Attitudes to Workplace Coaching

By James Cuming / Director, rogenSi, APAC April 2015
Executive summary /

rogenSi recently engaged in research with peers, colleagues and clients to understand more about current attitudes to workplace coaching.

The latest ‘Attitudes to Workplace Coaching’ survey shows that while there is a level of agreement amongst respondents, there is compelling evidence that the priorities and preferences of team leaders, their teams and their managers, are out of alignment.

The major finding in our research shows that leaders are significantly under-investing in coaching relative to the demand for coaching as expressed by their team members. This suggests that team members are being under-nourished, under-developed and their career aspirations under-realised.

Putting to one side the contribution of time that leaders and managers dedicate to coaching, we have identified three key areas of misalignment:

1. The relative importance of goal-setting versus action-planning.
2. How coaching relates to career development.
3. The importance of planning for coaching sessions.

How will this misalignment impact your organisation? Key indicators include lower levels of discretionary effort and productivity, fewer internal promotions, poor staff engagement and high turnover of talent. If your organisation is challenged in any of these areas, this paper will show you how to adapt your coaching approach to improve them.

The research indicates that there are three significant areas of agreement around coaching in the workplace:

1. The purpose and desired outcome of coaching is to unlock potential and maximise performance
2. The vast majority of individuals (75%) would commit to at least 3 hours of effective coaching per month.
3. The key skills required by an effective coach include: questioning skills, listening attentively and demonstrating empathy.

This whitepaper will help you tailor your development approach to coaching, identify how to sell it to the team and understand how to track the ROI.
The purpose & outcome of effective coaching /

It is clear from the sample data that there is strong agreement around the purpose of coaching and how to measure its effectiveness. ‘Unlocking potential’ is the number one response to “What is the purpose of coaching?” with more than 60% of survey participants placing it in their top three responses.

It is important that everyone involved in the coaching process has a common understanding of what potential is and how it can be unlocked. In our experience, there is often a lack of clarity about potential as a concept. We believe that potential can be seen through four lenses at any given point in time:

1. **Personal ambition**
   - How driven is this person is to improve themselves and their performance in their current role or looking ahead to a future role?

2. **Coachability**
   - What is their willingness to seek out and apply coaching advice from others in the team?

3. **Self-directed learning**
   - How much time do they put into developing their own capability during the work day? And in their own time?

4. **Resilience**
   - How well do they handle setbacks in their learning and working journeys?

This breakdown of the key factors has helped rogenSi clients to identify attitudes and activities that can be directly attributed to unlocking potential through coaching.
Outcomes of effective coaching /

The primary measure of coaching effectiveness is ‘Performance Improvement’. More than 80% of the survey group placed this in their top three responses. Measuring performance improvement is usually straightforward as most organisations have systems and processes for setting and measuring KPIs. At rogenSi we counsel coaches to shift their focus onto how KPIs can be improved rather than whether the KPIs have been achieved. KPIs are delivered through the application of time, capability and mindset to certain tasks. For instance, rather than focusing on whether customer-facing staff are achieving good customer satisfaction scores, their manager should look at improving what is driving the result. In other words:

- How can they respond faster?
- How can they get better at handling issues?
- Are they delivering solutions that truly help the customer?

At rogenSi we encourage our clients to measure inputs to KPIs at least as often as the outputs.

Fig 1. The purpose of effective coaching /
Coaching capability /

Great workplace coaches are measured of course by the results they help their team members achieve, but those results are dependent on what the coaches do with their time and the quality of their activities.

In terms of capability, our survey respondents agree that ‘Asking Good Questions’, ‘Listening Attentively’ and ‘Demonstrating Empathy’ are the top three skills required to be an effective coach. All good coaching development programs should allocate a major part of their time to developing these three areas.

Fig 2. Capabilities of a good coach /

Anecdotal feedback from our clients and our experience as trainers and facilitators tells us that the battle to get coaches talking less and listening more is not over yet.

Despite agreeing that questioning and listening are crucial to coaching success, too many coaches still default to ‘tell mode’ when planned or unplanned coaching sessions take place. It might be expedient to talk more, provide solutions and play the role of instructor, but our survey group is definitely telling us: “ask us more questions and listen to the answers we give you”.

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There is an old adage in the coaching world that “the person who has the problem is probably in the best place to come up with the solution”, so our role as workplace coaches is to facilitate that process whenever possible.

You can improve your coaching capabilities by taking the 5-day challenge we recommend to our clients. Try the following simple exercise over five consecutive days:

- Make a conscious effort to avoid giving advice and sharing your point of view. Instead, move into ‘Ask mode’
- Take time to think up some great questions that will allow your team members to build their own solutions.
- Use a journal to track your progress. Divide the page into two columns; every time you choose to “ask” instead of “tell”, make a mark on the right hand side of the journal.
- Each time you “tell” or give advice, make a mark on the left hand side of the page.
- Aim to have more moments captured on the right-hand side than on the left-hand side of the page by the end of the week.
- Celebrate that you have become a better coach!
Coaching time /

75% of all respondents would commit to three or more hours of good quality coaching each month. This suggests to us that if a leader is not giving their team members enough dedicated coaching time they will feel short changed. We often meet leaders in the field and in the training room who tell us: “I’m always coaching - not formally - but in dozens of different situations everyday”.

While this may be the case, there have been studies that reveal that much of the coaching that leaders believe they are doing is not being recognised by their teams as coaching. It is all about perception.

If you want to be recognised for the coaching you are doing, we encourage you to ‘label the activity’:

- Call these sessions ‘coaching’
- Book time in diaries for specific ‘coaching’ activity.
- Demonstrate good planning and great follow-up
- Use visible coaching tools.

If you are currently spending 3 or 4 hours per team member but you aren’t labelling the activity as coaching, your team members may not recognise or value the contribution you believe you are making.
Different roles, different perspectives /

For many of our clients, the coaching interface is where they have the highest expectations. Our survey sample agreed that the purpose of coaching is to unlock potential and its primary outcome is performance improvement. However the research also tells us where their views differ, providing us with clues to understanding different prevailing attitudes, opportunities for re-alignment and areas for development.

**Goal setting vs Action planning**

Whilst team leaders and team members agree that goal-setting and action-planning are fundamental, there is a distinct difference between the relative importance each group places on the two concepts. The data clearly points to a mismatch of priorities between team leaders and their team members.

**Fig 4. Team members & team leaders have different priorities when it comes to setting goals and developing action plans /**

Team leaders prioritise action over goals. Conversely, team members rate goal-setting well above action-planning. In our experience, this is reinforced by comments from team members who say: “my leader is always driving my activities and tracking my progress but I’m not sure how all this activity relates to what I am trying to achieve”.

Team members

- Unlocking potential
- Receiving feedback
- Setting goals
- Career development
- Developing action plans
- Being taught new techniques
- Interactive communication
- Problem solving
- Reward & recognition

Team leaders

- Unlocking potential
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- Reward & recognition
Team leaders we canvassed agreed, telling us: “My job is to drive activity”. While this is true of course, it is only half the story.

We see team members are more engaged, more productive and more energised when they are very clear about their KPIs, their personal goals and team-based objectives. That is because goal clarity provides relevance for day-to-day activities; it acts as a guide to progress and provides opportunities to improve.

**We advise team leaders to put more time into setting goals and discussing progress made towards those goals before moving on to establish or update action plans.**

### The Importance of planning

We all know the importance of planning. Planning for meetings, client presentations, stakeholder briefings and coaching sessions. It’s interesting to note that team leaders give much less importance to “good planning for coaching sessions” than team members.

### Fig 5. Team members & team leaders have different priorities when it comes to planning /

Team members are telling their team leaders to “do their homework” before coaching sessions. They want them to come with a plan for the coaching event. They want them to remember what was discussed and agreed the last session and to build on that base on for the next session.
If you are in a coaching role, ask yourself four questions:

1. How much time do I put into planning coaching sessions relative to the time I spend actually coaching? We recommend that for every hour of coaching you should spend at least 15 minutes planning.

2. Do I have a method for planning that helps me gather my thoughts, set agendas and maximise the value of each coaching session? We recommend using the rogenSi 5 Minute Planner before each coaching event.

3. How much time do I put into reviewing my coaching effectiveness? We recommend that for every hour of coaching you should spend at least 10 minutes planning.

4. Do I have a place to store and share all the minutes and agreements that come from each coaching session? If you don’t have a storage system, talk to us about ‘Springo’, our coaching conversation storage and sharing application.

Planning: a pattern is forming
The second comparison in our survey was between first level leaders (team leaders) and second level leaders (leader of leaders). Once again, there were several parallels and areas of consensus but we also found some areas where alignment between leaders could be tighter.

Fig 6. Team leaders & leaders of leaders have different priorities when it comes to planning /
Our experience is that while leaders of leaders are good at saying planning is important, there are some who don’t role model this in their own coaching sessions. If you are a leader of leaders and you don’t demonstrate planning and conspicuous use of coaching tools and formats then it’s highly likely that your team leaders will be following your lead. Remember that even if your people aren’t always listening, they are always watching. Lead by example. If you want to see more attention placed on planning then the best place to start that initiative is with yourself.

**Tactical vs Strategic**

Whilst team leaders and leaders of leaders agree that performance improvement is the number one outcome of effective coaching, they certainly differ in their views on the other outcomes. These views shift depending on the role or perhaps the career stage respondents find themselves in.

Leaders of leaders see coaching as the key driver of career development for coaching recipients whilst the team leaders are more focused on resolving challenging issues. This difference is probably perfectly natural and confirms what we already know: first level leaders tend to focus on short-term tactical coaching opportunities, whereas more senior leaders tend to focus on longer-term strategic objectives. If you are going to make the leap from manager (team leader) to leader of leaders, you need to be able to make that shift consciously whilst keeping in mind what team members, often at earlier stages in their career, are wanting to achieve through coaching.

After performance improvement, receiving feedback and setting goals, team members rate career development as their next highest priority, certainly well ahead of where it ranks for team leaders. We believe this creates an opportunity to realign expectations from coaching for all levels in the organisation.

**Fig 7. Team members & team leaders have different priorities around career development /**
Team leaders should make sure they spend more time on career conversations with their team members. Leaders of leaders should encourage the same conversation with their team leaders.

It can be as easy as asking team members basic questions to get a conversation going:

- What do you see yourself doing in three years time?
- What part of your current role would you keep in the future and which parts would you change?
- What learning or development activities could you do to further your career?

For more experienced team members and managers, questions should encourage reflection and a deeper probing into their self-knowledge and levels of motivation:

- What have you done lately do build on your strengths?
- How have your developed work relationships that are helpful to your career?
- When was the last time you did something that made you more courageous at work?

### The Generation Gap

Our survey highlights that attitude to coaching in the workplace shifts at different times along a person’s career. This can also interpreted as a difference in attitudes between Baby Boomers, (leader of leaders) Gen X (team leaders) and Gen Y, (team members). We compared attitudes in people with 10 or more years’ experience (ie > 30 years old) and those with less than 10 years’ experience (< 30 years old. We see that Gen Ys and early career roles are certainly telling us - and they should be telling you - that they want more coaching than their more experienced peers. They also want much more time spent on their career development over and above resolving day-to-day challenges.

### Fig 8. Attitudes to coaching at different career stages /

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<th>Years of Experience</th>
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<tr>
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We recommend managers flex their coaching style for Gen Y. Invest time talking about their future careers and what they can do to develop themselves. Help Gen Y build a career inside your organisation - before they leave to build a career with one of your competitors.

Coaching, just like in a good game of tennis, requires both players to know the rules, agree on the objectives and have the right tools and equipment. We encourage you to put as much effort in the ‘how’ you approach coaching as you do the ‘what’ - that is, the session itself. Keep in mind too that the different attitudes to coaching depending on the role level and career stage of the coachee. We are sure both parties will be well rewarded.

About the Survey
This “Attitudes to Workplace Coaching Survey” was conducted between December and May 2014 with a 51%–49% male/female gender split. 58% of respondents were team members and 42% were leaders. Of the leaders, the split between leaders of leaders and team leaders was 48/52. The Gen Y to non Gen Y split was 17%–83%.

What are your attitudes to workplace coaching?
Take part in this year’s survey by completing this three minute questionnaire here.

About rogenSi
rogenSi is a global consultancy that helps organisations achieve measurable results through leadership and sales execution. Operating throughout Europe, North America, Middle East and Asia Pacific, rogenSi focuses on helping leaders and their teams deliver results by aligning their vision, implementing their customer-centric strategy, developing capability and mindset and enabling process and technologies. rogenSi has worked with some of the biggest global brands, blue-chip companies, high-profile organisations and their leaders for over 45 years. Since August 2014, rogenSi is a TeleTech company. Our purpose is to bring humanity to business. rogenSi does this by inspiring exceptional performance in business, for life.