The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at:
https://www.emerald.com/insight/2205-2062.htm

Received 4 May 2022
Revised 1 June 2022
Accepted 4 August 2022

Coaching to build commitment for generating performance improvement

Paul Lyons
Department of Management, College of Business, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland, USA, and
Randall P. Bandura
Department of Accounting, College of Business, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The paper is practitioner-focused with a manager-as-coach applying experiential learning to aid an employee's learning and improve performance as well as helping to build employee commitment to both the job and organization. Reciprocity is intended as the learning and commitment of both the employee and manager are enhanced.

Design/methodology/approach – As a conceptual, not empirical, paper, the present study aimed at guiding manager behavior the methodology aims to examine the areas of manager-as-coach, efficacy of coaching, theoretical grounding of employee commitment and experiential learning processes. Study and coordination of information in these areas provided support for a detailed action plan for practical application.

Findings – It is possible to create a research results–driven practical guide/action plan for managers. The guide incorporates manager skills and commitment theory (investment) along with an experiential learning approach aimed at improving employee growth and building commitment.

Practical implications – There is clear evidence in empirical research that employee commitment positively relates to work performance, job engagement and job retention. This paper applies investment theory to build commitment as it is based on actual inputs and efforts of the employee.

Originality/value – There is very little research currently available that directly addresses manager-as-coach deliberately working to increase or build employee commitment to job, organization or the manager her/himself. This essay aims directly at how commitment may be enhanced.

Keywords Commitment, Experiential learning, Coaching, Action guide, Investment theory

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

This conceptual paper targets the manager-as-coach who makes use of experiential learning methods to aid the employee to improve performance, develop greater commitment to the organization and reinforce employee career prospects. Today, with flatter organizations and growing interest in manager-as-coach, employees need career development opportunities. Coaching can assist in developing learning, skills, and experience (Ghosh *et al.*, 2015). Coaching to assist employee learning is clearly related to individual development, work performance and career opportunities.

No financial support has been provided for the preparation of this paper.
There are no conflicts of interest per this paper submission.

Journal of Work-Applied Management
Vol. 15 No. 1, 2023
pp. 120-134
Emerald Publishing Limited
2205-2062
DOI 10.1108/JWAM-05-2022-0025

There is increasing interest in the role and functioning of manager-as-coach. In the past 20 years there have been hundreds of empirical and theoretical articles published on the subject of manager-as-coach. This output is in addition to a large body of research and opinion regarding full-time external or professional coaches and internal organizational coaches whose sole responsibility is coaching individuals or teams.

As McCarthy and Milner (2020) point out coaching is gaining in popularity worldwide in both organizations and in academia. They assert that coaching has become a management discipline that influences employee development and organizational performance. Reinforcing this assertion, Jones *et al.* (2016) conclude that organizations are moving away from authoritarian management and top-down command and control styles and are replacing them with managerial coaching that offers a framework for building trust and mutual support. Fatien and Otter (2015) assert that coaching by managers is rapidly increasing. They attribute this growth to expectations that managers will facilitate learning and development, the shift in employee development from a central Human Resource (HR) function to managers and growing recognition that managerial coaching does, in fact, result in positive learning and development.

Woo (2017) found that managerial coaching helps to create deeper levels of trust and employee commitment to the organization. In many organizations expectations exist for managers that make the role of coaching commonplace, thus reflecting shifts in responsibility for employee development.

The conceptual and practice-based information included in this work contributes to the coaching, management and human resources literature to include: (1) coaching for performance improvement (knowledge, skills and motivation) and job engagement, (2) a detailed review of critical factors associated with employee commitment and (3) a practitioner-based model (action plan) for enhancing employee performance and commitment and aiding employee career prospects.

Purpose

The essential purpose of this paper is to present a practical approach for a manager acting in a coaching role to enhance the development of an employee. In the approach, development takes several forms to include: assisting the employee to learn and ultimately improve work performance, increasing the competence and skills of the employee to strengthen the employee's career potentials and taking specific coaching initiatives to increase the employee's commitment to the organization.

Commitment is an important construct and little has been written regarding how a managerial coach may function to increase employee commitment. As will be explained later, commitment is an important component of employee retention (Lyons and Bandura, 2022). Retention of qualified, productive employees is critical in today's organizations. Commitment is also important with regard to one's career trajectory in an organization owing to its linkage with matters such as achievement, recognition, learning, possible new assignments and bonding with the organization.

Some specific objectives of this paper are to explain in detail the role and tasks of manager-as-coach and explain the theoretical and practical aspects of commitment to organization. Other objectives include the presentation of a vehicle – experiential learning process (ELP) – for the coach to use to spring to life valuable, research-validated behaviors to positively influence the employee, and, to offer an example of an action guide that a coach may use. Applying the steps in the action guide should affect the learning, performance and commitments of both the employee being coached and the manager initiating the coaching effort. Outcomes may be somewhat parallel for the participants, such as appreciation of others' efforts and achievements, increased knowledge, understanding and trust.

Methodology

Study of the research literature on coaching (see, for example, Cox *et al.*, 2014) provided initial guidance for study of managerial coaching. In addition, from reviews of relevant literature of practice and theory (Beattie *et al.*, 2014) and using search tools such as Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, PsychINFO, Science Direct and Education Research Complete, areas for exploration were identified. These areas include (1) manager-as-coach (Hawkins, 2012; Lawrence, 2017), (2) coaching skills (Ellinger, 2013) and (3) efficacy of coaching (Steelman and Wolfeld, 2018; Bozer and Jones, 2018; Barry, 2020).

Also addressed is the complex, theoretical grounding of the concept of commitment as extracted from several studies (Meyer and Allen, 1984, 1991; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001; Liu, 2009; Mowday *et al.*, 2013; Mercurio, 2015; Paz, 2019). Considerable attention is given to theories of commitment as there are few sources for managers, practitioners and HR staff to explore with regard to an examination of several theories in combination. Emphasis is given to investment theory (Rusbult *et al.*, 2011; and Tran *et al.*, 2019) which provides the primary basis for practice by manager-as-coach as she/he goes about the task of stimulating employee commitment to job and tasks. Finally, ELPs normally housed in action plans for practical application (see Ashford and DeRue, 2012; Jordan and Audia, 2012), are presented to guide manager-as-coach.

Following identity and explanations of the areas mentioned, an integration of critical features resulting in the form of a practical guide is proposed to assist a manager-as-coach work hand-in-hand with an employee to promote learning and improvement (knowledge, skills, understandings) and commitment to job, organization and manager.

Examination of coaching concepts

The review of selected areas is intended to provide foundational information to use in proposing an integrated approach for the manager-as-coach to use with an employee in a mutually beneficial action plan.

Manager-as-coach

There are different types of coaches and coaching. Some coaches are external consultants hired to work one-on-one with a manager for particular developmental purposes. Others are professionals who work for the organization in a coaching capacity only, and move from individual to individual or group to group in a helping role. And then we have the manager who acts in a coaching role with a direct report. The literature on coaching is vast and to a degree there is some confusion in the literature when it comes to defining the role and responsibilities of those acting as a coach. Up until a few years ago nearly all of the research on coaching was aimed at professional coaches who worked with executives or who worked as full-time coaches with different groups of employees per a particular objective. The concept of manager-as-coach is a relative newcomer and its popularity is growing. A manager (hereafter referred to as manager or manager-as-coach) who desires to coach employees can take on the coaching role with an employee (a direct report).

In this essay we have attempted to identify information that is aimed directly at manager-as-coach, is relatively recent (past 13 years), and is highly descriptive of coaching behavior. We have relied on studies that have been cited repeatedly in current research and that appear in journals with relatively high impact factors. With one exception all of the authors cited in the following material of this and the next section of the paper have published several papers, empirical and conceptual, in the area of coaching and manager-as-coach. Typically, their work is cited in most research recently completed by authors cited here and by other researchers.

Lawrence (2017) examined a large body of coaching research and concluded that a generally accepted definition of coaching does not exist. Yet, he found that much written about coaching aligned it with processes for facilitating learning and improving performance and this finding is in direct support of the expressed role of manager-as-coach in this essay. Gregory and Levy (2010, p. 111) define the manager-as-coach process as a

> developmental activity in which an employee works one-on-one with her/his direct manager to improve current job performance and enhance her/his capabilities for future roles and/or challenges, the success of which is based on the relationship between employee and manager.

This definition is devoid of mention of employee commitment. The argument made in this paper proposes that a manager acting in a coaching role can reinforce efforts, gains, achievements and the like by the employee being coached to bring attention to the valued investments made by the employee. Valuing investments should result in gains in commitment (and job satisfaction) to job and tasks and hopefully extend to one's manager and the organization.

Frequently, the focus of coaching is initially based on information inputs from performance appraisal data, modifications to a job, new organizational initiatives and the like. Unlike other types of coaches (above) manager-as-coach has a power relationship with employees as she/he is in a position to make decisions about the work assignments, tenure, and rewards of the employee. The power variable may or may not have significant influence in coaching success (Sonesh *et al.*, 2015). In their research Beattie *et al.* (2014) found that, as manager and employee worked together to aid employee learning and performance, the hierarchical space or power differential between them decreased. This change helped to improve the quality of their relationship. Anderson (2013) expressed the idea that managerial coaching largely combines with a relational, not hierarchical, distance between manager and employee that encourages a reciprocal, democratic and supportive way of managing.

Manager-as-coach practice has grown to an extent that Snell *et al.* (2016), having studied managers, report that many managers from various levels say that without coaching they would not have achieved as much as they did over the years. While some recent research (for example, Lawrence, 2017) has provided some information about professional or personal characteristics that might motivate a manager to undertake coaching, in general little is known about the matter (Hawkins and Turner, 2019).

In the past two decades (see Sonesh *et al.*, 2015), much of the literature on managers taking on a coaching role is based upon the notion that many organizations are moving away from traditional performance management and performance appraisal practices and as Pulakos *et al.* (2015) express, more toward other performance-based, manager – employee interactions. This may include features such as meetings that are frequent (more than two or three times per year), less directive and formal and that extend beyond required documented steps. As Eby and Robertson (2020) suggest, there are changes in management practice deliberately aimed at a coaching role. In addition, a survey (CIPD, 2015) revealed that 80% of organizations reporting expected managers to coach.

Sonesh *et al.* (2015) conclude that organizations increasingly encourage managers to provide continual, tailored feedback and direction to their employees. In part, these changes reflect some current trends in many organizations such as flatter structures, reduced training resources and increased performance expectations (Mowday *et al.*, 2013). Hunt and Weintraub (2011) conclude that the quantity of managers who take on the role of coach is growing, yet coaching is frequently thwarted because of limited time, competing demands and lack of training in effective coaching practices.

Efficacy of coaching

There is a large body of research evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of coaching practice some of which is mentioned here (Bozer and Jones, 2018). Few studies provide evidence that coaching is not effective. The CIPD 2015 survey found that more than 40% of survey respondents named coaching as one of their organization's most effective learning and development interventions. Supportive of this finding is the work of Beattie *et al.* (2014) in which they examined empirical research on coaching and found that the various forms of coaching (external, internal and managerial) are quite similar when it comes to actual practices applied and that managerial coaching is synonymous with the facilitation of learning. Because the various forms of coaching practice seem to have so much in common, included in this section is research (for example, Bozer and Jones, 2018; Theeboom *et al.*, 2014) on coaching efficacy that examined professional coaches but did not include manager-as-coach.

Many empirical studies of the effects of managerial coaching report similar findings. Grant *et al.* (2009) conducted a randomized controlled study. They found that managerial coaching resulted in increases in goal attainment, resilience and workplace well-being, and decreases in depression and stress. Theeboom *et al.* (2014) completed a meta-analysis of the role of coaching on five individual employee outcomes and found evidence that coaching is an effective intervention. Positive effects were found in these outcomes categories: performance, skills, coping, work attitudes, well-being and goal-directed self-regulation. Effect sizes ranged from $g = 0.43$ (coping) to $g = 0.74$ (goal-directed self-regulation).

Relatedly, Dawber (2019) completed a broad review of outcomes of coaching efforts and found several positive outcomes of managerial coaching to include: achieving work goals and improvement in job performance, increased satisfaction with one's work and manager and enhanced organizational commitment. In other studies of coaching outcomes, Hamilton (2019) found that coaching was effective as it raises employee commitment and engagement, productivity, customer loyalty and retention rates. These particular findings helped stimulate interest in proposing an action guide for manager-as-coach to learn about and then attempt to carry out coaching practices that could aid employee learning, performance and the development of commitment.

In summary, the individual studies mentioned above and meta-analytic studies (Theeboom *et al.*, 2014; Jones *et al.*, 2016) have clearly demonstrated that coaching has a positive impact on outcome criteria. These include performance improvement, well-being, job satisfaction, skills enhancement, self-efficacy, goal-directed self-regulation and, importantly for this conceptual paper, employees' clear expression of commitment to both the job and the organization.

Employee commitment

In the past two decades there has been increased attention given to employee commitment to organizations from both scholars and management (including HR practitioners) owing to factors such as economic instability, rapid change, increased competition and globalization vis-à-vis the need to retain talent (Grant, 2014). As Dychtwald *et al.* (2013) concluded, leaders need to recruit, grow and retain talent with capabilities and skills to help maintain competitive advantage. Pangarkar and Kirkwood (2013) found that employees that are committed and engaged are very valuable as they typically are highly invested mentally, emotionally and physically in achieving organizational objectives and they want to remain with the organization.

The concept of commitment to organizations is not a tidy, clear one. In his in-depth review of affective (or attitudinal or emotional) commitment, Mercurio (2015) points out that research on organizational commitment is confounded and fragmented, and has been since the 1970s. He set out to determine whether affective commitment, that is, commitment based on positive attitudes toward an organization (see Meyer and Allen, 1984) is representative of the core essence of organizational commitment. Mercurio (2015) indicated that if affective commitment is most representative of employee commitment to the organization, then it follows that it can be both useful and valuable for managers to design effective (learning) interventions to manage and develop commitment (Mercurio, p. 391).

Reviewing the theoretical basis of commitment helps to shape both the complexity and definition of the concept. Complexity, in part, is reflected by evidence that the theories are not mutually exclusive. One may be tied to another resulting from perceptions, then actions, then reinforcement of attitudes and various behaviors. The following section, spells out are the most prevalent theories of employee commitment. Keep in mind that an attitude is mostly about feelings, expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. On the other hand, as per Solinger *et al.* (2008) normative and continuance commitment are attitudes regarding specific forms of behavior such as staying or leaving. They posit that the three component model or TCM, of Meyer and Allen (1991) does not qualify as a general model of organizational commitment, but rather a specific model for predicting turnover.

Paz (2019), in a general approach to employee commitment, summarized information from surveys of executives which expressed that commitment can be improved through coaching/training employees, creating a work atmosphere based on trust, respect and mentoring, and creating elements of work that are significant and inspiring. The sample of executives projected two important ideas: (1) relationships (manager–employee) should cultivate an environment of accomplishment and (2) we aim at *fit* with the organization. That is, without commitment employees are disconnected. They tend to have little motivation and ultimately undermine the success of the organization.

Expressions of specific theories of commitment

First is Obligatory Commitment Theory (Meyer and Allen, 1991) which is about a mindset of obligation arising from specific norms that have been internalized (one's need to reciprocate with regard to benefits received from an organization). Second is attitudinal (affective) commitment theory (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). That is, feelings of involvement contribute to one's commitment and may include attitudes/feelings of care for the organization, pride in the organization, willingness to do more for the organization summed-up as: identification – association – attachment.

In reviewing the broad body of research on employee commitment, often using the same standardized survey instruments (Mowday *et al.*, 1979), one finds that affective or attitudinal commitment is more highly and negatively correlated with turnover and absenteeism and more highly and positively correlated with performance and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). In particular, Sharma and Dhar (2016), found a positive correlation (0.70) of attitudinal commitment with performance. In an earlier, comprehensive review of employee commitment, Mercurio (2015) had concluded that affective commitment is the likely core of organizational commitment.

A third theory, behavioral commitment theory (Salancik, 1977), purports that commitment arises out of the person's own behavior: (a) one's actions are freely made and owned, (b) there is an obligation to follow through on those actions, and (c) there are costs related to continuing or not continuing those actions. Actions freely made may stimulate an obligation to continue a behavior, such as continuing loyalty toward one's supervisor. Fourth is commitment as multidimensional theory (Meyer and Allen, 1991). This is the TCM or framework which is a complementary relationship between an attitudinal and behavioral definition(s) and includes the following dimensions: Affective (feelings/desire to remain; identification with organization), continuance (need to remain based on needs and investments made) and normative (obligation to remain). This theory has broad appeal as several forms of commitment are represented.

Finally, transactional/investment commitment theory (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986) expresses that commitment results primarily from economic decisions. This is about investments and rewards. Commitment may result as one weighs the potential risk of losing investments made (time, learning, effort and other) coupled with lack of desirable alternatives. As Rusbult *et al.* (2011) have made clear over several years a substantial amount of empirical research in several domains have documented the strong link of commitment to investments.

Theory choice for application

It is important and valuable to clearly delineate the linkages between coaching behavior on the part of the manager and the outcome of increasing employee commitment. The commitment may be to one's job/tasks, the manager, and/or the organization. Other commitment linkages may include one's coworkers or one's work unit or team. The primary focus in this essay owing to the content of the action plan example offered is commitment to job and manager.

It is suggested that transactional (investment) commitment theory be adopted as a basis for action. This adoption or selection ties with manager actions to assist an employee to learn, grow, and change because the learning structure/tasks and adaptations in behavior require investments by the employee. The manager-as-coach literature identified in this essay and make it relatively clear that coaching is often aimed at increasing employee learning and knowledge about the job and the skills involved. In actuality, the employee and the manager-as-coach are making investments and both parties should be aware of the contributions/investments made.

At least three reasons provide a foundation for application of this commitment theory: (1) to influence commitment there must be some specific direction (plan, behavior and reinforcement) for the manager to instigate, that is, what does the employee need to achieve? (2) there is no single, "best" theory of increasing employee commitment and (3) reliance on transactional/investment theory helps to explain how the manager in a coaching role may assist an employee to apprehend her/his own investments in learning, change and growth. Investments help create and/or reinforce commitment as achievement, growth, job satisfaction and work engagement result from investment contributions.

The coach must directly attend to and reinforce what has already been (and will be) achieved by the coached employee in terms of investments, such as, contributions, sacrifices, sustained effort and the like. For example, if the employees' investments and contributions as well as those of the coach via their interactions are valued and made obvious and clear to the employee, this information should lead to satisfaction and should influence positive feelings and attitudes toward the organization. Below, in the segment on ELP, the details of this approach are spelled-out.

Some dynamics of the investment model

Since the 1980s the investment model of Rusbult (1980) has become one of the most researched areas of commitment. While commencing as part of the research area regarding close relationships, over the past three decades the model has been extended to several areas including politics, jobs, coaching and buyer–seller relationships. The model provides a framework for discovery of the causes of, and stimulation of, commitment.

The investment model (Rusbult *et al.*, 2011) advances the idea that commitment to a job, person and sports participation and so on is influenced by three independently determined factors:

(1) One's level of satisfaction (with/job, boss, coworkers and organization);

(2) Perceived quality of available alternatives (a different job, or boss, situation and organization); and,

(3) Investment size – what resources, concrete or intangible, have been contributed (to the work, specific tasks, coworkers, organization and relationship with manager) such as time, effort, learning, preparation and emotion.

Tran *et al.* (2019) concluded from their meta-analysis of dozens of studies of the investment model, commitment increased with any or all of: more rewards or higher satisfaction, with less attractive alternatives and with increasing investments. When individuals are satisfied, lack alternatives and have deliberately invested in their work activities and relationships, they tend to form a strong intention to remain with the current job/organization. The influence of investment theory on positively influencing commitment of participants leads to the suggestion that the manager-as-coach needs to make special, deliberate efforts to identify and emphasize actual investments made by both the employee and manager in the learning and performance activities aimed at improvement. Continued and deliberate recognition of employee investments by the manager should stimulate feelings of commitment as well as job satisfaction.

Transitioning from theory to practice

From transactional/investment theory to practice-grounded considerations the proposed action guide for the manager (ELP – below) has three objectives. The first is recognition of, and reliance on, the reciprocal nature of manager and employee learning from the activities undertaken and from each other. Reflecting the work of Dawber (2019) and Heslin *et al.* (2006), the participants have shared responsibility in learning for varied purposes and in learning together. Second, as Caniels *et al.* (2018) and Quijano and Johnson (2018) suggest activities undertaken in the action guide help to increase manager and employee engagement in learning, work and change. Third, as Burnette *et al.* (2013) propose, completion of activities in the guide helps to stimulate employee commitment to learning and the task at hand, the job and the manager. This may include manager commitment to the employee as that employee makes progress.

The third objective encompasses the creation, over time, of investments such as efforts, trials and attempts at progress made by and perceived by both manager and employee. A stronger and more positive relationship between employee and coach should result from the investments that ultimately reinforce commitment (Rusbult *et al.*, 2011; Tran *et al.*, 2019). Strengthening of the relationship helps set the stage for future learning/change strategies.

Experiential learning process [ELP]: action model and guide

Presented here is an integration of activities of coach and employee that lead to specific changes in the growth of knowledge and commitment for both. As knowledge and commitment increase, the participants may commence with associated or completely new action plans to build upon what has been learned and accepted. Experiential learning is selected for application and not forms of explaining, telling or presenting (see Kolb, 2015). Experiential learning emphasizes the central role lived experience has in the learning process. It is chosen for several reasons among which are high connectivity with the day-to-day work environment and the subjective experience of the learner. On-the-job experiential learning is more effective than other learning methods because work tasks almost always contain several strong and valued learning drivers. Such drivers include work tasks that capture employee attention and have built-in ownership and relevance, contextualization and personalization is provided and naturally occurring work provides spaced opportunities for practice and helps to reinforce learning.

Suggested for the practitioner is the ELP as proposed by Ashford and DeRue (2012). Initially intended to aid manager learning, over time the process has been shaped in various ways. It is adapted here for use in coaching and is intended as an action plan or guide; it is not a blueprint. ELP reflects both the growth mindset (Dweck, 2016) as well as a learning orientation (Heslin and Keating, 2017), both of which support motivated, sustained learning and one's self-regulation of learning. The process to be guided by the manager consists of three distinct yet coordinated phases. They are approach, in which manager and employee jointly set learning goals; action, which is aimed at achievement of goals; and reflection or making use of feedback accompanied by discussion, understanding and conclusions (Ashford and DeRue, 2012).

The process as explained above may ultimately consist of two or more iterations as manager and employee seek progress with reference to initial goals. ELP, as expressed here has elements that may be construed as training. However, as manager-as-coach takes on a guidance role through several interactions with the employee over the course of each of the three phases below, the manager's behavior takes on a decidedly coaching effort. This effort includes instruction, offering advice, providing feedback and reinforcement and assisting the employee to discover new ways to view performance.

An ELP example

Suppose feedback on the performance of a sales employee points to the need for more/better product knowledge (products could be kitchen appliances). Sales work may involve interactions with customers live via Internet and telephone. The feedback conclusions are based on information from customer surveys over a period of six months, sales data and other inputs. The manager-as-coach wishes to assist the employee improve performance as well as to improve her/his own skills as a coach, communicator and instructor. This activity represents an attempt at reciprocal learning. The process and explicit guidance are presented next.

Note that the specific behaviors to be initiated and/or enacted by the manager-as-coach with the employee, in keeping with the theoretical and research grounding for stimulating performance improvement and commitment, are presented below in *italics.*

(1) Approach: A planning phase; set learning goals and plan experiments.

- Goals: *Manager and employee set specific challenging goals* targeting the improvement of product knowledge.
- Coaching context: The participants both recognize the need for learning and change. The *goal setting requires discussion based on available performance* information and data. *The coach expresses a desire to work with the employee* to help improve performance and employee development.
- Examples: Since refrigerators and microwave ovens are the largest selling items, focus is on learning in detail the features of those products. Learning specific competitive aspects of the products should be considered.
- Connections with investment/commitment: Knowledge attained represents investment in improvement. More/helpful product knowledge leads to achievement and is followed by satisfaction. Satisfaction with performance improvement should lead to increases in commitment for both employee and manager.

(2) Actions to take: (time period = six weeks)

- Employee:

  – Learn from manufacturer's literature, advertising, etc. the standard features of each model of microwave oven available in the store.

– Per the same sources of information, learn of special attributes of each model including advanced features, features competitors cannot provide, and so on.

- Manager:

  – Make sure the employee has the needed information (above) and it is up-to-date.

  – Meet with employee at least weekly. Offer support, guidance, encouragement. Discuss what has been learned; any particular needs/difficulties.

  – Ask what can be done to be helpful and supportive.

- Connections with investment/commitment: Owing to the give-and-take of the coaching interaction over the 6-week period the employee and manager are identifying and learning more information about the products. Over time progress is being made and they are learning more critical information about the products.

- [During the action phase of six weeks the employee makes various investments such as applying effort, skills, time on task, other, to improve product knowledge. During this time the manager is meeting with the employee and giving guidance, tools, support, and encouragement representative of her/his investments.]

(3) Reflection: after six weeks, the two participants ask: What have we learned? What is still needed? [Keep in mind that we have new/additional feedback on performance from customer surveys, etc.].

- Manager and employee meet to discuss improvements in product knowledge and how this knowledge may have influenced customer reactions and sales. For analysis and strategizing for future efforts (to date, the efforts expended represent one learning experiment) some questions are offered for coach and employee consideration:
  What has feedback revealed? (Basic stimulus for expressions of learning/understanding.)
  What important lessons are learned?
  What success can we identify?
  What improvements are needed?

- Connections with investments/commitment: Activities (above) represent investments and feedback helps validate outcomes and investments. Achievement should lead to satisfaction and increased commitment. The learning that has occurred should inform future investments and improvement.

The example (above) represents only one ELP experiment (see, Ashford and DeRue, 2012) directed by manager-as-coach. The guide/example provided represents the culmination of the position of this paper. It is a tool for a manager to consider as she/he plans to assume a coaching role with an employee to assist the individual as well as build and reinforce a positive working relationship centered on commitment. The remaining portion of this paper addresses implications for practice and research.

Implications for practice

The guide or action plan provided is an example of a practical experiment for manager-as-coach and an employee. As an experiment for change the ELP is aimed at a manager who may have limited experience in training, instruction, or coaching. It provides clear guidance for the manager to create an instance for change in employee performance and improvement.

Throughout the three-step process and owing to the give-and-take nature of the interaction suggested by the guide, the manager has several opportunities over the life of the experiment to review, assess and then regulate her/his own learning, change and behavior. There are not many examples available of instruction guides for coaches that include manager learning combined with employee learning.

There is the matter of relationship building and reinforcement, part of which is the element of commitment. Studies by Dawber (2019) and Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015) have emphasized the value and importance of relationship building in coaching work and they have pointed out that participants, manager and employee, via change experiments, are engaged in a reciprocal learning endeavor. As success is achieved we have reinforced the notion that new, additional learning experiments can be desirable and helpful; and commitments are increased.

A three-decade body of research on transactional/investment theory (see, Tran *et al.*, 2019) reinforces the idea that participants in a relationship, manager-as-coach and employee, will attend to the actual progress of their efforts or investments. Satisfaction per achievement will accrue thus leading to even greater commitment to process (learning experiments) and each other. As one may conclude based on the extensive meta-analysis work of Theeboom *et al.* (2014) increased commitment is linked to involvement and engagement, that is, motivation. Efforts aimed at mutual work toward other learning goals should reinforce the existing relationship. The construction of relationships per the manager – employee dyad may be subject to varied influences in different cultures/societies. A manager may wish to give this matter serious consideration in the primary phase of the guidelines (above). Cultural standards and expectations may require adjustments in how the manager choses to interact with an employee. Finally, the approach taken in this paper has illuminated the concept of "investments" and the influence of the apprehension of personal investments on learning, work, commitment and interpersonal relationships.

Implications for research

This essay presents an approach to demonstrate how concepts and theories link to one another and support an action plan (above). Managers, with direct reports, acting in a coaching role is a relatively recent area of study as contrasted with coaching in general. A growing amount of attention is given to manager in a coaching role in the literature of human resources, coaching and management. And, as Lawrence (2017) concludes, the study of it is still in its infancy and more research is needed. Manager stimulation of employee commitment has received very little attention. There is a need for more research in this area because commitment truly matters as reported by Dawber (2019) and others when it comes to work performance, dedication to task, energy applied, focus on results and employee interest in remaining with the organization.

Making use of an action plan/guide in its entirety assists the coach and employee to focus on self-regulated learning (SRL). Advances in personal SRL benefit the employee and research aimed at the study of specific employee efforts to improve learning can inform managers how to better assist the employee. The action plan presented in this paper highlights SRL because the manager and the individual being coached are both in learning mode as they are attending to goals, learning, improvements and the use of feedback (see Lyons and Bandura, 2022). Several research questions may be generated. For example: how does the joint attention given to goals, actions and/or feedback contribute to learning and changes in performance? Also, how might the manager-as-coach establish her/his own learning goals that are part of the coaching mission?

For research purposes, the reliable and valid Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006) has been used in many empirical studies aimed at commitment and work engagement. Use of that particular measure and others could be useful for examining employee level of commitment pre- and post-application of the action guide. Similar assessments may be conducted with variables such as job satisfaction, performance achievements, and turnover intention as these variables have been shown to be linked with commitment. Another area of research interest is the examination of employee commitment following each of the steps of the action guide. It may be that a given phase may not have the positive effect that was intended.

A broad area for research is identification and examination of possible moderators of perceptions and outcomes. For example, what influence does the style of the coach have on the employee? Does the power distance between coach and employee have influence on progress and their relationship? Also, there are many potential moderators available for study such as level of experience, task complexity, education, time pressures, training, as well as many other possible moderators. Findings in areas such as these may help support structuring of action guides for future application and may also be valuable in increasing the knowledge of manager-as-coach.

Finally, the examination of changes in relationships with manager-as-coach using questionnaires or surveys as per trust, responsiveness, helpfulness, attentiveness and listening skills may be useful. It may be revealing to examine both coach and employee attitude changes toward coaching, task completion, use of ELP and overall value of the activity with regard to performance improvement and commitment.

Limitations and conclusions

The isolation of a single theory of commitment to underpin an experiential learning approach to be applied by a manager in a coaching role may not be compelling given the variation across theories of commitment. Transactional/investment theory has been the subject of much research but most of that research is aimed at strength of relationships and not work and jobs. In practice, it may be difficult for some managers to strongly emphasize and reinforce investments by the employee. That is, the creation and recognition of investments must be front and center in the design offered in this paper. Such behavior is an investment on the part of the manager and it may be difficult for some managers to perform consistently.

Limiting the approach presented to experiential learning may represent a limitation. There are other tools that a manager may use to help create the investment-learning-commitment nexus. For example, the skillful use of a critical incident, clearly tied to the employee's job and work tasks, can stimulate investment in learning and change. The manager would need to clearly think through her/his role in the use of such a tool.

Part of the learning, growth and change that is anticipated in the model offered in this paper is that of relationship building: employee – manager. Investments by both parties in the experiential learning format should be made obvious. The recognition of the investments and reinforcement of their existence has to be on-going and consistent. Doing this may be difficult for some participants and both parties need to be fully involved.

In conclusion, the action plan offered is a guide, an example of a means to help build employee commitment at the same time learning, growth and achievement are taking place. We know that committed employees are better performers, are engaged in their work, and are more likely to remain with a job and organization.

References

Anderson, V. (2013), "A Trojan horse? The implications of managerial coaching for leadership theory", *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 251-266.

Ashford, S.J. and DeRue, D.S. (2012), "Developing as a leader: the power of mindful engage-ment", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 146-154.

Barry, K. (2020), "How managers perceive coaching their direct reports for performance improvement: a phenomenological study", Ph.D. Dissertation, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.

Beattie, R.S., Kim, S., Hagen, M.S., Egan, T.M., Ellinger, A.D. and Hamlin, R.G. (2014), "Managerial coaching: a review of the empirical literature and development of a model to guide future practice", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 184-201.

Bozer, G. and Jones, R.J. (2018), "Understanding the factors that determine workplace coaching effectiveness: a systematic literature review", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 342-361.

Burnette, J.L., O'Boyle, E.H., Van Epps, E.M., Pollack, J.M. and Finkel, E.J. (2013), "Mindsets matter: a meta-analytic review of implicit theories and self-regulation", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 139 No. 3, pp. 655-701.

Caniels, M.C.J., Semeijn, J.H. and Renders, I.H.M. (2018), "Mind the mindset: the interaction of proactive personality, transformational leadership and growth mindset for engagement at work", *Career Development International*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 48-66.

Chartered Institute for Personal Development [CIPD] (2015), *Learning and Development Annual Survey Report*, CIPD, London.

Cox, E., Bachkirova, T. and Clutterbuck, D. (2014), *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, London.

Dawber, T. (2019), "The manager as coach and facilitator for employees in information technology", *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, Special Issue 13, pp. 32-48.

Dweck, C.S. (2016), "What having a growth mindset actually means", *Harvard Business Review*, January 13, Digital Archive.

Dychtwald, K., Erickson, T.J. and Morrison, R. (2013), *Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills and Talent*, Harvard Business Press, Boston, MA.

Eby, L.T. and Robertson, M.M. (2020), "The psychology of workplace mentoring relationships", *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 7, pp. 75-100.

Ellinger, A.D. (2013), "Supportive supervisors and managerial coaching: exploring their intersections", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 3, pp. 310-316.

Fatien, P. and Otter, K. (2015), "Wearing multiple hats? Challenges for managers-as-coaches and their organizations", *International Leadership Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 24-35.

Gessnitzer, S. and Kauffeld, S. (2015), "The working alliance in coaching: why behavior is the key to success", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 51 No. 2, pp. 177-197.

Ghosh, P., Chauhan, R. and Rai, A. (2015), "Supervisor support in transfer of training: looking back at past research", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 201-207.

Grant, A.M. (2014), "The efficacy of executive coaching in times of organizational change", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 258-280.

Grant, A.M., Curtayne, L. and Burton, G. (2009), "Executive coaching enhances goal attainment, resilience, and workplace well-being: a randomized controlled study", *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 4 No. 5, pp. 396-407.

Gregory, J.B. and Levy, P.E. (2010), "Employee coaching relationships: enhancing construct clarity and measurement", *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 109-123.

Hamilton, D. (2019), "Leadership development: a blueprint for building a coaching culture", *Organizational Development Review*, Vol. 51 No. 3, pp. 42-49.

Hawkins, P. (2012), *Creating a Coaching Culture*, Open University Press-McGraw Hill, Maidenhead.

Hawkins, E. and Turner, E. (2019), *Systemic Coaching: Delivering Value beyond the Individual*, Routledge, New York, NY.

Heslin, P.A. and Keating, L.A. (2017), "Learning mode? The role of mindsets in derailing and enabling experiential leadership development", *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 367-384.

Heslin, P.A., VandeWalle, D. and Latham, G.P. (2006), "Keen to help? Managers IPT's and their subsequent employee coaching", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 59 No. 4, pp. 871-902.

Hunt, J.M. and Weintraub, J.R. (2011), *The Coaching Manager: Developing Top Business Talent*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Jones, R.J., Woods, S.A. and Guillaume, Y.R.F. (2016), "The effectiveness of workplace coaching: a meta-analysis of learning and performance outcomes from coaching", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 89 No. 2, pp. 249-277.

Jordan, A.H. and Audia, P.G. (2012), "Self-enhancement and learning from performance feedback", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 211-231.

Kolb, D.A. (2015), *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 2nd ed., Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Lawrence, P. (2017), "Managerial coaching: a literature review", *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 44-69.

Liu, Y. (2009), "Perceived organizational support and expatriate organizational citizenship behavior: the mediating role of affective commitment towards the parent company", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 307-319.

Lyons, P. and Bandura, R.P. (2022), "Coaching to enhance learning & engagement and reduce turnover", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 295-307.

McCarthy, G. and Milner, J. (2020), "Ability, motivation and opportunity: managerial coaching in practice", *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 58 No. 1, pp. 149-170.

Mercurio, Z.A. (2015), "Affective commitment as a core essence of organizational commitment: an integrative literature review", *Human Resource Development Review*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 389-414.

Meyer, J.P. and Allen, N.J. (1984), "Testing the side-bet theory of organizational commitment: some methodological considerations", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 69 No. 3, pp. 372-378.

Meyer, J.P. and Allen, N.J. (1991), "A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 61-89.

Meyer, J.P. and Herscovitch, L. (2001), "Commitment in the workplace: toward a general model", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 299-326.

Mowday, R.T., Steers, R.M. and Porter, L.W. (1979), "The measurement of organizational commitment", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 224-247.

Mowday, R.T., Porter, L.W. and Steers, R.M. (2013), *Employee-organizational Linkages: the Psychology of Commitment, Absenteeism and Turnover*, Academic Press, Cambridge, MA.

O'Reilly, C.A. and Chatman, J. (1986), "Organizational commitment and psychological attach-ment: the effects of compliance, identification, and internalization on prosocial behavior", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 79 No. 3, pp. 492-499.

Pangarkar, A. and Kirkwood, T. (2013), *Four Ways to Gain Employee Commitment*, Association for Talent Development, Alexandria, VA.

Paz, J. (2019), "Strategies to increase employee commitment and reduce employee turnover", D.B.A. Dissertation, College of Management and Technology, Walden University, Minneapolis, MN.

Pulakos, E.D., Mueller, H.R., Arad, S. and Moye, N. (2015), "Performance management can be fixed: an on-the-job experiential learning approach for complex behavior change", *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 51-76.

Quijano, C. and Johnson, F. (2018), "Creating an engaging workplace", *Training Journal*, October, pp. 16-18.

Rusbult, C.E. (1980), "Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: a test of the investment model", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 172-186.

Rusbult, C.E., Agnew, C. and Arriaga, X. (2011), "The investment model of commitment processes", Department of Psychological Sciences Faculty, Paper 26, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

Salancik, G.R. (1977), "Commitment and the control of organizational behavior and belief", in Staw, B.M. and Salancik, G.R. (Eds), *New Directions in Organizational Behavior*, St. Clair Press, Chicago, Il, pp. 1-54.

Schaufeli, W.B., Bakker, A.B. and Salanova, M. (2006), "The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: a cross-national study", *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 66 No. 4, pp. 701-716.

Sharma, J. and Dhar, R.L. (2016), "Factors influencing job performance of nursing staff: mediating role of affective commitment", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 161-182.

Snell, S., Morris, S. and Bohlander, G. (2016), *Managing Human Resources*, Cengage Learning, Boston, MA.

Solinger, O.N., van Olffen, W. and Roe, R.A. (2008), "Beyond the three component model of organizational commitment", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 93 No. 1, pp. 70-83.

Sonesh, S.C., Coultas, C.W., Lacerenza, C.N., Marlow, S.L., Benishek, L.E. and Salas, E. (2015), "The power of coaching: a meta-analysis investigation", *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 73-95.

Steelman, L.A. and Wolfeld, L. (2018), "The manager as coach: the role of feedback orientation", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 41-53.

Theeboom, T., Beersma, B. and vanVianen, A.E.M. (2014), "Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organization context", *Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 1-18.

Tran, P., Judge, M. and Kashima, Y. (2019), "Commitment in relationships: an updated meta-analysis of the investment model", *Personal Relationships*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 158-180.

Woo, H. (2017), "Exploratory study examining the joint impacts of mentoring and managerial coaching on organizational commitment", *Sustainability*, Vol. 9 No. 2, p. 181, doi: 10.3390/SU9020181.

About the authors

Paul Lyons (PhD, University of Florida) is Emeritus Professor of Management at Frostburg State University of the University System of Maryland, USA. Paul has taught undergraduate and MBA courses in organizational behavior and leadership and has experience as Dean of the graduate school, Department Chair and Associate Dean – College of Business. Also, he has experience in sales management and human resources management and as a consultant and trainer with businesses, as well as government and NGO. Paul Lyons is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: plyons@frostburg.edu

Randall P. Bandura (MS, Pennsylvania State University, and CPA) is Emeritus Professor of Accounting at Frostburg State University of the University System of Maryland, USA. Randall has teaching experience in accounting and finance areas, specializing in financial accounting. He also has experience as Department Chair. His practical accounting experience includes work with large international public accounting firms.