

WHITE PAPER

Building the Case for Executive Coaching



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Investing in Results

Executive coaching² is a \$2 billion industry globally.³ In fact, more than 70% of formal leadership development programs in organizations include coaching.⁴

Why are organizations willing to invest so heavily in coaching at a time when company resources are under tight scrutiny?

The assumption is that coaching gets results, including:

- better and accelerated learning
- development of critical thinking skills
- improvement in team leadership performance
- sustainable organizational change
- increases in leaders' self-awareness so they can use their strengths more effectively⁵

Despite many positive benefits expected from coaching, evaluating the effectiveness of coaching can be a challenge. Results from coaching take time to be realized; varying from one coaching engagement to the next; and they can be hard to measure. For this reason, measuring results is often neglected. In fact, 27% of organizations reported that they did not evaluate the effectiveness of coaching at all.⁶

Why Leaders Invest in Coaching





Does Coaching Actually Work?

Given how challenging it can be to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching, how do we know if it actually works? The Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL[®]) Evaluation Center focuses on assessing the impact of all types of leadership solutions, including coaching.⁷ And, there are multiple practitioners and scholars committed to understanding if coaching delivers on its promises.

One study⁸ found that people receiving coaching were seen as significantly more effective, satisfied in their jobs and inspiring to others to make an extra effort after being coached, whereas a similar group that did not receive coaching did not make any significant changes in the same time period. Others have found coaching increases goal attainment, well-being and improvement in constructive leadership styles,⁹ and improvements in overall leadership effectiveness.¹⁰

Less is known about whether the effects of coaching extend beyond the individual leader. However, a survey of individuals responsible for leadership development and coaching initiatives suggests that coaching has a moderate effect on outcomes such as strategy execution, teamwork and change management,¹¹ which may be the result of the coachee applying newly developed leadership skills to improve the overall functioning of the groups they lead.

Understanding the RACSR Model

There are many approaches and models of coaching but in this paper we focus on CCL's coaching model: **Relationship, Assessment, Challenge, Support, Results (RACSR)**. RACSR was developed based on applied professional experience and models of adult learning grounded in research.¹²

CCL's approach to coaching is the same for professional coaches and informal leader coaches—the goal is to help leaders be more effective and intentional as individuals and members of teams and organizations.

The RACSR model has three key guiding principles:

- Relationship between the coach and coachee.
- Assessment, challenge, and support.
- Results or outcomes of coaching.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACH AND “COACHEE”

At its core, the coaching relationship is a connection between two individuals based on rapport, commitment and trust.¹³ It can challenge a coachee's assumptions and biases and help unearth lessons from experiences that can expand his or her perspective.¹⁴

Over the last several decades, CCL coaching practitioners have determined that the role of a coach may range from expert, reflective learning and dialogue partner, to feedback interpreter, accountability partner, and role model, depending on the needs of the coachee and the desired outcomes.

Non-CCL research supports the idea that the coaching relationship is a critical predictor of coaching outcomes.¹⁵

ASSESSMENT, CHALLENGE, AND SUPPORT

The purpose of **assessment** is to get a holistic understanding of a coachee—what makes that individual unique, the context within which he or she operates, and opportunities for development. Assessment data collected formally or informally through interviews, instruments, and observations is woven throughout the coaching experience.

Experiences that **challenge** the coachee create “disequilibrium”¹⁶ and deliver the greatest developmental opportunities. Challenges can include “stretching” to new or different behaviors outside the coachee's comfort zone, as well as analyzing potential internal or external obstacles that prevent people from moving forward.

Support is the “third leg of the stool.”¹⁷ It's needed to help people overcome obstacles and tolerate the discomfort inherent to the development process.

Coaches can support coachees by

- helping maintain motivation
- ensuring commitment to and clarity about action plans
- holding a coachee accountable for the execution of action plans
- exploring the adequacy of available resources
- being patient with performance declines during the learning process
- encouraging a coachee to seek ongoing feedback about his/her behavior and its impact



CCL Coaching Effectiveness Research

Over engagements with thousands of leaders around the world, CCL has accumulated a considerable store of data related to coaching programs and outcomes of those programs. Presented below are high-level summaries of two studies conducted to better understand the impact of executive coaching and the factors that influence coaching outcomes.

CCL Study 1: Initial Findings

CCL conducted an analysis of an archival dataset¹⁸ that included 347 leaders, 3,103 raters and 37 coaches under the following circumstances:

- Leaders completed a coaching engagement with a CCL coach as part of a leadership development initiative that also included two three-day classroom sessions.
- Classroom sessions were nine months apart, with coaching engagements occurring in between (and sometimes just after the second session).
- All of the ratings were completed approximately nine months after they began the coaching engagement.
- Ratings were collected from the leaders themselves as well as their invited colleagues (e.g., managers, peers, direct reports, etc.).

While we cannot isolate the effects of the coaching compared to other aspects of the program, the data provide insights about how effective coaching can be.

Rating the Overall Quality of Coaching

One of the first findings of this study is that 95% of participants believed, to a moderate or higher extent, that the coaching was worth the time and effort required.

This is interesting because these data were collected after multiple coaching sessions, over the course of nine months on average. While it may be common for leaders to find a single coaching session valuable because it helps them reach new insights and set initial goals, our finding shows this assessment of the value of coaching can be sustained over time.

Coaching participants rated specific coaching behaviors consistently high in each of the areas of the RACSR model implying that the coaches were meeting the mark in applying the RACSR model:

| RACSR Component | Percentage of coaching behavior rated to a moderate extent or higher |
|-----------------|---|
| Relationship | 99% indicated, <i>"My coach clarified the purpose of the coaching relationship."</i> |
| Assessment | 98% indicated, <i>"My coach assisted me in recognizing areas for improvement."</i> |
| Challenge | 98% indicated, <i>"My coach encouraged me to practice new behaviors."</i> |
| Support | 98% indicated, <i>"My coach provided practical, realistic, and immediately usable input."</i> |
| Results | 98% indicated, <i>"My coach helped me identify specific behaviors that would help me achieve my goals."</i> |



Rating Goal Advancement

Using the data from Study 1, we next looked for evidence that leaders were making progress towards their goals during the same time period. Leaders wrote their own development goals, which ranged from being very broad (e.g., wanting to be a more effective leader) to specific skill development to more complex (e.g., wanting to develop specific relationships for the purpose of meeting a particular business objective).

And goals varied on a number of different criteria, including

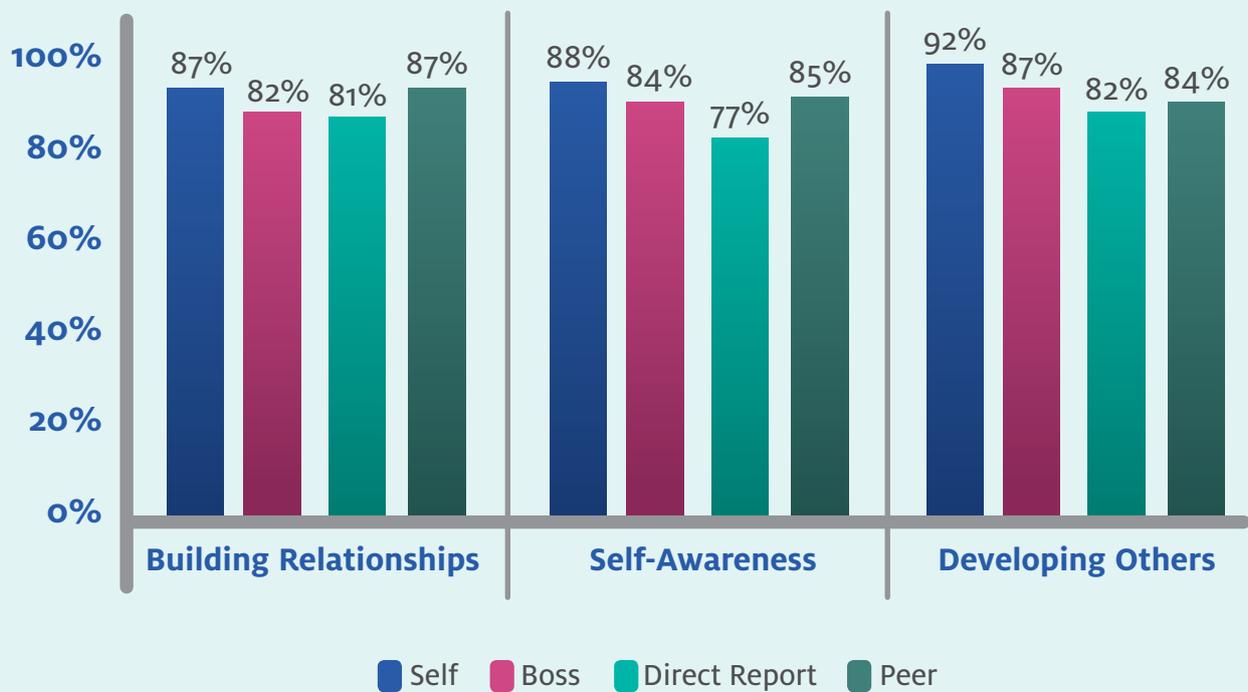
- the level of training a leader would need to accomplish the goal
- the effort required to achieve the goal
- whether the goal was task- or behavior-based
- length of time required to complete the goal

Based on 2,821 ratings of 347 primary goals,¹⁹ 61% of coaching participants and their raters indicated that substantial progress had been made towards the goals. An additional 11% rated the goal as “completed” during the coaching engagement; 99.8% of the ratings indicate that at least a little progress had been made.

In addition, leaders selected from among 49 leadership competencies those they would need to develop to make progress towards their stated goals. Competencies ranged from a focus on self (e.g., self-awareness and courage) to a focus on the organization (e.g., managing complexity, thinking and acting strategically).

Overall, on average, we saw improvement in all leadership competencies selected by the leaders. Figure 1 shows some of the most commonly assessed leadership competencies.

Figure 1: **Percent of Raters Reporting They Had Observed Improvements in Coachees' Leadership Competencies**





Leaders were asked to identify what impact the changes in behavior would have on themselves, their direct reports, and the groups they lead. Leaders and their raters also provided written comments. Some examples of specific impact included:

- A boss stating that as a result of the leadership development and coaching, the leader now more often challenges the leadership team, resulting in stronger decisions by the team.
- A leader indicating that because of improved team functioning, fewer mistakes are being made by his direct reports when using a technical system.
- A direct report indicating that the group's job satisfaction and stress levels have improved as a result of the leader's encouragement and support.

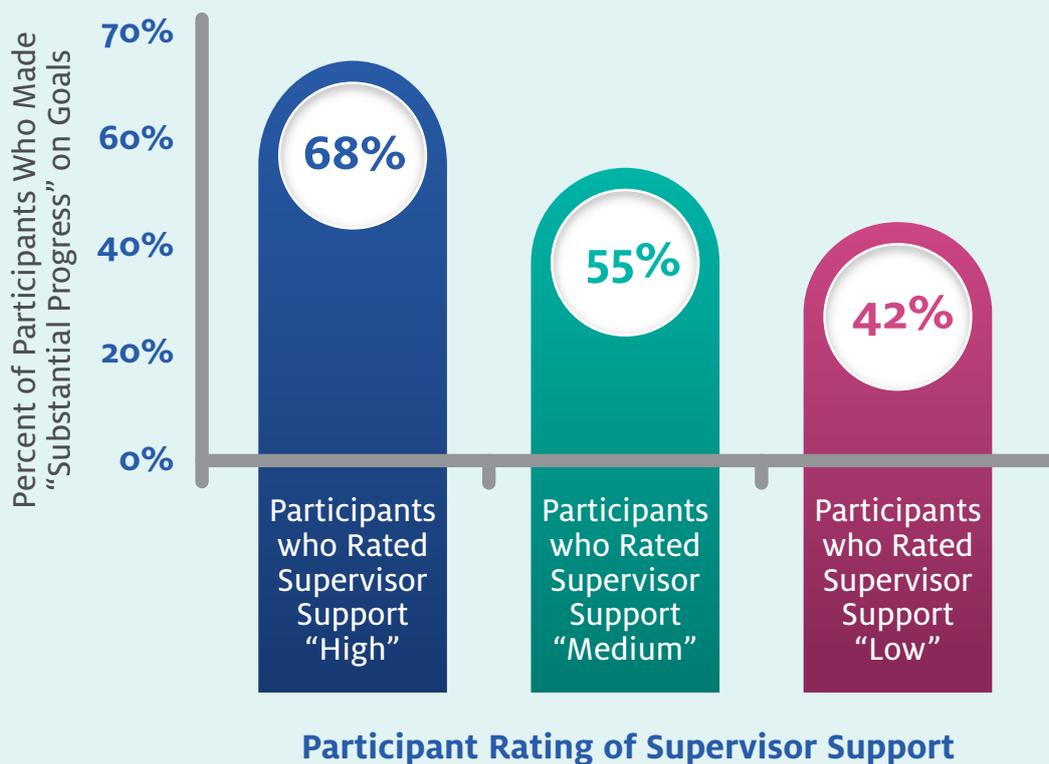
Overall, the data provide evidence not only of a positive coaching experience, but also of progress towards developmental goals, observable improvements in all leadership competencies assessed, and meaningful outcomes for the individual leaders and the groups they lead.

Connection Between Supervisor Support and Results

To better understand factors that contribute to goal progress, CCL also looked at the relationship between the self-ratings of “supervisor support” (the participant rating the support they received from their supervisor) and “supervisor ratings of goal progress” (the supervisor rating of the progress made by the participant on one, two, or three goals).

We found that the more participants felt supported by their manager, the more progress they made on their development goals. This finding highlights the important role of managerial support in a leadership development or coaching engagement.

Figure 2: Relationship Between Supervisor Support and Goal Process



*Progress rated by the boss; substantial progress=4 on a 5-point scale.

CCL Study 2: Initial Findings

The dataset referenced in Study 1 came from a leadership development program that included classroom programs in addition to coaching. Therefore, we cannot be certain to what extent the results were attributed to coaching versus classroom learning versus other factors, such as support from colleagues and personal circumstances.

Therefore, CCL conducted some preliminary analysis of a second dataset²⁰ that includes 171 coaching goals that 63 leaders were working on across multiple and diverse coaching engagements at CCL. Similar to the data referenced in Study 1, leaders, their raters and the coaches provided ratings of progress at a coaching engagement that lasted six months or more.

Positive Results from Coaching

Consistent with the data presented in Study 1, coaching participants were highly satisfied with the coaching. More than 90% indicated they would recommend their coach to a colleague.²¹

And similar to Study 1, coaching consistently helps participants make progress on their goals. Across all rater groups and multiple goals, 67% of all ratings implied that participants made substantial progress or had completed their goal during a coaching engagement that lasted six months or more. As in Study 1, goals varied in difficulty and specificity.

Coaching participants were asked how much of this progress they would attribute directly to the coaching using a five-point scale (none, a little, some, a significant amount, all), compared to other factors.

- 59% of the ratings indicated that “a significant amount” or “all” progress was attributed directly to the coaching.
- 99% of participants and their bosses attributed at least “a little” progress to coaching.

Additional Results

Similar to Study 1, participants and their raters were asked what changes they had made or observed as a result of coaching. Preliminary analysis of the results suggests that some of the most prevalent themes of the results leaders were getting relate to

- improved collaboration and communication with others
- increased personal confidence and effectiveness
- more effective use of feedback





Implications and Conclusions

As coaching becomes increasingly popular, organizations such as CCL continue to accrue evidence that it works. However, it should not be assumed that all coaches and coaching will be high quality and get results. Executive coaching represents a significant investment of time and money, so continuously monitoring quality and assessing whether an executive coaching initiative is producing results is critical. Organizations should make sure both coaches and the coaching engagement are evaluated by measurable criteria. Nonetheless, this research provides support for these key benefits of coaching initiatives:



It is likely that companies will continue to invest in executive coaching as a key tool to develop leaders and improve their ability to carry out strategic initiatives. A strong coaching program that is well-integrated and supported within the organization has the potential to positively impact leaders and the groups they lead.

Endnotes and References

- ¹ Sarah Stawiski, Senior Research Faculty, CCL; Maggie Sass, Faculty and Portfolio Manager, CCL; Rosa Grunhaus Belzer, Coaching Talent Leader, CCL. We would like to acknowledge the work of Mark Reynolds, Graduate Intern, who conducted some of the analyses for this paper.
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- ¹⁸ Data were collected between 2012–2014. Participants in the dataset range from first-level managers to leaders of functions.
- ¹⁹ “Some leaders wrote multiple goals. The first goal entered was considered the “primary goal.”
- ²⁰ of 67 coachees, 615 raters and 171 goals
- ²¹ “To a large extent or higher” or, 5 or higher on a 7-point scale.

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