

# Coaching as a Performance Improvement Tool at School<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the current literature and have an insight about coaching as a performance improvement tool at school. In today's world, schools have to survive and keep their organizational success in the highest level because of the high expectations from school stakeholders. Taking place in such a fierce competitive environment requires being more effective and efficient. Coaching can be a key to success for schools if it can be implemented in the school as a whole. The previous research findings show that if coaching techniques can be used effectively by the school principal, it becomes an effective motivation resource and performance booster not only for the teachers but also for the other staff and students.

**Keywords:** Coach; coaching; principals; teacher; performance

## 1. Introduction

Organizations struggle in a fierce competitive marketplace to achieve their goals, to become more effective and efficient. It is observed that more and more organizations have started to implement coaching process to train, develop and motivate their employees and also to keep successful ones within the organization. In many resources, coaching is described as a vehicle which takes people where they want to reach. In this sense intercultural buses are called as coach in English language. According to the definition made by the Turkish Language Association (2014) coach is the person who aims to develop people's leadership or managerial skills. People can get better results in work life by the help of their coaches. Coach is the one who guides the other person through a mutual, short term learning relationship (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002; Yirci & Kocabaş, 2011, p. 11; Sebera, 2004, p. 84). The main aim of coaching is to create a healthy learning relationship in order to improve organizational performance and individual development (Kilburg, 2000, p. 65; Judge & Cowell, 1997). For this reason, many companies are investing a significant amount of money on coaching each year. In 2006, the expenditures of the companies for coaching practice is referred to as \$ 2 billion (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006).

The main purpose of this research is to examine coaching process from an organizational perspective in detail and discuss its use as a performance enhancement tool in work life. Coaching is a very popular topic all around the world and it is commonly used in companies in the United States and European countries. Coaching is a relatively new topic in Turkey when it is compared to the USA and European countries. Literature review method was used in this research and a detailed definition was given for coaching process. The benefits of coaching for organizations and employees were discussed and the implications for Turkish organizations were indicated.

## 2. Coaching and Job Performance

Definitions of coaching indicate that coaching is the relationship between learning and collaboration. According to Cook (2009, p.11) coaching is defined as:

- The professional relationship that enables people to gain extraordinary results,
- Helping people to recognize their potentials,
- The process of helping people attain their organizational and individual goals,
- The learning collaboration process taking place between the individual and the administrator.

It is evident that coaching is defined as a collaboration of learning and this relationship occurs throughout a process. Coaching relationship is defined as the short-term process based on problem solving, which aims at enhancing worker performance and thus enabling the individual to recognize himself (Baltas, 2011; Rosinski, 2003, p. 4; Parsloe, 1999, p. 8; Whitmore, 2002, p. 171; Barutcu and Ozbay, 2007; Ilbay & Akin, 2014; Yirci, 2009, p. 4; Ozdemir, 2012; Arabaci, 2010; Shieh & Demirkol, 2014; Gregory and Levy, 2010). The coaching approach emerges as an ideal administrator model. This approach which ultimates administrator-transactor relations also promote necessities such as work peace, job satisfaction, productivity and performance. Thus, the coaching approach executes a new viewpoint which contributes to creating a high performance and successful organization (Barutcu and Ozbay, 2009). In the literature there are many findings on the positive effects of coaching on performance (Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997; Starman, 2007; Unsar and Unsar, 2008;

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Barutcu and Ozbay, 2009). The main characteristic of workers for most of the organizations is their contribution to organizational objectives. This contribution is the workers' performance at work; and the extent to which they effectively carry out their duties and responsibilities. A worker who displays high performance is the one who fulfills his duties and responsibilities successfully. Thus, one who contributes to the objectives of the organization (Aldemir, Atao and Budak, 2004, p. 291).

There are various factors which create or affect worker performance. These are (Dicle, 1982 cited in Yildirim, 2011).

- 1) Personal factors (skill, professional education level, personal knowledge level, characteristics of the worker),
- 2) Organizational factors (management and labour policy, work design and organizational structure, intra-organizational human affairs),
- 3) Environmental factors (social, financial, political and cultural factors).

Personal and organizational factors that create worker performance can be improved directly with coaching practices. According to Clear (1995), the primary aims of coaching are to enhance worker performance, assign responsibilities to workers in order to help them enhance their performance and enable workers to carry out complex tasks. Workers can objectively identify both their characteristics such as being open to improvement and the problems related to their skills and performances thanks to coaching practices. The feedback they obtain from the coaching process gives them the opportunity to develop a viewpoint of themselves. Motivation increases as performance increases. Because they are investing in their personal development, their commitment to the organization increases too. This helps them reduce their mistakes and in fact turn their mistakes into an opportunity (Aydın, 2007, p. 127). Coaching, which is implemented in order to reach the targeted performance, is a planned development program. Objectives that are related to business are in the foreground in this consultancy model. Emphasis is on objectives and characteristics of the individual that are open to development rather than on the difficulties. It is also a dimension of management. Coaching is not a process in which immediate solutions are suggested, but rather a process in which solutions are defined and implemented step-by-step (Esen, 2006).

### 3. The Importance and Benefits of Coaching

Statements such as "human resource is our primary resource", "we should build up all our employee", "revealing the hidden potential", "organizational shrinkage and age of responsibility" that we hear every day have now become a cliché. These statements will make sense and become valid only when practice and discourse come together. These statements remaining as vain words will bring no benefit. Coaching steps in at this point. Coaching is promising to reach the desired level of performance. Coaching requires substantial changes in attitudes, administrative behaviours and organizational structure. It thus enables carrying out the discourse and embodies the cliché (Whitmore, 2002, p. 27). This indicates that coaching has concrete benefits and effects. Coaching can have significant effects on organizations and employees when implemented effectively. Wilson (2007, p.10) has identified 7 principles for an effective coaching process. These principles are illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.1 The seven principles of coaching**

Source: Wilson, 2007, p. 10.

Awareness includes recognizing the individuals' objectives and skills, responsibility includes taking the responsibility of the decisions made and action includes stepping into action for change. In the coaching culture, mistakes are regarded as learning opportunities and no one is labelled as a scapegoat. Stomski, Ward, and

Battista (2011, 178) state that in organizations where coaching culture is dominant individuals openly share feedbacks between themselves, their groups and the whole organization. This helps improving performance. Such organizations make a big effort for the workers to give more specific and effective feedbacks. Performance evaluations, organizational climate investigations and personnel satisfaction are among the pursued issues in these organizations.

Whitmore (2002, pp. 166-168) lists the benefits of coaching as follows:

- Advanced performance and productivity,
- Staff development,
- Advanced learning,
- Improved relationships,
- Advancement in the individuals quality of life,
- Extra time for the administrator,
- More creative ideas,
- More effective use of resources, humans and skills,
- More rapid and effective feedback,
- Flexibility and conformity for change,
- Even more motivated staff.

Payne's (2006) book titles Coaching for High Performance includes a table listing the purpose and benefits of coaching.

**Table 1. The Purpose and Benefits of Coaching**

<b>Purpose of Coaching</b>	<b>Benefits of Coaching</b>
Building Skills	➤ Help coachee master new competencies
	➤ Link performance goals to skill acquisition
Performance Improvement	➤ Deal with barriers to competent job performance
	➤ Uncover reasons for below par performance
Developing Talents	➤ Help coachee prepare for a future opportunity
	➤ Explain a clear career path
Overcoming Conflicts	➤ Teach coachee how to resolve differences
	➤ Advise coachee how to avoid misunderstandings
Problem Solving	➤ Teach coachee how to think through problems
	➤ Coach individual regarding how to overcome obstacles
Commitment and Achievement	➤ Encourage commitment and build morale
	➤ Talk through issues that help coachee move to the next

*Source: Payne, 2006, p. 51.*

According to the Table, coaching has six primary goals. One of these is improving performance. Obstacles that negatively affect performance improvement should be eliminated. Causes for low performance should be identified as well. The coach leads the worker in how to overcome obstacles which cause low performance. Therefore workers can become more productive through coaching practices.

#### 4. School Administrator and Coaching

Organizations that don't create productive results in their organizational practices are bound to vanish. This is true for schools that are educational institutions. Thus, in order to gain high level productivity and quality while offering their services, school administrators should collaborate with the staff, maintain competent workers within the organization, head towards change, make effective communications, be sincere in their relationships and facilitate learning (Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Payne, 2006, pp. 2-3; Gregory and Levy, 2010; Ekinici, 2012; Sahin, 2014). These statements are also required for school principals in effectively managing the school. School administrators are those who direct the functioning of schools. The role of the school administrator is to manage the school according to its objectives by utilizing all the human and substantive resources of the school productively (Taymaz, 1995, p. 21). With this respect, the school principal is expected to display certain behaviours. The school principal has to (Basaran 1992, p. 113; Hosgorur and Apikoglu, 2013; Karakose, Yirci and Kocabas, 2014; Yorulmaz, Altinkurt, & Yilmaz, 2013):

1. Motivate and supervise workers to work productively.
2. Manage the conflicts that emerge between workers.
3. Enable novice members to adapt to the organization.
4. Promote group work with the staff.
5. Include workers to the administration.
6. Mentor workers in organizational practices.
7. Increase worker job satisfaction.

8. Give workers the opportunity to improve themselves.
9. Supervise workers in resolving their problems.
10. Create a friendship environment between themselves and the workers.

When behaviours that the school principal has to display are examined, it is obvious that along with being the school administrator they should have coaching skills and do coaching for workers. Yirci, Ozdemir, Kartal and Kocabas (2014) state that school principals are one of the important intra-organizational factors that influence teacher performance. The school principal also has to be an effective coach and strive to create a coaching culture within the school. The management model based on coaching is a process which indicates solutions rather than offering instant solutions to reach the desired performance levels. Coaching is also a dimension of management (Esen, 2006, p. 117).

With respect to the relationship between coaching and management, we can say that coaching is a new management trend. Coaching, which is regarded as a quest for new management, emphasizes creating organizations which improve their workers, increase their performances and increase their knowledge and which abandons the traditional mentality of management which focuses on command and control (Day, 2001, pp. 585-586). Thus, the school principal who is assigned as a coach is responsible not only for managing the school but also for motivating, increasing performance, solving problems, supporting the teachers and revealing their potentials.

Coaching practices can be implemented in various ways based on the needs of institutions and individuals. The most common practices are performance, career, administrator, life and education coaching. The coaching approach emerges as an ideal administrator model. This approach which ultimates administrator-transactor relations also promote work peace, job satisfaction, productivity and performance. Thus, the coaching approach creates a new point of view which contributes to creating high performance and successful businesses. (Barutcu and Ozbay, 2009). Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran (2010, p. 284) stated that in order to sustain coaching in the school setting, the school principal should take these into account:

- Show that you pay attention to the teachers,
- Trust the teachers in their self-development process and when they are taking on the responsibility of learning,
- Make sure that teachers speak out more than you,
- Mention about both the opportunities and difficulties of learning and development,
- Encourage them to explore their opportunities and to find the answers themselves,
- Help them in determining a road map for personal development,
- Help them brainstorm on how to carry out things more differently,
- Always be optimistic, energetic and positive,
- Inspire them to gain success by themselves.

## 5. Conclusion and Evaluation

The main objective of this study is to explore the possible benefits of coaching in the school setting when the school principals use it effectively. Examining the coaching process from an organizational perspective in detail and discuss its use as a performance enhancement tool at school is the main focus of this study. With this respect, definitions of coaching, benefits of coaching, and coaching roles of school administrators and results of studies conducted on this issue in Turkey were examined. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran (2010, p. 11) stated that coaching is a white hope model in performance improvement of teachers and other educators. Revealing hidden skills of teachers by empathizing with them rather than evaluating and questioning them is possible only through coaching. Coaching doesn't force teachers to do specific things; it guides them to find options and strategies to be even better.

Although coaching is a very popular topic all around the world and it is commonly used in many organizations in the United States and European countries, it is a relatively new topic in Turkey when it is compared to the USA and European countries. One of the recent studies was carried out by Isiklar-Purcek (2015). She stated in her doctorate study titled "Coaching behaviours of school principals and the relationship with job satisfaction levels of teachers" that counselling is the most important coaching behaviour that a school principal should display. This behaviour is followed by being empathetic and improving oneself. Teachers stated that school principals should be encouraging and empathetic to enable professional development of teachers. Both teachers and school principals stated that teachers should attend trainings for their professional development. School principals consider that they exhibit higher level of coaching behaviours compared to teachers (Isiklar-Purcek, 2015).

Ozturk (2007) compared coaching skills of school administrators in private and public high schools from the perspective of teachers. Research findings indicate that school principals in private schools use their coaching skills more effectively than teachers in public schools. According to the findings "coaching" is one of the most important career programmes. It has been stated that conscious and correct use of "coaching" practices

has both individual and organizational advantages. It enables individuals to achieve performance improvement, recognize themselves, increase confidence and be target-oriented. In terms of organizational advantages, it increases competitiveness and communication in the organization and enables to adopt and expand the organization.

In their study, Yirci et al (2014) examined school principals' coaching skills through teacher opinions. Having knowledge and experience, setting attainable goals, being a good listener were regarded as sufficient coaching skills for school principals. Showing empathy, effective communication, appreciating when necessary, giving sufficient feedback, asking related questions and motivating were among the coaching skills school principals were found as unsuccessful. With respect to these findings, Yirci et al (2014) stated that present school principals should receive in-service training programs regarding communication skills, empathy, and human relationships. Pre-service training programs should also be offered to school principal candidates.

When we consider the literature regarding the positive effects of coaching on teacher performance and motivation, it will be beneficial to practice coaching in a more professional manner in all schools. On June 10 2014, Regulation on Assigning Administrators to Education Institutions under the National Ministry of Education was amended. School principals were assigned through oral examination. Most of the school principals had to leave their schools after this implementation and the number of novice principals increased. Coaching support can be offered to novice principals when they require it. Collaboration can be arranged with universities.

Reviewed literature findings show that coaching in education and business organizations provides significant benefits such as ensuring a more competitive and efficient, organizational structure, increasing employee motivation and strengthening the capacity of employees towards working as a team. In this sense the use of coaching in Turkish schools in a professional and more systematic way may help them increase organizational performance and become more effective schools at national and international levels. What is important here is to adapt coaching practices into the Turkish culture and carry them out according to the Turkish educational system. Practices that remain only as copies and which are not appropriate for Turkish context will bring no benefit for the participants.

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