



FOCUS ARTICLE

Virtual Behavioural Coaching - Is it still effective?

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The coaching of leaders and employees is a popular managerial tool in motivating, developing and retaining employees; it is often embarked upon as a result of change and transition in organisations, to address stress management, underpin learnings and values, establish sustainable behaviour change, and create an organisational culture that promotes care.

But what is coaching?

There appears to be a lack of clarity about what the term “coaching” actually means; with the confusion appearing to be around the fact that many organisations use the terms “coaching” and “mentoring” interchangeably, without understanding the differences.

Mentoring centres around someone with the relevant experience and knowledge, imparting that experience to the mentee to guide them along a similar path. Conversely, coaching gives individuals an opportunity to unlock their potential by allowing them to reflect on what they currently do and how, and what they would like to do and how to achieve it; coaching is not about telling the individual what path they should take and how, it is about finding their own path and empowering that to find their way there.

Coaching is a conversation whereby the coach and coachee interact in a dynamic exchange to **ACHIEVE GOALS, ENHANCE PERFORMANCE**, and move the coachee to **GREATER SUCCESS**; the International Coaching Federation defines coaching as:

“partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. The process of coaching often unlocks previously untapped sources of imagination, productivity and leadership.”

Coaching involves the art of conversation and listening, and the benefits are known to support:

- increased staff engagement
- organisational commitment to staff development

- motivation and empowerment of individuals to unlock potential and excel in it
- identification of development opportunities
- identification and development of employees with high potential
- encouragement of individuals to take ownership and responsibility
- improved performance and productivity
- increased self-reliance
- increased job satisfaction
- ability to communicate and contribute more effectively to the team and the organisation
- creation of actionable steps towards achieving goals
- increased accountability for actions and commitments

What does Coaching mean for the employee and the organisation?

As listed above, the benefits of workplace coaching are plentiful, however, effective coaching requires an investment of both time and money. Nevertheless, an organisation's commitment to workplace coaching can send a strong message to members of the team that they are valued and are worthy of that investment; this then promotes a culture of care and inclusivity, that leads to increased motivation, engagement, and loyalty in employees from the bottom up and ultimately leads to increased productivity. Coaching helps individuals transfer learning events into the culture of the organisation.



Coaching fits into the business context through:

- coaching on critical elements to ensure success of the business' strategy execution;
- building resilience;
- coaching on leadership expectations driving towards consistency in values, beliefs, behaviours, decision making, practices.
- Coaching to increase performance – the context may change e.g. Safety leadership, technical skill, the output should always be an increase in performance

Whilst the benefits of effective workplace coaching is well documented and the resource commitments recognised, the past 12 months and the rapid move onto digital platforms enforced upon the world as a result of the covid-19 pandemic, has also shown the merits of the virtual delivery of coaching. Coaching helps individuals transfer learning events into the culture of the organisation.

How can virtual coaching be effective?

Your workforce should feel empowered to communicate freely and effectively but this does not have to be limited to a face-to-face environment; virtual platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Teams, Webex and similar, have been utilised by coaches and organisations to reach their global teams and offer support during this time.



Recent research from virtual coaching delivered to over 50 leaders across a range of industries from Health, Media, Professional Services, Education, IT, Energy, Retail, Engineering, Food Processing, to the For-Benefit sector over the last 12 months, has provided us with some useful insights on the subject.

Interestingly, virtual coaching has resulted in equally good results when compared with the face-to-face experience and feedback from a recent coaching programme involving multiple clients saw 99% report that they would recommend virtual coaching - with leadership, confidence and wellbeing levels increasing by an average of 3 on a 10 point scale.

Digital Coaching Solutions can Unlock your Employees full Potential.

Is the skill of virtual coaching the same as that for face to face coaching?

The techniques and tools deployed for virtual coaching are the same as those used in physical face to face sessions, but are adapted to ensure effective online delivery. At DEKRA we use the recognised GROW model to support clients in equipping their teams with the skills they need to initiate strong coaching relationships and engage in productive dialogue about concerns, efforts and improvements, which may be required within the organisation. Our coaching focuses on how to hone communication skills to bring out the best in people, especially around questions of safety.

How can you GROW with virtual coaching?

The GROW model enables you to undertake the following steps with the support of your coach:



What other benefits are there of virtual workplace coaching?

Coaching provides opportunities to develop people in specific skills required to enhance their performance and subsequently coaching them on their progress in practicing the skills and it can easily be customised dependent on the level and location of the coachee; global teams can be reached remotely, therefore entire team receive the same quality of support.

Additionally, virtual coaching results in greater efficiency through less downtime to the organisation, as no travelling of employees is required; this also promotes a better work-life balance for the team. Furthermore, less resources are expended - no travel costs to the organisation and no impact on the environment from increased carbon footprint. Virtual coaching can also be easier and quicker to facilitate due to there being no requirement to wait for travel arrangements arranged in-line with busy schedules, no travel delays, and no need to complete everything in a rush “while the coach is on-site”, as is often the case.



What does DEKRA see for the future of coaching?

Training alone is not effective in producing long-term, sustainable behavioural and cultural change. The knowledge and skills gained in training must be embedded, which means old habits must be broken and new ones adopted. This is why coaching is a valuable tool for organisations and leaders to ensure sustainable behavioural and cultural change, through motivating, developing, and retaining employees. By investigating in their most important resource, organisations can unlock their workforce’s capabilities by supporting their employees to perform to their potential; thus achieving the positive organisational culture they are striving for.

But does workplace coaching work effectively virtually or remotely, or should organisations revert to the conventional face to face method of coaching? The answer is virtual coaching is as effective as physical face to face coaching, and it should continue to be utilised for the reasons previously highlighted! Through DEKRA’s

extensive experience in delivering to clients both locally and internationally and based on the feedback from individuals and clients, the benefits listed in this paper have been evidenced by many coaches around the world; objectives and outcomes achieved as effectively for virtual coaching as there were previously. Virtual coaching will therefore continue to be a beneficial method in developing employees and credit should be made to the wonderful world of modern technology that enables this; furthermore, Virtual coaching provides an opportunity for organisations to support a more flexible working environment for employees, and it allows leaders the opportunity to take a more systemic and strategic approach.

However, face to face coaching still has its place, especially when we talk about the importance of social interactions, observing people’s behaviours in their work environment and how situations are being handled may only be able to be witnessed onsite; a blended approach to coaching could therefore also be a consideration for some organisations.

What are the challenges of virtual coaching?

There are benefits and challenges to most things; in terms of coaching virtually, the obvious issue of poor internet connections apply. However, there are other things to consider such as recognising that the aim is not to attempt to fully replat the conventional face to face delivery of coaching but to utilise technology to delivery something equally effective but marginally different and adapted to digital platform use.

Another point is that extra effort is required to connect and ensure trust, furthermore both the coach and coachee should try to minimise distractions to ensure they create an environment that is conducive to forming the connection and trust between them.

A common challenge that we hear people ask about, is the challenge of not being able to witness the work environment or not be able to pick up on nuances due to the lack of body language or even facial expressions. The good news however, is our experience is that virtual real-time meetings between the coach and coachee still allows enough capability to read facial expressions and pick up on speech and body language.

With some prior planning and a good internet connection in place, what is clear from our research, is that any of these challenges are surmountable, and that the benefits to both the organisation and the individual being coached far outweighs any issues that may occur due to the virtual nature of the delivery.

DEKRA Solutions

Our consultants know that people are at the heart of organisational performance. Employee engagements, behaviours, decision making, and leadership are, in fact, its key ingredients; they are the driver of change when companies seek to improve safety performance, overall organisational reliability and achieve operational excellence. While management systems and programmes provide a necessary safety framework, they cannot deliver tangible outcomes without a corporate culture centred on safety.

Our solutions have been designed to support organisations change, the behaviours and decision-making processes that have the biggest impact on major accident prevention; and we offer solutions that range from Organisational Diagnostic, Assessment and Development, through to Behavioural Safety Coaching for Leadership and Workforce.

“If you can connect,
we can connect”

Leadership Coaching Services – Your Benefits



DEKRA Organisational and Process Safety

DEKRA Organisational and Process Safety are a behavioural change and process safety consultancy company. Working in collaboration with our clients, our approach is to assess the process safety and influence the safety culture with the aim of 'making a difference'.

In terms of behavioural change, we deliver the skills, methods, and motivation to change leadership attitudes, behaviours and decision-making among employees; supporting our clients in creating a culture of care and measurable sustainable improvement of safety outcomes is our goal.

The breadth and depth of expertise in process safety makes us globally recognised specialists and trusted advisors. We help our clients to understand and evaluate their risks, and work together to develop pragmatic solutions. Our value-adding and practical approach integrates specialist process safety management, engineering and testing. We seek to educate and grow client competence to provide sustainable performance improvement; partnering with our clients we combine technical expertise with a passion for life preservation, harm reduction and asset protection.

We are a service unit of DEKRA SE, a global leader in safety since 1925 with over 45,000 employees in 60 countries and 5 continents. As a part of the world's leading expert organisation DEKRA, we are the global partner for a safe world.

We have offices throughout North America, Europe, and Asia..

For more information, visit www.dekra-uk.co.uk/en/dekra-organisational-and-process-safety/

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