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Achieving a growth mindset

Coaching - who finds it easy?

Intervention

Introduction

There is, for many people, a natural desire to help others develop and grow. Coaching, in its most socratic form, represents a method that requires others to think and act their own way to solutions; the coach merely asks good questions. Being an interactive approach, many people struggle to adopt it as it requires great patience, skill and an acceptance that, initially at least, results may take a while to come. Some people therefore seek to help others through the alternative route of more directive styles.

There is much debate about which style is better suited to which situation. Situational Leadership[1], for example, proposes that managers be more directive where the competence and commitment of people is at their lowest or where situations require urgent action, but most would agree that having a range of styles to deploy across situations is likely to prove more advantageous to an individual.

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Our Research

HOW EASY - OR DIFFICULT - DO PEOPLE FIND IT TO LEARN TO COACH?

By correlating the SoundWave[2] results of over 100 leaders, professionals and managers from within progressive organisations, with their observed coaching behaviours, attitudes and skills during in-depth programmes of coaching, we have hypothesised three roles of relevance.

A. Coaching Experts (n=34)	People who make their living by applying a non-directive style of coaching - 'pure' or "socratic' coaches. (This has been our 'control group').
B. Blended Leaders (n=49)	People who pragmatically try to adopt and incorporate different styles to different situations as part of their repertoire. They are not seeking to be coaching experts, but they are eager to extend their repertoire of leadership styles.
C. Expert Leaders (n=34)	People who apply more directive styles in helping others, determined to 'show and share' their expertise and experience. They see a lack of action in the style of coaching experts and are often firm in their view that 'show and tell' works.

All three roles play useful functions in organisational life. They each have their own advantages and limitations.

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Our Research

HOW EASY - OR DIFFICULT - DO PEOPLE FIND IT TO LEARN TO COACH?

As we can see below, the SoundWave profiles of each of these three groups vary significantly when compared to each other.

A. Coaching Experts (n=34)	Coaching Experts score at a high and statistically significant level in their use of the Exploratory voices (inquire; probe; diagnose) when compared to the other two groups. They adopt a highly positive attitude towards coaching.
B. Blended Leaders (n=49)	Blended Leaders use a full range of voices, evidencing repertoire, in a socially acceptable manner and utilise a particularly appropriate level of the 'correctional' voice. They adopt a pragmatic attitude towards coaching.
C. Expert Leaders (n=34)	Expert Leaders are altogether more directive, using the normal and accentuated form of the controlling (challenge; correct; critique) and positioning (advocate; articulate; advise) voices at a higher and more statistically significant level compared to the other two groups. They adopt a sceptical attitude towards coaching.

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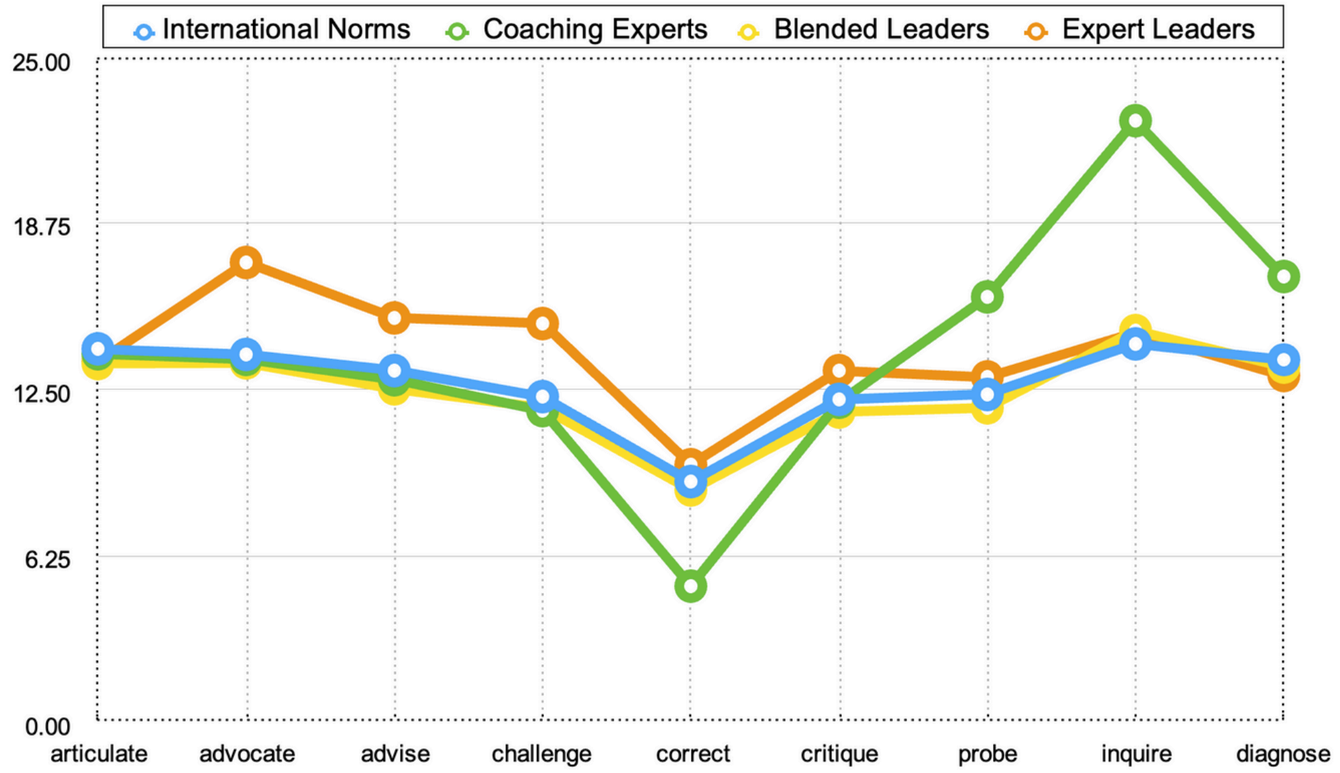
SOUNDWAVE DATA

SoundWave results from the three groups appears below:-



Note how the data profile of the Blended Leader tracks the international norm for SoundWave users whereas that of the other two groups deviates strikingly instead.

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ATTITUDINAL DATA

In addition, the profiles for each of the three groups are accompanied by important attitudinal differences, which are summarised in the table below.

Criteria	Coaching Experts	Blended Leaders	Expert Leaders
Relevance of coaching	The most value-adding style of leading others'.	Highly useful but a challenge to integrate it into daily working life.	Useful if you have time but time is a luxury few people have'.
Disposition towards coaching	Positive with strong advocacy for its use.	Positive and relevant - 'will find ways to use it'.	Sceptical or occasionally hostile. 'Someone has to provide direction. You can't ask your way to success'.
Attentiveness to coachees and their problems	High. Excellent listening and empathic skills combined with relevant challenge.	High. Patience shown with occasional mild frustration.	Low. Frustration and impatience palpable. Sometimes coach perception of coachees as not 'grasping the obvious'.
Narrative around coaching	It's a must-have skill'.	How to integrate it into the day-to-day'.	Dismissive and challenging - 'how would it work in this situation?
Progress as learners	Highly reflective. Strong progress.	Skill levels were observed to increase. Effort was applied.	Skill levels improved only marginally and some not at all. Limited effort applied.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH

1. WHAT LEARNING STRATEGIES?

For profiles which tend more towards the **Expert Leader** model, a process of development which begins by exploring attitudes and highlights the benefits and limitations of the existing expert style helps to develop the confidence needed to expand range.

For profiles which tend towards the **Coaching Expert**, the satisfaction of having this clear strength must be balanced with an ability to adopt a more directive, expert stance where required.

For profiles which tend towards the **Blended Leader**, the emphasis of development needs to be on amplifying the full range of voices and becoming situationally sensitive so that the right style is deployed at the right time.

However, for all Leaders, the best outcome is the ability to deploy the full range of style across the spectrum outlined below in the following **Continuum of Conversation** model.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH

1. What Learning Strategies?

	Command	Instruct	Train	Facilitate	Mentor	Coach	Counsel	Therapy
Role	To order someone on what to do and how to do it	To tell or show someone what to do and how to do it	To teach someone what to do and how to do it	To enable someone to identify what they need to do and support their doing	To advise someone on a helpful course of action	To help someone to work out for themselves what they need to do and how to do it	To help someone to be clear about personal obstacles that they wish to overcome	To help someone to surface and address deep seated personal issues and dilemmas
Listens for	Noises of dissent	Failure in grasp of understanding	Skill and knowledge acquisition	The range of exploration	Clarity of thought. Awakening	Self-reflection and adjustment	The interplay of thoughts and feelings	Tone. mood, clarity of thought, action preference
Looks for	Signs of dissent	Compliance	Competence	Understanding	Self-reflection	Learning and performance	Personal change	Transformation

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH

1. What Value Prediction?

SoundWave prefers to celebrate the unique way in which different people construct their dialogue and seeks to avoid typology. Few, if any individuals, will fall exactly into any one of the three patterns outlined in this research. But the research does provide a good starting point for asking questions about the degree to which an individual will or will not take to ‘socratic coaching’ and where they might experience success and difficulty.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH

1. What To Do with Expert Leaders?

Coaching is a socially desirable skill. No one admits to being a poor coach and yet some people clearly find this style of interaction hard to learn and hard to deploy. Such a limitation is not often an impediment to career success. Many ‘expert leaders’ occupy senior roles in good organisations. This is because they offer qualities that the more ‘coaching-inclined’ might lack, or qualities that are more in demand. Furthermore, even though their coaching skill is, by comparison, more limited, their motive to develop others is often not and others will see this; they just go about it differently - through ‘show and tell’.

Nonetheless, and in spite of our adoration for the expert role, our research does point to a certain resistance by some Expert Leaders to adopt more coaching styles.

Our conclusion is therefore this: rather than expecting these people to become good coaches overnight, focus more on developing their abilities to become excellent mentors and advisors. In this way, everyone will be positioned to make the best contribution they can.

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Footnotes

1. Hersey and Blanchard, The Situational Leader

2. For details of SoundWave see appendix 1

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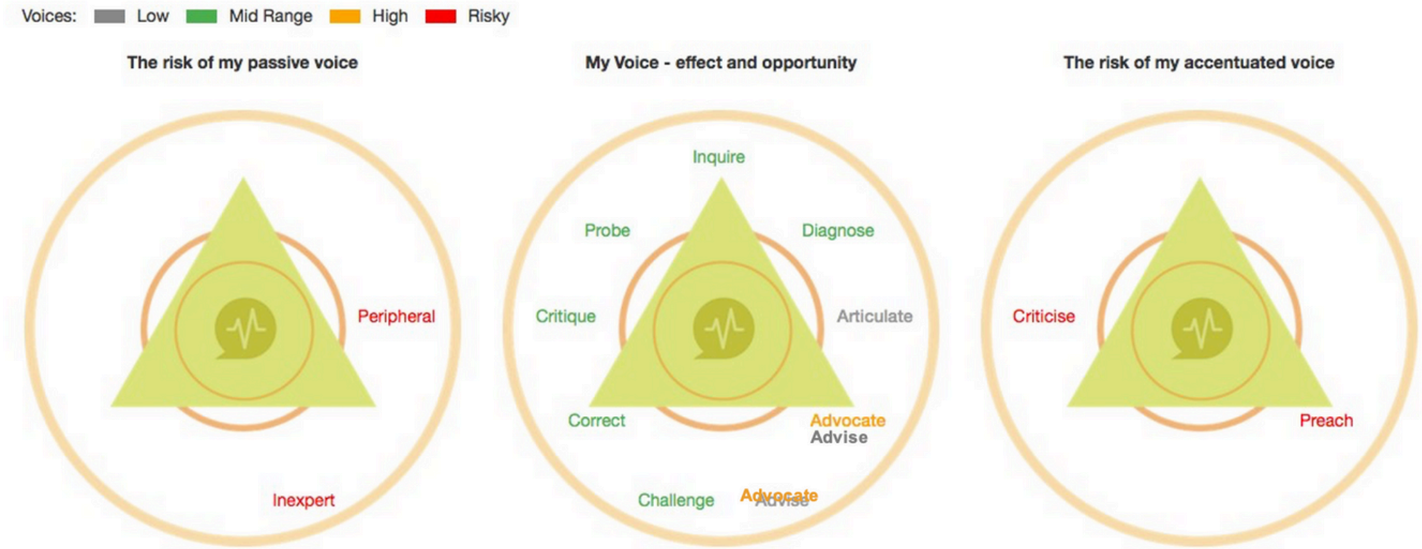
Appendix 1

Amazing things happen between people when the quality of their conversation is good. People feel enabled and respected and so their creativity, collaboration, productivity and engagement all increase. Performance improvement is just about guaranteed.

Being really effective as a communicator takes self-awareness and skill. Your SoundWave provides the insight necessary to help you build this capability.



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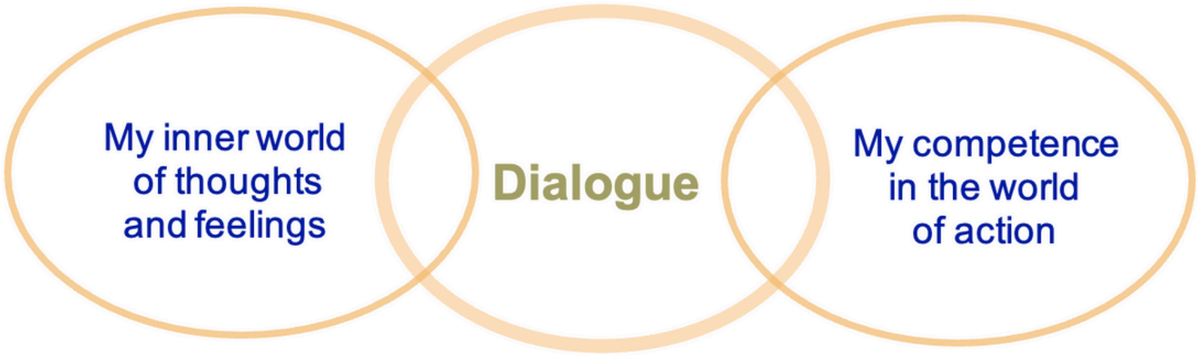
Appendix 1

SoundWave bridges the gap between your inner world of thoughts and feelings (often measured through the use of psychometrics) and your outer world of action (often measured through the use of competence frameworks); that bridge is dialogue.



We express ourselves on the basis of our thoughts and feelings and these expressions impact and direct our actions. Many times, our ‘talk is action’.

SoundWave analysis and reports are available in three ways. As a **SoundWave self-perception** analysis and report; as a **SoundWave 360** tool; and as an instrument that looks deeply at your preferences in communication, SoundWave Re-verb.

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Become a Better Coach with SoundWave.

- Explore your dominant verbal style with **SoundWave Brilliance 3**
- **Unlock your full 9 voices** with the SoundWave Self-Perception
- **Explore SoundWave 360** to measure the full impact of your talk on those around you
- **Get coached** by our expert SoundWave Accredited Coach Practitioners
- Dive deeper into the nuances of our talk with the **Free Official SoundWave e-Book**

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