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Original article

Team coaching: One more clue for fostering team effectiveness



Coaching d'équipe : une piste pour favoriser l'efficacité des équipes

I.D. Dimas^{a,*}, T. Rebelo^b, P.R. Lourenço^b^a GOVCOPP, School of Technology and Management of Águeda, University of Aveiro, Apartado 473–3754, 909 Águeda, Portugal^b University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Introduction and objectives. – The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of team coaching (provided by the leader and by peers) on team performance and on the members' satisfaction with the team. The mediated role of peer coaching in the relationship between leader coaching and individual and team results was also analyzed.

Method. – Adopting a multilevel approach and a cross-sectional design, 506 employees from 75 teams were surveyed. In the test of the hypotheses, multiple regression and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) were computed.

Results. – The results showed a direct positive effect of peer coaching on individual and team outcomes, and also a mediated effect of peer coaching in the relationship between leader coaching and both outcomes measured.

Conclusions. – Our findings put forward the importance of coaching in the achievement of team goals.

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R É S U M É

Introduction et objectifs. – L'objectif de cette étude a été d'examiner les effets du coaching d'équipe (coaching par le leader ou par les pairs) sur le rendement de l'équipe et sur la satisfaction de ses membres. Le rôle médiateur du coaching par les pairs dans la relation entre le coaching par le leader et les résultats individuels, et de l'équipe ont aussi été analysés.

Méthodes. – Dans le cadre d'une approche transversale et multiniveaux, nous avons interrogé 506 salariés appartenant à 75 équipes. En ce qui concerne la vérification des hypothèses, nous avons utilisé la régression multiple et la modélisation linéaire hiérarchique.

Résultats. – Les résultats ont démontré un effet positif direct du coaching par les pairs sur les résultats individuels et de l'équipe, et aussi un effet médiateur du coaching par les pairs dans la relation entre le coaching par le leader et ces deux mêmes indicateurs.

Conclusions. – Nos résultats soulignent l'importance du coaching dans l'atteinte des objectifs de l'équipe.

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1. Introduction

The use of coaching behaviors as a means to enhance performance has gained popularity in organizations (Boyatzis, Smith, & Beveridge, 2012) as evidenced by the growth of the coaching industry during the past decade (Segers, Vloeberghs, Henderickx,

& Inceoglu, 2011). Despite the fact that coaching is growing in the organizational setting, the literature on coaching is concentrated around externally provided executive coaching. Thus, just a few scholars have studied the effects of the other types of coaching, namely of coaching provided by the leader or by peers (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Goldman, Wesner, & Karnchanomai, 2013), and specifically focused on a team as a whole. Team coaching includes behaviors such as active listening, questioning, constructive feedback (Kim, Egan, Kim, & Kim, 2013), support in the identification of problems and consultation about possible solutions. It fulfills

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: idimas@ua.pt (I.D. Dimas).

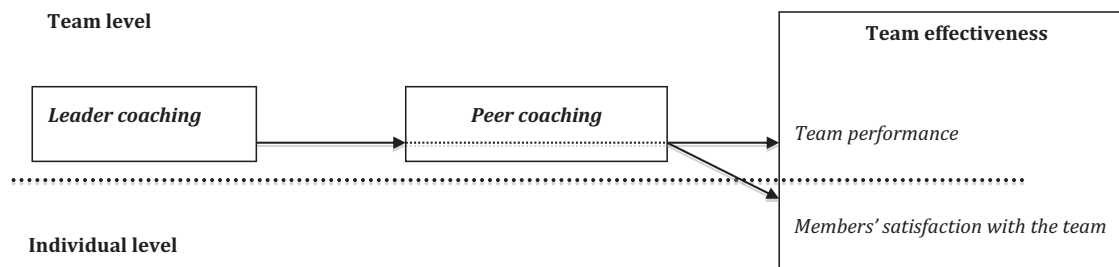


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

consultative and motivational as well as formative functions (Rico, Alcover de la Hera, & Taberner, 2010). Due to its empowering and facilitating character (Burke et al., 2006), coaching can provide teams with the resources they need to meet the demands of the environment. Indeed, coaching has the potential to stimulate reflection on new ways of performing the tasks (Buljac-Samardzic & van Woerkom, 2015), contributing to finding strategies to overcome barriers and difficulties, acting, in consequence, as a promoter of team results. Since teams in the workplace are created to generate value for the organizations, clarifying the conditions under which teams can be successful is an important goal to pursue (Lourenço, Dimas, & Rebelo, 2014).

Despite its potential importance and, although team coaching has emerged as a growing practice, few empirical studies gave support, in the team context, to the powerful nature of coaching teams (Clutterbuck, 2013; Rico et al., 2010). The present study aims to be a contribution to the field of team coaching, through the analysis of the impact of coaching behaviors provided by the leader on team results. Given that leader behaviors can indirectly influence team outcomes through the involvement of team members (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001), this study intends to contribute to clarifying the intervening mechanisms through which leader coaching may exercise a positive effect on team results, analyzing the role of coaching that is provided by peers. Given the widespread use of teams in the organizational setting (Mathieu, Tannenbaum, Donsbach, & Alliger, 2014), the empirical study of the effects of coaching the team as a whole and of its intervening mechanisms can contribute to shedding light on the strategies that lead teams to better achieve their goals, helping leaders and members to know how to behave in order to be effective.

The Input-Mediator-Outcome-Input (IMOI) approach (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005) was adopted as the framework for this research. In the scope of this approach, team coaching, as a leadership activity, is conceived as input, whereas peer coaching, which is a process related to interactions that are established between regular members (Carr & Peters, 2012), assumes the role of a mediator in the model. Considering the multilevel nature of teams, team inputs and team mediators can affect outcomes in many different ways and at different levels (Salas, Stagl, & Burke, 2004). In particular, coaching behaviors can affect the way the team performs its tasks and also members' states and perceptions. Hence, in the present research, outcomes from two levels of analysis are considered: team performance, from the team level, and members' satisfaction with the team, from the individual level, which are consensually recognized as team effectiveness criteria (e.g., Bales, 1950; Gladstein, 1984; Hackman, 1990; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Kwak, 2004).

To sum up, Fig. 1 depicts the conceptual model upon which this study is based. The following sections, preceding the presentation of the research carried out, are devoted to the explanation of the theoretical and empirical bases of the proposed model.

2. Literature review

2.1. Coaching and coaching teams

The concept of a coach was first used in sports to mean a trainer or a leader of players who creates motivation and improvement in performance through his/her action. The idea of coaching as a managerial activity appeared in the management literature in the 1950s, but it was in the 1980s and 1990s that coaching gained popularity in the organizational context (Evered & Selman, 1989). In fact, during the last two decades, coaching has become increasingly popular in organizations and, since then, coaching has no longer been just a term used in sport and has become part of managers' discourse. There is, in fact, evidence that managers are using coaching in their work, and that activities to develop coaching capability are being undertaken (Ellinger, 2013). The challenges imposed by an increasingly dynamic environment put forward the need for new management approaches and coaching emerged as a suitable behavior to generate development and success (Kim et al., 2013).

Coaching directed at individuals has been defined as a process that, through guidance, encouragement and support, enables coachees to improve their skills and individual performance, aligning them with organizational performance (Ellinger, Beattie, & Hamlin 2010; Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003; Evered & Selman, 1989; Hamlin, Ellinger, & Beattie, 2008; Mink, Owen, & Mink, 1993; Redshaw, 2000). The main focus of coaching is, in this sense, the process of achieving something, the "how to do it"; it is about questioning and giving constructive feedback, instead of giving answers or solutions (Buljac-Samardzic & van Woerkom, 2015). In fact, this concept is understood as a way of unlocking the potential of individuals to maximize their performance, under the logic of helping them to learn rather than teaching them (Law, Ireland, & Hussain, 2007).

Coaching can occur in different forms in the organizational context, including, among others, executive coaching (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999), leader coaching (Hackman & Wageman, 2005), peer coaching (Goldman et al., 2013), and managerial coaching (Hagen & Aguilar, 2012). Moreover, it can be provided in a formalized intervention, where the coach (internal or external to the organization) and the coachee are engaged in a coaching program, or can be provided in a more informal and unstructured way, through coaching actions and behaviors that leaders or peers can have with collaborators or co-workers, respectively. The focus of the coaching activity can also vary and it could be at the individual, group or organizational level. When the target of the coaching activity is a work group, the person who provides it is doing team coaching.

Team coaching can be conceived as an interaction between a coach and a team, in order to reflect upon, define and implement new strategies to achieve team purposes (Carr & Peters, 2012; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Peters & Carr, 2013). The team coach role could be assumed by a person external to the group (a consultant, for instance), by the team leader or even by regular members.

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