



COACHING AS A (NOT)NEW METHOD OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEES

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Keywords: coaching, lifelong learning education, the workplace as a place of learning, professional development of employees, trainings

Abstract. The current socio-economic reality forces organizations to modify their personal management strategies. To meet the challenges of the modern world, it is essential to apply such actions which allow the organization to maintain their position in the market. At a time when the pandemic has revolutionized forms of work and competition on the market is high, companies should recognize their opportunities first of all in employees, in developing and using their work potential. The aim of this study is to present coaching as a (not)new method of employee development applied by organizations. Coaching, which is over 60 years old abroad, has been known in Poland since the 1990s, is a constantly interesting aspect of human development. It is becoming an increasingly popular method of supporting employees in their workplace. In the content of this paper, the author understands coaching as a process supporting both individuals and workplaces in the development and improvement of the effects of their activities.

COACHING JAKO (NIE)NOWA METODA ROZWOJU ZAWODOWEGO PRACOWNIKÓW

Słowa kluczowe: coaching, kształcenie ustawiczne, zakład pracy jako miejsce uczenia się, rozwój zawodowy pracowników, szkolenia

Streszczenie. Obecna rzeczywistość społeczno-ekonomiczna zmusza organizacje do zmodyfikowania strategii dotyczących zarządzania personelem. Aby sprostać wyzwaniom współczesnego świata, niezbędne jest zastosowanie przez firmy, takich działań, które pozwolą utrzymać im pozycję na rynku. W czasach, gdy pandemia zrewolucjonizowała formy pracy, a konkurencja na rynku jest

wysoka, zakłady pracy powinny dostrzegać swoje szanse przede wszystkim w pracownikach, w rozwijaniu i wykorzystywaniu ich potencjału. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest przedstawienie coachingu jako wcale (nie)nowej metody rozwoju pracowniczego stosowanego przez organizacje. Coaching, mający za granicą ponad 60-letnią tradycję, w Polsce znany jest od lat 90. ubiegłego wieku i stanowi nieustająco interesujący aspekt rozwojowy człowieka. Jest on coraz chętniej stosowaną metodą wspomagania rozwoju w miejscu pracy. W treści niniejszego artykułu autorka pojmuje coaching jako proces wspierający zarówno pojedyncze jednostki, jak i zakłady pracy, w rozwoju oraz poprawie efektów ich działania.

Introduction

Globalisation, social changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic have compelled contemporary organisations to implement new management solutions. Today, business practices diverge significantly from those employed, for instance, a decade ago. Modern strategies of large corporations and small workplaces regard the individual, their employee, as the most crucial capital of the organisation. The continual development of business and modern digital technologies necessitates further education and learning at the workplace. This gives rise to the need for regular growth and enhancement of employees' educational capital within the system of lifelong learning (Szłapińska, 2010).

The author, in her considerations on coaching, endeavours to convince readers that it is by no means a (non)new method of employee development. Alongside training, mentoring, and tutoring, it constitutes an important form of support not only for individuals but also for the employed. Starting from the analysis of continuous education in companies as a space for employee learning, she emphasises the importance of training policy in organisations. Thanks to this, coaching in the workplace also gains a different dimension. Business coaching has been used for a long time in organisations as part of consulting services or as a method supporting employee training.

Continuing education in the workplace as a space for employee learning

The success of ventures undertaken by both small, often only a few-person companies, and large enterprises, depends on many factors, both internal and external to the organisation. As for external factors, an attempt was made to signal them in the summary of this article. Ewa Solarczyk-Ambrozik discusses these

issues more broadly in her works, emphatically stating that investing in areas that stimulate economic growth – such as education and training – becomes key to economic development and competitiveness. Furthermore, the level of competencies and skills needs to be adjusted to the changing needs of the economy and the labour market (Solarczyk-Ambrozik, 2013, p. 29).

In turn, a determining internal organisational factor is the recognition of the individual as a significant component of the organisation, the desire to engage them for its purposes, and the need to persuade them to work efficiently. These indicators have led to the flourishing of the field dealing with the issue of people in organisations, known as Human Resource Management (HRM). One of its subsystems is training and staff development¹.

Michael Armstrong and Stephen Taylor advocate that employee development policy should reflect the organisation's concern for the continuous enhancement of employees' skills and competencies, aimed at maximising their contribution to the company's activities and ensuring they have opportunities for qualification improvement, utilising their potential, career development, and increasing their professional attractiveness, both within and outside the organisation (Armstrong, Taylor, 2016, p. 615). As a function, it is directed towards updating professional knowledge, maintaining and improving the efficiency of work performed, and developing specific skills necessary for performing current and future tasks. Enhancing competencies and refining employees' skills is a crucial factor for survival in a competitive environment, guarantees the company's future market position, and influences the enterprise's success (Szlapińska, 2010).

In the Polish context of human resource management studies, Henryk Król emphasises that further education and development of human capital are processes of systematic improvement in knowledge, behaviours, and motivation of employees, aimed at equipping them with the skills necessary for more effective performance of current and future tasks and the growth of the organisation's human capital (Król, 2014, p. 432). In such understood education and professional development of employees, the main focus is on acquiring specific skills and qualifications essential for performing work in a given position, continuously multiplying previously acquired knowledge and competencies, and increasing the ability to perform optimally in a constantly changing economic

¹ For the subject matter of this study, only the context of HRM development policy is of importance, hence the author does not discuss the remaining components of personnel policy.

reality, focused on permanent competitiveness. Therefore, it should be concluded that the essence of human resources development is to reduce the gap between the current knowledge and skills of employees and the present and future needs of the enterprise (HCM Deck, 2023, p. 24).

Returning to analyses concerning continuing education, it is essential to emphasise that lifelong learning can mean continuing school education, participating in courses, training, seminars, lectures, conferences, or undertaking postgraduate studies. It also encompasses self-education through reading books and professional journals, as well as utilising new technologies in the process of self-education. According to Urszula Jeruszka, professional development is a process that spans a person's entire life, while continuing education is a determinant of human capital development. It is primarily associated with professional work and career development. Jeruszka asserts that professional development is motivated by material benefits and better living conditions. This, in turn, encourages people to work well and achieve high outcomes (2008, p. 135).

Ryszard Gerlach emphasises that "education is a form/type of support for the adult individual in today's uncertain times. This support lies not only on the side of organisations employing workers but primarily on the side of adult individuals and their own educational activity" (Gerlach, 2022, p. 173). This is evidenced by the results from the Human Capital Balance study, which record a high level of educational activity among adult Poles. According to researchers, as many as 83% of people aged 25-64 were developing their competencies, learning in formal, non-formal, or informal ways. Meanwhile, at the workplace, through coaching, mentoring, and observation, this was done by 29% of the respondents (Górniak et al., 2022, p. 11).

As has already been highlighted, continuing education relates to the current needs of the economy but also to the specific needs of individual units viewed from the perspective of the labour market, and constitutes an economic imperative, also rooted in the principles of a knowledge-based economy. Gerlach posits that in the situation of job variability, adult education is of significant, even crucial, importance. This requires organisations to engage in the continuous education of their employees to a greater extent than before, especially in relation to the fourth industrial revolution and society 5.0 (Gerlach, 2022, pp. 176-177).

In light of the described phenomena, professional training and development are therefore gaining increasingly important significance and affect an ever-growing number of professional groups. Education obtained in the school system is unfortunately insufficient, often outdated, hence the necessity arises

to develop knowledge and qualifications in forms and to an extent that are optimal for the individual.

Renata Tomaszewska-Lipiec, in her deliberations on the current and prospective approach of employers to the issue of education and professional development of employees, clearly states that this is a research area of work pedagogy (Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2017, pp. 371-377). This sub-discipline of pedagogy deals, among other things, with the widely used form of developing competencies of adults through learning in the workplace. Meanwhile, Gerlach notes that nowadays, the primary educational environment for adults is workplaces that create opportunities for raising not only professional qualifications but also the social skills of employees (Gerlach, 2022, p. 177). An individual's engagement in their own development manifests in two fundamental types of behaviour: the first includes participation in diverse forms of learning-related activities, and the second is associated with seeking information about current job opportunities and prospects for further professional career development.

The aim of education at a workplace (*work-based learning*) is to assist individuals in supplementing and/or updating their knowledge and skills. Through acquiring new qualifications and skills, an employee can improve their situation in the labour market and continue their professional career development, for example, by retraining (Institute of Labour Market Analysis, p. 11). As reported in the *Rozwój kompetencji – uczenie się dorosłych i sektor szkoleniowo-rozwojowy* [*Skills Development – Adult Learning and the Training and Development Sector*] report, new forms of adult education appear in the workplace: coaching, mentoring, and tutoring (Górniak et al., 2022, p. 20).

In Polish literature (Król, Ludwicyński, 2014; Poczowski, 2018), employee development is understood as a process of raising employees' qualifications to increase their efficiency of action, which is very important in their current and future positions. It includes shaping knowledge, skills, attitudes, and specialist competencies. Training, on the other hand, involves teaching employees (technical or executive) tasks in their current position. Meanwhile, Western literature (Wilson, Rosenfeld, 1990, p. 23) defines training as a set of activities aimed at improving or increasing an employee's skills, knowledge, experience, or changing their views.

As has already been highlighted in the earlier part of this text, training and employee development should lead to increased efficiency and satisfaction and protect against the obsolescence of knowledge. If people are not adequately trained or believe they are expected to do something they cannot without proper

training, it can be assumed that employment turnover will increase in the workplace or the number of rotations will rise.

Training, depending on who orders it and for whom it is designed, can be divided into two types: *closed (internal)* and *open (external)* training. Closed training is characterised by being exclusively for employees of a specific company. It can be directed both to those who work with each other on a daily basis and to individuals from different departments who do not have direct contact.

The decision to conduct training is usually made by the company's management to improve the efficiency of employees in a selected area. Participation in it is typically mandatory, organised during work hours, and its costs are covered by the employer. It can be conducted within the company or externally, e.g., on the premises of a training company or a training centre. It can be carried out by individuals working in the company as well as trainers from consulting firms (Łaguna, 2004, p. 17).

Regarding internal training, the identification and analysis of training needs are handled by the training department in cooperation with internal trainers, who later conduct the training. Most often, only large organisations with the necessary financial resources can afford to independently design and implement such training.

Another option is to prepare the training in collaboration with a company specialising in such activities. In this case, the training department of the organisation conducts an analysis of training needs, preparing the plan for a specific course, while its implementation is managed by external trainers. Courses can be conducted exclusively by a training institution; then its employees handle the needs analysis, designing the training, and its implementation (Łaguna, 2004, p. 17).

Open training, on the other hand, is characterised by voluntary participation. Employees can also acquire work-related skills through them, but they are not compelled to participate. Recruitment is conducted by the consulting institution, and interested individuals can register their participation. Sometimes, an employer directs a specific employee to external training because there is no need to organise a course for a larger group. In this case, the company may partially or fully cover the cost of the employee's participation in such training. As for the analysis of training needs, in the case of open training, it is usually not conducted. It is mainly the managers of the organisation who decide whether there is a need for an employee to participate in training (Łaguna, 2004, p. 18).

There are many types of open training. These include short courses, as well as postgraduate studies, which cover a period of one or two years. They educate in a relatively narrow field related to work and take place at the premises of the training institution or at a training centre (Łaguna, 2004, p. 18).

In summary, the training services market offers two types of courses: open (external) and closed (internal). The former are aimed at individuals who wish to acquire knowledge on their own initiative. Therefore, the themes of such training are adapted to the needs present in the contemporary labour market. The latter, designed for specific companies, are characterised by a thematic scope tailored to the needs of the organisation.

The Human Capital Balance data from 2021 and previous years show that the costs of vocational courses and training are primarily covered by employers. The percentage of participants indicating their employer as the sponsor of activities decreased by 7 percentage points from 2019, from 78% to 71% in 2021 (Górniak et al., 2022, p. 13). It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decline in the overall number of trainings at the workplace. When they were organized, they were mainly in an online format. Only 14% of people aged 25-64 participated in face-to-face courses and training related to their work (excluding health and safety and fire protection) in the last 12 months before the survey, which was 8 percentage points less than in 2019 (Górniak et al., 2022, p. 34).

The most commonly used form of learning at the workplace in 2021, as in previous years, was on-the-job training, which was utilized by 2 out of 10 working Poles aged 25-64. The percentage of those who developed their skills through on-the-job training is almost the same as the percentage of employees who participated in online training related to their profession (20%) or in face-to-face courses and training (19%). The second most common was the use of support from more experienced employees (mentoring, coaching: 16%); the third was the exchange of experiences during team meetings (13%). However, it is worth adding that in 2021, as many as 63% of employees did not develop their skills at the workplace at all. Among the reasons for educational inactivity, the indication that participation in courses or training was not needed at work has been consistently in first place since 2010 (Górniak et al., 2022, p. 14).

Concluding the above discussions on learning in the workplace, one can echo the words of R. Gerlach, who contends that “continuing education is no longer a privilege but a necessity that offers the opportunity to continually face new professional challenges. Those with the best qualifications have the chance for

success, but only the continuous expansion of these qualifications allows for the achievement of a stable and favourable position in a knowledge-based economy” (Gerlach, 2007, p. 62).

Coaching as a (not)new method of development

The history of coaching, especially in its initial period, is not very well documented in the literature. The first elements of coaching can be found in the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates. Already 2,500 years ago, he taught people how to live better, and diagnosed the mental potential of his students through questions, forcing them to reflect on themselves and motivating them to develop.

The origins of coaching can be traced back to the works of Sheila Kampa-Kokesch and Mary Z. Anderson (2001, p. 207). These authors see elements of coaching in the early interventions of consulting and psychological counselling, which developed in the 1960s. However, this term was often used to describe confidential psychological assistance for a manager or the work of a consultant in a company (Wujec, 2012).

Contemporary coaching is gaining popularity, and its history in Western countries demonstrates that it can be used in enterprises as an alternative or complementary form to training (Świeży, 2020, p. 7). The literature indicates that John Whitmore significantly contributed to the establishment of coaching in the business world. Whitmore defines coaching as: “unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is more about helping to learn than teaching” (Whitmore, 1996, p. 8).

It is crucial to emphasize that coaching differs from other forms of working with people. It is not advising – where the advisor’s expert knowledge plays a significant role, sharing it or developing suitable solutions for the situation. It is not a relationship with a mentor, who serves as a role model and source of support based on life and professional experience. It is not therapy, which starts from the patient’s suffering or difficulties in functioning (Świeży, 2020, p. 11). Coaching, however, is individual personal training conducted by a coach, aimed at developing an employee’s skills and personal competencies in a specific area. Importantly, this method focuses on the individual needs of the learner (Institute of Labour Market Analysis). The strength of coaching lies in the fact that the coach does not try to “fix” or “heal” the client, i.e., change them according

to their own discretion, but helps them achieve personal goals and find their own solutions to problematic situations.

It is also worthwhile to consider the definition of coaching according to the International Coach Federation, which describes coaching as “a relationship between a coach and an individual or group of individuals focused on their actions aimed at achieving set goals, visions, desires” (ICF, cited in: Kraśniewski 2022, p. 37). In the coaching process, through the use of questions, the coachee’s self-reflection, and feedback, their awareness and responsibility are strengthened. Coaching helps the coachee to define and achieve goals much more quickly and effectively. Simply put, the essence of coaching is about change. The type of change will be decided by the coachee, defining their developmental goal (Rzycka, 2015, p. 32).

The term *coach* itself is closely related to a loanword from 16th-century Hungarian, in which the word *Kócs* denoted a specific type of carriage designed, among other purposes, for long journeys. Over time, the word was adopted by other languages – including European ones (such as *coche* in French, *kutsche* in German, *cocchio* in Italian; the word *kocz* was also used in Polish) – as Ernest Weekley points out, remaining with unchanged meaning to contemporary times (Weekley, 1967, cited in: Brzeziński, 2013, pp. 13-14).

A coach is an individual who possesses the knowledge and skills necessary to conscientiously guide a client through the coaching process, and thereby, through their process of change. They have at their disposal a range of tools that will assist the client (coachee) in working towards the achievement of set goals. They pose questions², stimulate thinking, provoke change, keep the problems entrusted to them confidential, believe that the client is capable of achieving their goals, and support them in this endeavour. A coach cannot tell the client what they should do or choose. In accordance with the ethical code³ a coach collaborates with the client and accompanies them through the process of change.

This paper does not discuss the entire coaching process, as both Western and Polish literature document its course in great detail (Thorpe, Clifford, 2003; Sidor-Rządkowska, 2021). It was considered necessary, in the context

² Questions are the main tool in a coach’s work, they allow for the independent generation of solutions appropriate for the client, support his or her development, and build motivation for further work and learning.

³ The author of this text advocates the application of the ICF (International Coach Federation) Code of Ethics in coaching practice, available on the website: <https://icf.org.pl/kodeks-etyczny/>; 26.01.2024). The ICF was the first organization in the world to establish ethical standards that its members are obliged to adhere to.

of the discussions on employee development in the workplace, to discuss only the types of organizational coaching.

The goal of coaching in the workplace is to ensure that people identify with the company, become increasingly responsible for the company's fate, and that their actions significantly influence the economic profit. The organisation aims to earn money and strengthen its assets, including those intangible ones hidden in the knowledge, competencies, and attitudes of its people. On one hand, coaching means an increase in productivity and efficiency, as well as financial inflow to the company. On the other hand, the goal of coaching is to retain the best and most valuable talents by offering them opportunities for development, improving efficiency, and enhancing their satisfaction with life and professional work (Rzycka, 2015, p. 33). "Coaching involves constant partnership contact and cooperation of the employee with a partner who is more experienced and competent, helping them in professional development and in better performing their organisational role" (Oleksyn, 2018, p. 284).

The first type of business coaching is known as *executive coaching* (EC), which is usually intended for top management. The coaching service is often purchased for a specific manager. In this case, the company is represented by a human resources employee or the superior of the person who is to participate in the coaching process. They play a part in the decision to purchase the service, thus they can be called sponsors. However, the deciding voice on who becomes the coach should belong to the coachee.

It must be emphasised that executive coaching plays a particularly vital role in the development of individuals and organisations. It differs from other forms of coaching in that it presumes a tripartite relationship: the coach, the manager, and the organisational context, represented by all stakeholders, as it is the organisation that pays for the service. Additionally, EC focuses on the needs of both the manager and the sponsoring organisation (Wujec, 2012, p. 24). It is becoming common practice to sign long-term contracts with external coaches in order to more deeply integrate them with the organisation and conduct the process based on an understanding of its specific conditions.

The second type, becoming increasingly popular in many companies, is known as *internal coaching* – conducted by individuals who are specially trained and employed by the company. Such an internal coach better understands the client's problems associated with functioning within the organisation; they are usually more focused than external coaches on supporting clients in solving

specific professional issues. A large group of companies offers internal coaching to lower-level managers (Wujec, 2012, p. 24).

Given the possibility of seamlessly integrating coaching with other forms of employee development, especially with training programs, it should be noted once again that supporting training with coaching programs, particularly internal coaching, facilitates the transfer of knowledge acquired during training to the realities of everyday work. The results of the Human Capital Balance research show a regular increase in the offer of individualised forms of development in the workplace, such as training, individual training sessions, coaching (by 28%), or mentoring (Górniak et al., 2022, p. 17).

In the table below, more detailed statistical data regarding the professional development of employees in organizations through the method of coaching is presented.

Table 1. Statistical data on the professional development of employees in organizations through the method of coaching

Service	On-site		Remote		Blended learning		On-the-job	
	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021
Coaching	83%	81%	7%	46%	8%	40%	18%	16%

Source: Own elaboration based on: Górniak et al., 2022, p. 69.

As indicated by the above table, coaching sessions conducted in a traditional, face-to-face setting are giving way to coaching carried out remotely. This shift is primarily due to the pandemic situation, which has necessitated the transfer of this service to the online domain. Coaching conducted using modern technologies also represents a time and space saving for organizations to carry out the process.

Concluding the considerations regarding coaching as a (not) new method of professional development, it is essential to highlight several issues. The essence of such coaching is to create an understanding of oneself and one's surroundings, through which the coachee:

- Gives direction to their life and work by clearly defining priorities (What is important to me?) and related goals (What do I wish to achieve?);
- Is aware that they have many options to choose from (Which actions will bring me closer to my chosen goal?);
- Takes responsibility for their life and work and consciously decides on their quality (What will my next step be?) (Wujec, 2012, p. 24).

How relevant these questions are when applied to the context of organizational management.

Conclusion

In this paper, an effort has been made to highlight that the ongoing socio-economic transformations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the introduction of modern technological solutions contribute to an increase in competition in the job market and intensify rivalry between organizations. Through participation in continuous education, we can counteract the ageing of employee competencies, both in the workplace and in the personal lives of individuals.

Employers increasingly perceive the value of their employees through the lens of skills and their willingness to engage in continuous learning. The growing competition somewhat forces contemporary organizations to invest in their employees. Today, it is an absolute necessity to create opportunities for them to fill competency gaps, so they can find their place in the new organizational reality and be able to adjust to the present in which they live. And this is precisely where the support of a coach comes in, enabling adaptation based on the potential that coachees have within themselves.

In the view of the author of this study – a practicing coach – the issues described clearly indicate that coaching is currently an indispensable form of development, both professionally in the workplace and personally.

The considerations and analyses undertaken here concerned coaching as a (not) new method of professional development of employees. The author emphasizes that coaching, used in continuous education in the workplace, is a long-known and applied method of supporting organizational training.

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