

Career Development Research Paper

Nathan Sifers

Texas A&M University - EHRD 613

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### **Introduction**

Throughout this semester, this course has allowed me to broaden my horizon in Human Resource Development (HRD) with a focus on Career Development (CD). As a class, we examined career theories and development practices as it relates to our studies in HRD. Career development can be done through an assortment of practices. In this paper, I will examine a function of CD known as coaching. Coaching is “the art of guiding another person, persons, or human systems toward fulfilling futures” (Hudson, 1999, p. 22). Effective coaching is relational, it is business-driven, and it is psychological. In order for a coach to be successful, he or she needs to be able to master these elements. This will then in turn develop the employee and the organization. This paper will explain HRD theories involved in coaching as well as the strengths and weaknesses of coaching.

### **Coaching**

To understand how coaching works, we must understand the HRD theories that relate to coaching. Two theories are influential in helping the coach connect to the employee. The first one is Super's Theory. Super's Theory is made up of five stages. They are growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2006). Super's Theory helps the coach understand what stage an employee is in regarding their career. This can help the coach determine whether the employee needs peer coaching, managerial coaching, or executive coaching. Another theory a coach should use while discovering their employee is Holland's Theory. Holland's Theory focuses on the personality traits of a person. He breaks them down into six different traits: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Brown et al., 2002). Once the coach can determine the employee's personality, then

they should be able to understand how to connect and utilize their traits during the coaching process. Both theories need to be addressed in order for the coach to understand how to work with the employee. The most popular way to get an understanding of the employee is for the coach to conduct a 360-degree feedback. This process involves the employee, their supervisor, colleagues, and anyone else the employee may be in contact with in their job role. Data is gathered through a series of interviews and surveys in order to understand the employee's strengths and weaknesses (Feldman & Lankau, 2005).

Coaching provides an opportunity to develop an employee, a group of employees, and the organization as a whole (Hudson, 1999). In order for this to be successful, all parties: employee, organization, and coach; need to participate in the coaching process. These three groups create a triangular relationship (Sherman & Freas, 2004). All three need to have a mutual understanding of the purpose of coaching, while also participating and supporting the coaching program. A coach needs to have a great relationship with the employee they are coaching. A coach also needs to have a great relationship with the organization who hired them to coach their employee. It is a triangle effect where all parties need to trust and respect one another during the coaching process.

### **Strengths of Coaching**

The purpose of coaching is for an employee to develop skills, change their behavior, and grow as a person for the economic gain of the organization (Sherman & Feas, 2004). The strength of coaching is found through the triangular relationship mentioned in the previous section. Coaching works best when all parties in the triangular relationship are involved and in agreement of the goals and outcomes. The direct outcomes for the employee and the organization is why coaching has become so popular. Coaching helps the individual develop both inwardly

and outwardly, while helping the organization meet their business needs. This cannot be done without the knowledge and skills of the coach who is hired by the organization and serves the purpose to provide the necessary teaching to the employee. This section provides further explanation of why coaching is good for both the employee and the organization and how the coach's experience impacts the results.

For the employee receiving coaching, he or she will develop two dimensions (Hudson, 1999). The first is their inner self. Coaching provides an employee the opportunity to develop their psychological behaviors while figuring out their purpose in life. For psychological behaviors, coaching can help an individual get over barriers such as anxiety, depression, stress, and many others. Coaching helps an employee develop a personal career path that aligns with their personality, goals, and attributions. This clearly connects coaching with Career Development (CD).

The second dimension that coaching provides is developing the employee's outward actions and performance. It provides an employee the opportunity to develop new skills. For example, the coach could provide strategies to impact their work ethic or tackle problems that they encounter with work-related tasks. Additionally, coaching can be utilized to help an employee overcome social barriers, such as managing a team of employees or communicating with other colleagues.

Another strength to coaching is that it when it meets the needs of the employee, it will then start to meet the needs of the organization (Lowman, 2005). Coaching does affect the organization as a whole when used properly. The organization can be impacted by coaching based on the improvement of their employee who is going through the coaching process. This could be based on a change of behavior or performance by the employee that then creates a ripple effect

of change within the organization. A successful coaching process could also influence others to request their own coach, which could then help create a culture of learning and improvement for the organization.

The strength of the coach helps predict the outcome of the coaching process. A coach is “someone trained and devoted to guiding others into increased competence, commitment, and confidence” (Hudson p.6). A strong coach understands business and psychology, which is influential in dealing with an employee who needs coaching (Wylyshyn, 2003). In the business sense, a coach understands “leadership, business disciplines, management principles, and organizational politics” (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). In other words, the coach has experience and a reputation in the field that they are working in. They understand the standard principles and protocols within their area of expertise.

An experienced coach knows how to look for psychological clues in order to determine the best means for coaching an employee. Overall, a coach with an understanding of how the psychological aspect plays into coaching knows the difference between a “problem employee” verses an “employee with a problem” (Berglas, 2002). If it is the problem employee, then the coach will focus on functional training. If it is an employee with a problem, then the coach will have to look towards using psychotherapy to influence the employee’s mindset to change. When an employee is coached by a person with a deep understanding in both the business aspect and the psychological aspect, the employee will benefit greatly from the coach’s expertise and guidance.

### **Weaknesses/Limitations of Coaching**

While coaching can be an effective method for career development, there are a few limitations to consider. One limitation to consider is that anyone can call themselves a coach, which

means that an organization and an employee could be investing in someone who actually is not as experienced in the profession as they say they are. Another weakness of coaching goes back to looking at the triangle relationship and commitment level of the three parties (coach, employee, and organization) and their involvement to the process. Additionally, there is no tangible return on investment (ROI), and there is no standard protocol on how long a coaching process should last in order to be effective.

In coaching, one weakness is that anyone can call themselves a coach. There is no defined standards of what criteria a person must meet in order to be considered a coach. A company could be fooled into bringing on a person who claims to be a coach, yet does not have the required qualifications that the organization desires in a coach. In today's world, it is easy for someone to market themselves as a coach. All they need is a great website, a business card, and to come off as very motivated. Berglas discusses in his article, *The Very Real Dangers of Executive Coaching*, that some coaches like to use the sports style of coaching to get the attention needed in order to become a coach (2002). An example of the sports style of coaching would be a football coach motivating his players. A football coach motivates his players with passionate words in order to pump his team up for the game in order to make great plays and win the game. Unfortunately, that style of coaching is not enough in order to be an effective coach in the professional world. Coaching is not all about just giving a person advice. It is about developing the employee in the two dimensions discussed earlier through educating them and teaching them to see through new perspectives. If coaching is just giving advice, then there will be no long-term change for the employee.

Another limitation of coaching is found when all parties are not equally involved and committed to the process (Sherman & Freas, 2004). From the employee standpoint, the employee

must have a desire to personally change for the better. This desire must be genuine and not a force from the organization, as that could have a more negative effect. If the employee does not care about making a change, then they will put up a barrier between themselves and the coach. This will also affect the relationship between the employee and the organization. The best way to limit this from happening is by the organization and the employee working together to come to a mutual agreement that the employee needs help in overcoming a specific weakness in their role within the company.

Additionally, the organization can also become a limitation to coaching if it does not promote and support coaching and all the positive outcomes that could come out of the process for their employees. The organization needs to look at coaching as an effective tool for all levels within the organization (Lowman, 2005). If the organization cannot properly support coaching, nor view it as a valuable tool for all levels, then the coach and employee will not feel that their work together is important. This will then cause the employee and possibly the coach to care less about the process, which could result in wasted time and cause negative feelings towards the organization from the employee. If the organization does not play their role in the coaching process, then the employee and coach will not obtain the required resources to make progress in the area of coaching that they are focusing on with the employee. An example of this could be that the coach wants the employee and their team to take a third party assessment in regards to communication so that the employee can learn how to communicate with individuals in their team. If the organization does not allow the purchase of the third party assessment, then they are making a statement that they do not value the coaching process as beneficial to the organization or employee.

Another weakness is that you cannot see a physical return on investment (ROI) from coaching (Sherman & Freas, 2004). An organization's stock or profits probably will not noticeably change because of one of their employees or a group of employees has gone through coaching. It is not necessarily easy to see the intangible changes that result from coaching, which makes it difficult for some organizations to consider coaching for their employees. A clearer way to see progress may be through a culture shift in the workplace, an employee's change in behavior, and the attitude of an employee towards themselves or towards others whom they come into contact with. The value of coaching can best be seen by the relationships and processes the employee is involved in.

One limitation about coaching is that there is no clear rule on how long to coach an employee. There is no set standard in a coaching contract. The length of a coaching relationship can be determined by either setting a length of time in the contract or until the employee meets an agreed-upon goal. Ultimately, the organization has the call on how they would like to handle the length of the coaching relationship as they are paying for the coach to develop their employee. The difficult part is determining which plan is better for the organization as there are possibilities that the goal might not be met in a set timeframe by the organization. This could end up causing the organization more money than expected as they might have to extend a contract with the coach, or the contract might be longer than necessary.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, coaching should be seen as an effective tool in an employee's career development if done in a thoughtful and systematic way. There needs to be a three-way relationship where all parties involved are on board and understand their roles in the development of the em-



employee. A breakdown of the triangular relationship will limit the outcomes of the coaching process. The employee must understand the benefits of coaching and desire to change. The organization must be committed to the process and provided the necessary support regardless of not being able to see a financial return on investment. The coach must qualify as an expert in the area that is to be focused on in the coaching process. However, if all parties work together and care is taken to address some of the possible limitations, then the outcome of coaching will present itself through the development of the employee in the psychological and business dimensions.

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