

Manager and coach: dependencies and limitations

Management Summary

This essay would like to answer the question: How to be a manager and a coach for your own employees?

Reason for choosing this topic is that more and more managers are taking training to become a coach and it is interesting to know how to make the best usage of both roles.

First it would put into light the modern leadership theory which describes the “Coaching leadership”. Nowadays both roles of manager and coach seem to blend into one, boundaries seem blurred. Therefore we will then go through the definition and the differences between those two roles. Questions to be answered are: Can a manager coach his / his / their employee and to which extend? How is it an advantage as a manager to be a trained coach?

The coaching training might help a manager to be a state of the art leader, as they would apprehend people relationship and conflict differently. However managers need to be careful not to coach their employees due to their role within the company: this might lead to a conflict of interest, as they are not neutral to the problems encountered and work towards the company goals.

When the frame of how to blend both role is set-up, we will go through two coaching tools, which can be used on daily basis by managers to improve their leadership skills and relationship to employees: feedback method and systemic questions.

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Introduction:

Studies about management styles have been numerous in the past decades. Management styles would first be described by Kurt Lewin in 1939 in the Journal of Social Psychology. Afterwards more and more psychologists would study intensively management theory.

The authoritarian management style was described by Lewin as part of three general management styles. A manager embodied authority and had a central decision power. This management style would be detail and success orientated. Such style was not especially people oriented, preferring achieving company goals as quick as possible. Managers have in this case a power position, deciding the company strategy and communicating it to the employees without involving them in the decision process. Authoritarian managers might not consider themselves as part of the team, but keep a certain distance from team members, while being assertive.

A modern management theory is introduced by Daniel Goleman in his book "The emotionally intelligent leader". It includes six type of leadership style: a manager is nowadays expected to be a leader focusing on people in order to lead to better results. Company cultures are nowadays expected to be characterized by flexibility, openness and trust between management and employees. This is due to an increased rapidity and complexity of the current work environment. New generations have also other expectations from their work and company.

One of the management style described by Coleman which stroke me is the so-called "Coaching leadership". Team members and their personal development are put into focus, which leads to a positive and motivating company culture. Manager should be empathic, would focus on the strengths of each team member individually and would build tight relationship with employees through individual feedback culture. Companies want their management and leadership teams to develop their coaching competencies, therefore more and more managers are learning to become coach.

Reading about those different management styles was an eye-opener, which led to following questioning: What is the difference between a coach and a manager role? Can a manager coach his team and to which extend?

1. Managing and Coaching : what is the difference?

It is important to understand the difference between a manager and a coach, as well as knowing if both roles can be taken over by one same person or if those roles should be differentiated in a company.

What are coaches for?	What are managers for?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Improve employee performance- Increase employee engagement- Let employees be part of decision making- Develop employee professionally- Provide constructive feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assign tasks- Delegate work- Monitor and evaluate progress- Train new employees- Take top-down decisions- Meet targets and deadlines- Solve problems and conflict situations

Coaching is giving guidance to the employees and collaborate with them in order to enable them finding their own solutions and taking conscious decisions. This increases generally their commitment to work and support their professional development.

Coaching focuses on the growth of the employees and help them to increase their performance on the long-term. One of its primary aim is to make team members feel valued and supported. Through critical thinking and being solution oriented instead of problem orientated, the coach helps people to develop positive behaviours and habits. Coaching could be described as a two way communication between coach and coachee: it is an exchange at eye level. The coachee explains its goals and challenges and the coach will guide and support by asking relevant questions and using coaching tools.

Managing is giving direct instructions to the employees and has a supervision component in order to track achievements and get short term results. A manager is expected to be result oriented and be able to take decisions, as their performance is usually measured by the achievements of company objectives. Managing is very effective : decision making stays with the manager, who give clear tasks to be achieved to the employees. However communication goes usually one way from manager to employee and feedback is provided when necessary.

To sum-up here are the key focus of managers and coaches:

Coach	Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growth - Two-way communication - Long-term development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directive and task oriented - One-way communication - Decision-making

2. Being a coach and a manager: To which extend?

Most probably both roles, manager and coach, can be blended into a right balance. A good manager should have coaching competency as much as core management abilities and that coaching and managing are complementary skills. What is this balance? Which lines should not be crossed? What can be the consequences?

2.1. What does speak against mixing both roles of manager and coach?

A manager might not want to be a full-time coach to his employee. An employee might not want to be a full-time coachee to his manager.

First it is very much necessary to define the framework in order not to cross personal boundaries of the employees. Coaching generally includes sharing personal behavioural patterns and private history, which in a business context might be very uncomfortable. Employees might not want to trust their manager with those confidential information: the manager represents the company, even if the framework of the coaching is set and the role are explained. The employee might then not be authentic during the coaching process. Not to forget that a coaching can only be lead if the coachee is aware of it and approve the process. This is actually the most central point before starting any coaching session.

Manager and employee do not have the same role and level in the company, one is the subordinate of the other on the hierarchy scale. And this is one more reason why the coaching cannot be successful – manager and employee are not at eye level: final decisions are in the hand of the manager and the employee is aware of it.

Moreover a manager works to achieve the company goals. There is no neutrality in the manager role in the company. A manager has the complex task to keep its team motivated,

self-sufficient, proactive on one hand, where using coaching tools can be very helpful and real eye opener for the team. On the other hand managers answers to the company goals coming from the upper management. This can lead to very conflicting situation in the case of a coaching.

For example one of my employee announced me he received a job offer outside our company and was struggling with the decision process whether leaving or staying in the company. This would have been a typical situation where I could have helped him as a coach. However it is not in the interest of my company and in my interest as the team lead to see one of the employee with such an important skillset leaving. There is a conflict of interest: in this situation a manager coaching an employee is not adequate, as the outcome of the coaching could be the employee leaving the company. In this specific case, my employee met an external and neutral coach and decided to hand me his resignation.

Due to several such situations where I could not coach my employees, in order not to disrupt my work system and fulfil my management tasks and the company goals, my opinion is that managers cannot coach their employees to a full-extend. However, the tools we have learnt as coach and the mindset are definitely an asset for managers in order to retain their employees and to expand their potential.

2.2. How can managers benefit from being coach?

A few questions can be asked in order to understand how to blend wisely the role of manager and coach: In which situation is it possible? How does the coach knowledge affect a leadership style?

I believe that each manager can benefit from a coaching training. First of all because it teaches a basic behaviour helpful in a relationship with employees: openness, optimism and empathy. A coach learns to actively listen to other people, not to judge situations or let its own experiences influence the coaching process. Moreover one important believe is that each person has a good purpose to justify its behaviour. Following these listening principles as a manager makes the dialogue with employees opener and easier, as it installs a trustful relation between both parties. When the manager believes in the best out of its employee, that allows the employee to develop itself professionally and go beyond its own set limits. Emotional intelligence is nowadays a pre-requisite for a manager to lead its team through good as well as difficult times, therefore we now speak about emotional leadership. A manager should be accessible, be able to be comfortable showing its own emotion, as well as dealing with

emotions from others. Good leadership is not only having the best expertise in its work field, but being able to create a good work environment, measured through employees satisfaction and motivation, where emotions have a place.

Second it teaches us to reflect on ourselves and on others: discover behaviour patterns and how to apprehend those. This can be very well used in conflict situations for example, in order to understand the underlying motive of the conflict and how to work towards solution with all parties having the feeling to be heard and understood.

Third being coach means being solution oriented and not problem oriented. The role of a coach is to identify and acknowledge the problem. However looking at the problem from each possible angle and stick into negativity instead of focussing on a solution will not lead a successful coaching. This is true as well in almost all work situation: if the employee is stuck into a problem and cannot find its own way towards a solution, a manager which a coaching experience can be very helpful to build up the employee and propose him to look into a solution from a different angle. Moreover a top down solution based on past experiences from and given by the manager has much less chance to be endorsed by the employee than a solution worked out by himself on his own terms.

The coaching training is a must do in order to be a state of the art leader. Manager will not only benefit from it on a professional front, but in all aspect of their lives apprehending people relationship and conflict differently.

3. Which concrete tools can be used by managers in their daily work?

From my point of view there is two very important coaching tools, which can be used on a daily basis by managers without providing a full-extend coaching to team members. It might lead to a better working environment in the team, where respect and appreciation plays a central role. This is not an exhaustive list, each and every method and tools are source of inspiration.

3.1. Feedback

First of all one method which should be mastered by every manager, but is often wrongly used is the constructive feedback. It means to invite the feedback receiver to self-reflection. It is important for a manager to be able to formulate its expectations and wishes, without hurting people's feelings. As this could lead to a loss of motivation in the team. A constructive

feedback is: descriptive, concrete, specific, based on facts and comprehensible. One useful method is to use a 3 steps method to give constructive feedbacks (in German: 3Ws Method):

- “Wahrnehmung” – Perception. The feedback giver will describe neutrally “camera-like” the situation and what has been perceived by his/her senses. All declarations should be traceable and comprehensive.
- “Wirkung” – Impact. In a second step the feedback giver can describe his / her / their subjective perception of the situation. He / She / They describe(s) his / her / their own needs in a positive message towards the feedback receiver. Afterwards asking if the message is comprehensible for the feedback receiver is important to make sure it has been received.
- “Wunsch” – Request. The feedback giver has to formulate which adjustment are wished and how the situation should be handled in future as a last step in the process. The formulation of these wishes should be clear and direct, so it does not leave place for interpretation. Asking if the message is comprehensible once again is important.

This method is effective if some other points are respected: The feedback giver has a positive intention, is not emotionally loaded, have a neutral position, takes enough time to deliver the message, is clear about the changes he / she / they wish(es) in future, communicates using the pronoun “I” in order to avoid generalities.

3.2. Systemic questions

Another coaching tools should be used on a daily basis: systemic questions. Asking the right questions might open a new way of working and give transparency on the employee’s goals, empowering them to find solution to problems themselves. In different situation, such as a problem description or a conflict situation, it is helpful to ask systemic questions.

There is different types of systemic questions to be use in a business context, this list is non-exhaustive:

- Circular questions: The employee will be asked about the approach and / or positions of a third party, which allows him / her / them to change perspective and gain a new point of view in order to create new ideas or solution. Example: How would your colleague evaluate the situation?

- Scale questions: The employees is asked to measure the subjective perception of a situation on a scale from 1 to 10. Example: On a scale of 1 to 10: How motivated do you feel? These questions are leading in general to deeper exchange on how to increase or decrease the value on the scale.
- Hypothetical questions: Usually those questions start with “What if” : The employee will be asked to think differently of a problem with another factor and be creative for looking for new ideas and solutions. This opens new possibilities for a next step in the solution process. Example: What if you could decide alone what to do?
- Paradox questions: This is a question about a contrary scenario, which first might be irritating for the employee because it is wondering about a worse situation. Those questions should be used when the employee is fully stuck with its problem, as the employee imagines losing all control over the situation, which might lead valuable statements. Example: What would you need to do to completely ruin the project?

Using those coaching tool on a daily basis will help each manager to focus on and listen more to the employees and be solution orientated.

Conclusion:

A coach and a manager have different roles in a company and therefore it is not possible to conduct coaching to their full-extend with your own employees as a manager. This might lead to a conflict of interest and leave the manager as well as the employees struggling with all brand new issues. However a manager should use coaching tools in order to enforce the focus on the employees and give him the possibility to design his / her / theirs own solutions. In doing do they will have a modern leadership style which could qualify as “coaching leadership”. Managers having been trained as a coach might as well be in-house coach for their company: they have years of experience in the specific company fields, knows the corporate culture. This would make great coach for employees which are not directly in the system of the coach.