

The power of coachability

What the evidence reveals about performance, agility, and the overlooked half of coaching.



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FORMAT

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01

THE OPPORTUNITY

Employee development as a competitive advantage.

Contemporary organizations understand that continuous employee development is an important way to create and sustain a competitive advantage.

As such, organizations globally spend over **\$60 billion per year** on leadership development programs.^{15,7,10} As continuous development for employees at all levels proves vital for individual, team, and bottom-line success, companies across industries and markets are increasingly focused on harnessing the power of employee coaching. In fact, organizations today spend more than **\$4.5 billion annually** on organizational coaching initiatives.

THE CENTRAL IDEA

Highly coachable employees move the bottom line.

Current research and practice focus primarily on the *coach* — the ability of the manager or leader to coach effectively. While that focus makes sense, it ignores one half of the coaching relationship: the *coachee*, and his or her willingness to receive and actively contribute to coaching.^{6,17,18,20}

Defining employee coachability

This concept — **employee coachability** — is defined as an employee's willingness and ability to seek, be receptive to, and act on constructive feedback and coaching in ways that accelerate development and improve performance.^{22,23}

In other words, highly coachable employees proactively ask for feedback, are more willing to accept constructive feedback from a wide range of sources, and can better develop strategies to implement the useful feedback they receive.

02

REFRAMING THE RELATIONSHIP

The overlooked, yet crucial half of the coaching equation.

Elevating employee coachability, in turn, improves the manager's coaching ability. Managers who have highly coachable employees are able to provide more specific, constructive developmental feedback to employees who are receptive to – rather than defensive toward – that feedback. Thus, improving employee coachability optimizes the entire coaching interaction and its resulting outcomes.^{21,23}



Overlooking the role of the coachee is a fundamental flaw in our current approach to coaching within organizations – something both researchers and practitioners must address. Historically, we have given little attention to employee coachability, even though coaches intuitively know that their effectiveness depends on the receptivity and efforts of the person being coached. Indeed, researchers have concluded that coachees are active participants who can either enhance or undermine the effectiveness of coaching, regardless of the coach's efforts and the quality of the coaching.^{2,6,13}

Coachability is a trait **and** a skill

While many think employee coachability is exclusively an inherent character trait, research clearly indicates that it is both a trait **and** a skill. Researchers and practitioners therefore suggest coachability is a critical factor that organizations should **hire for** and **elevate** through coachability skills training.^{4,22,23,24,11,12,17,18}

03

PERFORMANCE IN A VUCA WORLD

Improve employee agility & performance in times of change.

According to global HR & L&D leaders, employee coachability offers organizations an effective method for accomplishing change management at the individual level. Recent research in the Health Sciences / Bio-Pharma industry demonstrates that highly coachable employees are significantly more agile and adaptable than their less coachable counterparts.^{22,23}

77%

of HR practitioners and leaders report their organization is in a constant state of change⁹

V·U·C·A

Volatile, uncertain, complex & ambiguous — how scholars characterize today's workplace¹⁶

3x

priorities, goals, and strategies continuously shift — adaptability is now indispensable^{5,8,19}

Researchers and practitioners widely regard the ability of employees to adapt to novel situations and thrive during change as more crucial now than ever before. Yet many organizations invest in large-scale change initiatives — restructuring, expansions — while failing to properly equip individual employees with the skills necessary to succeed in an unpredictable environment.

This means highly coachable employees are better able to handle and succeed in turbulent environments. Research suggests they are more effective than less coachable employees when faced with new tasks, procedures, and strategies, company expansions, change-management initiatives, and mergers & acquisitions.²²



04

TALENT & SUCCESSION

Develop a stronger talent and leadership bench.

Most organizations understand the importance of developing and sustaining a strong talent bench – it provides the human-capital resources crucial for success and competitive advantage. Elevating coachability accelerates individual development, increasing both individual and organizational performance. Research also suggests that highly coachable employees are **more promotable**: relative to less coachable peers, they actually develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for success in advanced roles.^{22,23}



Highly coachable employees signal a genuine desire for continuous growth – through feedback seeking, receptivity, and implementation – demonstrating they can take on more responsibility and higher roles.

Interestingly, this same research suggests coachability actually *decreases* as employees increase in tenure and age – making early, deliberate investment all the more valuable.^{22,23} While coachability provides a critical avenue to develop the next generation of leaders, recent research also confirms its importance for leadership effectiveness itself.

A STUDY OF 5,000 LEADERS ACROSS INDUSTRIES²⁵

20% more effective

Highly coachable leaders, compared to those operating at only moderately coachable levels, are 20% more effective as leaders. Elevating leaders' coachability increases their overall effectiveness and impact within the organization.

05

RETURN ON TRAINING INVESTMENT

Amplify the effectiveness of every training initiative.

Organizations invest in employee training because a skilled workforce translates into a competitive advantage. This explains why companies in the US alone spend well over **\$164 billion annually** on employee training and development.¹⁴ The Association for Talent Development reports that per-employee training expenditures continue to increase every year.¹ Given investments of this scale, how can organizations ensure they maximize their return?

THE L&D LEADER'S VIEW

Coachability is a development multiplier.

Global HR and L&D leaders describe elevating coachability as a "training-and-development multiplier" – and an early skill investment that maximizes the value of every future training dollar.

By definition, highly coachable employees hold growth mindsets, are more receptive to developmental information, and proactively implement feedback to improve performance. As a result – regardless of the training topic, from account management to advanced selling skills to navigating a new market channel – they are more likely to retain and transfer new material back to their jobs than peers lower in coachability.

In short, coachability **amplifies the effectiveness of all training initiatives** an organization employs, and is therefore best understood as a learning-and-development multiplier.



06

THE CASE IN BRIEF

Coachability outcomes and impact.

Coachability improves job and sales performance, and increasing employees' coachability accelerates their development — boosting both individual and organizational results. The evidence converges on four outcomes:

Performance

Higher job & sales output

Coachability is a strong, direct predictor of job and sales performance.^{22,23,17}

Coaching ROI

Better coaching interactions

Coachability skills significantly improve managerial coaching — a key driver of sales-force and organizational effectiveness.²¹

Promotability

Steeper career trajectories

Highly coachable employees are deemed more promotable, building stronger talent pipelines and leadership benches.^{22,23}

Leadership

20%

more effective — highly coachable leaders vs. those lower in coachability, across 5,000 managers.

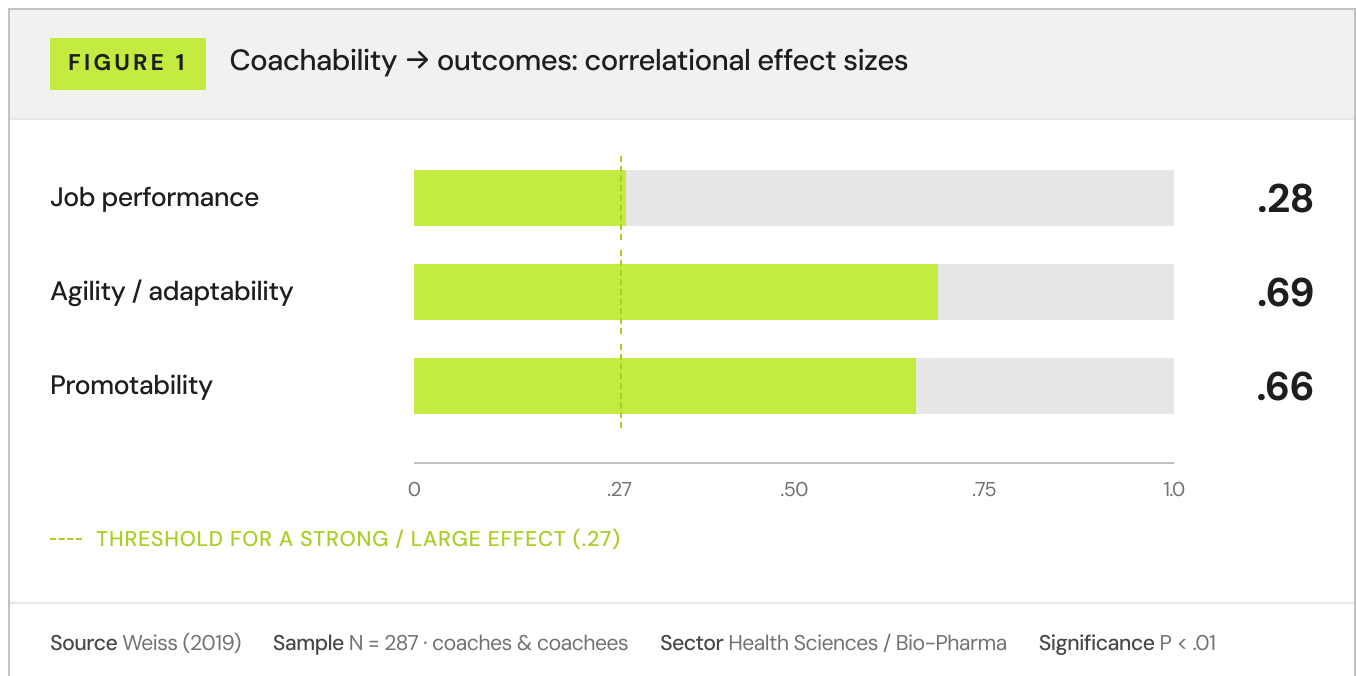
In sum, highly coachable employees and leaders provide incredible value to their organizations. The value a company receives from hiring coachable employees — and from elevating current employees' and leaders' coachability through skills training — can far exceed its investment.

07

THE EVIDENCE · FIGURE 1

Empirical research findings on employee coachability.

The data in Figure 1 comes from a quantitative study conducted in late 2019 in the Health Sciences / Bio-Pharma industry, with **287 participants** (coaches and coachees). The study examined whether, and to what extent, employee coachability impacts job performance, agility / adaptability, and promotability. All findings reach significance at $P < .01$, and all effect sizes are classified as large / strong³ — meaning coachability is a strong predictor of each outcome.



08

THE EVIDENCE · FIGURE 2

Same coaching, different results.

Published in the peer-reviewed *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* (Feb 2021), this study asked: if employees lower in coachability receive the **same exact coaching** as those high in coachability, what is the difference in outcomes? Coaching quality, delivery, psychological safety, support for feedback seeking, and relationship quality were all held constant.



Highly coachable employees perform at a **10% higher** level, are **28% more adaptable**, and are **30% more promotable** than those lower in coachability — even when receiving identical coaching. Critically, the research found that employee coachability influences these outcomes to a *significantly greater extent* than managerial coaching behaviors.^{22,23}

09

FROM MEASUREMENT TO RESULTS

The impact of coachability training & interventions.

If coachability clearly influences performance, agility, promotability, and coaching effectiveness, the practical question follows: do coachability training interventions actually raise individuals' coachability to highly coachable levels — and move results? In partnership with a global pharmaceutical company, we set out to answer it.

We collected baseline coachability behavioral data prior to any intervention, then again at multiple timepoints during and after the engagement, allowing us to assess behavioral change. Because the organization provided objective performance data (sales-goal attainment), we could measure the impact of coachability improvement on bottom-line performance directly.

RESULT OF THE INTERVENTION

+27%

month-over-month performance increase

+28%

increase in employee agility

+79%

franchise-wide sales growth

Implementation of coachability initiatives significantly boosted individuals' coachability to highly coachable levels — and those improvements led to the gains above, measured against performance before the interventions. In all, the data showcase the tangible, bottom-line value of coachability interventions within organizations.

10

GLOBAL SPECIALTY PHARMA · LUNDBECK

Coachability in practice.

CLIENT



Company needs

- Improve leaders' capacity to develop talent and build high-performing teams through coaching
- Maximize current coaching practices and investments
- Cultivate a coaching and coachability culture that impacts bottom-line results
- Accelerate adoption of a new commercial & sales strategy and integration of expansion hires

CCI solutions

- Coachability@Work® CQ Assessment + Explore Your Coachability sessions
- Team Coachability@Work reports + Explore Team's Coachability
- Elevate Your Coachability skills-training program
- Internal Coachability Certified Partners
- Robust pull-through & sustainability plans

95%

high performers retained

+79%

franchise-wide sales growth

+28%

agility improvement for highly coachable employees

+27%

performance improvement for highly coachable employees

After Coachability, the people leaders and sales reps felt and demonstrated a strong sense of ownership over their development and performance. This led to consistency in how leaders develop talent, which drastically boosted coaching effectiveness and performance – helping retain our talent, strengthen our culture, and boost results every month.

– VP OF SALES

Coachability helped me realize I am often quick to discount or dismiss new perspectives and ideas, especially from certain individuals. This helped me improve the dynamics and culture within my team and expand my influence across the organization.

– REGIONAL BUSINESS DIRECTOR

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