




# COACHING: MAXIMISING BUSINESS IMPACT


On 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023, over 150 CRF members gathered in-person to explore the topic of coaching. The event focused on four main themes: connecting coaching to the business strategy, maximising the business impact of coaching, measuring and evaluating coaching, and future coaching trends. The event also included practical lessons and experiences shared by two case study organisations. These Post Meeting Notes summarise the discussion. They also include a recording of the associated webinar which took place on 28<sup>th</sup> September, on [page 8](#).


KEY TAKEAWAYS


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**1. Be intentional when deciding to do coaching –** it has many benefits though is not always the best solution for every person every time.
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**2. Terminology and concepts relating to coaching often vary considerably,** even within the same organisation; it's important to first clearly define what is meant by coaching. In particular, coaching should not give direct advice or solve personal issues.
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**The availability of coaching and money spent on coaching are both increasing** (two thirds of CRF survey respondents said that their spend had increased in recent years).
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**4. Aligning coaching to the business strategy and measuring the business impact of coaching are two of the main gaps in coaching practice.**
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**To better align coaching with the business strategy, first focus on making sure everyone is actually aware of the business objectives!** Coaching can also provide a space for individuals to explore how to translate strategic goals into day-to-day actions.
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**6. Research shows that coaching can improve coachee motivation and confidence, increase expertise and positively impact on individual and organisational performance.**
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**7. Setting goals, creating a safe place for people to learn from reflection and creating a clear action plan for after the coaching all help to maximise coaching impact.** A psychologically safe culture is also an important prerequisite of impactful coaching.
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**8. Individual motivation is one of the main predictors of coaching success.** It can be improved by ensuring coaches are credible and that there are clear expectations about what the coaching can achieve.
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**9. It is difficult to isolate the impact of coaching interventions,** though there are many steps organisations can take. This includes collecting data from multiple sources and bringing in external evaluators if necessary.
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**10. The range of coaching technology available is rapidly expanding, though the human coaching relationship will not disappear.** Hybrid combinations of technology and humans will become more prevalent and coaches should work closely with coachees to leverage their trusting relationship.

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### ★ SUMMARY OF CRF COACHING RESEARCH



**GILLIAN PILLANS** is Research Director and the author of over 30 CRF research reports on a wide range of strategic HR topics including HR and business strategy, leadership development, talent management, organisation development and learning. Gillian has worked as a senior HR practitioner and OD specialist for several organisations including Swiss Re, Vodafone and BAA. Prior to her HR career, she was a management consultant with Deloitte Consulting and is also a qualified solicitor.

✉ EMAIL

#### DEFINING COACHING

A clear and consistent definition of coaching helps organisations to choose whether coaching is the right intervention for them, as well as more easily make comparisons during evaluation. However, coaching terminology is often still unclear and varied. CRF research defined coaching as:

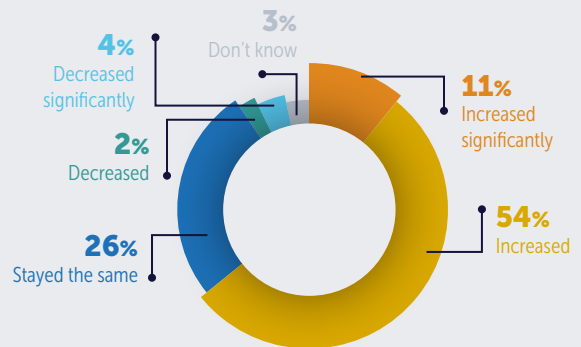
*“A goal-focused, collaborative and client-centred approach which is designed to enable behaviour change and unlock people’s potential to maximise their performance.*

*It is distinguished from mentoring and counselling as it focuses on enhancing the coachee’s skills, self-awareness and effectiveness rather than providing direct advice or solving personal issues.”*

#### KEY TRENDS IN THE COACHING SPACE

**The availability of coaching and money spent on coaching are both increasing.** A 2023 global coaching study by the International Coaching Federation (ICF) found that active coach practitioners generated over \$4bn in 2022. The number of coaches has also increased by more than 50% since the pandemic. CRF research similarly found that two thirds of companies have seen an increase in coaching spend over the last three years.

#### HOW HAS YOUR ORGANISATION’S COACHING SPEND DEVELOPED OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS?



Source: CRF Coaching Member Survey 2023

However, two large gaps remain in coaching practice: aligning coaching to the business strategy, and measuring the business impact of coaching.

The research found that organisations are using coaching in the following ways:

- Integrating coaching into development programmes to support learning transfer.
- Supporting transitions, such as supporting an employee as they move into a more senior position.
- Supporting business transformation, such as making coaching available to leaders who are overseeing a transformation.
- Helping leaders make sense of complexity and plan through uncertainty.
- Implementing targeted interventions such as supporting D&I initiatives or helping people through maternity transitions.
- Increasing access to coaching (i.e. democratisation) – 43% of organisations are increasing access to external coaches for the wider employee population.

CRF developed and tested a coaching maturity curve to identify the features of organisations that are maximising the business impact of coaching, which considered:

- To what degree is coaching aligned with, and flowing from, the business strategy? E.g. is there an ongoing dialogue about business priorities, the capabilities required to achieve these priorities, and how coaching can support this?
- How intentional is coaching? Is there a clear strategy and coordinated plan, integrated into the business plan?
- Does coaching align with other talent and leadership initiatives?
- How is coaching embedded into the culture? What expectations are made of leaders and do they use coaching in their day-to-day interactions with their teams?

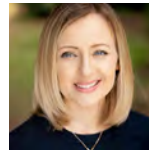
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- Is coaching consistently evaluated, allowing you to track progress and impact?
- How are individual assignments managed, and how are coaching conversations transferred into the work environment?

The maturity curve outlines five levels, with CRF research finding that the vast majority of respondents remained at level 1 and level 2.

CRF research also identified the following broad areas of recommendations and challenges:

- Ensure coaching addresses strategically relevant issues.
- Be deliberate about when to choose coaching ahead of other interventions.
- Implement robust processes around quality coach selection and management.
- Prepare the coachee (coaching motivation is a very important factor in success).
- Engage key stakeholders in the coaching process.
- Effective evaluation – only 44% actually evaluate the effectiveness of interventions!
- Harness technology to scale access and better integrate coaching and L&D.



**PROF. REBECCA JONES** is Professor in Coaching and Behavioural Change at Henley Business School. Alongside this Rebecca is a Chartered Psychologist and a Co-Founder of The Inclusive Leadership Company. Her research interests lie in examining the factors that influence coaching effectiveness and her consultancy practice focuses on working with organisations to create diverse and inclusive workplaces using coaching and psychological theory and research to achieve sustained behaviour change. Rebecca is the author of *Coaching with Research in Mind*, host of The Coaching Academic podcast and has published her research in globally recognised journals.



**NICOLAS CEASAR** is Head of the Senior Leadership Development and Coaching Centre of Expertise at the NatWest Group, and an executive and team coach and OD consultant. He has made his career about helping leaders to learn, grow and succeed in times of personal, organisational and societal challenge and change. Currently he is Head of The Senior Leadership Development and Coaching Centre of Expertise for NatWest Group where he is responsible for the development of the most senior leaders and leadership groups in the organisation. He is also a board adviser for Ezra, a tech enabled coaching democratisation service and platform. Prior to this he was a member of faculty and a consultant for Ashridge Business School.



## CONNECTING COACHING TO THE BUSINESS STRATEGY

Prof. Rebecca Jones and Nicolas Caesar outlined the following guidelines to better align coaching with the business strategy:

- First ensure that everyone understands the businesses' objectives; this will make conversations around alignment much clearer. The three-way relationship between coach, line manager and individual is critical.
- Acknowledge that it's a journey; there are moments that are easier to connect the strategy to coaching than others.
- Coaching is particularly useful in large scale or strategic transformations – it creates space for someone to explore how they can embrace new agendas. It's important to create a safe, confidential space where people can think about implementation during large organisational transformations.
- Create a cadence of regular meetings, such as meeting with ExCos every six months to learn about their strategic priorities.
- Create straight forward guidelines and processes that can be followed when things change on ad hoc basis.

**Q** How can we align with strategy if it is changing very frequently or we are not clear what it is?

**A** Sometimes strategies can change so quickly that they can expire before you have had the chance to implement them! However, this implies the problem is with your strategy, rather than with your coaching approach. If this is the case, coaching might actually help you to create and communicate your strategy. HR can also help with communicating the organisational strategy.

**Q** Whilst people are aware of the strategy, staff are often too preoccupied with coping with the day-to-day responsibilities to achieve good strategic alignment. What can be done to help with this?

**A** Strategy is all about execution! It's very easy for coaching to start to focus on personal issues, rather than live business issues (such as strategy). Coaching can be part of the response of supporting employees to shift from just 'coping' to something more sustainable. Coaching also gives you valuable data and insights – you should listen if your people are using coaching just to get through their daily responsibilities, as it's not sustainable, and recalibrate if you can.

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### MAXIMISING THE BUSINESS IMPACT OF COACHING

Gillian Pillans led a Q&A session with Rebecca Jones focusing on research-backed ways of maximising the business of coaching, summarised below.

#### \* What does the research tell us about the link between coaching and business impact?

It's critical to make a business case for coaching based on outcomes; otherwise coaching risks being cut when financial circumstances are tight. Coaching can be expensive and is not always the optimal solution to every problem. Therefore it's critical to be intentional, understand the outcomes you want to achieve, and calibrate coaching with strategic objectives.

Rebecca outlined her research-based, tested framework of three positive coaching outcomes:

- **Affective outcomes:** how the coachee feels (e.g. levels of motivation or confidence).
- **Skills-related outcomes:** the impact on the coachee's expertise or ability to complete a task.
- **Results outcomes:** impact on individual and organisational performance, which can be either indirect or direct.

#### \* How can organisations really maximise the impact of coaching?

Research shows there are three areas organisation can focus on to maximise coaching impact:

- **Goal setting.** People are not naturally that good at setting goals, yet a coach is ideally placed in supporting them to have those conversations. People are also much more likely to achieve their goals if they resonate with their values and are linked to an outcome.
- **Create a safe space for people to learn from reflection.** Reflecting on past behaviours or perceived failures can be a difficult experience. However, without understanding why we acted as we did, or what worked well, it can be difficult to change. Coaching provides a space where this reflection can happen.
- **Action Planning.** Coaching will only have the desired business impact if you also create specific plans for after coaching. Consider how the coach will support the next steps: what will actions look like? How will you overcome any barriers?

Coaching and learning cultures are also interlinked with psychological safety; unless you have a psychologically safe culture, it will be very difficult to create a coaching culture. A psychologically safe culture enables people to feel able to challenge and disagree, which are fundamentals to coaching.

Coaching governance is also fundamental to maximising impact. Without this awareness of how coaching is being used, you cannot make intentional decisions about how best to use coaching (e.g. how will you decide who will be offered coaching and how will you know when coaching is working?).

#### \* What does the research tell us about how to maximise impact at the individual level?

The key predictor of success is how motivated someone is to be coached (e.g. do they want to be coached? Do they believe it will have a positive impact?). This motivation occurs at three levels:

- **Individual level.** Do not recommend coaching to someone who does not want to be coached – there is likely a different intervention that is a better fit.
- **Coach level.** The coach can foster motivation by ensuring they have credibility and there is transparency and clarity on what the coachee can expect. Definitions of coaching vary and if someone does not get what they expected out of coaching, this can break the psychological contract and affect how motivated and engaged they are.
- **Organisational Level.** Be very intentional about how you are using coaching and how are you communicating and positioning coaching across the organisation (e.g. is it for particular groups or everyone?). What expectations are you creating for the session (e.g. how many sessions will there be?).

#### \* What are some of the practical ways to stimulate motivation?

- Make sure people understand what they can get out of coaching and what coaching actually is.
- Share research that coaching actually works – that can be a lack of credibility relating to coaching.
- The level of line manager support is also important. From the outset, coaching should be a three way conversation between the line manager, coach and coachee. In particular, the line manager will need to support the coachee in creating time to work on what they have discussed and a safe space to experiment with new behaviours, as well as ongoing accountability and support.

#### \* What should organisations consider when selecting and appointing coaches?

Whilst the research base is relatively lacking, Rebecca has found that more successful coaches:

- Are open, non-judgemental, have a clear view of their own assumptions or biases and are very self-aware.
- Display good ethical practice, working regularly with a coaching supervisor to get the support they need.
- Are willing to engage with the challenges of the organisation and really understanding the context they are working in.

#### \* What can businesses do to help coordinate coaching activity at an organisational level?

- Support 'quality control' of coaches, including reviewing their performance and providing developmental feedback.
- Consider what competencies all coaches are expected have and how this will be monitored consistently across the organisation.

Nicolas Caesar additionally shared some practical tips from his experiences at NatWest:

- Focus on prioritising – who, when, what we're doing, with whom, why.
- Experiment and test things out (e.g. NatWest initially trialled 'coaching Tuesdays' with drop in sessions).

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### “ CASE STUDY THE ROLE OF COACHING IN ACHIEVING BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AT ASTRAZENECA



**HELEN BASFORD** is Global Capability Lead for Coaching within the Global Talent and Development CoE at AstraZeneca. Helen owns the coaching strategy and is responsible for successfully developing coaching capability in leaders as well as ensuring the professional coaching services utilised throughout the business provide the best experience. Helen is an advanced professional coach, coaching consultant and experienced facilitator with a background in organisational psychology and business leadership. With a proven track record for performance enhancement across professional industries, Helen holds a degree in Organisational Psychology, CPCP through ICF, ICF Advanced Diploma in professional coaching and PCC Certification.

✉ EMAIL

**AstraZeneca** have implemented a Bold Ambition for 2030, which aims to launch at least 15 new medicines and for the business to be carbon negative. To achieve this, the organisation invested in their leaders, managers and HR communities, which included:

- Moving away from performance management (as it was too directive and backward looking) to performance development with regular coaching checkins and feedback as ‘feedforward.’
- Working collaboratively with key stakeholders internally and externally to examine how they could develop coaching capability that would ultimately unlock potential.
- With over 100,000 people at the organisation, AstraZeneca focused on ensuring scale-up remained aligned to their core ICF coaching capabilities. This included helping staff to learn the competencies to take a coaching approach and adopting a transformational, not transactional approach.

Through staying true to coaching design principles AstraZeneca have seen a positive impact, including:

- 12% increase in behaviour change in coaching competencies.
- 85% of employees receive coaching from their line manager.
- 98% say they have increased confidence in coaching conversations.

#### + ACHIEVING BUSINESS BUY-IN

The most challenging part of any coaching strategy is achieving business buy-in, which AstraZeneca considered from multiple levels:

- **Individual level** – how do we ensure great talent really engages in our organisation once they arrive?
- **Group engagement** – how do we help groups, teams, sub-teams etc. to have good conversations, including at scale? Coaching competencies, such as putting aside your own assumptions and listening to someone else’s points of view, help with this. It’s also important to ensure conversational practices are consistent across the organisation, so that people know what to expect.

#### + EVALUATING COACHING AND GATHERING DATA

- No matter what you do – even if starting small – focus on collecting your data. Ask questions along the whole journey, right from concept or pilot stage.
- Evaluate the coaches you’re using and ensure your coaching interventions are actually achieving what they set out to.
- Don’t just speak to coachees / participants – also ask the people around them (e.g. who they lead, their managers, their teams). Over time, you can collect 1000s of data points which can be overlaid onto different data sets and help measure the impact on retention, engagement, or behaviours.
- Put governance systems in place and measure effectiveness through asking what leaders are trying to achieve through coaching (rather than just asking whether the experience is enjoyable).
- It can be difficult to isolate the impact of coaching interventions. However, over time you can see the impact that multiple interventions have in tandem. Whilst the business transformation that AstraZeneca has experienced can’t only be attributed to coaching, attrition and engagement levels did vary according to whether people had been coached.

#### + ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- It’s critical to ensure your senior leadership team is on board. Don’t assume that they know what you mean by coaching and speak their language – frame coaching as a commercial discussion.
- Engage heavily with HR and acknowledge that implementing coaching and being a coaching strategist are different skillsets. HR are often a very under-invested group – invest in your HR team so they can experience coaching and are able to speak consistently about it.
- Don’t underestimate the power of constantly engaging and taking the whole organisation along with you on the journey.

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### ➤ CASE STUDY BUILDING AN INTERNAL COACHING CAPABILITY AT NATWEST

Nicolas Caesar shared his experience at **NatWest** of building and sustaining internal coaching:

The unpredictable external environment present since Covid has required NatWest to rethink their approach to leadership and development. This has included three main focus areas of intervention:

1. Increasing ability and adaptability
2. Increasing human connection
3. Executing through evidence-based experimentation

The business context is also becoming more complex and turbulent; it was therefore important to create a space (such as coaching) where people can think things through and be supported to be the best version of themselves. In response to this, Nicolas oversaw the creation of an internal coaching programme:

- The benefits of internal coaches include their good understanding of the organisation's context and how they are generally responsive and adaptable to the internal environment.
- At NatWest, the internal coaches came from all sorts of background and did not have previous coaching experience.
- The scheme at NatWest had a large mandate; exec buy-in was therefore not an issue.
- After the initial scheme, the intervention was then rolled out across the whole of NatWest group. The coaches have since delivered over 45,000 hours of coaching and the organisation is now building their third team of internal coaches.

Nicolas provided four suggestions for building an internal coaching team:

- 1. Run yourself like a business.** Think about including structured teams covering areas such as relationship management, sales, technology support and product development. Additionally decide whether you will sit in HR.
- 2. Talk about products and services, rather than just coaching.** Everyone has a different reference point for what coaching is; it's better to instead have a team with high coaching capability that can be inserted into targeted products and services.

### 3. Provide as much visibility as possible to stakeholders.

This helps you to prioritise and judge value. Prioritise insight and feedback loops over evaluation. For example, run a weekly standup meeting about what has gone well, or monthly reports on what coaches are working on.

- 4. Learning is not separate from the work – learning is the work.** NatWest provided four competency frameworks, a code of ethics (tailored to the organisation), and coaching mentors to help the coaches through their development.

### ⚡ MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Rebecca Jones emphasised that isolating the impact of coaching interventions is possible, though very hard to achieve in the real world. However, there are lots of steps organisations can take, which include the following:

- Think carefully about what you want to evaluate and how you will identify and report on coaching outcomes.
- Evaluating is a specific skill set – if you don't have the capability internally, then consider bringing in support from external organisations.
- Collect multiple data from multiple points, and triangulate it with other metrics (e.g. attrition data).
- Consider the best time to collect data after coaching, and ensure that you have provided people with enough time to start to implement the change.
- Be aware that, whilst coaching providers usually offer to evaluate their services, they will have a vested interest in showing that they have an impact. Consider in-house evaluation or using an independent evaluator.

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### THE FUTURE OF COACHING



**CAROL BRADDICK** is Co-Leader of the Tech Workstream of the Future of Coaching Collaboration, a UK working group taking a systemic view of trends in technology for organisational buyers and market providers of coaching services. As a coach, Carol has a strong track record of over 20 years of successful partnerships with global leaders and their teams. She recently co-authored a chapter on the business of digital coaching for the forthcoming *The Digital Coaches' Handbook* and also contributed a chapter on technology for *Emerging Conversations in Coaching and Coaching Psychology*.

✉ EMAIL

The number of coaching types and vendors available has expanded rapidly in recent years. The range of 'experiences' that can be called coaching has also rapidly expanded. For example, coaching could refer to either a digital assistant tool that helps with calendar organisation, or a human-to-human longer engagement. It's therefore important to be intentional and consider what different vendors are bringing to the market.

Carol introduced the idea of a coaching supplier 'market motorway,' which can be simplified into three different types of coaching vendors:

- **Digital first coaching platforms focused on coaching individuals.** These are usually implemented through a mobile app that also generates data for research.
- **Legacy coaches** – people who have been in coaching or assessment for a long time, often working in small organisations or freelance. In their use of technology they usually provide concise, up to date information about coaching activities.
- **A mix of thousands of independent coaches who work in networks or alliances.** Turnkey technology solutions are available to help these types of coaches.

### FUTURE TECHNOLOGY CHANGES AND TRENDS

- New technologies are frequently becoming available. This includes coachbots which can be blended into coaching programmes with humans or work as a standalone. Other examples include conversational AIs (such as 'Pi'), and a voice-based AI coaching platform which is currently in an advanced MVP stage.
- There will be a greater use of technology in assessing coaching.
- Coaching training will be modernised, with a particular focus on increasing the digital literacy of coaches.
- The coaching relationship will not disappear. Many coaches will still work with clients, but further integrate technology and data into their ways of working. Hybrid combinations of technology and humans will become more prevalent, which will make buying services harder.
- Technology will generate large data sets that can be used to inform future research.

### HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN BENEFIT FROM THE EMERGING DEVELOPMENTS

- Examples of how AI can complement or augment humans' work are still quite limited. Instead, it can be useful to have a conversation with people in other areas of your organisation who are already experienced in AI augmentation (e.g. lawyers or R&D).
- Technology will unlikely be an abrupt replacement of the human coaching relationship.

Therefore, a human coach can introduce the technology, ask the client what types of technology they would like to use (if any) and build on a pre-existing, trusted relationship.

- Plentiful data, content, and technology is now available relating to L&D and coaching. It is easy to get overloaded by this, but a useful starting place is tracking how many learning journeys your employees are on.
- Have conversations with your internal 'super users' of technology about what might be useful and how coaching can be leveraged into technology you already have.
- Optimise the buying cycle to avoid a new technology being obsolete by the time it arrives.

These Post Meeting Notes were prepared by **Jo Nayler**, Senior Research Executive at CRF.

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**COACHING:  
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31<sup>st</sup> October, 9.00 GMT, In-Person, London



15<sup>th</sup> November, 14.00 GMT, Online

Register →



IN-PERSON RESEARCH BRIEFING

[Coaching: Maximising Business Impact](#)



14<sup>th</sup> November, 15.30 CET, In-Person,  
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### FURTHER READING

CRF. 2014. *Coaching – Business Essential or Management Fad?* Research Report. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/coaching-business-essential-or-management-fad-2>

CRF. 2023. *Coaching – Maximising Business Impact.* Research Report. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-coaching-maximising-business-impact>

### the OCM

- 1 **FREE Coaching Culture Review to CRF members.** Please follow the link for [more information](#).
- 2 **SIGN UP for Optimise the Impact of Your Coaching Investment.** Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023, 12-1pm. Register [here](#).

### The Oxford Group

A City & Guilds Business

- 1 **FREE Whitepaper: *Unlock Innovation with Psychological Safety – Why it's time to face up to the challenges of a polarised world***  
Access [here](#).