

COACHING AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT: USE AND UNDERSTANDING

Dragoş-Daniel DENDRINO^{a*}, *Marius Ghiberdic*^b, *Marius-Bogdan PETRE*^c

^{a, b, c} *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*

ABSTRACT

There were two rationales for this research. Firstly, coaching is growing in popularity yet there is a lack of literature on the perception and use of this instrument by managers in general. Secondly, there is a need to see if coaching is perceived as an instrument for the project managers to use complementary to the traditional functions of project administration in order to acquire other competencies that modern project management requires. The research is based on the study of recent publications and a questionnaire to see how coaching is perceived and use in Romania. We intended to study if there were any confusions regarding the coaching concept and how it is perceived and the way it is used by the project managers. The research revealed that coaching is more and more used in Romania and it is indeed perceived and used as an powerful instrument for managing teams to achieve their goals.

KEYWORDS: *coaching, executive coaching, perception of coaching, project management.*

DOI: 10.24818/IMC/2023/01.04

1. INTRODUCTION

The utilization of coaching in professional environments has seen a notable rise in the last years and coaching skills have become central to workplace learning (Truijen & van Woerkom, 2008). In the modern models of leadership coaching has a determinant role for self-development and work (Bass & Avolio, 2000; Goleman, 2017; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). We have observed that there is a lack of literature on the perception and use of coaching by managers. There are a few articles regarding the way coaching is used in project management and by managers/ leaders in general. While numerous managers undergo training in workplace coaching skills to improve employee performance and facilitate organizational change, there is limited understanding of managers' views regarding the costs and benefits associated with adopting workplace coaching behaviors (Grant, 2010).

Our study is based on the literature review of the perception and use of coaching and coaching skills in management in general and project management in particular and on the results of a small qualitative analysis regarding the perception and use of coaching in Romania.

We used a questionnaire applied to a group of people who are managers or leading roles in the organizations they work.

The results showed that further research on the perception of coaching is still needed and although there are multiple materials on describing coaching models and instruments, there are almost no articles on the perception of coaching in general and before and after coaching is used.

Our researched revealed that even though in general there is a confusion between coaching and mentoring but in Romania, our respondents have correctly identified the difference between the two

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: dendrinodragos23@stud.ase.ro.

instruments. We have also revealed through our small study that regarding the use of coaching we have similar characteristics to international statistics. Coaching is mainly used by managers and not employed by contract. Our main impediment was the limited response to our questionnaire.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Our main sources of information were scientific articles, coaching literature and ICF statistics. What is coaching? This question is extremely important to see the way perception is influenced by the multiple definitions of this concept. There are multiple definitions of coaching that reflect the field where it is used: sport, business, psychology, personal development. A possible definition can be the following "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 client and potentially for other stakeholders" (Bachkirova, Cox & Clutterbuck, 2014, p.1). Another definition of the coaching process from the project managers point of view states that coaching serves as a learning approach in which the coach assists the project manager in cultivating their skills. The predominant techniques involve posing questions, providing encouragement, issuing challenges to prompt action, and offering feedback (Morten & Karlsen, 2007).

The historical approach of the definition of coaching shows us that the word *coach* was first used as derived from the Hungarian word *kocsi*. There is a town in Hungary called Kocs and here they used to build carriages (Senge et al., 1999). Slowly the word become symbolic and around the 19th century the students in the UK used the term as referred to their personal tutor.

In the modern times coaching as we know it was promoted by Gallwey & Green (2015) in his book "The Inner Game of Tennis" in which he defines it as a process that helps individuals tap into their own potential and improve their performance by reducing interference from self-doubt and overthinking. He emphasizes the importance of fostering self-discovery and creating an environment that allows individuals to learn and grow on their own terms (Gallwey & Green, 2015). The philosophy behind Gallwey & Green's coaching revolves around the removal of mental obstacles, enabling the enhancement of skills.

The key aspect of coaching to encourage reflection is the involvement of both the coach and coachee in a "dialogue" regarding the coachee's teaching behavior. In this interaction, both parties actively contribute and listen, striving to build upon each other's insights (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).

Coaching is future-oriented, helping individuals reach their maximum potential using introspection with the aid of specific techniques of addressing questions. In coaching, answers, magic recipes of success, or advice are not provided; instead, exploration is encouraged through responses to open-ended questions. This creates an ideal framework for discovery and achieving objectives.

Thompson & Cox (2017) states that a survey of existing literature and research on coaching reveals a growing trend in describing and exploring coaching across at least four major dimensions as shown in the figure 1:

- 'I' – a first person perspective on the coaching process by the coach and/or coachee describing individual experiences of both parties involved.
- 'We' – a second person perspective that emphasizes the relationship between the coach and the coachee, the role of language and culture in their interaction.
- 'It' – more tangible elements of the coaching process, that are able to be observed by a third party and even measured if necessary, such as particular interventions and tools of coaching, specific behaviors and models.
- 'Its' – the systems that are present as a background and an influencing force of the coaching process, such as sponsoring organizations and other social and professional groups."

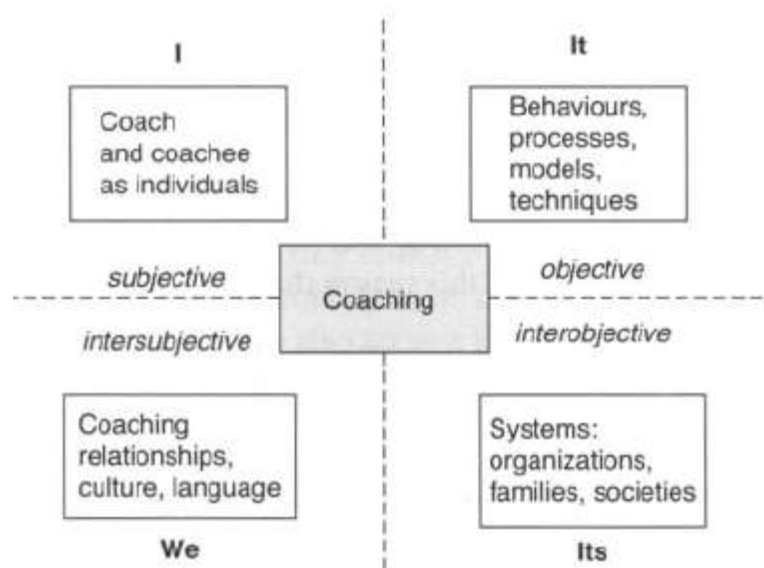


Figure 1. Four dimensions of coaching

Source: Thompson & Cox, (2017, p.5)

Business coaching is also pertinent as the industry has expanded in recent years to encompass executives, top leaders, entrepreneurs, and leaders of small to mid-size enterprises (Walzer & Athiyaman, 2007).

The perception of coaching differs from one person to another. In literature it is shown that there are two aspects of project managers perceptions of coaching, one that states that coaching is like other helping approaches as training or particularly mentoring and the other that coaching needs specific soft skills (Thompson & Cox, 2017).

In the realm of project management, particularly within the context of agile coaching, the notion assumes a "dual flavor of coaching and mentoring." This is because, in the agile coaching framework, coaches not only assist coaches in gaining new perspectives and exploring possibilities but also serve as mentors (Adkins, 2010).

Three fundamental themes emerged concerning perceptions of coaching: navigating initial skepticism, adopting a deficit-based view of coaching, and establishing expectations shaped by these perceptions (Fontannaz, 2018).

When applied the coaching process extended beyond the formal sessions conducted by the external coaching team. Instead, an informal coaching network evolved gradually, encompassing both formal coaching by the external team and informal coaching by managers (Fontannaz, 2018).

In addition, regarding project managers that also act as coaches there are several issues that can be caused when there isn't a clear distinction between the moments when the project managers act as a manager performing a coaching leadership style or as a coach (Berg & Karlsen, 2007).

Initially, project team members may find it challenging to discern the specific role being undertaken by the project manager. Additionally, the project manager might lack proficiency in coaching, leading them to adopt a quasi-coaching leadership style. Consequently, the project team members may not observe the anticipated results, fostering a negative attitude towards coaching.

In terms of the use of coaching, first we have studied the official statistics of International Coaching Federation (2023). Every year ICF conducts a global survey on the distribution, use, development, and financial status of the coaching industry. There is an increase in the number of respondents every year but starting with 2020 the number corresponded to a global survey. The total number was 22.457 valid respondents from 161 countries and territories.

The ICF Global Coaching Study employs the concept of the "coaching continuum" to illustrate the diverse modalities wherein coaching approaches and competencies can be employed. At one extreme of this continuum, you find managers and leaders utilizing coaching skills within the workplace, with the nature and depth of their training varying significantly. At the opposite end, there are skilled, professional coach practitioners, the majority of whom derive or have derived a portion of their yearly income from serving as internal or external coaches (International Coaching Federation, 2020).

The coaching continuum is represented by the categories presented in Table 1, representing how the respondents of the International Coaching Federation Study (2020) respondents identified themselves

Table 1. The coaching continuum

Coach practitioners			Managers/Leaders Using Coaching Skills	
External coach practitioners	Internal coach practitioners	Both internal and external coach practitioners	Human Resources/ Talent Development Manager/ Director Who Uses Coaching Skills	Manager/Leader Who Uses Coaching Skills

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study (2020, p.7)

Apart from the global results, we have followed the results of the study mainly for North America, Eastern and Western Europe and Romania.

The coaching continuum members are distributed by generation according to Graphs 3 and 4. The common understanding and categorization of the generations is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Generations by year

Generation Z	1997 - 2012
Millennials	1982 - 1996
Generation X	1965 - 1981
Baby boomers	1946 – 1964
Greatest/Silent Generations	1945 and earlier

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study (2020, p.9)

The study presents the global distribution by generation of both coach practitioners and managers who use coaching skills. This is an important distinction because the dual approach on the coaching industry is presented all along the research articles on coaching. We have discovered that the in the business use of coaching there is almost no distinction between these two categories, although there are arguments that state that the use of coaching by a manager can lead to confusion (Berg & Karlsen, 2007).

Table 3. Generation by region – coach practitioners

	Millennials (%)	Generation X (%)	Baby boomers (%)	The greatest generation (%)
Global	9	51	38	2
North America	5	39	53	3
Western Europe	7	58	34	1
Eastern Europe	22	64	14	-

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study (2020, p.9)

Table 4. Generation by region – managers and leaders using coaching skills

	Millennials (%)	Generation X (%)	Baby boomers (%)	The greatest generation (%)
Global	19	61	19	-
North America	12	53	35	-
Western Europe	11	61	19	-
Eastern Europe	31	61	8	-

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study (2020, p.10)

It is interesting to note that the global distribution of coach practitioners by generation varies a lot between Eastern Europe and the rest of the area highlighted. In Eastern Europe the number of practitioners from the millennial's generation is larger than the other areas and the global average. The generation X practitioners are almost equally distributed in Europe (both western and eastern) and according to the global average but with a small percentage in North America.

The second group from the coaching continuum is represented by managers and leaders using coaching skills. Eastern Europe has almost double the number of millennials who are using coaching skills than Western Europe and North America. Generation X managers and leaders are uniformly distributed internationally.

Between the two main categories from the coaching continuum, we have observed that the greatest generation has the lowest percentage of coach practitioners worldwide and almost no practitioners between managers and leaders who use coaching skills.

As far as ICF statistics show, the distribution in Romania is as follows in Table 5.

Table 5. Generation in Romania – both big categories of coaching continuum

	Generation Z (%)	Millennials (%)	Generation X (%)	Baby boomers (%)
Romania	1	33	58	8

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study and Future of Coaching Romania (2023, p.11)

The main difference between Romania and the global statistics from the generations point of view is that in Romania we have statistical relevance for the percentage of Generation Z practitioners, who in the global statistics are not representative.

To have a complete image for comparison the two big categories of the coaching continuum, in Table 6 we have also presented the categories of coaching that are practiced by the Romanian respondents of the ICF study.

In the 2023 study ICF presented the coaching practitioners in a different graph than the 2020 study. It is important to also present this distribution in order to compare the two statistics and see a complete image for the coaching industry in Romania.

Table 6. Coaching type – Romania (%)

External coach practitioner	63
Internal coach practitioner	6
Both external and internal coach practitioner	15
Manager/leader who uses coaching skills.	9
HR/talent development manager/director who uses coaching skills.	6
No longer coaching and do not plan to do so in the future.	1

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study and Future of Coaching Romania (2023, p.14)

The main conclusion is that in Eastern Europe the number of professional practitioners is greater than the global average. In Romania almost 70 % of the coaching practitioners are professional accredited ones.

There is a range of both formal and informal coaching opportunities and statistics show that (Thompson & Cox, 2017). Managers /leaders who are using coaching skills are a big part of the global use of coaching, only in Eastern Europe the percentage is smaller than the global average. This can be explained by the recent development of the coaching industry in Eastern Europe by the opening of a lot of coaching schools who facilitate the accreditation in this field, so most coaches are accredited and practice in a professional manner.

From our research it seems that most of the coaching accreditation forms are at a national level and the ICF accreditation is still requested by a small number of practitioners from Eastern European countries.

In terms of gender the coaching practitioners are distributed as shown in Tables 7,8 and 9.

Table 7. Coach practitioner – Gender (%)

	Male	Female
Global	30	70
North America	25	75
Western Europe	34	66
Eastern Europe	25	75

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study (2020, p 11)

Table 8. Managers and leaders using coaching skills – Gender (%)

	Male	Female
Global	32	68
North America	23	77
Western Europe	33	67
Eastern Europe	20	80

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation Study (2020, p 11)

Table 9. Romania – Gender distribution of coaching practitioners (%)

Male	Female	Neutral/ Gender fluid
20	78	2

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation and Future of Coaching Romania (2023, p.11)

The conclusion of the gender distribution is that coaching is practiced mainly by women. Over 50 % of the practitioners, no matter the way of practice (accredited or not) or region, are women. In Romania the percentage is even higher than the global average, over 70 % of the practitioners are women.

The main areas of coaching in Romania are also presented in the International Coaching Federation (2023) and shown in table 10.

There are two main categories of coaching, business and life. Leadership, Business/ organizations, Executive, Small Business are included in the grand category of Business coaching, the rest of them: career, relationship, health and wellness are included in the live coaching category.

The use of coaching by project managers is focused on the one hand towards the development of the team and on the other on self-development of the manager developing soft skills to be more collaborative or supportive with the team members (Thompson, 2019).

Table 10. Main area of coaching – Romania (%)

Leadership	26
Business/ organizations	24
Life vision & Enhancement	19
Executive	8
Career	9
Small business	2
Relationships (Singles, Couples, Families, etc.)	2
Health and wellness	4
Other	3
No specialty	2

Source: adapted from International Coaching Federation and Future of Coaching Romania (2023, p.15)

Coaching practice serves as a pragmatic method for cultivating soft skills, with a specific focus on fostering supportive and collaborative abilities. This is because the coaching philosophy establishes a framework for aligning intentions, promoting a shared commitment to collaborate on the coacher's agenda (Rogers, 2008).

Studies show a real and significant impact of the use of coaching by the project managers. Coaching sessions had a great impact in the increase on competencies such as managing, leading and even cognitive abilities. There were significant results also in the increase of the communication skills and effectiveness of communication (Ballesteros-Sánchez, Ortiz-Marcos & Rodríguez-Rivero, 2019).

The use of coaching by the project managers showed an increase in the ability to deal with challenging situations. Change-coaching models were developed and proved to have good results for project managers (Bickerich, Michel & O'Shea, 2018).

The use of coaching by the project managers at the office proved to have results on the long term for the teams, research shows that it takes about six months for the benefits of adopting coaching behaviors show effective results, but after this time the teams are more adapted to change and result oriented in crisis situations (Grant, 2010).

3. OUR SURVEY

We have conducted an experiment to see how many project managers will answer a quick survey which consists of a small questionnaire with both demographic data and also questions about the perception and use of coaching. Out of 50 online questionnaires sent we had only 15 valid responses. It is a reduced response rate but if it is compared to the national response rate for the International Coaching Federation and Future of Coaching-Romania, of 120 respondents we can observe that in Romania is a reduced response rate in general.

The results were interesting and that is why we choose to present it and use it for further research. The results are presented in Tables 11 – 18, below.

Table 11. Gender distribution of the survey respondents (%)

Male	Female
14,3	85.7

Table 12. Generation distribution of the survey respondents (%)

Generation Z (%)	Millennials (%)	Generation X (%)
7.7	23.1	69.2

Table 13. Education distribution of the survey respondents (%)

Master degree (%)	Bachelor's degree (%)	High school diploma (%)
57.2	36.7	7.1

We have applied a series of three sentences for the respondents to show agreement and to complete a response. The series is presented below:

- a) The respondents had to complete the sentence " In your opinion, coaching ...", ad the main answers were:
- It is a rather useful tool in personal development – 64.3 % of the responses.
 - It is a rather useful tool in the professional environment – 35.7 % of the responses.
 - Is a useful tool for managers – 78.6 % of the responses.
- b) Coaching is similar to mentoring. I can use both with the same results for my team
- I strongly agree – 21.4 % of the responses.
 - Neutral – 14.3 % of the responses.
 - I disagree – 14.3 % of the responses.
 - I strongly disagree - 50% of the responses.
- c) Coaching is an important tool for improving organizational performance.
- I strongly agree – 78.6 % of the responses.
 - I agree – 14.3 % of the responses.
 - I strongly disagree – 7.10 % of the responses

Table 14. How coaching is provided in your organization (%)

External coaching	23.10
Internal coaching	23.90
The manager is also the coach	53

Table 15. How often are coaching sessions organized in your organization? (%)

Occasionally	69.20
Monthly	15.40
Weekly	15.40

Other results of our survey suggest that only 14.3 % of the respondents consider coaching to be a useful instrument for the HR department.

Most of the respondents (85.7 %) consider that the manager should be also a coach or have coaching skills.

The primary method for improving team performance is coaching for 64.30% of the respondents. The second is consulting.

Even though our study had a small response rate we wanted to show that the results are interesting and open the way for further research on the use of coaching in Romania. The findings indicate that in 53% of the organizations the manager is also the coach and only 23% of organizations utilize external coaching services. This reveals that coaching is still at the earlier stages of development in Romanian organizations, and that the managers are the main providers of coaching for their teams, also coaching is sporadically employed (69.2%) and not on a consistent basis.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Our research indicates a lack of scientific information regarding the perception of coaching in the business environment. The literature review revealed that most of the articles are oriented towards different ways of usage for coaching inside organizations and mainly by leaders/ managers/ project managers. Also, the literature review indicates that there is still a lot to discover about the benefits of acquiring coaching skills by team members and mainly by managers. The development of soft skills in general and coaching skills in particular can bring a significant impact on the way an organization responds to a crisis. The advantages of the use of coaching are seen also in developing skills and the effectiveness of communication.

Even though coaching is perceived as similar to mentoring or is considered to bring confusion when used in sessions by the project managers, it is clear that adopting coaching skills take time (an average of six months) and brings benefits on the long term.

Our small survey indicates that research is needed in Romania to reveal the perception, use and effectiveness of coaching. Romania has the same gender distribution as the global average and show similar statistics with the ones of ICF on the Eastern Europe. For further research it is clear that further quantitative and qualitative research methods have to be applied on a larger cohort in order to obtain a clear image of coaching in Romania.

REFERENCES

- Adkins, L. (2010). *Coaching agile teams: A companion for Scrum Masters, agile coaches, and project managers in transition*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Professional.
- Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The leadership quarterly*, 16(3), 315-338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001>.
- Bachkirova, T., Cox, E. & Clutterbuck, D. (2014). *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* (1st edition). London: Sage.
- Ballesteros-Sánchez, L., Ortiz-Marcos, I., & Rodríguez-Rivero, R. (2019). The impact of executive coaching on project managers' personal competencies. *Project Management Journal*, 50(3), 306-321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972819832191>.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (2000). *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*. Redwood City: Mind Garden.
- Bickerich, K., Michel, A., & O'Shea, D. (2018). Executive coaching during organisational change: a qualitative study of executives and coaches perspectives. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 11(2), 117-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2017.1407806>.
- Fontannaz, S. (2018). A temporal multi-stakeholder perspective on the perceptions, expectations and experiences of coaching in a team context. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 16(12), 111 – 122. <https://doi.org/10.24384/000534>.
- Gallwey, W. T., & Green, B. (2015). *The Inner Game of Tennis*. Pan Macmillan.
- Goleman, D. (2017). *Leadership that gets results*. Harvard Business Review, pp. 70–90.
- Grant, A. M. (2010). It takes time: A stages of change perspective on the adoption of workplace coaching skills. *Journal of Change Management*, 10(1), 61-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697010903549440>.
- Hargreaves, A., & Dawe, R. (1990). Paths of professional development: Contrived collegiality, collaborative culture, and the case of peer coaching. *Teaching and teacher education*, 6(3), 227-241. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X\(90\)90015-W](https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(90)90015-W).

- International Coaching Federation. (2020). *ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, From: <https://coachingfederation.org/research/global-coaching-study>.
- International Coaching Federation. (2023). *ICF Global Coaching Study and Future of Coaching_Romania*. From: <https://coachingfederation.org/research>.
- Berg, M. E., & Karlsen, J. T. (2007). Mental models in project management coaching. *Engineering Management Journal*, 19(3), 3-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10429247.2007.11431736>.
- Rogers, J. (2008). *Coaching skills: A handbook (2nd edition)*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., Roth G., & Smith B. (1999). *The Dance of Change: The Challenges of Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Thompson, S., & Cox, E. (2017). How coaching is used and understood by project managers in organizations. *Project Management Journal*, 48(5), 64-77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972817048005>.
- Thompson, S. (2019). The power of pragmatism: how project managers benefit from coaching practice through developing soft skills and self-confidence. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, (S13), 4-15. <https://doi.org/10.24384/86ee-ps25>.
- Truijen, K. J., & van Woerkom, M. (2008). The pitfalls of collegial coaching: An analysis of collegial coaching in medical education and its influence on stimulating reflection and performance of novice clinical teachers. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 20(5), 316-326.
- Walzer, N. & Athiyaman, A. (2007). *Entrepreneurship and local economic development*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.