Managerial Coaching Competencies

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With the recent change in the management paradigm, the role of the manager as coach has been emphasized. Previous studies associated with what effective managerial coaching constitutes have mostly focused on coaching skills and behaviors. Given the nature of coaching that goes beyond skills or explicit behaviors, it is necessary to explore the underlying characteristics of what it means to be an effective coaching manager. The purpose of this paper is to identify managerial coaching competencies which refer to people’s comprehensive abilities. To develop a competency model, the technique we used is an expert panel. With coaching managers and professional coaches, semi-structural in-depth interviews and a two-round Delphi survey were utilized. As a result, twenty-seven sub-competencies and sixty-eight behavioral indicators were grouped into four competency categories: a coaching mindset, building trusting relationships, effective coaching interaction, performance management, and enhancement. These results could provide fundamental and comprehensive criteria for developing effective coaching managers.

Keywords: managerial coaching, managerial coaching competency, coaching mindset, building trusting relationships, effective coaching interaction, performance management, and enhancement

1 Introduction

Today's new business environments demand a change in the traditional manager’s role. Thus, managerial coaching in organizations has been perceived as an important function of managers for the development and growth of employees leading to performance improvement (Li-yan 2008; Ellinger et al. 2003; Stowell 1988; Orth et al. 1987). Although managerial coaching has been given considerable attention in management and leadership, little academic and empirical research has done than practitioner literature (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). In particular, few studies have focused on what abilities or competencies managerial coaches utilize to actually influence employee change (Herrera 2010), and even among those studies, “no universal credential seems to exist to identify competent coaches” (Joo 2005)

Existing studies associated with manager’s coaching abilities have focused either on coaching skills or coaching behaviors. In numerous normative books and articles, a set of coaching skills has been presented (Peterson & Hicks, 1996; Graham et al, 1994; Evered & Selman 1989; Stowell 1988; Orth et al. 1987). This skill approach seems to assume that once managers utilize these skills, coaching is effective. In addition, although efforts toward the identification of effective coaching behaviors have been made by several scholars (Noer 2005; Beattie 2002; Talarico 2002; Ellinger and
Bostrum 1999), they only focus on explicit external behaviors which managers demonstrate. This behavioral approach somewhat fails to succinctly identify what is necessary to be an effective coach, because the studies do not include other internal characteristics which act as the driving force to change behaviors.

Managerial coaching is clearly a skill that managers must learn and practice (Hunt and Weintraub, 2002). However, reviewing the results of previous studies reveals that coaching is based on the humanistic approach which refers to an optimistic view of the person, in terms of values and assumptions (Stober 2006). This approach is consistent with numerous practitioners' contention that there is a prerequisite before discussing coaching skills or behaviors based on the assertion that thinking drives action (Hargrove 2000; Doyle 1999).

Thus, the primary purpose of this study is to identify what constitutes effective managerial coaching, in terms of competency which refers to people's combined characteristics including knowledge, skills, traits, motive, self-image (Spencer and Spencer, 2003), behavioral indicators for each competency are present in the current study. In doing so, the current managerial coaching model takes a more holistic view, complementing the skills and behavioral approach. The identified managerial competency model could provide important criteria for developing and selecting coaching managers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of managerial coaching

According to Evered and Selman (1989), coaching in sports was introduced to the management field in the 1950s. By the early 1990s, coaching emerged as a way to describe a specific set of managerial activities in private sector organizations (Wenzel 2000). In the literature, coaching in management can be classified into two forms: executive coaching and managerial coaching (Herrera 2010; Li-yan 2008). According to the literature, both types of coaching has traditionally been regarded as a way to correct poor performance and to link individual effectiveness with organizational performance (Joo 2005). However, there is a clear distinction between these types of coaching in terms of their practice. In managerial coaching, which is often interchangeably used with manager as coach, managers play the role of coaching an individual in daily interaction which focuses exclusively on achieving work goals (Fillery-Travis, 2006). In contrast, in executive coaching, the executive is being coached by an external, professional coach with an open agenda (Joo 2005).

Managerial coaching has multiple definitions depending on its emphasis. Orth et al. (1987) defined coaching as a day-to-day, hands-on process of helping employees recognize opportunities to improve their performance and capabilities. Ellinger et al. (2003) and Mink et al. (1993) focused more on facilitating employees' learning to encourage growth and development. From a process perspective, Peterson (1996) defined coaching as a process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective. In this study, managerial coaching is defined holistically as a process for supporting employees to develop themselves for improving work performance through daily interaction.
2.2 Managerial coaching skills, behaviors, and competencies

Regarding what is needed for effective managerial coaching, there are two approaches of the literature: a skills perspective and behavioral perspective. From the view of coaching skills, many practitioners and consultants have suggested specific sets of managerial coaching skills (Gilley et al. 2010; Ellinger et al. 2003), and they overlap considerably: listening, questioning, interview skills, observation, analytical skills, feedback skills, building trust relationships, and setting goals presented (Peterson & Hicks, 1996; Graham et al, 1994; Evered & Selman 1989; Stowell 1988; Orth et al. 1987). However, these skills have been described in a normative and prescriptive way without empirical evidence, so that there remains a call for its validity and reliability. In addition, to be an effective coach, coaching skills are necessary, but not a sufficient condition (Hunt and Weintraub, 2002; Hargrove 2000).

The other body of the literature is derived from a behavioral perspective. Empirical research on managerial coaching behaviors has been considerably limited (Gilley et al. 2010). Each study was conducted with a different focus. In terms of a managers facilitating their employee learning, Ellinger and Bostrum (1999) identified a taxonomy of 13 managerial coaching behaviors that were grouped into two categories, facilitating and empowering, utilizing a qualitative critical incident method. Beattie (2002) also described 22 coaching behaviors and classified them into nine categories: thinking, informing, empowering, assessing, advising, being professional, caring, developing others, and challenging employees to stretch themselves. McLean et al. (2005), identified four aspects of managerial coaching behaviors based on a team approach: open communication, team approach, value people, and accept ambiguity. Noer’s (2005) study developed the Coaching Behaviors Inventory according to the coaching process of assessing, challenging, and supporting. The behavioral approach in managerial coaching shows the phenomenon in a descriptive and concrete way. However, there is a limitation to explain effective managerial coaching because other characteristics which cannot be explicitly observed are possibly overlooked. Thus, more a comprehensive approach is needed.

2.3 Definition of competency

Although the definitions of competency and the terms used to define competency vary depending on the scholars, there is some commonality among the definitions. Competency includes the abilities associated with a specific job performance and a set of personal characteristics including knowledge, skills, attitudes, traits, values, motives, self-concepts, and beliefs (Spencer and Spencer, 2003; McLagna 1989, Boyatzis 1982). These characteristic distinctions “demonstrate the way in which people behave, think or generalize across situations” (Smith 2008, p 455). For example, Spencer and Spencer (2003) define competency as a combination of motives, traits, self-concepts, knowledge, and skill.

- Motives. The things a person consistently thinks about or wants that cause action
- Traits. Physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information
- Self-Concept. A person’s attitudes, values, or self-image
- Knowledge. Information a person has in specific content areas
- Skill. The ability to perform a certain physical or mental task (pp. 9-11)
A competency may involve just one area of knowledge, skill, or values, or it may be a cluster of any combination of these (Marrelli 1998).

3. Methods
To develop a managerial coaching competency model, this study utilizes an expert panel. This approach has strengths for exploring ill-defined concepts and when the number of subjects is not large enough (Spencer & Spencer 1993). A thirty-five-member expert panel included nineteen coaching managers from different companies and sixteen professional coaches who mainly coach managers. They were recommended from the Korea Coach Association which is recognized as a certified organization in Korea. The average of their coaching experience was 232 hours. To collect data, semi-structured in-depth interviews and a two-round Delphi technique was used. The interviews were conducted with four coaching managers and five professional coaches among the designated expert panel members. The interviews averaged at least two hours in length and were tape recorded and transcribed literally. Based on content analysis, tentative managerial competencies and behavioral indicators were included in the first survey. The survey was distributed to the whole expert panel. Using a 6-point Likert scale and descriptive comments, they confirmed how appropriate the tentative competency model is (categories, competencies, and behavioral indicators). In the second survey, which was revised on the basis of the first survey, the same procedure as the first survey was repeated to verify the final managerial coaching competency model.

4. Findings
The results of managerial coaching competency can be seen in Table 1. Four competency clusters were identified including a) coaching mindset, b) building trusting relationships, c) effective coaching interaction, and d) performance management and enhancement. Twenty-seven competencies and sixty-eight behavioral indicators were clustered into those four categories. Each competency had one to five behavioral indicators. Overall, sixty-eight behavioral indicators were identified from three of the four clusters, with the exception of the coaching mindset category. This is because competencies in coaching mindset are related to individual’s attitudes, belief, or values, so it would be meaningless to express explicit behavior indicators. Due to space limitations, this paper presents behavioral indicators only from the category of performance management and enhancement as an example (see Table 2).
### Table 1

**Managerial Coaching Competency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managerial coaching competency</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A. Coaching mindset</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Trust in people’s abilities and potential</td>
<td>Believing that all people have their own unique abilities and have the possibility to grow by developing their potential</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Commitment to nurturing and enabling employees</td>
<td>Striving to develop subordinates, believing their growth is the responsibility of managers</td>
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<td>c. Passion for long-term work performance</td>
<td>Pursuing long-term and continuous performance improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Belief in coaching as mutually beneficial</td>
<td>Believing he/she can achieve both the team’s goal and members’ development by means of coaching, to increase their own proficiency and performance as a result</td>
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<td>e. Self-innovativeness</td>
<td>Transforming and changing continuously by means of self-development</td>
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<td>f. Respect for diversity</td>
<td>Respecting subordinates’ individuality and diversity such as personality, style, experience, and viewpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B. Building trusting relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Professionalism and expertise</td>
<td>Having profound knowledge, a wide range of experience with regard to the current job, and problem-solving skills</td>
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<td>b. Self control and balance</td>
<td>Balancing and self-managing emotions and mood in interpersonal communication and daily life</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Authenticity</td>
<td>Treating subordinates honestly and respectfully by believing that performance is the consequence of personal growth</td>
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<td>d. Upholding ethical values</td>
<td>Judging and behaving ethically in coaching activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Continuous learning through self-reflection</td>
<td>Continuously looking back and endeavoring to make up for weakness with regard to coaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Integrity</td>
<td>Having conscientious attitudes in work and daily life</td>
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<td>g. Caring</td>
<td>Showing empathetic concern to subordinates by receiving their points of view</td>
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</table>
### C. Effective coaching interaction

**a. Questioning**
Questioning to help subordinates reflect on their own problems and finding an answer by themselves.

**b. Listening**
Listening to subordinates and paying attention to their verbal and nonverbal expressions to understand their intentions, emotions, and situations.

**c. Feedback**
Providing timely, accurate and objective feedback about the behaviors and work outcomes of subordinates.

**d. Acknowledgement and recognition**
Recognizing subordinates’ efforts, growth, contributions, and achievements to motivate and maintain expected and desired behaviors.

**e. Sensitivity to others and environment**
Carefully identifying characteristics, traits, and situations of subordinates and providing individualized coaching.

**f. Intuition and insight**
Identifying subordinates’ state of mind and the unique circumstances by using intuition and insights.

**g. Clarifying coaching focus**
Making a development point of subordinates by means of analyzing their strengths, weaknesses, and gaps between targeted and current levels.

**h. Understandings of coaching process**
Distinguishing different phases of the coaching process and understanding respective characteristics.

### D. Performance management and enhancement

**a. Aligning personal and organizational goals**
Strategically aligning the developmental goals of subordinates and performance goals of the team/organization from a long-term perspective.

**b. Setting action plans**
Planning an effective action plan together to achieve performance and developmental goals of subordinates.

**c. Managing progress and accountability**
Supporting subordinates to carry out their development plans and to increase performance for the team and organization.

**d. Patience and anticipation of change**
Observing the results of coaching with patience from a long-term perspective.

**e. Integrating human resource management and development capability**
Integrating various managerial approaches involving coaching and utilizing them effectively in terms of increasing performance and potential of subordinates.
### Table 2

*Examples of Behavioral Indicators (Performance management and enhancement)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Behavioral indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Aligning personal and organizational goals</td>
<td>a-1 Identifying that subordinates understand the long- and short-term goals and strategy of the team or organization&lt;br&gt;a-2 Helping to set up subordinates’ goals within the scope of not conflicting with the individual’s needs and organizational goals&lt;br&gt;a-3 Helping to set up work objectives and to understand subordinates’ roles as team and organizational members for the purpose of achieving goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Setting action plans</td>
<td>b-1 Discussing a plan with each subordinate to increase performance during the formal performance appraisal or review of work progress&lt;br&gt;b-2 Identifying obstacles to hinder self-development of subordinates together, and encouraging them to plan to overcome such challenges&lt;br&gt;b-3 Empowering subordinates in terms of giving them important projects to develop their capabilities and bearing some risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Managing progress and accountability</td>
<td>c-1 Reviewing the progress of the previous developmental goals regularly with subordinates, and modifying the plan, if necessary&lt;br&gt;c-2 Supporting participation in the development programs or projects that are consistent with each subordinate’s needs&lt;br&gt;c-3 Giving neutral feedback to subordinates when they do not keep a promised action, without their feeling monitored&lt;br&gt;c-4 Discussing root causes and helping to solve the problems, when an expected change is not shown after coaching is carried out&lt;br&gt;c-5 Coaching continuously and not being merely a one-time intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Patience and anticipation of change</td>
<td>d-1 Observing and caring without being impatient, even though the expected performance improvement is not shown</td>
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</table>
e. Integrating human resource management and development capability  
e-1 Distinguishing the issues to give a direct command or identifying the issues to coach  
e-2 Integrating and utilizing various managerial interventions (coaching, mentoring, counseling, teaching, and etc.) appropriately, depending on each subordinate and situation

5. Discussion

The results of this study show holistic managerial coaching competency with definitions of competencies and behavioral indicators. Many of the findings seem to overlap with previous studies. Competencies in effective coaching interaction, in particular, are consistent with widely accepted coaching skills, in general. However, the findings of this study identify several unique competencies which were not empirically identified in previous studies. Competencies related to a coaching mindset, such as trust in human ability and potential, belief in coaching as mutually beneficial, respect for diversity, and commitment to nurturing and enabling employees, refer to underlying assumptions and beliefs of a manager. These aspects of competencies have been mainly discussed in normative books and articles (Hargrove 2000; Doyle 1999). They assert that having a coaching mindset is a fundamental competency for effective coaching. Thus, this finding suggests that being an effective manager as a coach needs not only explicit skills such as feedback and questioning, but also internal characteristics such as trust in people’s abilities and potential.

The current managerial coaching competencies reflect the nature of a managerial context quite well, but managerial coaching should be distinguished from other forms of coaching (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006). Since this type of coaching is implemented informally during daily management activities and focuses explicitly on the achievement of work goals, it is important to perceive that the consequences of coaching influence managers as well as employees and have advantages for both. Among the identified competencies in this study, belief in coaching as mutually beneficial, aligning personal and organizational goals, integrating human resource management and development capability clearly reveal this perception.

6. Conclusions and Implications

This study investigated and developed a comprehensive managerial coaching competency model. In addition, the skills associated with coaching including individual’s underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs are empirically represented in the current competency model. This finding is quiet unique comparing with the previous studies.

Since coaching has been popular in organizations, an increasing number of companies have implemented educational programs for developing coaching managers. However, they mostly focus on coaching skills within one or two days. There is some skepticism about the effectiveness of this type of short-term coaching. It seems that skill- and behavior-based approaches to coaching disregard people’s internal characteristics that make managers effective coaches. Thus, the current model suggests criteria that could be utilized for development of manager coaches.

There are some limitations in this study that require further study. A coaching mindset such as trust in people’s abilities and potential and a belief in coaching as being
mutually beneficial should be verified empirically in terms of the extent to which it affects other competencies or the effectiveness of managerial coaching, and what is the relationship between a coaching mindset and the other three categories. Developing measurement tools based on the current model could be the goal of future study.

Reference


