people more than tasks (Ellinger et al., 2007). A genuine interest and

concern for people and their development is core to effective managerial coaching (Chikampa, 2018). Effective managers-as-coaches believe in people's resourcefulness and wholeness, are genuinely interested in developing their staff and have faith that people have the desire and potential to learn and grow (Ellinger et al., 2018; Emerson & Loehr, 2008; Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2018; Simpson, 2019). These managers possess a mindset that is non-directive, enabling, empowering, developing, motivating and humanistic (Lawrence, 2017). Coaching education programmes for managers should focus on enabling managers to develop a growth mindset – an outlook grounded in the belief that coaching skills can be learned, just as individuals and teams can be developed (Chase, 2010).

Managers-as-coaches need to be intra-personally, interpersonally and cognitively competent. Intrapersonal behaviours in a leader include self-awareness, creating opportunities for own personal and professional growth and maintaining a coaching presence (Coaches and Mentors South Africa, 2021). Coaching managers possess ambitious standards, are open to their own growth and development and welcome feedback (Ellinger et al., 2018; Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2018).

Interpersonal competencies refer to a range of social skills that enable a person to build relationships with others (Chase, 2010). A trusting, psychologically safe and developmental space lays the foundation for a sustainable coaching relationship between a manager and an employee (Filsinger, 2014; McCarthy & Milner, 2020; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018). Social and emotional intelligence, encompassing various clusters of competencies, are crucial for fostering effective relationships with employees (Beattie et al., 2014; Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2018). Listening, analysing, observing, interviewing, communicating, establishing clear expectations and giving feedback are critical manager-as-coach skills (Steeleman & Wolfeld, 2018) as well as open-style questioning (McCarthy & Milner, 2020).

The cognitive skills of the manager-as-coach include the capacity to consciously navigate the multiple roles or wearing of several 'hats' - a metaphor Fatien and Otter (2015) use to describe the complexity that arises when managers add coaching to their repertoire. Managers who coach facilitate learning at every opportunity by enhancing employees' thinking and reflection. The purpose of business coaching, including coaching by managers, is to help organisations deliver on business objectives and drive business performance as it aims to enhance the performance of the individual to achieve business results (Kahn, 2014; Stout-Rostron, 2012). It is the responsibility of the manager-as-coach to align each coaching conversation with the organisation's vision, values, strategies, objectives as well as the individual's performance agreement and ensure that the coaching is goal and solution-driven. Coaches encourage people who are already competent to think differently, embrace wider perspectives and make decisions (Beattie et al., 2014; Simpson, 2019; Zhao & Liu, 2020).

Research problem and purpose

Coaching by managers receives resounding support in the literature and in practice because it delivers benefits to the individual, the manager and the organisation, and enables organisations to respond to the complex-adaptive world. For these reasons, organisations invest in the development of managers-as-coaches. Despite the need for managers to embrace coaching as part of their management repertoire, the manager-as-coach is a 'rare species' (Ellinger et al., 2018, p.264) and the few managers who do coach, coach infrequently (Ellinger et al., 2018; Lyons & Bandura, 2021). Organisations invest in coaching training for managers, but many see little benefit as the taught skills are not applied in the workplace (Grant & Hartley, 2014). Furthermore, many managerial coaching skills programmes are developed, designed and delivered by external coaches (Lawrence, 2017) and managers receive little or no supervision to support and sustain their coaching practice (Wingrove et al., 2020).

The research study aimed to explore the interconnected elements necessary for the holistic education of managers to become effective coaches and sustain coaching as a practice. Additionally, it aimed to develop a comprehensive manager-as-coach framework that incorporates all these components. The next section unpacks the methodology adopted during the study, followed by the research findings supported by participant quotations. The manager-as-coach framework as well as the limitations of the research and recommendations for future research, conclude the paper.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodologies intend to answer questions about complex social and contextual phenomena, using unstructured methods (Gray, 2018) as is the case with this research study. During the execution of the study, the researchers did not set out to, what Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Gray (2018) identify as, corroborate or refute a theory, but applied inductive reasoning by gathering detailed and rich data and then developing a framework, from the data, which would support organisations in educating managers to coach and sustain coaching by managers. The developed manager-as-coach framework aims to answer a complex organisational question which is: How can intervention management development be designed to effectively equip managers with coaching skills and ensure the sustainability of these practices in empowering and developing individuals in their teams?

Qualitative research strategies are flexible and iterative, allowing researchers to move back and forth between steps to reflect on the emerging 'story' (Fouche, 2021; Schurink, Schurink & Fouche, 2021). This study adopted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Using an inductive approach, researchers move from the particular to the general, immersing in the detail to discover themes and patterns (Fouche, 2021; Gray, 2018). IPA explores the meaning people attach to significant experiences (Miller et al., 2018) to understand the relationship between individuals and phenomena (Gray, 2018; Schurink et al., 2021). Participants' assigned meanings are the 'main currency' of IPA (Noon, 2018).

The study population comprised of middle to senior managers in South African organisations, selected based on specific criteria, including a managerial role for at least three years, oversight of at least three direct reports, and coaching experience.

Using purposive and snowball sampling, a sample of nine participants was obtained, deemed sufficient for qualitative research to achieve data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Patton, 2015). Data saturation occurs when no new information or themes emerge from the data collected, and additional interviews merely confirm the existing findings (Geyer, 2021). In this study, data saturation was reached after eight participants were interviewed. To ensure that saturation was fully achieved, a ninth interview was conducted, which corroborated the existing data and confirmed that no new insights were forthcoming.

Participants had managerial experience ranging from three to thirty-five years and represented diverse demographics: four were males (three White, one Indian) aged late twenties to early sixties, while five were females (four White, one Black) aged late twenties to mid-fifties. They worked across various industries, including manufacturing, banking, auditing, and fast-moving consumer goods. While all had coaching experience, not all engaged in formal coaching, instead integrating coaching informally as opportunities arose (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a widely used data collection method in qualitative research (Burden & Roodt, 2007; Geyer, 2021; Mason, 2017) and are particularly prevalent in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Miller et al., 2018). Both participants and researchers are active in the interpretative process,

employing double hermeneutics (Noon, 2018; Schurink et al., 2021). This study encouraged participants to make sense of their world as coaching managers, while researchers interpreted this sense-making. During interviews, phrases like “*So what I'm hearing you say is...*” and “*please correct me if my interpretation doesn't capture what you are sharing*” ensured understanding. Combining the researcher and participant's hermeneutic beliefs yields deep insights (Rajasinghe, 2020), as experienced in the semi-structured interviews. It facilitated a dynamic dialogue through which meaning emerges, as qualitative researchers acknowledge that knowledge is context-dependent (Mason, 2017). Burden and Roodt (2007, p.14) describe qualitative interviews as an “inter-view” or “interchange of views,” highlighting the opportunity for participants to share their perspectives while developing rapport with the researcher (Kelly, 2006; Miller et al., 2018).

The interview questions were categorised into three key categories: (i) the participant's professional journey, (ii) their coaching experience, and (iii) their perspectives on the future development of educational manager-as-coach programmes. Interviews were conducted synchronously via Microsoft Teams and Zoom for eight participants, while one participant opted for a face-to-face interview, which was audio-recorded using a mobile phone. The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, except for one, which extended to 75 minutes with the participant's consent. A semi-structured interview guide provided a structured yet flexible framework, allowing for follow-up questions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives (Gray, 2018).

In this study, participants' experiences as coaching managers were meticulously analysed. The process involved listening to audio recordings, transcribing them verbatim, and re-reading the text while replaying the recordings to highlight relevant extracts. Notes were made in the margins to facilitate deep immersion in the data. Patterns, themes, and recurring ideas were identified using different coloured highlighters. Themes were then grouped, and a name was assigned to each cluster, or superordinate theme. Each participant's data was organised in an Excel spreadsheet, with columns for emergent themes and rows for subordinate themes and citations.

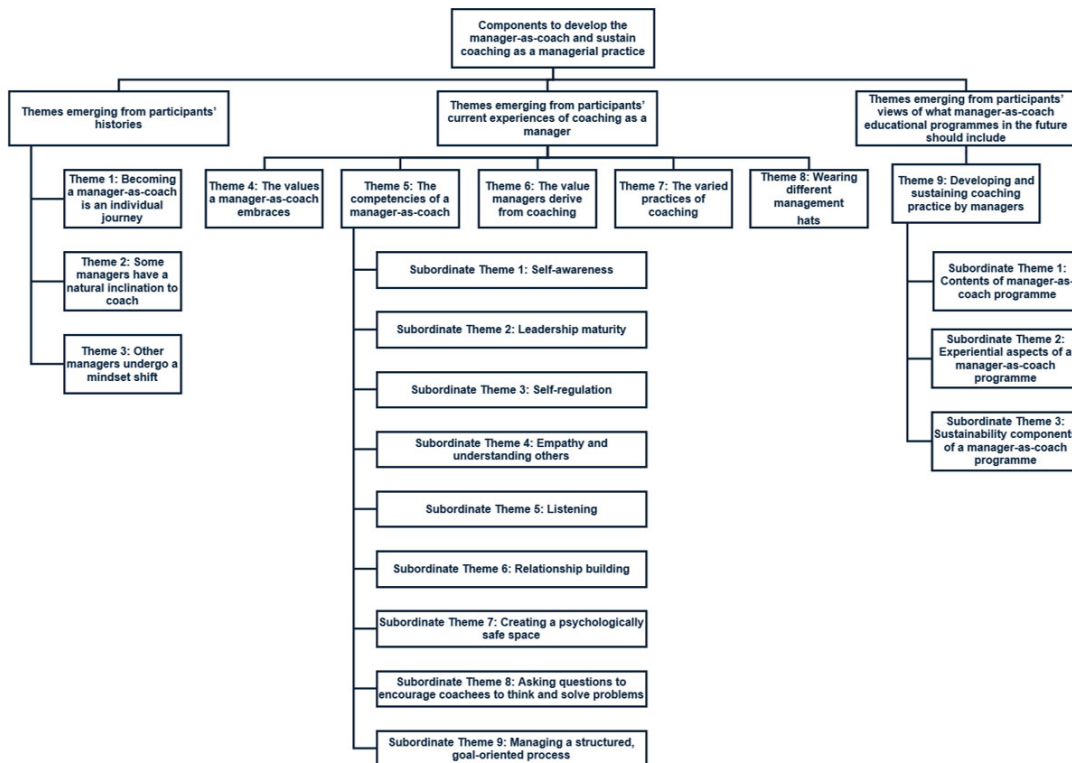
A key lesson from the IPA process was the importance of spacing interviews to allow for complete transcription and analysis before the next interview. When interviews were too close, analysing one data set while conducting another interview was challenging. Discipline was needed to bracket ideas from one case while conducting another, ensuring idiographic integrity. IPA focuses on how individuals make sense of phenomena, emphasising personal experience (Noon, 2018; Rajasinghe, 2020). This approach necessitates careful scheduling to facilitate thorough analysis and maintain the quality of interpretative insights (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022). Unlike nomothetic approaches, which generalise findings (Miller et al., 2018), this study valued each participant's unique experiences, conducting detailed case-by-case analysis before comparing cases. The analysis considered both convergence and divergence, interpreting data deeply to add ‘interpretative flair’ and incorporating double hermeneutics.

To reinforce the credibility of the research, a panel of five purposively selected experts, including two senior HR practitioners, a coaching interest group chairperson, a coaching professional body board member, and an Industrial Psychologist, reviewed the emergent themes and manager-as-coach framework. Consistent with the Delphi method for anonymity (Rekalde et al., 2015), but different, because it did not produce a group response, the panel provided individual feedback on whether the framework was acceptable, reasonable, and valuable (Jabareen, 2009). Four panel members responded, describing the framework as ‘in depth,’ ‘very comprehensive,’ ‘well-thought through,’ and ‘impactful.’

Findings

Table 1 (below) presents a coding tree that visualises the findings, displaying the nine themes and twelve subordinate themes that emerged from the raw data.

Table 1: Coding tree visualises the findings



Theme 1: Becoming a manager-as-coach is an individual journey

Interview data revealed varied journeys to becoming a manager-as-coach, with each experiencing a mindful realisation of the significance of adopting leadership and what this meant for them. Incorporating coaching as a leadership style emerged as a personal journey, leading to unique applications for each manager. The findings showed that numerous factors contributed to their development as manager-coaches, including a natural inclination to coach, childhood experiences, professional coaching, having a coaching manager, attending training, completing academic qualifications, reading books, and management roles. All participants underwent some form of leadership and coaching intervention, from workshops to professional coaching or working in organisations that institutionalised coaching. These interventions uniquely influenced each manager's evolution as a coach.

Two participants reflected on their early years:

My coaching journey started at home because I have an older sister that seemed to have a learning disability. I almost think I took on the coaching role to constantly like be on the lookout for her so, it expanded, everywhere else I went, even in the workplace. (P2)

I was head boy of the primary school, I was cricket captain, I was house captain and soccer captain, at some point somebody identified some leadership qualities in me at a young age. At UCT I stepped up into a leadership role, managing the gym, was on the SRC. I took

responsibility for the young engineers in training, and I worked for the university, did tours for the young students. (P8)

Two participants studied Psychology, one completed an MBA, and two participated in various leadership and coaching training interventions. Participant 2 noted that studying Psychology and Industrial Psychology helped understand people's needs. Participant 4 mentioned working for "very forward-thinking companies in terms of learning and development", which provided a "fantastic training ground". Participant 6 highlighted that she "learnt how to coach from a coach."

Theme 2: Some managers have a natural inclination to coach

Coaching comes naturally to some and is learned by others. Four participants indicated a natural inclination to coach. Participant 1 noted some managers are "inherently that way," while others "have to learn it," and for her, coaching is "a learned behaviour."

Participant 7 reflected on her early management years, saying she "would engage my staff naturally... in a coaching type style," unlike more autocratic managers and Participant 4 stated he "gravitated towards it (coaching), possibly due to my personality" and felt the manager-coach philosophy fitted well with his character.

Theme 3: Other managers experience a mindset shift

A mindset shift theme emerged among managers who realised coaching was not natural for them and consciously changed their outlook. This change occurred at different career stages. They acknowledged that success depended on developing and leading teams. Participant 6 noted, "When I started managing people my mindset changed" and "I had to coach them and teach them." Participant 9 stated, "Coaching is about getting them to a point when they become better at the job than you." Participant 1 emphasised the need for maturity to adopt coaching:

You need to almost be at a stage where you were ready to adopt coaching... it's that maturity that comes when you realise you cannot get the job done unless you take the people with you.

Theme 4: The values a manager-as-coach embraces

Managers' values drive coaching, with those lacking a natural inclination experiencing a mindset shift to embrace coaching values. Trust was emphasised by five participants, with Participant 4 stating, "Trust is the ticket to the game." Authenticity was noted by four participants, with one highlighting the importance of "Getting real with each other" and having direct conversations. Four participants advocated for a genuine interest in developing others, supported by the quote, "You truly and genuinely want to help somebody." Humility was valued by three interviewees. Integrity, respect, honesty, consistency, and vulnerability were raised by one or two participants with Participant 1 emphasising, "As a manager, you are not signed up to a professional code of conduct, so therefore integrity is key."

Theme 5: The competencies of a manager-as-coach

Interviews indicated that emotional intelligence is essential for managers-as-coaches. Key competencies include self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, understanding others, and building relationships. Participant 7 emphasised the importance of EQ, self-awareness, and self-regulation highlighting:

What is key for great managers-as-coaches is that they are very aware about who they are, what is their personality structure, what are their derailers, what are their blind-spots and their

strengths.

Although only two participants used the term empathy, seven highlighted understanding people as essential. Participant 4 noted, *“Skills like empathy and Emotional Intelligence are quite important,”* and Participant 8 added, *“Once you know and understand the person, it becomes much easier to have honest conversations.”* Participant 2 highlighted relationship building: *“If we’ve got a partnership, that is the best relationship a leader can have.”* Situational awareness and understanding *“interdepartmental conflict and politics”* was raised by Participant 7.

Listening was deemed essential by five participants. Participant 7 stated, *“Moving from telling to listening is quite a tough thing... listening skills are key.”*

Participant 5 emphasised creating a psychologically safe space for coaching, supported by four other participants.

It is imperative that you create a psychologically safe space – psychological safety is key. People must know they can make mistakes; people must know they can challenge the leader and each other; people must know they can take risks.

Five participants raised asking questions to encourage problem-solving. Participant 5 stated that coaching *“allows the coachee to get to their solutions on their own, by probing and asking relevant questions rather than telling the coachee what to do.”*

Managing a structured, goal-oriented process was highlighted by four participants. Participant 2 remarked that coaching must be *“structured and purpose-driven”* with *“specific goals and outcomes.”* Giving *“honest, real constructive feedback”* was another competence raised by two participants as pivotal to having honest conversations with employees.

Theme 6: The value managers derive from coaching

All participants recognised the value of coaching. Participant 8 experiences *“personal satisfaction, even joy”* from witnessing employee growth. Participant 6 stated coaching empowers her to *“enable my team to do their best and not to do it for them.”* Participant 3 noted coaching helps team members reach their potential sooner. Cultivating *“a winning culture”* and *“a culture of accountability”* was emphasised. Participant 5 and Participant 4 added, *“Coaching can really help turn an individual’s performance around.”*

Theme 7: The varied practices of coaching

Managers implement coaching in several ways. Four participants engage in informal, ad hoc coaching, while five practice both formal and informal coaching. Participant 6 uses *“coachable situations”* and draws on personal experience. Participant 5 prefers *“day-to-day, on-the-spot, ad hoc coaching.”*

Participants 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 engage in both formal and informal coaching. Participant 3 sets up regular meetings to discuss *“what they need to stop doing, continue doing and start doing. It is constructive and developmental.”*

Theme 8: Wearing different management hats

Four participants suggested that managers need to play different roles and wear different hats, explained by Participant 1 and Participant 7 respectively:

When I need to coach you, I can put my coaching hat on, when I need to mentor you, I can put my mentoring hat on, when I need to direct you, I will put my directive hat on. So, it's very situational.

I think the capacity to shift between different ... manager styles, so sometimes they will not be able to be manager-as-coach, they will have to be... a directive, autocratic manager. So, ... the capacity to discern when they move between different styles, so understanding the different styles and when to use those different styles.

Theme 9: Developing and sustaining coaching practice by managers

Participants provided comprehensive answers to the question about developing managers-as-coaches and creating sustainable managerial coaching. Responses included learning content, experiential aspects, and strategies to sustain coaching.

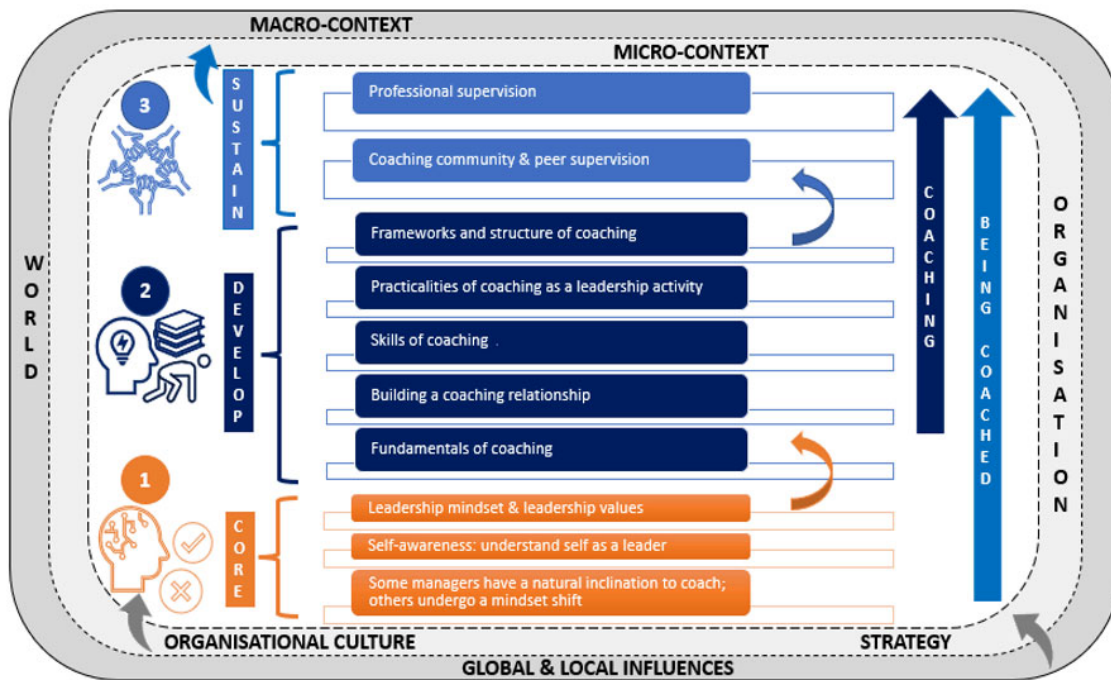
Participant 7 recommended a “*phased approach*” with time between sessions with someone “*holding their hand as they build this competency.*” She emphasised “*Power with responsibility*” and “*confidentiality*” as crucial topics. Competencies from Theme 5 were suggested as learning content. Four participants stressed the importance of supervision for coaching managers, and five suggested continued coaching by their own manager to reinforce their practice.

Conclusions

The Manager-as-coach framework (Figure 1) seeks to encapsulate the developmental elements essential for educating managers in coaching and sustaining coaching practices within organisations. This framework addresses a gap in the reviewed existing literature, as no specific study, framework or model currently offers a view of all the components necessary for effective managerial coaching development.

The journey to becoming a manager-as-coach is individual, as unveiled during the research interviews, with managers at dissimilar stages on their coaching path. The Manager-as-coach framework (Figure 1) is phased and modular, making it flexible and iterative, suitable for customisation based on organisational and individual needs. The three phases are: Core, Develop, and Sustain. These phases emerged as participants emphasised the necessity of a ‘*phased approach,*’ aligning with Fatien and Otter's (2015) perspective that developing managers into effective coaches is an educational and transformative process. This development extends beyond one-time training sessions to encompass ongoing application and support, including peer coaching and supervision. Recent studies corroborate this view, highlighting that coaching-based leadership requires continuous development and support mechanisms to be effective (Coaching-Based Leadership Intervention Programme, 2020). Additionally, the role of supervision in coaching was underscored as a critical component for sustaining coaching effectiveness and fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Clutterbuck, 2023).

Figure 1: Framework to Develop Managers to Coach



The context

The Manager-as-coach framework (Figure 1) acknowledges the significant influence of global, local, and organisational contexts on coaching managers. As highlighted in the literature review, managers must adapt to constantly shifting macro and micro contexts (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019; Veldsman & Johnson, 2017). The research findings build upon the reviewed literature, emphasising that a coaching culture profoundly impacts the integration and sustainability of coaching practices. This is particularly evident among managers who either lack a natural inclination to coach or have not transitioned from a command-and-control mindset to a grow-and-empower approach. The data revealed that those who naturally coach will continue to do so regardless of the organisational culture. One participant noted that leadership behaviour “*filters all the way down,*” highlighting the challenge of fostering a coaching culture without observing the “*core competency from people above you.*”

The research underscored the value of being coached by one's manager, providing first-hand coaching experience, which is integrated into the framework throughout the transformative journey. A participant suggested that new coaching managers require an experienced resource to guide them. This was supported by an expert panel member who emphasised that managers should “*experience the benefit of coaching*” to become more comfortable with the approach.

The concern raised in the literature review by Wingrove et al. (2020) regarding the lack of supervision for managers, and the call by Beattie et al. (2014) for organisations to provide peer coaching and supervision for coaching managers, were reinforced by the research data. Participants highlighted the significant role that peer coaching, peer supervision, and professional supervision could play in supporting coaching managers to sustain coaching practices. This accentuates the vital role that the micro context plays in the developmental process. Each phase in the Manager-as-coach framework (Figure 1) is unpacked.

Phase 1 – Core

Figure 2: Core phase of the proposed framework to develop managers to coach



Figure 2 represents Phase 1: The core. Both the literature review (Chikampa, 2018; Ellinger et al., 2018; Emerson & Loehr, 2008; Fatien & Otter, 2015; Ladyshewsky & Taplin, 2018; Lawrence, 2017; Simpson, 2019; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018) and research findings indicate that managers who coach possess a growth mindset, a genuine interest in people, and a focus on empowering others. Some participants noted that they ‘gravitated’ towards coaching due to their personalities and found that the ‘*manager-coach philosophy*’ aligned well with their character. Conversely, others needed to undergo a mindset shift to incorporate coaching into their managerial repertoire. A manager’s mindset is crucial for adopting a coaching style, with most participants emphasising their responsibility for their team’s development.

The Manager-as-coach framework (Figure 1) acknowledges the pivotal role that values play in underpinning effective managerial coaching, a critical aspect that the reviewed literature has largely overlooked. Honesty, trust, authenticity, and humility were highlighted as important values. A genuine interest in helping others and integrity were also emphasised. An expert panel member declared:

“Development of the managers’ values system is therefore core, because as managers, we do not receive that training anywhere else, other than perhaps at home, from care givers. With the absence of values being transferred from often non-existing care givers, we do not have a source of values anymore. Herein lies great opportunity for this framework.”

A question emerged during the literature review and research interviews which was whether managers with an authoritarian mindset can coach. Such managers need a significant shift to integrate coaching, which may be challenging. The research findings corroborated the extant literature confirming that a command-and-control mindset inhibits a psychologically safe relationship, necessary for coaching. The research interviews stressed that leadership maturity is crucial for adopting a coaching style. Organisations should consider if managers unwilling to adopt a coaching mindset can proceed to the Develop phase of the educational journey.

The Core phase of the Manager-as-coach framework provides a crucial opportunity for reflection. Self-awareness, which emerged as a coaching manager competence in the research interviews, is encouraged in this phase as it urges managers to reflect on their mindset, leadership values, and readiness to embrace coaching. An expert panel member noted that manager-as-coach programmes often fail because they omit this “*basic, but critical building block: self-awareness.*” During the Core phase, managers are guided to consider questions such as: Do I have a coaching mindset? Who am I as a manager and leader? What are my leadership values? Would integrating coaching benefit me, my team, and my organisation?

Phase 2 – Develop

Figure 3: Develop phase of the proposed framework to develop managers to coach



Figure 3 represents Phase 2: The Develop phase of the manager-as-coach framework. This phase enhances coaching managers' knowledge and skills. It covers the fundamentals of coaching, differentiating it from professional coaching, mentoring, training, and counselling. To effectively promote organisational coaching, it is recommended to highlight success stories and the benefits of coaching. Grant and Hartley (2014) suggest utilising personal case studies to illustrate these advantages. Participants in the study advocated for customised role-play scenarios to enhance coaching skills. Role-play exercises have been shown to be effective in developing leadership competencies, including communication and problem-solving skills, by simulating real-life situations (CMA Consulting, 2024). Additionally, incorporating case studies in training programmes provides practical examples that can facilitate learning and demonstrate the tangible benefits of coaching (McCormick, 2023).

The research data emphasised building relationships and creating psychologically safe, trusting partnerships consistent with the views of Filsinger (2014), McCarthy and Milner (2020) and Steelman and Wolfeld (2018) who recognise that safe spaces lay the foundation for sustainable coaching relationships between managers and employees. One participant noted that fear from a command-and-control approach inhibits psychological safety. Another highlighted that coaching is collaborative and non-threatening.

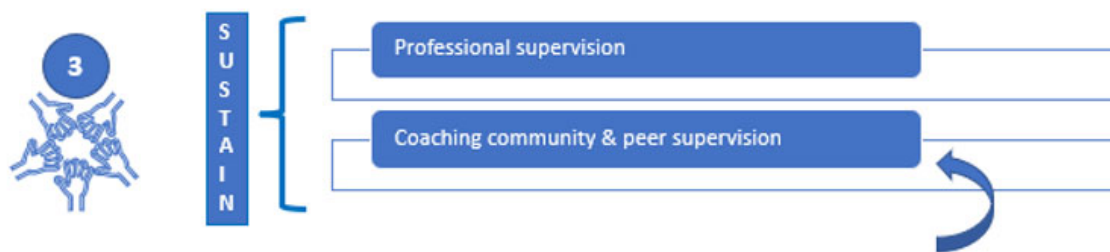
Building coaching skills is a significant component of the Develop phase. Empathy, understanding others, and situational awareness emerged as core competencies of a manager-as-coach during the research interviews, supporting the literature that emphasises emotional intelligence as an essential competency for coaching managers (Beattie et al., 2014; Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2018). Both the reviewed literature (Steeleman & Wolfeld, 2018; McCarthy & Milner, 2020) and the research interviews highlighted key skills for manager-coaches; including listening, open-ended questioning, giving constructive feedback and managing a structured process.

The Develop phase addresses the practical aspects of coaching, encompassing both formal and informal coaching, various coaching conversations, and the navigation of managerial roles. Issues such as power and confidentiality are also considered, with one participant affirming that '*power with responsibility*' is fundamental. Both the existing literature and the research findings highlight that managers must discern when to wear different 'hats', a metaphor used by Fatien and Otter (2015) to describe the complexity that arises when managers incorporate coaching into their repertoire.

The final element of the Design phase encompasses coaching theories, models, and assessments, encouraging managers to formulate their coaching approach while enhancing their ability to manage a structured process. Various methodologies, such as GROW and CLEAR, support the structuring of conversations. Managers are encouraged to reflect on the psychological and philosophical paradigms to formulate their coaching approach, including the structure they will follow when coaching. During the Develop phase, learners should coach each other, establishing a community of peer coaches and peer supervisors, and apply these skills in their work environment while still being coached by their manager.

Phase 3 – Sustain

Figure 4: Sustain phase of the proposed Framework to Develop Managers to Coach



Phase 3 (Figure 4) represents the Sustain phase, emphasising the importance of post-classroom activities in reinforcing coaching practices among managers. Research findings highlight that these activities are essential for ensuring the long-term implementation of coaching, which led to the development of this phase. Participants emphasised the significant role that peer coaching, peer supervision, and professional supervision can play in supporting coaching managers to sustain their coaching practices. Additionally, the interview process revealed that limited organisational support is a key factor preventing managers from coaching their direct reports and continuing their coaching application. An expert panel member highlighted that the Sustain phase is critical to the success of the process. The expert further noted that supervision is an effective way to sustain coaching practice, *“especially if these sessions are also used for further skills development, exposing the managers to alternative coaching methods and enriching their coaching toolbox”*.

To ensure sustainability, the Manager-as-Coach framework compels organisations to establish a community of coaching managers who meet regularly to discuss cases and, as one participant noted, *“to learn and grow from others.”* Sustaining managerial coaching beyond a training intervention necessitates that organisations build communities of coaches and provide continuous peer and professional supervision.

Limitations and recommended future research

IPA research can be criticised for lacking scientific controls due to the small number of participants and the experiential and subjective nature of the data gathered. Consequently, the framework that has emerged from this process is limited in its generalisability and requires further testing. Additionally, the small sample selected for this research study included only managers who coach or had coached. It would be valuable to explore the reasons for not integrating coaching into their managerial repertoire by interviewing managers who have not coached. The study is therefore limited as it did not include managers who do not coach or have not coached.

The scope of this study focused on managerial coaching of individuals, thus failing to explore the area of team coaching, which is an under-researched subject yet part of any manager’s

responsibility. It would be intriguing to investigate the lived experiences of managers who coach their teams, how this activity differs from other team activities, and how team coaching differs from individual coaching.

During the semi-structured interviews, it emerged that unless authoritarian, command-and-control managers experience a mindset shift, integrating coaching into their repertoire is highly unlikely. Furthermore, it was revealed that authoritarian managers whose command-and-control style is ego-based are even less likely to experience a mindset shift and adopt a coaching approach. A study of this nature would provide insight into whether this view is accurate and whether a mindset shift could be activated in authoritarian managers.

Linked to the above recommendation is the research question: Is there a personality makeup that pre-disposes managers to coach? This thought was alluded to during the data gathering and analysis process and was explored in the findings under the themes *some have a natural tendency to coach* and *others experience a mindset shift*. It was also suggested in the literature that authoritarian managers are less likely to coach.

In the context of professional leadership coaching, coaching and mentoring are recognised as distinct practices that should not be conflated or assumed to overlap. However, findings from this study indicate that managers, in their daily interactions with direct reports, perform multiple roles, including directing, coaching, mentoring, and training. Unlike external coaches, who focus solely on coaching, managers navigate fluid boundaries between these functions, often integrating them based on situational demands. This observation raises an important avenue for future research: exploring whether these functions can merge or transition seamlessly and whether a manager can effectively direct, coach, mentor, and train simultaneously or in combination.

Additionally, this study highlighted potential limitations of external coaches in delivering coaching education to managers, as they may lack first-hand experience with managerial complexities. Conversely, while managers and organisational trainers are familiar with these challenges, they may not always have a comprehensive understanding of coaching theory and practice. Further research examining the optimal balance of managerial experience and coaching expertise necessary for developing effective coaching education programmes could yield valuable insights into best practices for leadership development.

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