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Coaching for responsible management

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Abstract

The United Nations (UN) Global Compact (GC) was launched in 2000 to encourage businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and responsible management. It now has over 12,000 participants <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/ParticipantsAndStakeholders/index.html> . In 2007, the UN launched the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) to inspire responsible management education and research. Over 500 business schools and management-related academic institutions are signatories to PRME <http://www.unprme.org/participants/> . However, many practising managers were not exposed to these principles when they went through university. To ensure that managers pay more than lip service to the Global Compact principles, such as being opposed to child labour and corruption, managers need time to think through the principles and how to apply them in their contexts. There is an opportunity for coaches, mentors and others involved in leadership development to enable managers to genuinely engage with the principles of responsible management and commit to implementing responsible management practices. This paper makes the case for coaching to be a part of such an initiative, exploring the literature related to coaching for change and reporting on a small pilot study of the views of coordinators of graduate coaching programs as to whether coaching could make a useful contribution. The paper concludes that academics and practitioners could and should collaborate to develop knowledge, resources, models, skills and methods to coach their clients to engage with and implement the UN Global Compact principles, and to validate the effectiveness of this coaching approach through empirical research

Keywords

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Coaching for Responsible Management

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Abstract

The United Nations (UN) Global Compact (GC) was launched in 2000 to encourage businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and responsible management. It now has over 12,000 participants <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/ParticipantsAndStakeholders/index.html> . In 2007, the UN launched the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) to inspire responsible management education and research. Over 500 business schools and management-related academic institutions are signatories to PRME <http://www.unprme.org/participants/> . However, many practising managers were not exposed to these principles when they went through university. To ensure that managers pay more than lip service to the Global Compact principles, such as being opposed to child labour and corruption, managers need time to think through the principles and how to apply them in their contexts. There is an opportunity for coaches, mentors and others involved in leadership development to enable managers to genuinely engage with the principles of responsible management and commit to implementing responsible management practices. This paper makes the case for coaching to be a part of such an initiative, exploring the literature related to coaching for change and reporting on a small pilot study of the views of coordinators of graduate coaching programs as to whether coaching could make a useful contribution.

The paper concludes that academics and practitioners could and should collaborate to develop knowledge, resources, models, skills and methods to coach their clients to engage with and implement the UN Global Compact principles, and to validate the effectiveness of this coaching approach through empirical research.

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Global Compact (GC) was launched in 2000 to encourage businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and responsible management. It now has over 12,000 participants

<https://www.unglobalcompact.org/ParticipantsAndStakeholders/index.html>. In 2007, the UN launched the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) to inspire responsible management education and research. Over 500 business schools and management-related academic institutions are now signatories to PRME <http://www.unprme.org/participants/> . However, many practising managers were not exposed to these principles when they went through university or other management training. To ensure that managers pay more than lip service to the Global Compact principles, such as being opposed to child labour and corruption, managers need time to think through the principles and how to apply them in their own environment. There is an opportunity for those involved in leadership development to enable managers to genuinely engage with the Principles of Responsible Management and commit to implementing responsible management practices. This paper makes the case for coaching to be a part of such an initiative.

Research Question

The research question this paper seeks to address is whether there is a case to support the use of coaching to encourage responsible management practices. This question is addressed through a review of the coaching literature and also through a small pilot study which sought the views of academics with responsibility for graduate coaching programmes.

Literature Review

This literature review explores the application of coaching for change, as well as team coaching and coaching cultures.

Coaching for change

Many authors have written about coaching for change. Indeed, Bachkirova, Cox et al. (2014: p.1) describe coaching as

'a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders.'

In other words, the very purpose of coaching in their definition is about promoting 'desirable and sustainable change'. Similarly, Smith, Van Oosten et al. (2009: p.146) describe a coaching approach focused on achieving 'sustained, desired change in the individual being coached'. Both

definitions share the notion that the change should be sustained, and that the change should be one that is desired by the individual being coached.

There is evidence to support the effectiveness of coaching to achieve sustained behavioural change (McCarthy, 2014), provided the person being coached wants to change. Skiffington and Zeus (2003) see the role of the coach as facilitating change and supporting people to maintain the changed behaviour. Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) identified 6 stages of change, viz.

- precontemplation when people may think about change but do not intend to do anything,;
- contemplation when they think seriously about making a change;
- preparation in which they actively prepare to implement a change;
- action when they start to implement the change;
- maintenance, when they sustain the change; and
- exit.

Different coaching skills are appropriate during these different stages (McCarthy, 2014). For example, at the precontemplation and contemplation stages, coaches primarily use their listening and questioning skills to understand the current situation, raise awareness, challenge assumptions and reframe issues. However at the preparation stage, coaches will use the same skills to explore options and consequences, and establish commitment and also use goal-setting and rehearsal to increase self-efficacy.

Grant (2010) stresses the importance of support during the maintenance stage. His research into managers implementing coaching skills in the workplace found that it took about six months for new behaviours to become routine. It is important for managers to be supported during this transition phase. Similar observations have been made about implementing what has been learned in training sessions, with Olivero, Bane et al. (1997) noting an increase of 22.4% in productivity following training alone, but a staggering 88% increase in productivity where training was augmented by coaching over a two-month period.

Coaching then is seen as a way of achieving sustained change. What about the second element of the definitions of Bachkirova, Cox et al. (2014) or Smith, Van Oosten et al. (2009), that the change should be desirable?

John Whitmore (2004) made the case for the need for leadership change over 10 years ago, before the Global Financial Crisis, arguing that:

- *“Because too much of business is corrupt, if not morally bankrupt: Enron, Andersen and the rest of the massive iceberg that still lies beneath the surface.*

-*Business leaders spend too much time in short-term, self-serving, survival consciousness, and are sadly lacking in global vision and social responsibility.”*

In this case, one might query whether such individuals would desire change or whether in fact the need of other stakeholders might be foregrounded.

In an interview in 2009, Whitmore (2009a p.178) summarised his experience as *‘more and more executives seeking coaching want to address the issue of meaning and purpose in their lives, and that is further exacerbated by the economic crisis, which has raised deeper questions for many people.’* It is common for coaching in organisations to be used to help clients achieve personal and organisational goals. However, when the organisation is paying for an external coach’s services, the question of values, meaning and purpose may not always be discussed (Ives and Cox, 2012; Garvey, Stokes et al., 2014; McCarthy, 2014). The power of coaching may thus not always be harnessed to optimal effect for the individual, their employers or society.

Team Coaching

Team coaching is a growing practice, according to Clutterbuck (2013), who cites examples in a UK supermarket (Asda) and a UK university (University College London). Clutterbuck found that team coaching is used for a variety of purposes, including defining team purpose and priorities, understanding team environment and processes, building team trust and capacity to manage conflict positively.

While there is as yet comparatively little research on the effectiveness of team coaching, what little there is suggests that team coaching helps develop social intelligence (Thornton, 2010), team commitment, accountability and conflict resolution (Kets de Vries, 2005), team empowerment and effectiveness (Mathieu, Maynard et al., 2008). Similar findings have been reported when managers coach their own teams (Shipper and Weer, 2011).

Coaching Cultures

In addition to considering how coaching is used with individuals and teams, it is also useful to consider coaching cultures, defined by Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014: p.92) as

‘coaching cultures exist when groups of people embrace coaching as a way of making holistic improvements to individuals within their organisations through formal and informal coaching interactions’.

Gormley and Van Nieuwerburgh go on to say that coaching can support leaders to inspire cultural change within their organisations and they conclude that coaching cultures can be used to develop the quality of leadership and encourage innovation.

The link with innovation has been linked with the use of coaching skills to listen and questions, to challenge and reframe issues (McCarthy, 2014). A coaching culture is an open culture, where people’s voices are heard and where questions are asked. As Megginson and Clutterbuck (2006 p.233) point out, when a coaching culture is embedded, *‘people are able to raise difficult or controversial issues, knowing that their motivations will be respected and that colleagues will see it as an opportunity to improve, either personally, or organisationally, or both’.*

A coaching culture is also linked with trust and openness leading to more open, participative and transparent decision-making, according to Anderson et al. (2009). Their survey of US business leaders along with other research (Agarwal, Angst et al., 2009) have identified a range of other organisational benefits arising from developing a coaching culture, including employee engagement, collaboration and teamwork, employee retention, performance, productivity, an improved ability to execute strategy and increased adaptability to change.

Hunt and Weintraub also link coaching cultures with trust (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010), arguing that managers must consistently behave in ways that reinforce trust. Trust has also been associated with many positive outcomes, and so organisations who develop a coaching culture can also expect to achieve positive outcomes such as improved performance and increased commitment (Stahl and Sitkin, 2005).

Pilot Survey

A short survey was sent to the course coordinators of graduate coaching programs to ascertain their expert views as to whether coaching would be useful approach to developing understanding of and commitment to the Principles of Responsible Management Education and the UN Global Compact. Twenty-six university graduate coaching programs were identified in Europe, Africa, Australia and North America, where a named contact person was listed on each university website. A link to the survey was sent to all 26, however one of these was returned as undeliverable. Of the remaining 25, 5 completed the survey, a response rate of 20%.

Of the 5 who completed the survey, two universities were not signatories to the UN Global Compact, and the other three did not know whether or not they were signatories. One university was a signatory to the Principles of Responsible Management Education, one was not, and the other three did not know whether or not they were signatories. One university said they made reference to the UN Global Compact and PRME within their coaching program, four said they did not.

With regard to curriculum content, Table 1 shows the responses with regard to applications of coaching applications.

| To what extent does your coaching program include the application of coaching to: | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Developing Awareness of Self or Others | 5 | | | | |
| Individual Change | 4 | 1 | | | |
| Organisational Change | 2 | 2 | 1 | | |
| Exploring Values | 5 | | | | |
| Developing Engagement/Commitment | 2 | 2 | 1 | | |
| Setting Goals | 4 | | | 1 | |
| Giving/Receiving Feedback | 4 | 1 | | | |

Table 1: Applications of Coaching

Number of responses on a scale on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Not included in curriculum or assessment' and 5 is 'Very strong emphasis both in curriculum and assessment'

As can be seen from Table 1, respondents were unanimous on the application of coaching for developing awareness of self or others and for exploring values. 4/5 also included individual change, setting goals and giving/receiving feedback.

One respondent also noted that they introduce the participants in their programs to Codes of Ethics and Good Practice Guidelines, Shared Value Statements and Competency Frameworks of leading professional coaching bodies. This respondent also noted that assessment tasks, even in shorter continuing professional development programs, are designed to ensure that participants can demonstrate high quality coaching standards. This approach is consistent with the ethical approach embodied in the Global Compact principles relating to transparency, without explicitly referencing the Global Compact.

Table 2 shows the responses when participants were asked to what extent they believed that coaching leads to change in how people think or behave:

| To what extent do you believe coaching can lead to: | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Changes in how people think | 4 | 1 | | | |
| Changes in how people behave | 3 | 2 | | | |

Table 2 Coaching for Change

Number of responses on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Does not achieve lasting change' and 5 is 'Achieves lasting change'

This suggests that most see that coaching can lead to changes in thinking; however some believe that this may not necessarily result in changes in behaviour. Furthermore, one respondent noted that not all coaching is about 'improvement' or 'behavioural change'.

Table 3 shows responses to questions relating to how coaching might or might not be useful in relation to the UN Global Compact and responsible management practices.

| To what extent do you agree with the following statements: | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Unsure/ Not applicable |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|------------------------|
| Coaching would be an | | 2 | 2 | | | 1 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|---|
| effective way to help managers understand how the UN Global Compact applies in their context. | | | | | | |
| Coaching would be an effective way to develop managers' commitment to implement the UN Global Compact. | | 1 | 3 | | | 1 |
| Coaching would be an effective way to develop managers' understanding of what responsible management practice means in their context. | 3 | | 2 | | | |
| Coaching would be an effective way to develop managers' commitment to implement responsible management practices. | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | |

Table 3 Coaching and Responsible Management Practices

Number of responses on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'Completely disagree' and 5 is 'Completely Agree'

Free text responses to this included comments relating to investment in management and leadership development (including coach development) and to the directive/non-directive nature of coaching. In relation to the former, a respondent noted that:

“I want to agree (5) with you but this question begs reflecting on rhetoric or reality. More investment and focus is required in management and leadership development on 'coach education and development' and less about 'training for developing coaching skills'. I also don't believe you train a coach!”

In relation to the directive/non-directive nature of coaching, a respondent commented that:

“Not sure if this would be part of a coachee's agenda and therefore it would assume a more directive approach to coaching based on 'deficit' model of learning.”

These survey results will be discussed in the next section

Discussion of Survey Results

The low response rate of 20% may indicate a lack of awareness of or interest in the UN Global Compact or the Principles of Responsible Management Education among coaching program directors. Of those who did respond, only one was definitely a signatory to PRME and one included UN Global Compact/PRME in the curriculum, while others were either not signatories or unsure. This may reflect a focus on coaching individuals in the programs concerned, which would be consistent with the differing responses shown in Table 1 which indicate a stronger concentration on coaching for individual change than on coaching for organisational change. It should be noted that while programs may not refer explicitly to the UN Global Compact or PRME, they may include codes of ethics or codes of conduct and thus support the principles in this way.

While bearing in mind that such a low response rate and low actual respondent numbers cannot be taken as representative, we can nonetheless see in Table 1 that there is agreement among these respondents (who are all experts in coaching education) that their coaching programs do explore values, self-awareness, individual change, setting goals, and giving or receiving feedback. Furthermore, Table 2 shows agreement around the effectiveness of coaching leading to changes in how people think or behave. Both tables are consistent with previous research on coaching and with the requirements of professional associations such as the International Coach Federation and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (ICF; McCarthy, 2010).

Given these strengths of coaching, it is not surprising that Table 3 shows agreement that coaching could be used to develop both understanding of and commitment to the UN Global Compact and responsible management practices. However the caveats noted in the free text responses should be considered.

Firstly let us consider the notion that ‘training’ people in coaching is not enough, people have to understand the nature and philosophy of coaching, not mechanically apply a set of tools. This, as

the quote included earlier indicates, requires investment – investment in both time and resources. A short training course in coaching will not make someone a coach. Indeed there is a danger with such short courses that people may apply a coaching model mechanically without really listening and helping the coachee to think and engage (McCarthy, 2014: p.18). To date, many coaching managers are self-taught with little in the way of dedicated training that addresses the specific issues experienced by the manager using coaching skills with their employees (McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Milner and McCarthy, 2014).

The point relating to time is an interesting one. Previous research has found that coaching may take more time initially, but as those being coached get used to coming up with their own solutions, they take less and less of their manager's time (McCarthy and Milner, 2013). A survey of 580 coaching managers in Australia reported that finding time to coach was a challenge initially, but the positive business and personal benefits realised made it worthwhile spending the time (McCarthy and Ahrens, 2012). Similarly, as Wilson (2011) points out, when coaching proves useful, e.g. by enhancing clarity and sense of purpose, then objections related to finding time soon vanish.

Secondly, let us consider the directive versus non-directive debate, which is an on-going debate within the coaching community. In the western world, coaching is often described as a non-directive conversation (Ives, 2008; Parsloe and Leedham, 2009). Some authors assert that being non-directive is an essential part of a coaching approach, e.g. Ives and Cox (2012: p.26) define coaching as:

“A systematic and collaborative helping intervention that is non-directive, goal-oriented and performance-driven, intended to facilitate the more effective creation and pursuit of another's goals.”

In contrast, the definition of the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches does not focus on the directive/non-directive debate but rather defines business coaching as:

“Business coaching is the process of engaging in regular, structured conversation with a "client": an individual or team who is within a business, profit or nonprofit organization, institution or government and who is the recipient of business coaching. The goal is to enhance the client's awareness and behavior so as to achieve business objectives for both the client and their organization.”

(WABC, 2011)

It appears then that a fully non-directive approach is less common in organisations as the goal or purpose of coaching relates to the needs of the organisation as well as the individual. Being fully non-directive is also less common in some coaching models, such as in a solution-focused approach, where, as highlighted by Cavanagh and Grant (2010), coaches often share their mental models, educate their clients, and coaches not only ask questions, they also tell. Perhaps not surprisingly, the solution focused model is one that often appeals within organisations, as it appears to focus traditional coaching skills such as listening and questioning on the achievement of organisational goals. However the wording of some of the typical questions used in a solution focused approach (e.g. the miracle question which asks people to visualise what would happen if a miracle had happened or if someone had waved a magic wand and their problem was solved) may be made more business friendly when applied in an organisational context (e.g. ‘what would it look like if your problem were resolved?’). In other words, the approach may be retained as it generates commitment to the solution visualised, but the phrasing is more neutral.

Cunningham (2008) argues that coaching should be neither directive nor non-directive, but simply respond to the client’s need, which sometimes requires sharing known solutions that work. Clutterbuck (2008) also argues that coaching can be relatively directive or non-directive, depending on the circumstances. Individual coaches may have a preference for being more or less directive, but should be guided by the agreed purpose of the coaching engagement (if an external coach coming into an organisation) or the agreed coaching agenda (for an internal coach or coaching manager).

The respondent quoted above equates the use of coaching to explore the UN Global Compact Principles with a ‘deficit’ model of learning. However this would only be the case if people were simply being informed of the Principles, whereas coaching can be used to get a deep understanding, to gain commitment to their implementation, and to agree a process and timelines for how the goal will be achieved. While the topic of the UN Global Compact Principles might not be the coachee’s choice (as they might not even have heard of them), the exploration would be in line with the coachees’ interests. The coachees would define what the principles mean in their organisation, supply chain and environment, what they as an organisation or team can do to address, and when and how they can address. In other words, the coachees drive the agenda for implementation.

If a coach is completely non-directive and only follows an agenda defined by the coachee, then the UN Global Compact and responsible management practice will only be explored if it is

already on the coachee's radar. As Whitmore argues,

“Many coaches stick rigidly to the idea that they work unswervingly on the coachee's agenda, however they will increasingly face the fact that their own values and that of their client may be at odds. I strongly assert that if their own values are of a more inclusive and more universal order, they take precedence over those of the client, and they should not be afraid to say so” (Whitmore, 2009b p.3).

The UN Global Compact Principles comply with what Whitmore (2009b) terms ‘*values of a more inclusive and more universal order*’ and hence offer a foundation for coaching for values that have support in many countries and organisations. Exploring fundamental questions such as where an organisation stands on human rights or how to avoid corruption in diverse international situations (where, for example, distinctions between gift-giving and bribery may not always be clear or consistent with practice in the employee's home country or head office location) offers a way to align personal and organisational values and address the important questions of meaning and purpose.

Coaches can make a choice as to whether they wish to use their coaching skills to support individuals and organisations to develop their awareness of and commitment to the UN Global Compact. If they choose to do so, there are many ways in which they can work with clients.

In the precontemplation and contemplation stages of change defined by Prochaska and DiClemente (1982), coaches could explore the Global Compact principles with their clients, thereby raising their awareness of the principles. They cannot however force a client to want to make a change. Indeed coaches need to guard against their clients appearing to endorse the principles because of the clients' susceptibility to social desirability bias. After all, what manager is going to openly object to a UN initiative seeking to reduce corruption or promote human rights? A manager might pay lip service to the principles and even go through a mechanistic goal-setting process, but it is unlikely that this would lead to any meaningful change. The coach's skill in asking questions that probe and challenge the manager's motivation is vital in these stages.

If managers do genuinely engage with the principles, then they can move into the stage described by Prochaska and DiClemente (ibid.) as the preparation stage, where they decide how they will implement changes that reflect their commitment to the principles. At this stage, the coach can help with goal-setting, visualising how the change might look in practice, and rehearsing new

behaviours where appropriate. In the action and maintenance stage, the coach helps reinforce the new behaviours by reviewing feedback and other data with clients to see how they might adjust their behaviour in order to achieve their long term goals. Finally the coach exits, as the new behaviours have now become the manager's normal way of doing business.

It is also important to note that coaching can be used to achieve organisational change (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; McCarthy, 2014). Coaching has in fact been described as a way of helping managers making sense of a 'continuous sea of change' (Du Toit, 2007: p.283). This implies that coaching can be used to develop a shared understanding of the Global Compact principles and foster their implementation across organisations as a genuine commitment to implementation requires changes in thinking and behaviour. For instance, in relation to supply chain management, companies might have to rethink how they ensure that all their suppliers in all countries do not use child labour.

Team coaching is a useful option to consider in this context as team members can develop a shared understanding as they collectively consider how the UN Global Compact Principles apply in their environment, whether the team is a purely internal service or a more externally facing team such as procurement or customer service.

The ability of employees in organisations with a coaching culture to raise difficult issues contributes to transparency, enhancing the ability of employees at all levels from the shopfloor to the boardroom to highlight concerns where they see a potential conflict between what is done in or by an organisation and its values or its commitment to the UN Global Compact principles. Organisations with coaching cultures and which live their values of trust and open transparent decision-making will find a natural affinity with the UN Global Compact Principles.

Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

Given the strong evidence in the literature that coaching can lead to sustained behavioural change, it seems clear that adopting a coaching approach to exploration of responsible management practices could indeed lead to a more widespread understanding and ultimately uptake of responsible management practices. The pilot study reported here, although very small in scale, provides support for this proposal. The big limitation of the survey is the response rate

(20%) of a very small sample (25 academics responsible for coordinating graduate coaching programs around the world). Further research could identify a wider selection of participants and include practitioners. A Delphi Group approach might be effective with the academic participants in order to explore the topic in more depth.

Since coaching can assist individuals articulate their goals and how they will meet them, it offers a very different approach to a training session telling someone about the UN Global Compact or an organisation telling a manager to implement. Instead coaching raises awareness and encourages managers to think through what responsible management practices mean to them and to their organisation, thus developing meaningful engagement and deep commitment. It then follows through with goal-setting and with feedback on implementation until the change is embedded and sustained, part of the normal way of doing business.

Coaching can thus address a gap not currently filled through the UN Global Compact and PRME. However, in order to use coaching in this way, coaches, as Whitmore (2009a) suggests, need to have knowledge, skills, models and methods to address deep questions. Academics and practitioners could and should collaborate to develop knowledge, resources, models, skills and methods to coach their clients to engage with and implement the UN Global Compact principles, and to validate the effectiveness of this coaching approach through empirical research.

Organisations that are serious about implementing the Global Compact Principles should consider incorporating coaching in their approach. Both external and internal coaches and coaching managers can all play a role. Indeed if an organisation invests in developing the coaching skills of their managers, they will reap a range of other benefits associated with coaching cultures such as those mentioned above, including enhanced employee engagement and increased rates of innovation and productivity, and trust (Hunt and Weintraub, 2007; Hunt and Weintraub, 2010).

Although not the focus of this paper, it seems that the UN also needs to consider how best to engage university departments and faculty who do not see themselves as engaged in management education and yet are developing graduates who are often in management roles and hence in a position to influence the implementation of the Global Compact Principles. This includes not only coaching programmes based in psychology departments, but a wide range of courses such as Bachelor of Science and Entrepreneurship, Bachelor of Communications, Bachelor of Law, Master of Engineering Management and Master of Biotechnology Management. The more

students genuinely engage with the principles, the more likely it is that they can bring their awareness to the workplace, in a much broader range of areas than is currently the case.

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