



# Building a Coaching Culture with Managers and Leaders

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# Building a Coaching Culture with Managers and Leaders

## Executive Summary

Although coaching has traditionally been used as a developmental tool for executives, in many organizations access has expanded to individuals at every age and stage of their careers. This is because a growing number of organizational decision-makers recognize the capacity of coaching to empower, engage and develop employees.

As the face of individuals receiving coaches changes, so do the modalities used. Increasingly, organizations are utilizing managers and leaders who use coaching knowledge, approaches and skills to create awareness and support behavior change. Organizations with strong coaching cultures value and invest in professional coach practitioners and managers/leaders using coaching skills in order to support employees at all levels in growing their skills, enhancing their value and reaching their professional goals.

For the third consecutive year, the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and the International Coach Federation (ICF) partnered to research coaching within organizations. In a study of almost 900 human resources (HR), learning and development (L&D), and talent management (TM) professionals, leaders and managers, the key research findings include:

- There is a business case for a strong coaching culture.
  - Seventeen percent of respondents' organizations have a strong coaching culture. They measure higher employee engagement (62% of employees rated as highly engaged compared to 50% of other responding organizations).
  - Organizations with a strong coaching culture report recent revenue above their industry peer group (51% of organizations compared to 38% of other responding organizations).

- Coaching impacts many talent and organizational outcomes, but it is not a solution for every challenge.
  - Improved team functioning, increased employee engagement and increased productivity are the top outcomes of coaching and are reported by more than half of all survey respondents.
  - Lack of time and lack of accountability for using coaching skills are the top reported impediments to using coaching skills.
- The use of all three coaching modalities (i.e., external coach practitioners, internal coach practitioners and managers/leaders using coaching skills) correlates with strong coaching cultures.
  - Sixty-four percent of respondents in organizations with strong coaching cultures report the presence of all three modalities, compared to 33% of respondents in organizations without strong coaching cultures.
- Relative to prior HCI/ICF studies, the share of respondents reporting that their organizations use professional coach practitioners has declined.
  - Managers/leaders using coaching skills are the most common modality. Their usage has increased nine percentage points since 2014.
- Establishing trust, applying ethical standards and practicing active listening are rated the most important coaching competencies for managers and leaders.
  - All of the [ICF Core Competencies](#) for coaches were rated highly, with the exception of establishing a coaching agreement.
- Training for managers to use coaching skills is an important component of building a coaching culture.
  - Eighty-seven percent of respondents in organizations with strong coaching cultures report that their current training for managers/leaders to use coaching skills has been instrumental in building a coaching culture, compared to 43% of all other respondents.
- Sixteen percent of respondents say their organizations plan to offer managers and leaders coach-specific training from a program that was accredited or approved by a professional coaching organization in the near future.
  - Managers/leaders using coaching skills are trained most often by the L&D department, HR department, and internal coach practitioners.

## *Definitions of Key Terms*

- **Coaching:** partnering with coachee(s) in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.
- **Professional coach practitioner:** someone who provides an ongoing partnership designed to help coachees produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources and creativity that the coachee already has.
- **Internal coach:** a professional coach practitioner, who is employed within an organization and has specific coaching responsibilities identified in their job description.
- **External coach:** a professional coach practitioner, who is either self-employed or partners with other professional coaches, to form a coaching business.
- **Manager/leader using coaching skills:** a leader who uses coaching knowledge, approaches, and skills to create awareness and support behavior change.
- **Coach-specific training:** training that teaches coaching competencies and/or how to apply technical skills in a coach-like manner and encompasses theories and core coaching competencies designed to prepare an individual to practice as a professional coach.
- **Accredited coach training program:** any program consisting of coach-specific training that has met the rigid criteria required to be approved by a professional coaching organization.

*“What we want to do is create a culture of coaching so that our managers could develop skills in their teams, and also empower our employees so that they can make their own decisions and take action on things that they felt they needed to, so that we could have a bigger organization focused on achieving goals. It sounds like you’re releasing capabilities, like you’re handing over stuff to the employees to make decisions, but there is nothing more empowering to an individual than to realize that they made that decision.”*

—RICARDO NILES, DIRECTOR  
HR GLOBAL SOURCING  
FOOTWEAR—adidas GROUP

## Introduction

Several trends in talent management have primed organizations to be more receptive to building a coaching culture. In lieu of an annual performance review, performance management systems are being reevaluated and revamped to include more frequent conversations about performance and development.<sup>1</sup> Millennials, who comprise a growing proportion of the workforce, want more feedback than other employee segments.<sup>2</sup> There are more on-the-job learning opportunities, and some training and development responsibilities have transferred from the HR and L&D functions to line managers.<sup>3</sup> In addition, managers and leaders are moving away from a command and control management style to a new approach based on inclusion, involvement and participation.<sup>4</sup> These trends drive the need for managers and leaders to use coaching knowledge, approaches and skills in their interactions with direct reports and peers. Previously, access to coaching was available primarily to senior leaders through engagements with professional coach practitioners. Now, as the number of managers/leaders using coaching skills grows, the coach-approach is disseminating throughout organizations and driving performance and development.

Studies have highlighted the positive impact that coaching interactions, when strategically designed and implemented, can have on an organization. Hard financial benefits (e.g., increased productivity and quality), intangible benefits (e.g., improved relationships, teamwork and job satisfaction), soft benefits (e.g., decreased stress and increased resilience/well-being and engagement) and behavior change (e.g., better time management, faster onboarding, and better decision making) have all been observed as a result of coaching in organizations.<sup>5</sup> In addition, recent research from HCI and ICF found that strong coaching cultures correlate with higher employee engagement and better financial performance.<sup>6</sup>

Coaching can be used to develop a specific skill set, improve performance over a set period of time, or expand personal and professional development.<sup>7</sup> Although they are not professional coach practitioners themselves, managers/leaders using coaching skills can also address these needs.

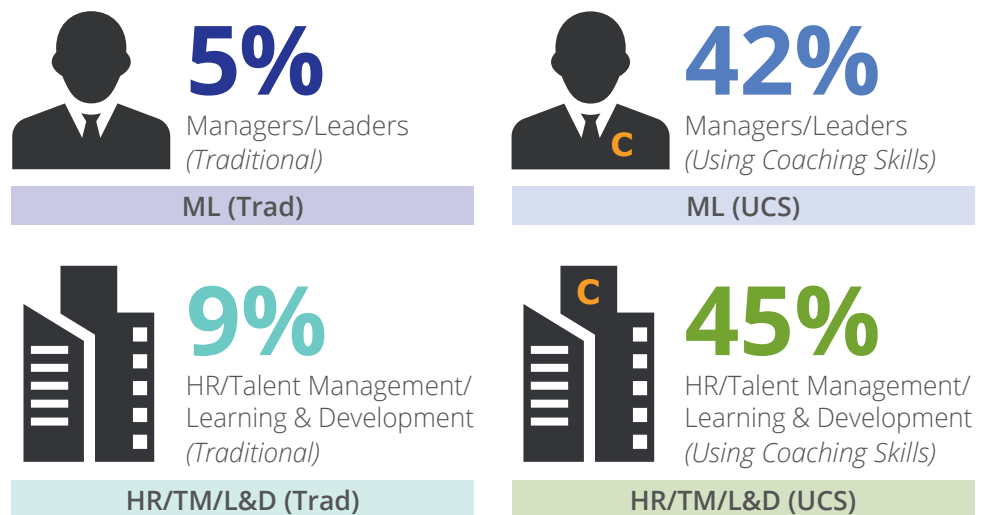
Besides the obvious senior leader support and role modeling of coaching behaviors, many factors must be in place to ensure that managers/leaders using coaching skills are leveraged successfully. Primarily, managers and leaders need to be trained on coaching competencies. Although this modality is more prevalent than the use of internal and external coach practitioners, managers receive less coach-specific training than professional coach practitioners.<sup>8</sup> Beyond the scope of this research study, other elements such as complementary learning style profiles, shared values, exhibition of appropriate coaching and learning behaviors, and complementary personality traits are

necessary for the manager-employee dyad to succeed.<sup>9</sup> Also a factor in the success of a coaching relationship is whether or not managers and leaders perceive people’s traits as “fixed” or changeable (i.e., growth mindset); this can influence how much time they invest in using coaching skills with their teams.<sup>10</sup>

This 2016 research is a continuation of a three-year partnership between HCI and ICF and is our largest, in terms of survey sample size (n = 879), and most geographically diverse (37% of respondents from outside of North America) study. In addition, managers and leaders comprise almost half of the sample (Figure 1). This extension beyond HR, L&D, and talent management respondents helped us determine how managers/leaders use coaching skills and possible outcomes of, as well as impediments to, creating a coaching culture.

The purpose of this research report is to educate business leaders, line managers, and HR/TM/L&D professionals on the components of a strong coaching culture. From our survey and subject-matter expert interviews, we detail the characteristics of strong organizational coaching cultures, with a focus on training for managers/leaders using coaching skills.

**Figure 1.** Survey sample respondent percentages.

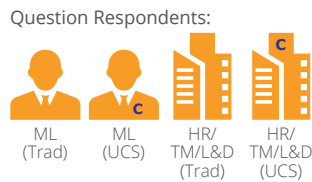


## Building a Coaching Culture

Although this research series was not designed as a longitudinal study, each year the share of respondents' organizations classified as having strong coaching cultures increases. In 2016, a total of 17% ( $n = 152$ ) of respondents have strong coaching cultures at their organizations (up from 13% in 2014 and 15% in 2015), as determined by meeting at least five of the criteria below:

- Strongly agree/agree that employees value coaching.
- Strongly agree/agree that senior executives value coaching.
- Managers/leaders (and/or internal coach practitioners) spend an above-average amount of their weekly time on coaching activities (28% is average for managers/ leaders; 34% is average for internal coach practitioners).
- Managers/leaders (and/or internal coaches) receive accredited coach-specific training.
- Coaching is a fixture in the organization with a dedicated line item in the budget.
- All employees in the organization have an equal opportunity to receive coaching from a professional coach practitioner.

**Figure 2. Strong coaching culture composite.**



|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  | <p>Employees value coaching.</p>   |  | <p>Senior executives value coaching.</p>       |  | <p>Managers/leaders (and/or internal coach practitioners) spend an above-average amount of their weekly time on coaching activities.</p> |
|  | <p>Managers/leaders (and/or internal coaches) received accredited coach-specific training.</p> |  | <p>Coaching has a line item in the budget.</p> |  | <p>All employees in the organization have an equal opportunity to receive coaching from a professional coach practitioner.</p>           |

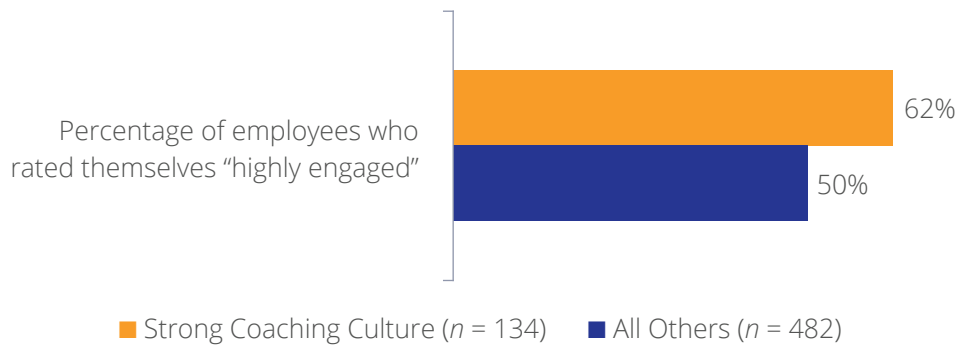
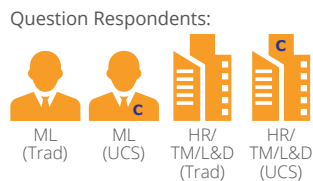
Organizations with 1,000 to 10,000 employees, as well as those headquartered in Asia, appear to have a higher incidence of a strong coaching culture (40% compared to 12% for North America and 10% for Middle East/Africa). This effect can perhaps be explained by noting a higher incidence of Indian respondents in an earlier ICF research study who expressed strong interest in the manager/ leader using coaching skills modality.<sup>11</sup>



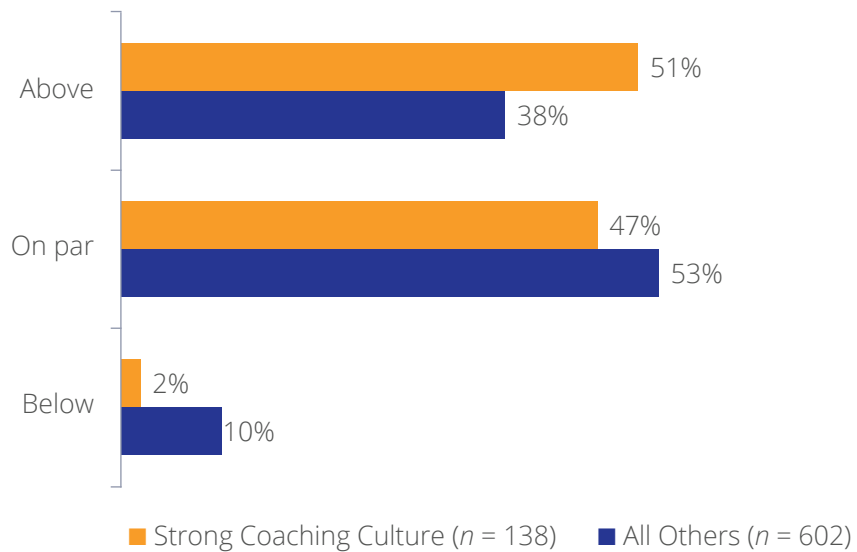
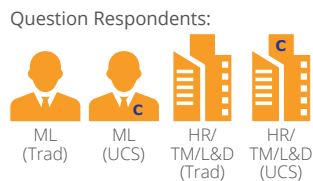
### The Business Case for a Strong Coaching Culture

Although a relatively low proportion of respondents' organizations have strong coaching cultures, it is important for employers to understand why such a culture is so important to their success. A strong coaching culture positively correlates with employee engagement and financial performance. Nearly two-thirds of respondents from organizations with strong coaching cultures rate their employees as being "highly engaged," compared to only half from organizations without strong coaching cultures (Figure 3). In terms of financial impact, 51% of respondents from organizations with strong coaching cultures report their 2015 revenue to be above that of their industry peer group, compared to 38% from all other organizations (Figure 4).

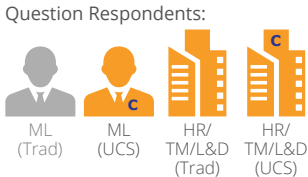
**Figure 3.** Highly engaged employees by strong coaching culture.



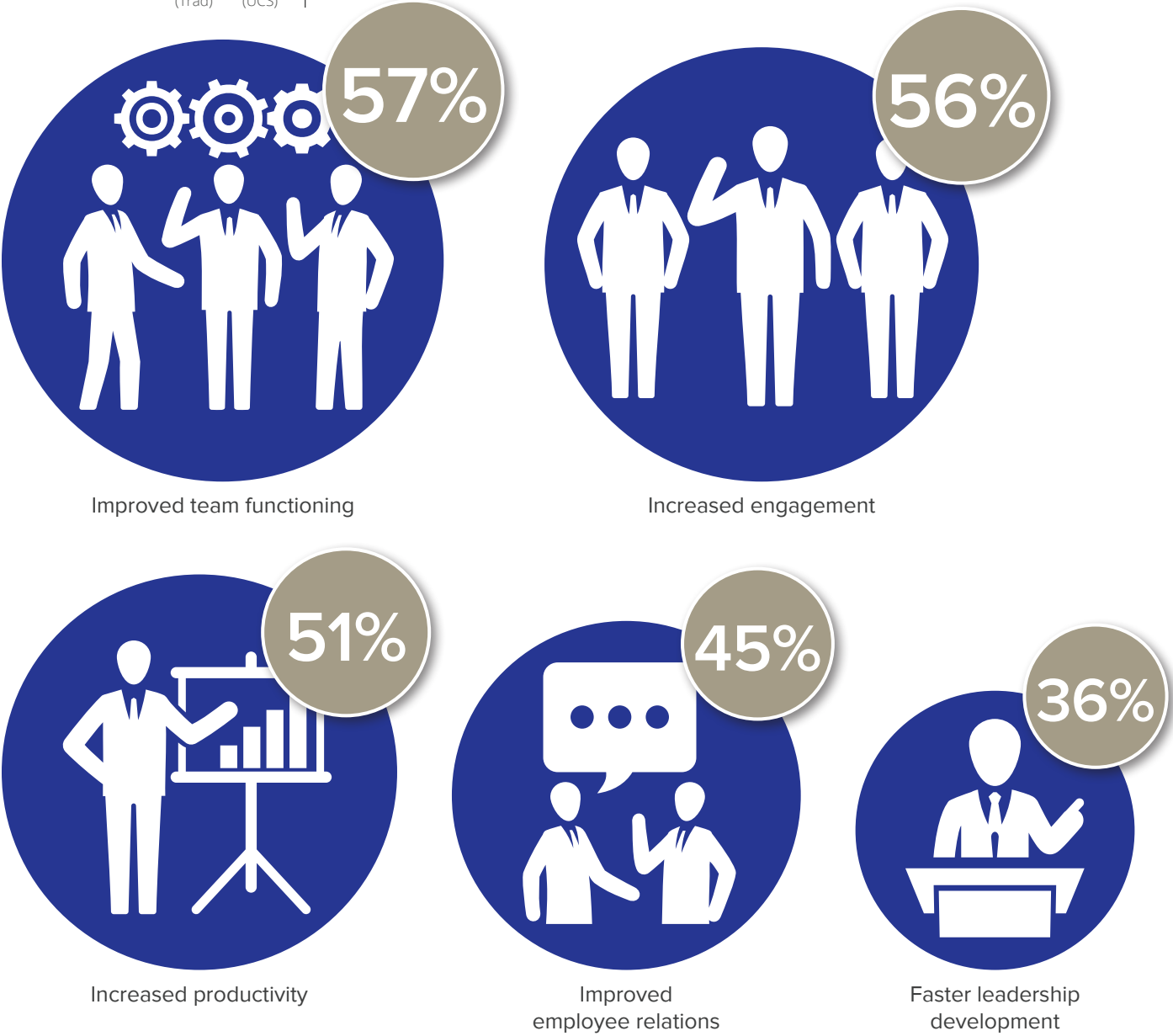
**Figure 4.** 2015 revenue growth in relation to industry peer group by strong coaching culture.



Survey respondents were asked to report the most important indicators of coaching impact observed in their organizations. Improved team functioning, increased employee engagement and increased productivity are cited among the most important indicators of coaching by more than half of all respondents (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** What are the most important indicators of coaching impact that have been observed for the individual/team/organization? (Top 5 responses, see Appendix D for the full list)



Although there are numerous benefits of leveraging managers/leaders using coaching skills, it is not a panacea for all organizational and talent pain points. It is one modality that affects individual and team performance, and its potential extends only as far as its frequency of use. There are several reasons why coaching skills are not used more often (Figure 6). The main impediments are lack of time (48%), lack of accountability for using coaching skills by managers and leaders (34%), and inability to change from command and control leadership style (28%).

Lack of time was the No. 1 coaching challenge reported in the 2014 HCI/ICF research study.<sup>12</sup> Competing priorities and short-term versus long-term focuses contribute to why managers, leaders and internal coach practitioners do not use coaching skills or deliver coaching as often as they would like. Large teams divide up the available time managers and leaders have to apply coaching skills

in their interactions. As reported in one study, managers who had eight or fewer people to supervise received better ratings on their coaching skills from their subordinates than those with larger spans of control.<sup>13</sup>

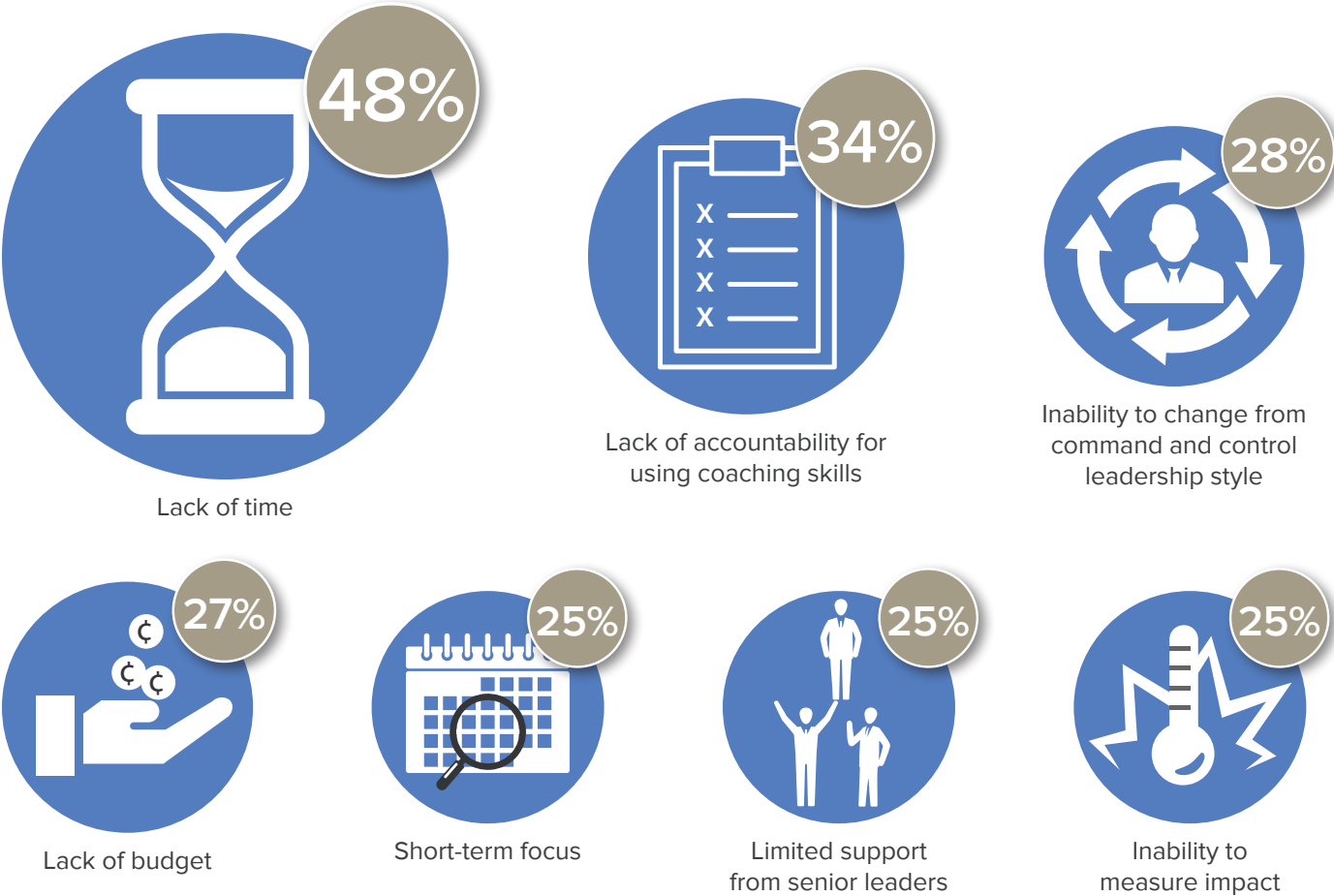
When it is expected that coaching skills will be used in an organization but no true mechanism is in place to ensure this, the lack of accountability can be viewed as an impediment to the process. Many options for accountability processes exist, including formal coaching agreements and the provision of mentor coaching and/or coaching supervision.

A coach approach differs from a traditional, authoritative management style where direct reports are simply delegated tasks, and may include exploring, asking questions, facilitation and partnering. Often, managers need to “role-switch” between a coach-approach and more traditional management techniques. Managers/leaders using coaching skills need training and ongoing development opportunities to learn how to balance these roles and gain competence and confidence in using coaching skills.

*“There is definitely evaluation of coaching training after the fact. We do an immediate evaluation and we do a 3- or 6-month follow-up to identify whether people are using the skills or what impact it has had upon their job, and if they haven’t used it yet—if they anticipate using it.”*

—JULIA GARD BERTERMANN,  
PROGRAM MANAGER AT CINCINNATI  
CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL MEDICAL CENTER,  
MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

**Figure 6.** What are the most obvious impediments to using coaching skills in your organization? (Top 6 responses, see Appendix D for the full list)



Question Respondents:



# IN YOUR WORDS

## Trends Affecting Coaching

Survey respondents share their thoughts on the trends that will impact coaching over the next five years.

### Shifting developmental strategies

- *"In terms of trends, the war for talent is definitely one we need to keep our eyes on. Therefore, in terms of retention, development and eventually promotion of key talent, coaching will become a key enabler in terms of strategy."*
- *"Performance management will move away from the traditional once- or twice-a-year event, to regular check-ins with employees. I can see managers adopting more of a coaching style with this agile form of performance management."*
- *"Coaching will become the 'in' thing because it's empowering and enabling people to bring out their potential using powerful questioning and effective listening. Professional coaching will grow and each employee will have a coach. It's a growing area which can't be ignored."*
- *"In the next three to five years coaching will be a required skill/competency for managers/leaders. Technology will be in place to monitor/measure a leader's coaching ability."*

### Building Talent Analytics Capabilities

- *"Better reporting measures would help our organization with our coaching initiative."*
- *"We are moving toward an HR analytics tool that should help us track outcomes and ROI for coaching types of activities."*

### Redesigning workplaces

- *"As more employees work remotely, coaching will be that much more important to ensure that remote workers feel well-connected and still have opportunities to build skills and move up within a company."*

- *"Changing workplace environments means that more empathic leadership, shifting values regarding lifestyle, application of whole brain vs. left brain thinking, a move toward total transparency and greater use of smart technology will be necessary."*

### Changing demographics

- *"Impending retirements will create increased on-boarding needs for leaders coming into the organization as well as faster promotions through leadership ranks. I plan to institutionalize leader transition coaching starting now to set foundations for this to be part of how we do business in the coming years, as the needs will likely increase."*
- *"Gen Y requiring more autonomy should encourage more managers to adopt a coaching style."*

### Engaging and retaining employees

- *"Our coaching initiative thrives on the desire to show growth personally and professionally for our employees as retention and engagement tool."*
- *"The increased understanding of the importance of mental health and well-being as a contributor to employee engagement and productivity helps our coaching initiative."*

### Changing economies

- *"Lack of revenue growth and cost-cutting really affect the practice of coaching."*
- *"Lack of support from management makes it difficult to coach, and the market is greatly reducing so budgets do not support a coaching model."*
- *"The skills shortage has caused us to begin to create internal coaching/mentoring within the organization."*

## Opportunities for and Access to Coaching

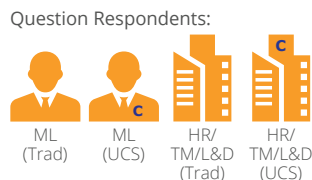
The percentage of respondents who report that their organizations leverage managers/leaders using coaching skills has increased over the past three studies with a three-year average of 86% (Table 1). Although managers/leaders using coaching skills spend, on average, almost one-quarter of their week on coaching activities, they could use coaching skills in their everyday conversations. Frequent feedback and goal-setting enable performance management activities to move from an annual event to an agile, commonplace practice driven by the use of coaching skills. Internal coach practitioners spend 22% of their weekly time coaching, most likely because they have other roles and responsibilities that take up more of their time. Larger organizations and those with higher revenue growth are more likely to have internal and external coaches.

**Table 1. Frequency of coaching modalities and time coaching.**



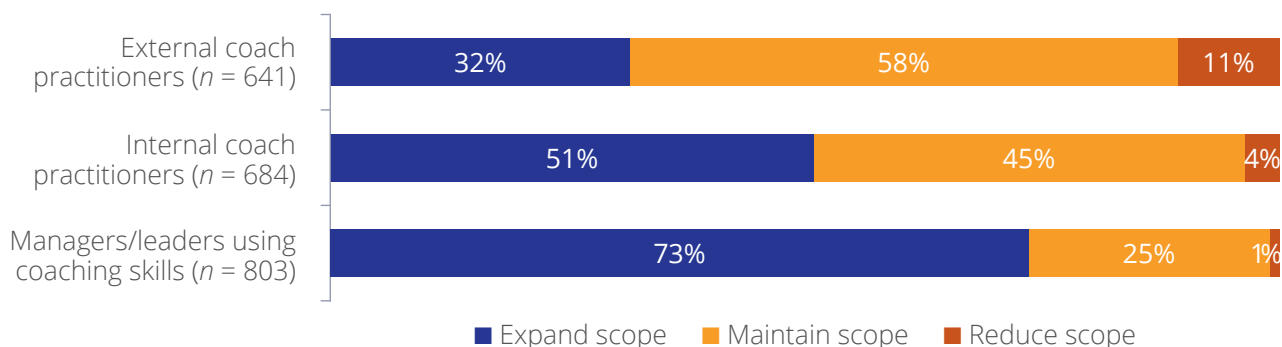
| Modalities                           | Percentage that Offer |           |           |           | Percentage of Weekly Time Spent on Coaching |           |           |           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                      | 3 yr. mean            | 2016 mean | 2015 mean | 2014 mean | 3 yr. mean                                  | 2016 mean | 2015 mean | 2014 mean |
| External coach                       | 59%                   | 58%       | 65%       | 53%       | N/A   | N/A       | N/A       | N/A       |
| Internal coach                       | 54%                   | 55%       | 57%       | 50%       | 22%   | 34%       | 16%       | 17%       |
| Manager/leader using coaching skills | 86%                   | 91%       | 84%       | 82%       | 22%   | 28%       | 19%       | 19%       |

**Figure 7. What are your organization's plans for this modality within the next five years?**



Each of the above modalities is used for different purposes and all are important to the organization. One-third (33%) of organizations use all three modalities, while that figure rises to 64% among those with strong coaching cultures. Organizations with strong coaching cultures see the value that the mixture of modalities brings, especially whenever managers/leaders using coaching skills can receive accredited coach-specific training and be coached by professional coach practitioners in order to deepen their understanding. Larger organizations with more resources are more likely to utilize all three modalities, while only 6% of organizations with 100 employees or fewer utilize all three modalities.

Seventy-three percent of organizations plan to expand the scope of their managers/leaders using coaching skills in the next five years; this number is



Note. Responses may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

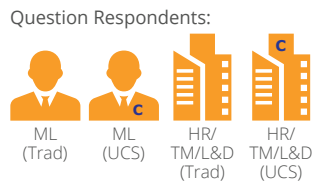
down from 81% in 2014 (Figure 7). Most respondents say their organizations will maintain the scope of internal and external coach practitioners, and 11% of respondents say their organizations will decrease the use of external coach practitioners within the next half-decade.

Organizations with strong coaching cultures give employees greater access to coaching. Thirty percent of respondents (and 87% of those whose organizations are classified as having strong coaching cultures) report that everyone inside the organization has an equal opportunity to receive coaching from a professional coach practitioner. This proportion has increased since 2015, when just one in six respondents (6%) said their organization provided this opportunity to all employees.<sup>14</sup>

Most employee segments have access to managers/leaders using coaching skills, but external coach practitioners appear to be reserved for those in senior-level positions (Table 2). High-potential employees are more likely to have access to managers/leaders using coaching skills than to professional coach practitioners.

Compared to past HCI/ICF studies, there has been a reduction (-6%) of external coach practitioners being provided to senior-level employees. Conversely, it appears that a relatively higher proportion (+17%) of organizations are offering senior-level employees the opportunity to engage with managers/leaders using coaching skills.

**Table 2. Percentage of respondents' organizations offering coaching to each employee segment.**



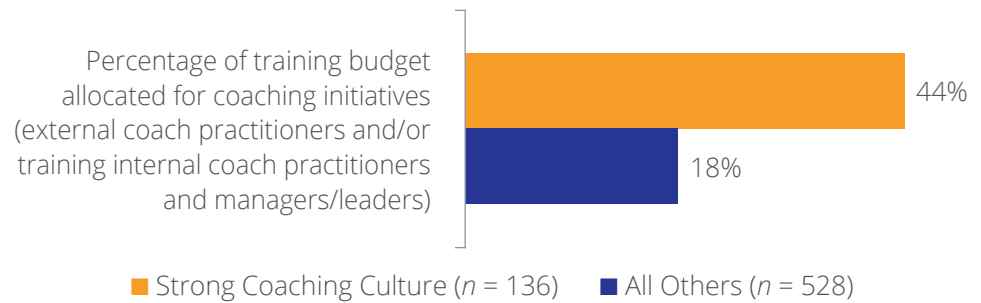
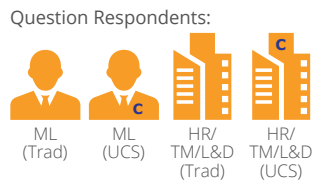
| Modalities        | Internal coach practitioners |      | External coach practitioners |      | Managers/leaders using coaching skills |      |
|-------------------|------------------------------|------|------------------------------|------|--|------|
|                   | 2016                         | 2015 | 2016                         | 2015 | 2016                                   | 2015 |
| Employee Segments |                              |      |                              |      |  |      |
| Entry-level       | 36%                          | 27%  | 10%                          | 3%   | 77%                                    | 69%  |
| Mid-level         | 38%                          | 40%  | 23%                          | 14%  | 78%                                    | 74%  |
| Senior-level      | 32%                          | 33%  | 55%                          | 61%  | 65%                                    | 48%  |
| High potentials   | 37%                          | 39%  | 41%                          | 39%  | 72%                                    | 58%  |

## The Budget for Coaching Initiatives

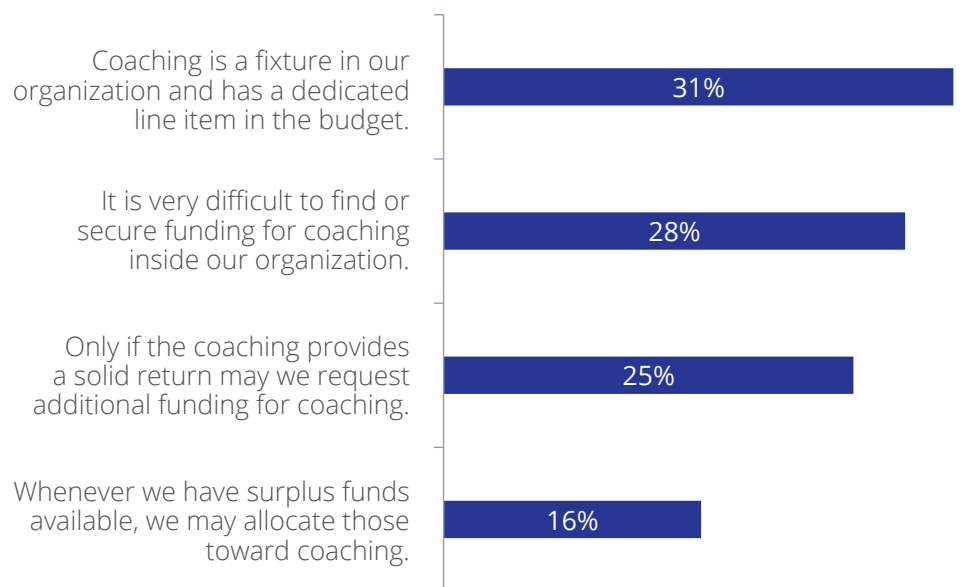
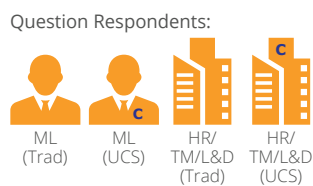
It is clear from this study that organizations have committed resources to offer coach-specific training and provide their employees with access to professional coach practitioners. Overall, respondents to this study indicate that 23% of their organizational training budgets are allocated for coaching initiatives. This overall spend has increased significantly when compared to recent HCI/ICF study findings (11% in 2014 and 14% in 2015). However, those organizations with strong coaching cultures apportion significantly more of their overall training budget toward coaching initiatives (Figure 8).

Almost one-third (31%) of all respondents indicate that coaching is a fixture in their organization with a dedicated line item in the budget (Figure 9). This percentage rate has remained virtually unchanged over all three HCI/ICF studies.

**Figure 8. Training budget by coaching culture.**



**Figure 9. Which of the following best describes the current budget scenario for coaching in your organization?**





# IN YOUR WORDS

## Coaching Technology Predictions

Survey respondents share their thoughts on the technologies that will impact coaching over the next five years.

### Delivery

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- *"On-demand, virtual coaching would be a technology that would advance our coaching initiative."*
- *"A coaching app to let coaches see how their coachees perform with video and comments running on real time would be an awesome technology to advance our coaching initiative."*
- *"One form of technology that could impact our coaching initiative is artificial intelligence-based coaching."*

### Access

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- *"Coaching conversations will be 5 to 10 minutes. They will be done in bursts covering multiple people at same time."*
- *"We would love to expand our coaching with additional opportunities for remote coaching for employees in remote locations or who work from home."*
- *"We need to expand our coaching opportunities to more remote employees, as managers indicate that it is harder for them to coach by phone. Our annual coaching plan documents today are done manually*

*on paper and metrics around sessions are also calculated manually. We have a desire to capture these plans and the activity in an online platform. There is a concern that the face-to-face meetings may be impacted by putting the process online."*

### Training

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- *"The ability to share quick micro-learning modules that remind managers to practice coaching skills via mobile device would expand our ability to focus on and create more of a habit with key coaching skill sets."*
- *"An app to track when I coach or when I am coached would be helpful... as would an avatar that could be used to practice skills."*

### Monitoring

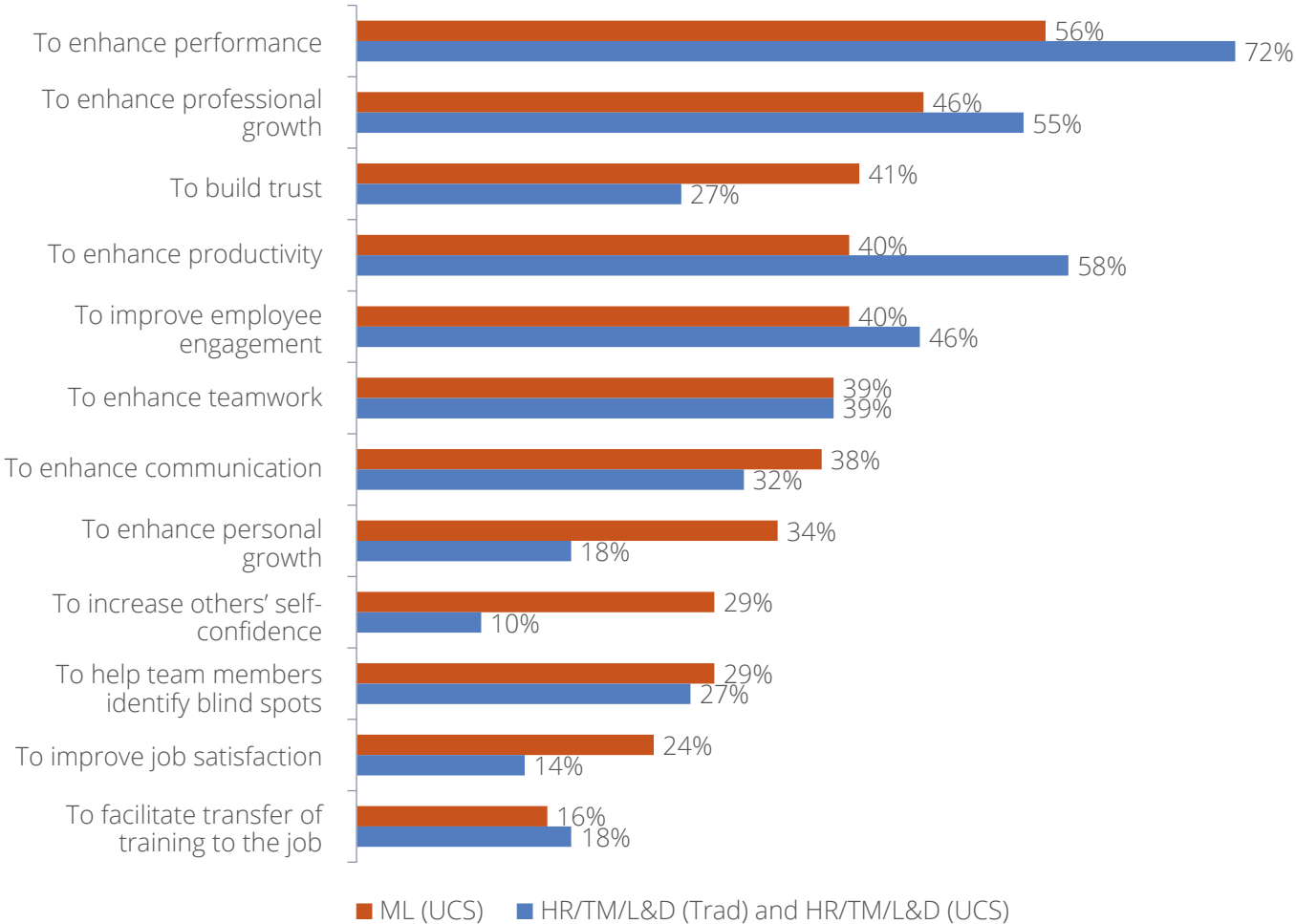
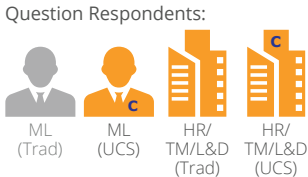
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- *"A technology that we would love is a new talent management system to capture coaching interactions so we can have greater visibility of what coaching is happening."*
- *"A financially viable training portal that would help us track the hours of coaching occurring would impact our coaching initiative."*

### Managers and Leaders Using Coaching Skills

Among the three modalities identified for organizations in this study, managers/leaders using coaching skills is cited as the modality utilized most widely among respondents' organizations. The perceived purpose for using coaching skills differs slightly between manager/leader and HR/TM/L&D respondents in this study (Figure 10). Both respondent groups say the top reason is to enhance performance, but managers/leaders who use coaching skills appear more likely to view coaching as an opportunity to improve the relationship with their subordinates. Building trust, enhancing personal growth, increasing others' self-confidence and improving job satisfaction have differences of more than 10 percentage points between managers/leaders using coaching skills and HR/TM/L&D respondents, with managers/leaders using coaching skills rating these items higher. Performance, development or relationship-building motivations can all be applicable; the purpose of coaching depends on what is needed for the individual at that moment. HR/TM/L&D practitioners need to have an open dialogue with managers and leaders as to the purposes for using coaching skills to make sure a myopic viewpoint does not form in either group.

**Figure 10.** Why do managers/leaders use coaching skills? (Select no more than five choices.)

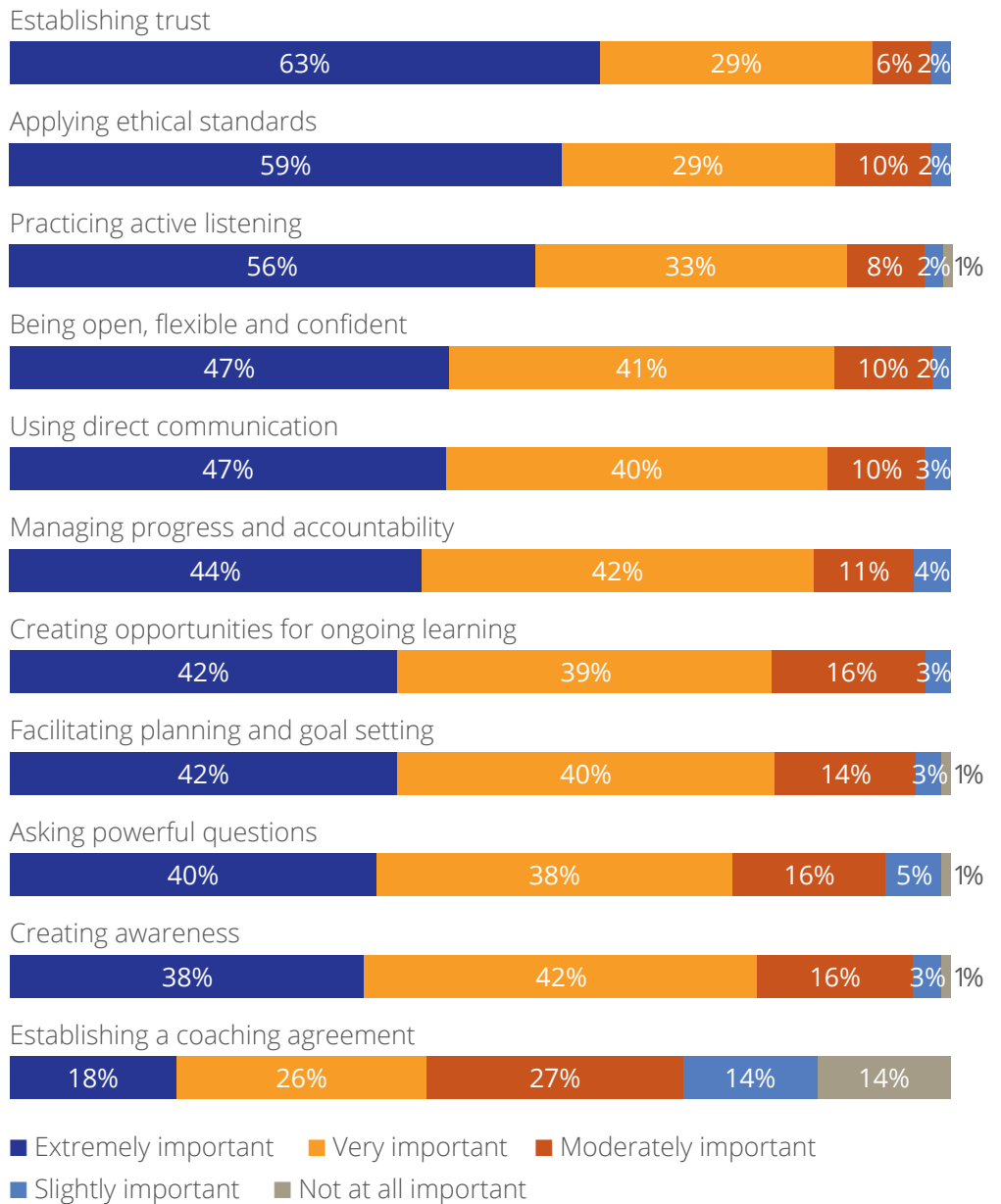


### The Importance and Usage of the ICF Core Competencies

The ICF Core Competencies are 11 skills identified by ICF as integral to the practice of coaching. With just one exception (“establishing a coaching agreement”), the majority of respondents rate all of the competencies either as “extremely” or “very” important. Establishing trust is rated highest in terms of importance (Figure 11). The establishment of trust allows for open communication and the reception of constructive feedback.

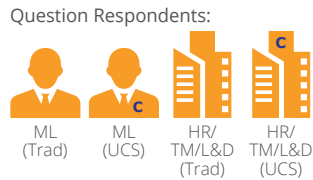
**Figure 11.** How important are the following coaching skills for the managers and leaders to be using in their roles at your organization?

Question Respondents:

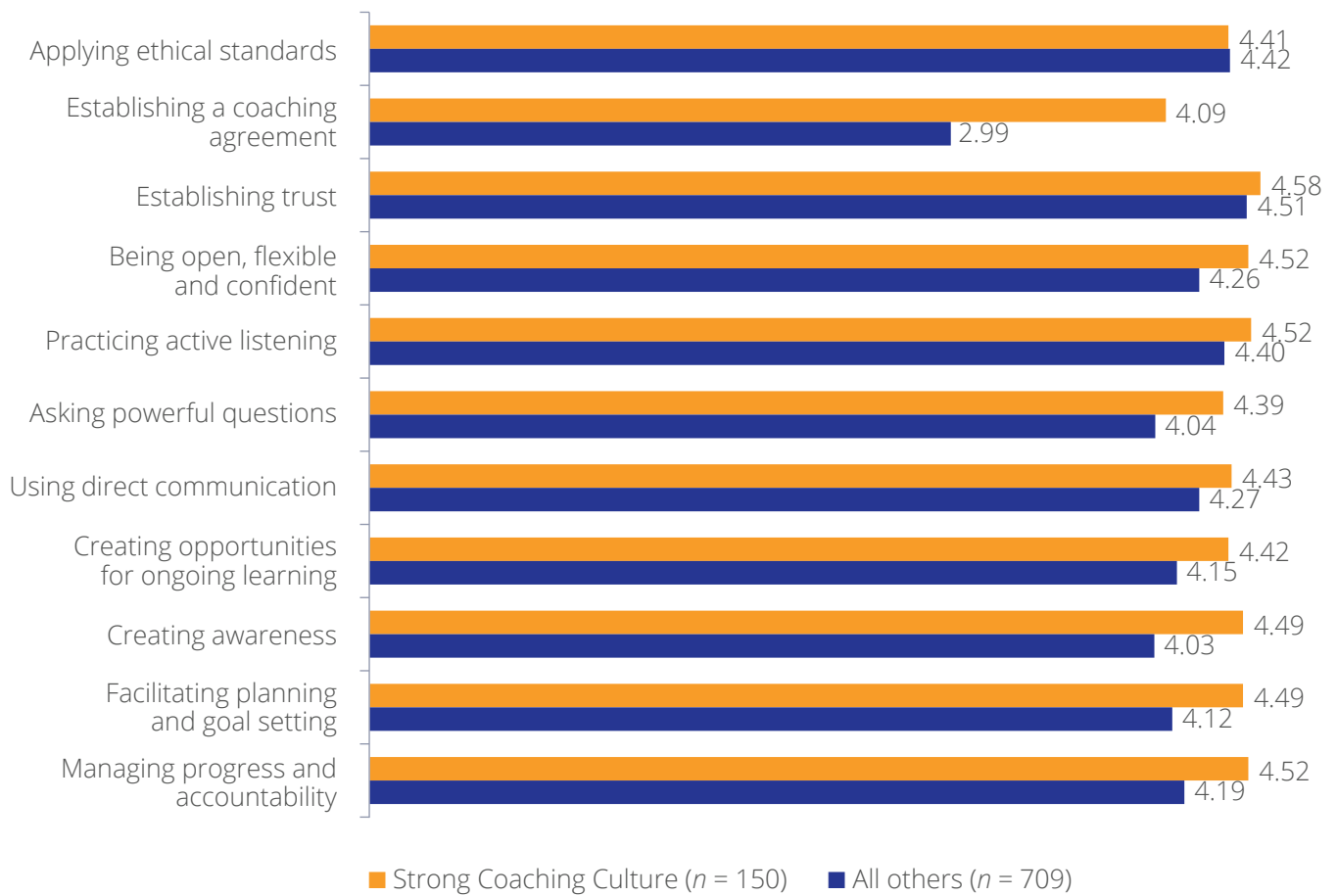


Note. Responses may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

**Figure 12. Coaching skills for managers/leaders rated on 5-point importance scale by strong coaching culture.**

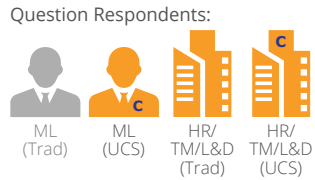


The highest- and lowest-rated competencies call out the duality present in the manager/leader using coaching skills modality. In some instances, managers/leaders using coaching skills model their approach after professional coach practitioners. This arrangement brings formality into the relationship where coaching agreements are strongly encouraged. However, qualitative research has shown that managers believe that a relaxed, informal approach allows them to build trust with their direct reports.<sup>15</sup> All organizational stakeholders (employees, managers, leaders, and HR/TM/L&D professionals) need to determine what level of formality is necessary and appropriate for their coaching culture.

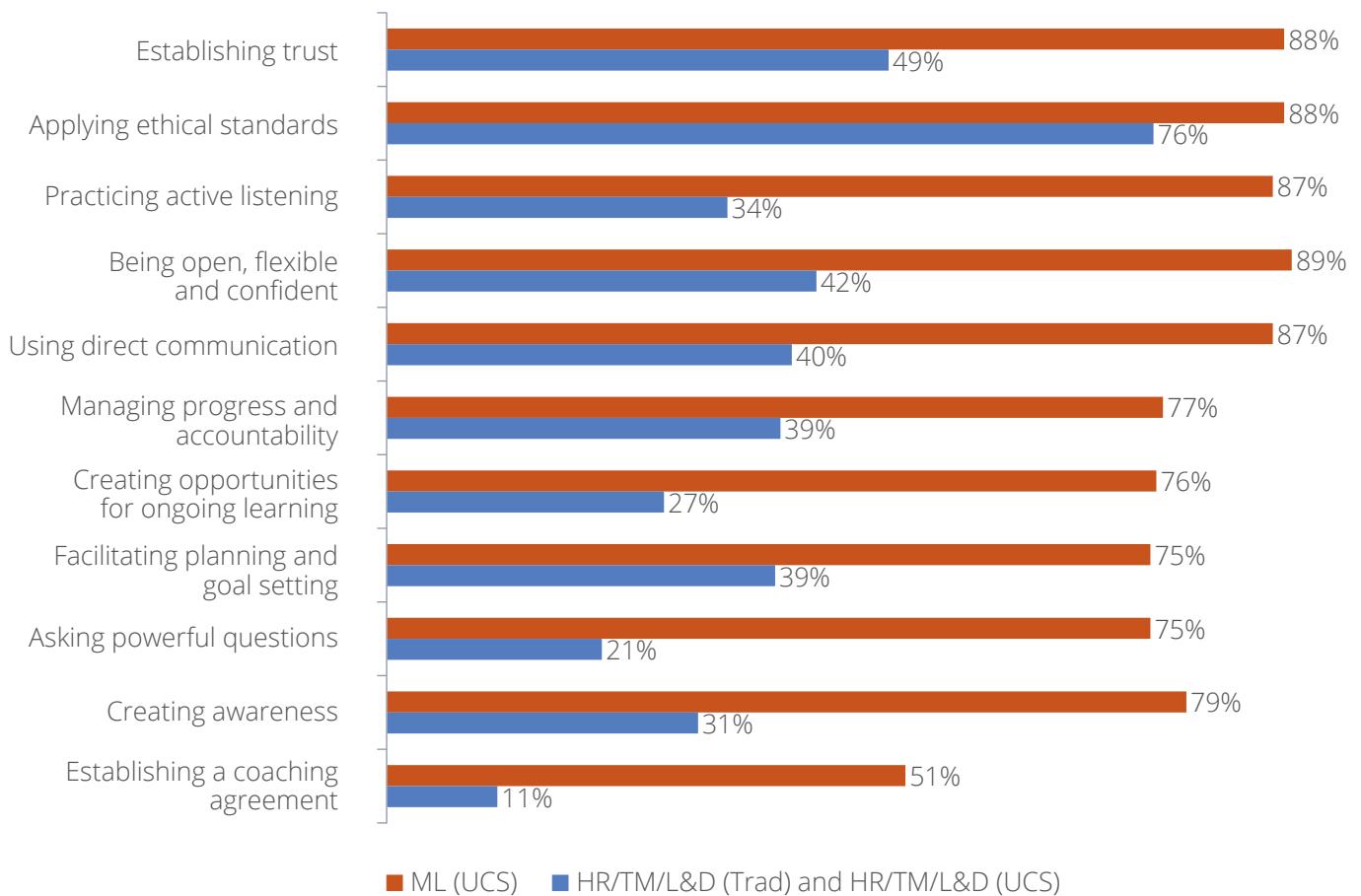


Note. 5-point scale: 1 = "not at all important" to 5 = "extremely important"

**Figure 13. Managers/leaders use coaching skills “always” or “most of the time” by respondent type.**



Organizations with strong coaching cultures assign most of the coaching competencies higher relative importance. The largest difference (> 1 point) between the groups is for establishing a coaching agreement (Figure 12). Those organizations with strong coaching cultures see the need to establish standards and formality around the practice of coaching. Agreements can serve as one way for an organization to hold managers/leaders accountable for using coaching skills and also ensure that employees remain accountable for their own individual development.



*“There is a significant emphasis on the value of coaching, but more training and support is needed so that managers/leaders can effectively use coaching techniques. Coachees also need to accept accountability for their own performance and development.”*

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

Managers/leaders using coaching skills report using coaching skills more often than all HR/TM/L&D respondents recognize that they do (Figure 13). HR/TM/L&D are unable to witness all (or any) instances of coaching between managers and their direct reports, and thus may underreport the practice. An alternative explanation could be that managers and HR/TM/L&D have different conceptualizations of how coaching is defined and practiced, and thus disagree on how seamlessly managers and leaders can integrate coaching skills into their daily conversations. Fortunately, only slight rating variations exist between the perceived importance and frequency of using of coaching skills (Tables 3a, 3b).

Question Respondents:



Question Respondents:



**Table 3a.** Mean rating (on a 5-point scale) for managers/leaders using coaching skills importance/frequency.

| Top Rated Importance        | Mean | Highest Frequency          | Mean |
|-----------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|
| Establishing trust          | 4.61 | Applying ethical standards | 3.87 |
| Applying ethical standards  | 4.53 | Establishing trust         | 3.37 |
| Practicing active listening | 4.51 | Using direct communication | 3.25 |

**Table 3b.** Mean rating (on a 5-point scale) for managers/leaders using coaching skills importance/frequency.

| Top Rated Importance        | Mean | Highest Frequency                  | Mean |
|-----------------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|
| Establishing trust          | 4.46 | Applying ethical standards         | 4.45 |
| Practicing active listening | 4.38 | Establishing trust                 | 4.37 |
| Applying ethical standards  | 4.32 | Being open, flexible and confident | 4.35 |

### Coaching Agreements

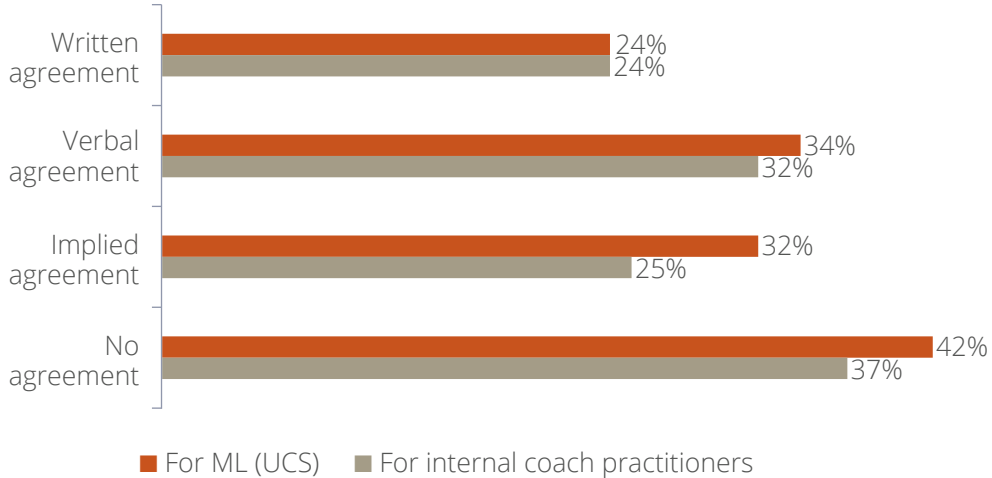
Coaching agreements are useful in that they enable all stakeholders to create a foundation for the coaching relationship. These agreements define the coaching process and relationship, outline expectations, and act as an accountability mechanism for practicing and receiving coaching.

Perhaps because managers/leaders using coaching skills strive to fully integrate coaching skills into their daily conversations, many of those (42%) who participated in this study deem coaching agreements largely unnecessary. It is, however, somewhat surprising that more than one-third (37%) of respondents indicate that internal coach practitioners in their organizations also do not use coaching agreements. This approach does not align with the accepted practices of many trained professional coach practitioners and, thus, represents an important educational opportunity for global standard-setting bodies such as ICF.

Among the potential types of agreements, respondents identify verbal coaching agreements as the most common type for both managers/leaders using coaching skills (34%) and internal coach practitioners (32%). Written coaching agreements are the least frequently utilized.

**Figure 14.** How would you characterize the agreement(s) that are in place for conversations in which coaching skills are being used? (Check all that apply.)

Question Respondents:



Managers/leaders using coaching skills can integrate these skills seamlessly in workplace conversations; thus, they may not see an obvious need to formalize the relationship with an agreement. Interestingly, managers/leaders who use coaching skills are more likely than all HR/TD/L&D respondents to use coaching agreements (Figure 13). Coaching culture stakeholders need to determine what type of agreements are applicable for managers/leaders using coaching skills at their organizations. They also must clearly define the instances where the commitment and responsibilities of managers/leaders using coaching skills lie—to the organization, to the coachee or to a combination of both.

# IN YOUR WORDS

## Coaching Agreements

Selected responses from survey participants on how they use coaching agreements for managers/leaders using coaching skills.

### Written agreements

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- *"The coaching relationship is built on trust. The coach agrees to keep all conversations and information with the client private and confidential. No personal ideas, information or thoughts expressed will be shared with anyone."*
- *"The agreements are written to ensure the company stays within the law and employees have a record of what training is covered."*
- *"The agreement should include things to be coached, a coach's ideal behavior, a trainee's ideal behavior, how a coach must be motivating and methods of coaching."*
- *"Written agreements are used to create a safe environment for the client to explore insights and develop new skills, establish a trusting relationship with the client, engage the client through active listening and providing a clear sounding board, be a direct communicator, design and create action plans and action behaviors, and develop plans and establish goals congruent with the client."*

### Verbal agreements

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- *"Verbal agreements can be used to respect the boundaries and limitations mutually agreed upon in each situation."*
- *"Verbal agreements can specify performance goals, professional development goals, expectations,*

*accountability steps, measurement of goals, what each party (manager and employee) will do to make progress toward those goals, developmental activities, action items and next steps."*

- *"Our verbal agreements are very informal. Typically it is simply stating to the coachee that this is a coaching opportunity. We will be discussing the topic of the moment in a context of a development opportunity."*
- *"Most conversations are informal and fairly non-specific. Managers want their people to do well, but we do not have a culture of accountability because managers (and others) are uncomfortable asking for specific commitments. Therefore, recording them would be too uncomfortable."*

### Implied agreements

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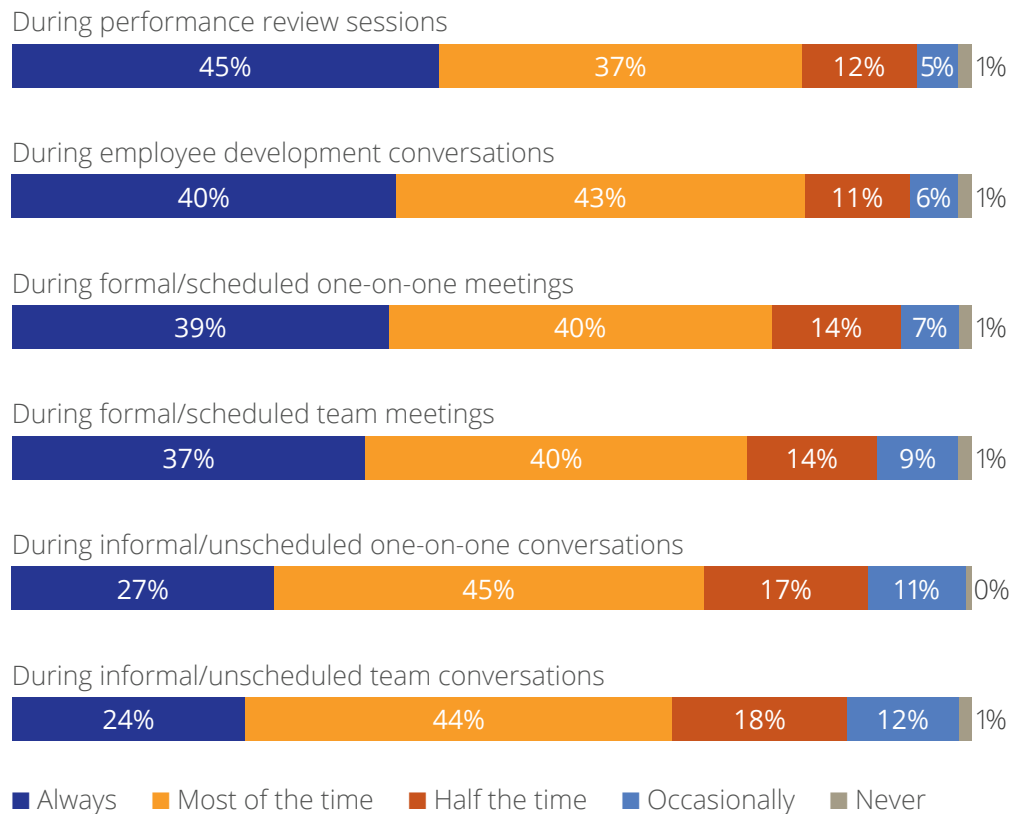
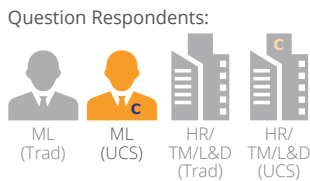
- *"Implied agreements must outline a time period for the agreement and maintain confidentiality. No gossip."*
- *"It is unspoken. I don't agree that this is the best policy; however, it is acceptable in our organization."*
- *"It is assumed that because you are my manager, you have the right/expectation that you should be coaching/managing me to success. It is once again left ambiguous as to what the agreements actually are and they are interpreted differently in different parts of the organization."*



### Situations Where Coaching Skills are Used

Managers and leaders use coaching skills with equal frequency during performance review sessions and employee development conversations (Figure 15). Topics addressed in these coaching conversations can include career aspirations or career pathing, skill-focused development, confidence-building, communication skills, and a review of their performance to date. According to participants in this study, coaching skills are more likely to be used during formal or scheduled discussions, as opposed to informal conversations occurring inside the organization. Furthermore, respondents note they are more likely to draw upon their coaching skills during one-on-one encounters, as opposed to team meetings. HR/TM/L&D participants have similar responses, but again believe managers and leaders use coaching skills less often than these individuals report that they do (Figure 16).

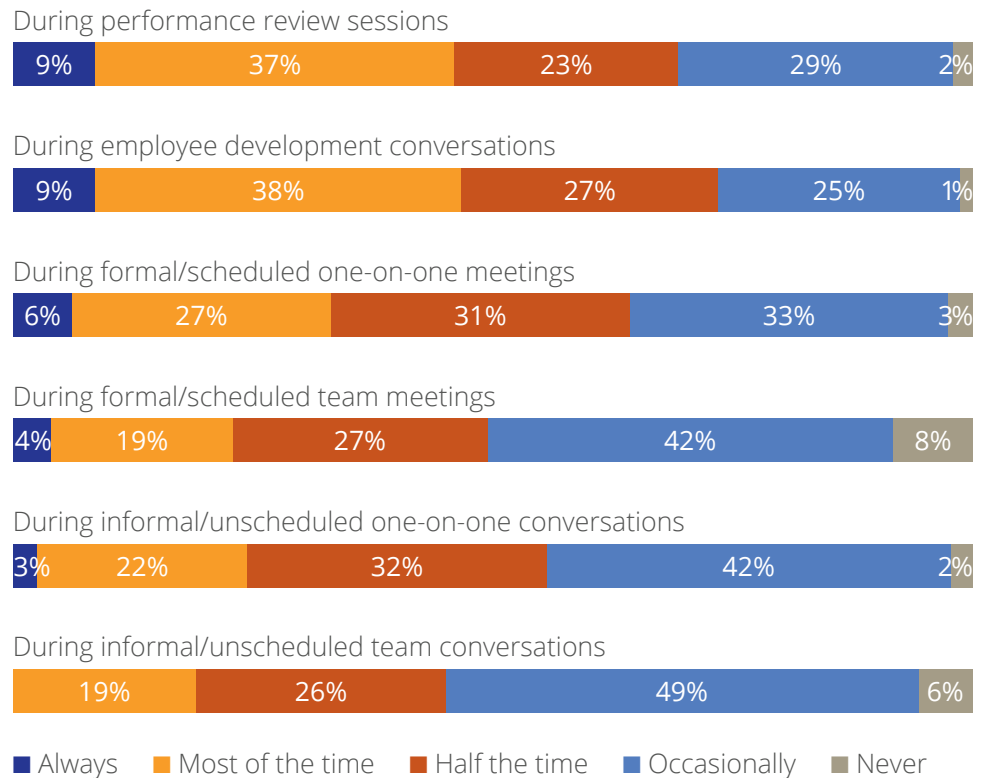
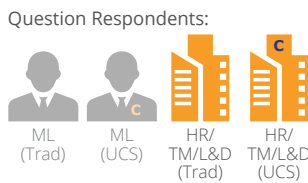
**Figure 15.** *Approximately how often do you utilize coaching skills in the following instances?*



Managers/leaders using coaching skills apply coaching competencies to a range of activities, from informal, daily conversations to structured coaching sessions covering both the performance and development of their direct reports. For some, this switching between activities may cause confusion and managers/leaders using coaching skills with inadequate coach-specific training may increase the complexity and ambiguity for their roles. However, this transition among activities should appear seamless (Figure 17). As one survey respondent says:

*“Managers do need to know the distinction between coaching (empowering an employee to find their way) versus directing (requiring specific actions) or supporting (letting a person drive and be there as needed) an individual. However, I don’t feel coaching skills should be separated from other skills, like leadership, management or communication. We can teach people coaching skills without really telling them they are ‘coaching skills,’ so that they become natural skills to use during managing, leading and communicating.”*

**Figure 16.** How often do managers/leaders at your organization utilize coaching skills in the following instances? (n = 430)



Note. Responses may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Along with the situations to use coaching skills it is worth mentioning the different coaching contexts besides the hierarchical one (i.e., managers/leaders using coaching skills with their own subordinates) and internal and external coach practitioner modalities. Peer coaching involves managers, leaders or individual contributors from different professional backgrounds learning from each other. When the lines of command are removed it allows for free and open sharing of ideas and concerns. Team coaching closely resembles the coaching originating in sports teams. This dynamic allows for greater opportunity to learn from peers, but can be difficult to manage.<sup>16</sup> Cross-organizational coaching is a new area that involves collaboration between two or more organizations. Lastly, the increasing use of virtual workers and teams ushers in the need for a technology solution, such as virtual or e-coaching. Coaching culture stakeholders need to determine which coaching contexts and modalities are the best fit for their organizations.

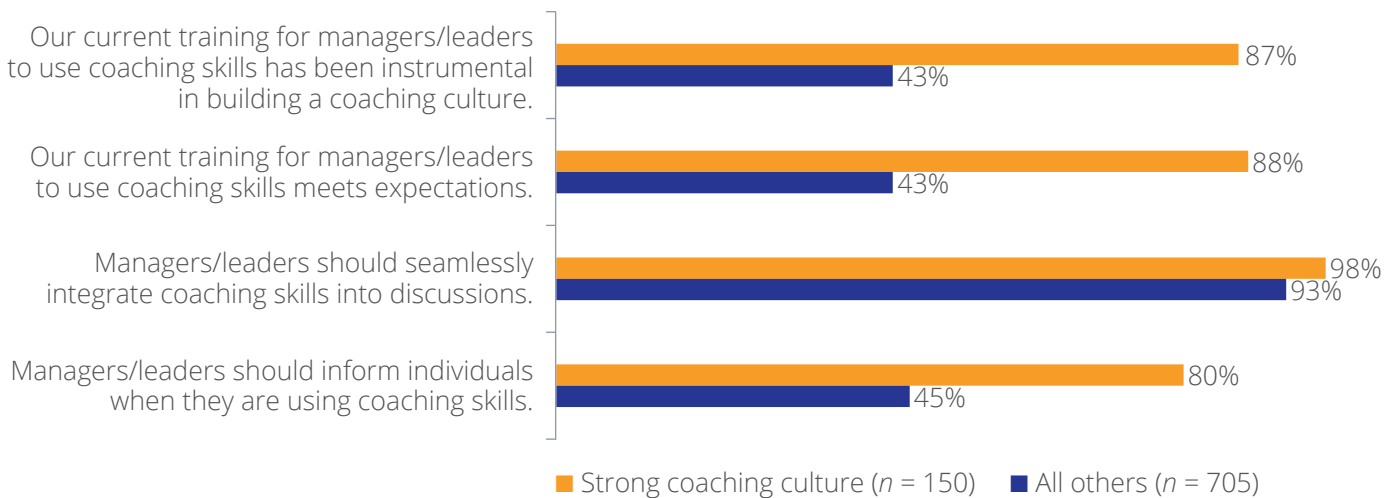
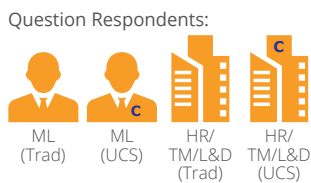
## Educating Managers and Leaders to Use Coaching Skills

Business leaders and HR/TM/L&D professionals cannot expect managers and leaders to successfully use coaching skills without adequate training and time to practice those skills. It takes between three and six months to become comfortable with using coaching skills in the workplace.<sup>17</sup> A recent study of HR and L&D practitioners and leaders reported that managers lack the skills required to provide ongoing coaching and feedback to employees.<sup>18</sup> On average, 43% of managers receive training on how to develop and coach employees and they have almost 12 hours of training per year. High-quality (and accredited) coach-specific training should be immersive and include opportunities for on-the-job learning.<sup>19</sup> It should emphasize practical application along with critical thinking and self-exploration. Ideally, training should drive the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, along with shifts in attitudes and mindsets around the topic.

Managers/leaders and HR/TM/L&D practitioners who currently do not use coaching skills often desire to learn and use them. Overall, more than four in five (82%) respondents to this study who do not currently use coaching skills indicate that they would consider being trained. HR/TM/L&D respondents (84%) are more likely to want training than managers and leaders (77%). The following page highlights some of the open-ended survey responses showing why coach-specific training is considered desirable by these groups.

Organizations with strong coaching cultures have more effective training; 88% of respondents from these organizations say current training meets expectations versus 43% from all other organizations (Figure 17). The training for managers/leaders using coaching skills is a very important part of building a coaching culture; 87% of respondents with strong coaching cultures report their current training has been instrumental in building a coaching culture versus 43% of all other respondents.

**Figure 17.** Percentage of respondents who “strongly” and “somewhat” agree with the following statements.



# IN YOUR WORDS

## Why Coaching Skills Training Is Considered Desirable

### Selected manager responses:

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#### ■ Develop employees' potential

- *"Foster development of other employees in order to strengthen the organization and build a succession plan at all levels of the company."*
- *"Coaching skills are invaluable to gain the most from employees."*

#### ■ Advance in career

- *"Coaching skills can be useful in advancing my career as well as promoting personal skills. It will aid in promoting my personal and professional relationships."*

#### ■ Identify an alternative to managing

- *"Coaching, I believe, is a better tool to assist employees than attempting to 'manage' them."*

### Selected HR/TM/L&D practitioner responses:

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#### ■ Train managers and leaders

- *"A primary reason for me to be trained to use coaching skills would be to help train leaders/managers in the organization to use those coaching skills to improve employee performance and behaviors for personal and organizational success."*

#### ■ Support the development of team

- *"I need coaching skills to support my team and to understand and bring out their full potential for performance improvements."*

#### ■ Bring internal coaching modalities in-house

- *"I would be interested in being an internal coach."*

#### ■ Advance in career

- *"To help debrief 360 survey results, create development plans and follow up on development actions. I would love to expand my skill set and marketability as I further my career."*

#### ■ Improve team functioning and communication

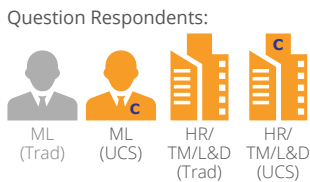
- *"Coaching could enable better communication with leaders and employees."*

### Training Sources

Managers/leaders using coaching skills are typically trained by the L&D department (67%), HR department (61%), and internal coach practitioners (56%) (Figure 18). A positive experience partnering with an internal or external coach practitioner motivates managers and leaders to use coaching skills and increases their confidence in applying these skills. Sixteen percent of respondents say their organizations plan to train managers/leaders from a program that was accredited or approved by a professional coaching organization in the near future.

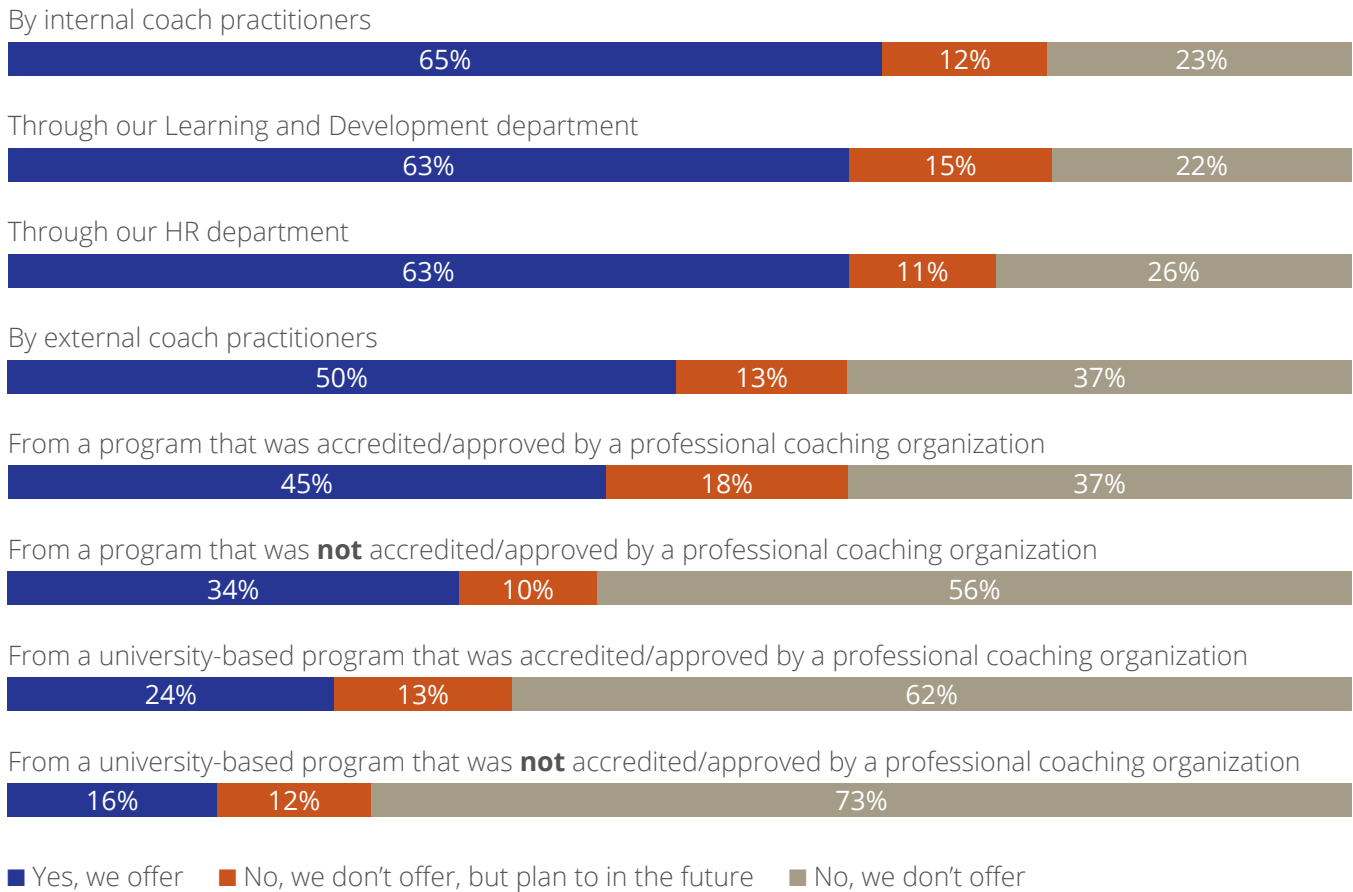
For managers and leaders, these sources of coach-specific training are similar to those which typically are available for internal coach practitioners. Internal coach practitioners are most often trained by other internal coach practitioners (65%), through the L&D (63%) and HR departments (63%), and by external coach practitioners (50%) (Figure 19).

**Figure 18.** How is coach-specific training currently offered to your managers/leaders using coaching skills?



Note. Responses may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

**Figure 19.** How is coach-specific training currently offered to your internal coach practitioners?



Note. Responses may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Question Respondents:



### Amount of Coach-Specific Training

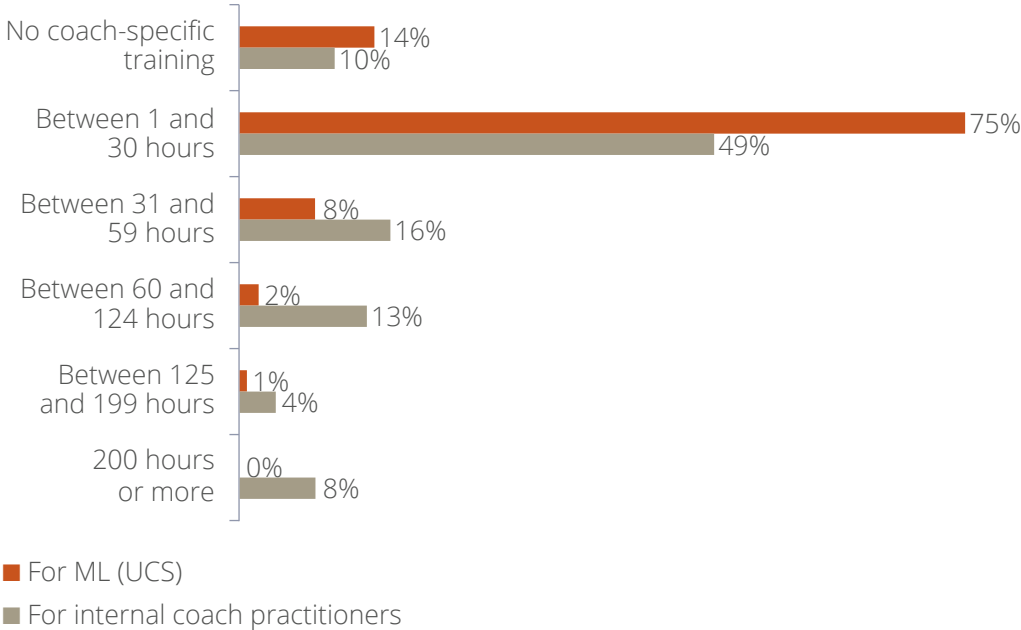
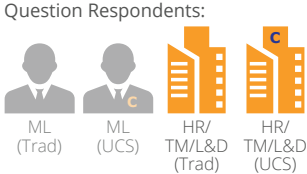
Not surprisingly, internal coach practitioners typically receive more total hours of coach-specific training than managers/leaders using coaching skills (Figure 20). Most managers/leaders using coaching skills receive between one and 30

hours of coach-specific training (Figure 21). Given ideal conditions, the majority of respondents (50%) indicate that their desire would be to provide managers/leaders with between 30 to 60 hours of coach-training; only 30% say fewer than 30 hours is sufficient.<sup>20</sup> Organizations with strong coaching cultures report that they provide significantly more training hours for managers/leaders using coaching skills; 36% offer between 31 and 59 hours, 25% offer between one and 30 hours, and 23% offer between 60 and 124 hours (Figure 22).

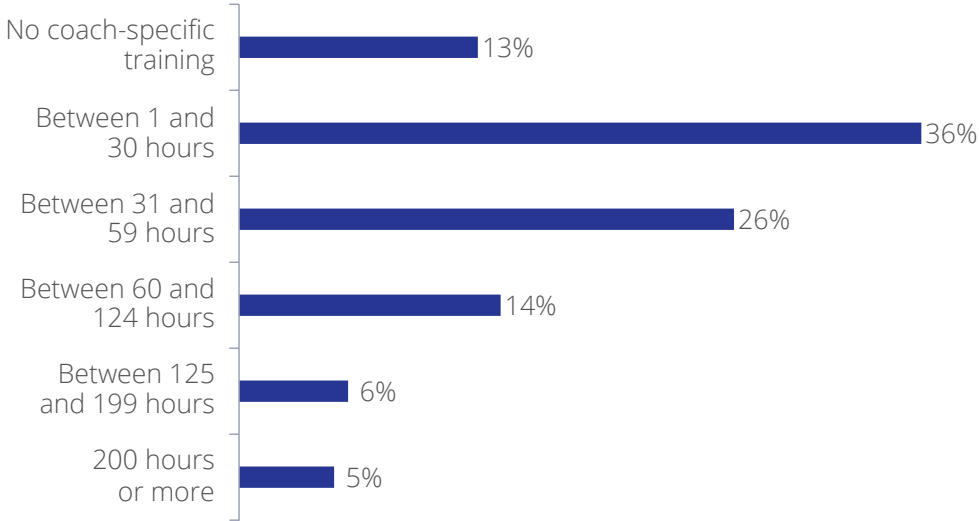
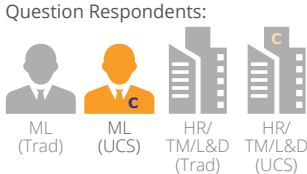
*“The coaching training focuses on our need to coach every day, not only during performance concerns and scheduled meetings. The culture of the program is built by the promotion of goals, and discussion of current reality, options available, and the establishment of clear, agreed-upon action steps. At the heart of the model is the acknowledgement that trust is key.”*

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

**Figure 20.** Which of the following best describes the current level of coach-specific training?

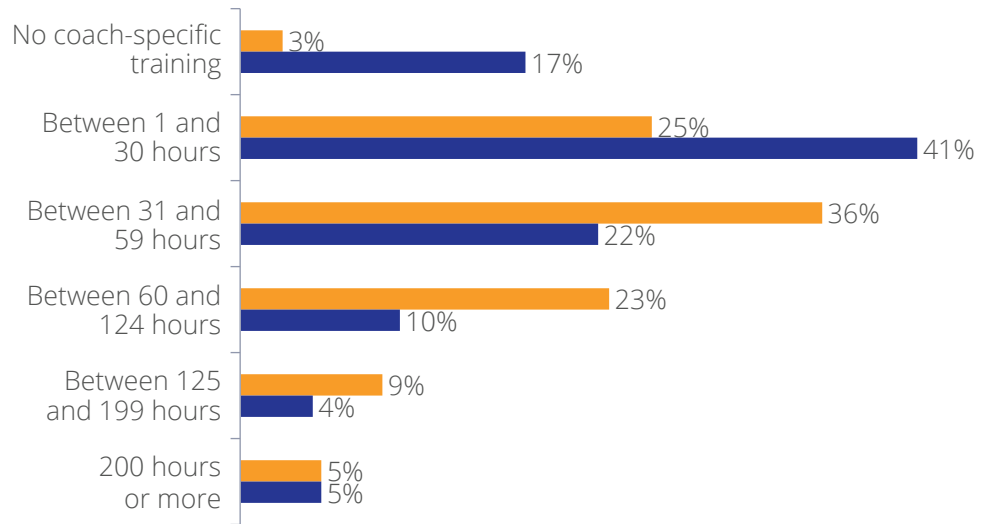
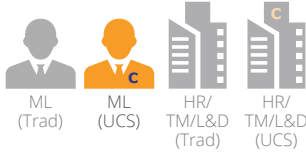


**Figure 21.** Which of the following best describes your current level of coach-specific training?



**Figure 22.** Which of the following best describes the current level of coach-specific training received by you?

Question Respondents:



■ Strong coaching culture (n = 115) ■ All others (n = 246)

### Ongoing Development of Coaching Skills

Coach-specific training should not be considered a one-time exercise. Ongoing development allows for increased skill-building, learning and practice. Sixty-seven percent of respondents who use coaching skills cite more opportunities for coach-specific training as necessary to help support ongoing coaching skills development (Figure 23). Other development opportunities include mentor coaching, communities of practice, peer coaching, credentialing and supervised coaching.

**Figure 23.** Which of the following things should your organization do to help support ongoing development for using coaching skills? (Check all that apply.)

Question Respondents:





## Conclusions and Recommendations

Strong coaching cultures are highlighted when organizations offer coaching to all employees, communicate coaching's value and purpose, and maintain accountability for the process. Senior leaders, managers, employees and coach practitioners all play an important role in developing strong coaching cultures. Senior leaders need to role model coaching behaviors and allocate budget and resources. Managers need to participate in ongoing coaching competency training and dedicate time to coaching their team members. Employees need to adopt a growth mindset and own individual coaching outcomes. Internal and external professional coach practitioners deliver coaching and, at times, training around coaching skills. All of these stakeholders work together to build a strong coaching culture and to realize the benefits and outcomes of coaching behaviors. By implementing the following recommendations, HR/TM/L&D professionals, business leaders, and employees can build a strong, sustainable coaching culture.

- Increase access to coaching.
  - Create equal opportunity for all employees to partner with professional coach practitioners.
  - Embed the practice at all levels with a combination of the three modalities.
- Communicate the value of coaching.
  - Assess and influence mindsets toward coaching; it needs to be seen as a developmental opportunity rather than remediation.
  - Consistently and constantly reiterate the purpose of coaching and measure and share impacts of organizational coaching outcomes.
- Enhance training opportunities.
  - Offer managers/leaders using coaching skills additional opportunities for accredited coach-specific training.
  - Support managers/leaders using coaching skills in their desire to obtain coaching credentials/certificates.
  - Provide managers/leaders using coaching skills examples, toolkits, videos, etc. on the coaching core competencies.
  - Support the expansion of mentor coaching, peer coaching and new communities of practice.
  - Provide managers/leaders access to credentialed internal or external coach practitioners to deepen their coaching skills.

*“We focus a lot of our supervisory training on leaders as they first step into that role, and we have a lot of training programs and support provided when you first make that transition and over that first 2 years. We designed an experienced supervisor cohort where they went through a couple of different classes together over the course of the year, and they would get together for different group learning activities. They were utilizing coaching skills, but it wasn't overt, or using that terminology.”*

—BRADY PYLE,  
DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
AT NASA-JOHNSON SPACE  
CENTER

- Hold all stakeholders accountable in a coaching culture.
  - Have standardized, organization-wide coaching agreements that define parameters of the coaching relationship. Have managers/leaders using coaching skills, internal coach practitioners and employees acknowledge the agreements to ensure clear expectations and accountability.
  - Recognize that managers apply coaching skills in the moment (e.g., informally and unscheduled), along with at formal, scheduled times.
  - Incorporate coaching skills into job descriptions for managers and leaders, and hire and promote managers and leaders who are willing to use coaching skills and see the value in developing their direct reports.
  - Encourage employees be receptive to coaching and feedback, to trust their developmental process, and to adopt a growth mindset.

# IN YOUR WORDS

## Best Practices for Managers/leaders Using Coaching Skills

Survey respondents share best practices for managers/leaders using coaching skills.

### Start early

- *"Embed coaching as part of the on-boarding process so all employees are exposed to it from day one and it emphasizes the importance of coaching in the organization."*

### Change mindset around coaching practices

- *"We are not about 'fixing' anyone; we want our coaching to highlight development and facilitating the learning process."*
- *"Don't tell the employee what to do; instead, ask powerful questions. This allows the employee to create their own solutions when they go through the thought process to get to resolution."*
- *"Coaching requires enhanced mutual trust and respect between supervisors/subordinates. No more bosses, but coaches!"*
- *"The managers are supposed to coach the people not only in coaching sessions but also during their personal interactions."*

### Provide support and resources

- *"We distribute a monthly blog to all managers with videos, articles, book recommendations, learning aids and other tools to support, sustain and reinforce coaching skills."*
- *"We have a dedicated portion of the budget allocated for improving coaching and training."*
- *"We have a dedicated team to monitor our coaching practices."*

### Leverage multiple modalities for training and development of coaching skills

- *"We have created an internal coaching network (about 5% of our leaders participate) in which leaders agree to provide structured career coaching to employees outside of their direct*

*line-of-sight as leaders. These leaders serve as champions of coaching, as facilitators within our coach training program, as peer mentors to one another and a community of practice."*

- *"We have an informal group of managers who meet with internal coach practitioners to discuss how to improve our skills."*
- *"External professional coaches are arranged whenever needed."*

### Offer formal training

- *"We hired an outside coaching firm to instruct managers. The managers then use these skills to engage employees and guide them."*
- *"Coaching training programs are offered in a one-to five-day format to your managers and leaders, designed to provide your internal team with skills, practice and feedback in core coaching skills and tools."*

### Create opportunities for peer learning

- *"We leverage current leaders who have good coaching skills to partner with those who need to raise their skill levels to establish development plans and work through them together."*
- *"We have a mentoring program and community of practice that users are able to download and share resources through. We also use technology to ensure that teams in locations other than their supervisors are not being forgotten."*
- *"We have an informal group of managers who meet with internal coach practitioners to discuss how to improve our skills."*
- *"We intend to set up 'coaching cafes' for internal coaches/manager-coaches to come together and discuss challenges, successes and topics of interest."*

## Appendices

### A: End Notes

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16. See Note 9.
17. 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.
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19. Fatien, P., & Otter, K. (2015). Wearing Multiple Hats? Challenges for Managers-as-Coaches and Their Organizations. *International Leadership Journal*, 7(3).
20. See Note 8.

## *B: About the Research*

This research report was developed in partnership between the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and International Coach Federation (ICF). Between June 6 and June 27, 2016, a survey was distributed via email to HCI members who opted into the HCI Survey Panel. HCI members who opted into electronic mailings associated with the HCI Talent Communities of Learning and Development and Management and Leadership also received emails regarding the questionnaire. In addition, participation in the survey was promoted on HCI and ICF's social media channels and to a list of HR/L&D contacts provided by ICF. In addition to survey invitations delivered by HCI and ICF, we utilized an online panel provider (Qualtrics) to supplement international participation and access to managers and leaders. This third-party survey panel provider distributed the survey to line managers around the globe and obtained 300 responses, with the most of the respondents' organizations headquartered in North America (40%), Asia (31%) and Western Europe (17%).

The questionnaire for this research report was divided into three sections.

- The first section determined what subsequent questions the respondent would receive in the questionnaire. If the respondent indicated that he or she was a professional coach practitioner, it was explained that the survey was geared toward those in HR, talent management, and learning and development roles. He or she was asked to share the questionnaire with the appropriate contact and received no further questions. For respondents who indicated that they work as a manager or leader; as a manager or leader who uses coaching skills; in HR, talent management, or learning and development; or in those functions using coaching skills, he or she was guided to the second section. If the respondent selected that none of the above applied, he or she was directed out of the questionnaire. Respondents who indicated that they do not use coaching skills were asked if they would consider being trained to use coaching skills.
- The second section asked questions about coaching within the respondents' organizations with regard to: the coaching modalities used and for whom, frequency of coaching, number of coach practitioners, and delivery of coaching. If the question was specific to a type of modality, the respondent only received it if he or she indicated that the modality was present in his or her organization and/or he or she used coaching skills. Questions about budgets, training, coaching competencies, coaching agreements, impediments, outcomes and evaluation were presented in section two.
- The third section contained the demographic questions.

The number of respondents who completed the questionnaire was 1,132. Thirty-six duplicate entries, 133 professional coach practitioners, 23 individual contributors, 13 non-manager/HR/L&D respondents, and 48 with no coaching present at their organization were removed from the results of this research for a total sample of 879. See the demographics section for the respondent demographics.

HCI conducted in-depth interviews with experts on the topic, including:

- **Julia Gard Bertermann**, Program Manager, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center
- **Mel Cockerham**, Director of Organization Development & Training, American Trim
- **Ricardo Niles**, Director of HR Global Sourcing Footwear, adidas Group
- **Brady Pyle**, Director of Human Resources, NASA Johnson Space Center
- **Jessica Saltz**, Director of Talent Management and Head of Learning and Development, North America, BNP Paribas
- **Bob Stead**, Vice President of Human Resources, American Trim

To supplement these methods, researchers reviewed relevant information from a variety of secondary sources, including academic journal articles, white papers, articles, books, blogs and case studies. The results of this questionnaire, subject-matter expert interviews and secondary sources form the basis of this research.

### C: Demographics

| Geographic Region  | %   |
|--------------------|-----|
| North America      | 63% |
| Asia               | 16% |
| Western Europe     | 10% |
| Middle East/Africa | 5%  |
| Oceania            | 4%  |
| Latin America      | 2%  |
| Eastern Europe     | 1%  |

| Level of Seniority     | %   |
|------------------------|-----|
| C-level                | 7%  |
| VP-level               | 9%  |
| Director-level         | 25% |
| Manager-level          | 47% |
| Individual contributor | 11% |
| Independent consultant | 1%  |

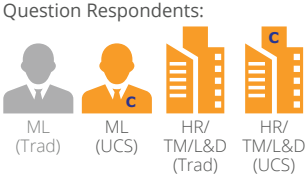
| Number of Employees   | %   |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Under 100             | 13% |
| > 100 and ≤ 1,000     | 30% |
| > 1,000 and ≤ 5,000   | 22% |
| > 5,000 and ≤ 10,000  | 10% |
| > 10,000 and ≤ 50,000 | 15% |
| > 50,000              | 9%  |

| Industry                                     | %   |
|--|-----|
| Manufacturing                                | 12% |
| Financial Services/Real Estate/<br>Insurance | 11% |
| Business/Professional Services               | 10% |
| IT Hardware/Software                         | 8%  |
| Healthcare                                   | 7%  |
| Government                                   | 7%  |
| Retail                                       | 6%  |
| Chemicals/Energy/Utilities                   | 6%  |
| Education                                    | 5%  |
| Construction                                 | 5%  |
| Food & Beverage/Consumer Goods               | 4%  |
| Transportation/Warehousing                   | 3%  |
| Nonprofit                                    | 3%  |
| Telecommunications                           | 3%  |
| Bio/Pharmaceuticals/Life Sciences            | 3%  |
| Higher-Education                             | 2%  |
| Media & Entertainment/Travel/<br>Leisure     | 2%  |
| Aerospace & Defense                          | 2%  |
| Travel                                       | 1%  |

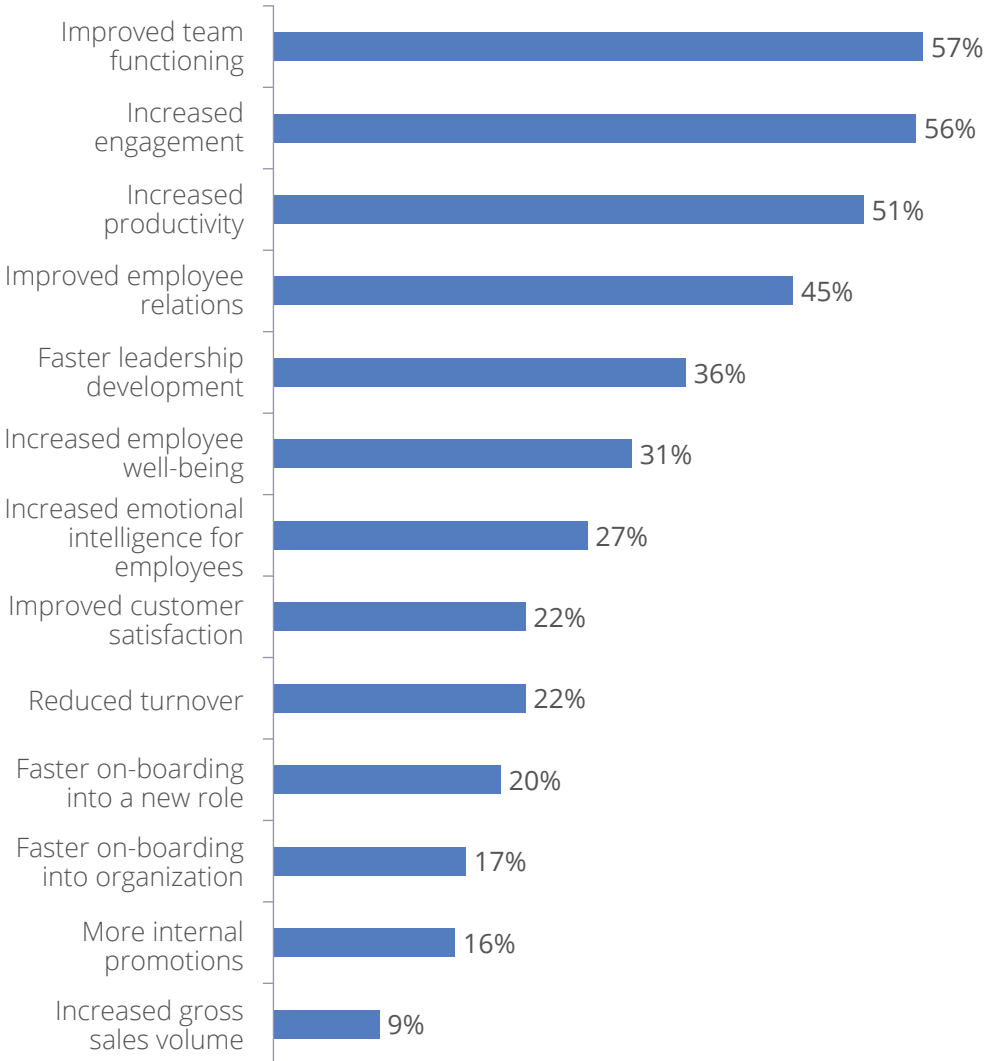
Note.  $n = 879$



**Figure 24.** What are the most important indicators of coaching impact that have been observed for the individual/team/organization? (Select no more than five responses.)

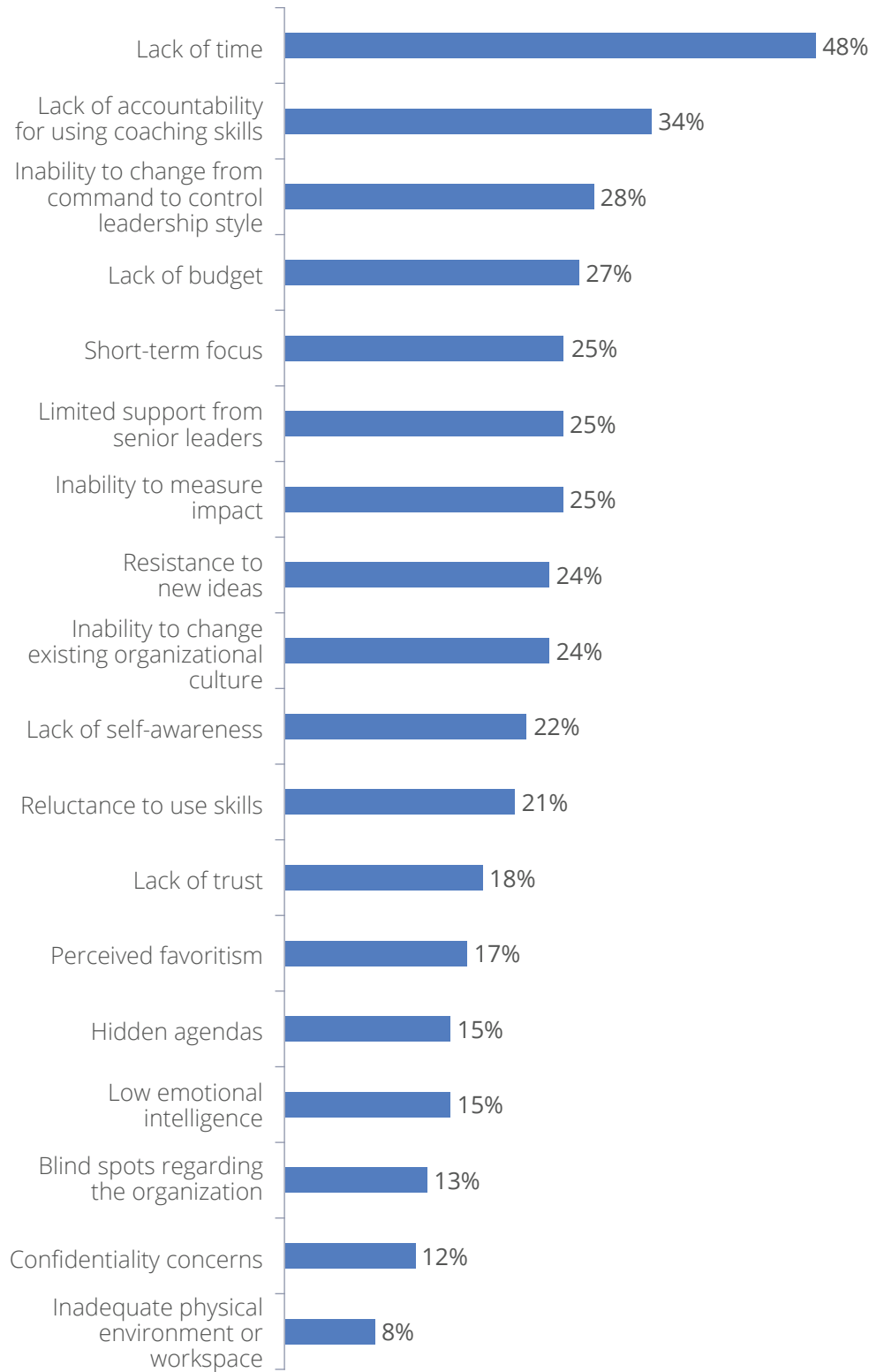


*D: Additional Figures from the Study*



**Figure 25.** *What are the most obvious impediments to using coaching skills in your organization? (Select no more than five of the most obvious impediments.)*

Question Respondents:



## *E: About the Research Partners*



### **About the International Coach Federation**

The International Coach Federation (ICF) is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines. ICF is active in representing all facets of the coaching industry, including Executive, Life Vision and Enhancement, Leadership, Relationship, and Career Coaching. Its 25,000-plus members located in 130 countries work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices. Learn more at [Coachfederation.org](http://Coachfederation.org).



### **Human Capital Institute**

HCI is a premier thought leader in the new discipline of strategic talent management with an unparalleled reputation for innovation, leadership and excellence, demonstrated through cutting-edge research and analysis. HCI Research draws from the knowledge of a large network of executive practitioners, expert consultants, leading academics and thought leaders, as well as thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis, to produce insightful findings and recommendations that shape strategy and encourage action across the continuum of talent management. For more information, please visit [www.hci.org/content/research](http://www.hci.org/content/research).



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