

# The surprising value of coaching in a crisis

Research report

April 2020



# Introduction

## What can we learn about coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

We carried out some research on the use of coaching at this time, and it turns out that:

- **1 in 4 senior leaders are getting more value from coaching now than they were pre-COVID**
- **People are currently 90% more likely to want fast and frequent 1:1 coaching than group coaching**

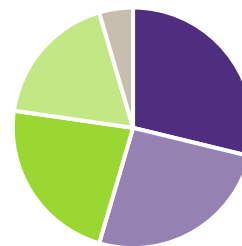
In previous times of crisis, many leaders acted unsurprisingly with:

- An increase in directive leadership focusing on strong, decisive, “tell first” styles over “ask first” interactions built around having time to think
- A cut in discretionary spend on people change and improvement programmes, as well as personal development tools such as coaching

But this time it’s different. Longer-term projects are being put on hold yes, but development and support are playing an important role in helping leaders build resilience and new thinking skills to equip them for this unprecedented time. Coaching has an important part to play.

Organisations using “ask first” approaches are making better, more measured decisions, and those with broader visions of what coaching can do to encourage longer-term, innovative and systemic thinking are benefitting from seeing coaching deliver fast results and a strong return on investment.

## Roles represented



- Leader of OD/L&D/coaching
- Senior leader in the organisation
- Internal coach
- Independent coach/consultant
- Other

Our research was completed by 66 respondents made up of the following roles:

- Senior leaders in the organisation
- Leaders of organisational development / learning & development / coaching
- Internal coaches
- Independent coaches

Businesses represented include global FTSE-listed companies, central Government, the NHS and other public sector organisations, technology and financial services companies, national charities, and professional bodies.

The following pages summarise headline findings from the research, and we’d love to hear your thoughts on this. If you’d like to receive the full report, just contact our team (details on page 5).

# Headline findings

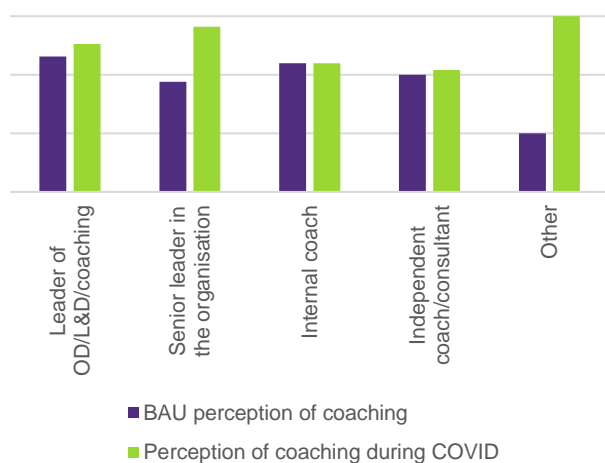
The value leaders get from targeted coaching to support them is perceived as far more effective now than before the pandemic.

Coaching is providing leaders with time to think during this period of global disruption and that's adding real value.

**Senior leaders responded that the value they are getting from coaching now is 24% higher than pre-COVID.**

This is particularly notable as the value they saw themselves gaining before the pandemic was scored lower than that which independent coaches felt they were delivering.

## Value of coaching



In many organisations, OD functions are tightening controls on coaching and wider development spend for good reasons. The data indicates however that coaching for leaders and senior managers right now is as helpful as ever, as a valuable stress tester for them to evaluate their thinking and approach. Cutting down on coaching as a resilience resource may prevent senior people accessing the support many need at a time when they are stretched.

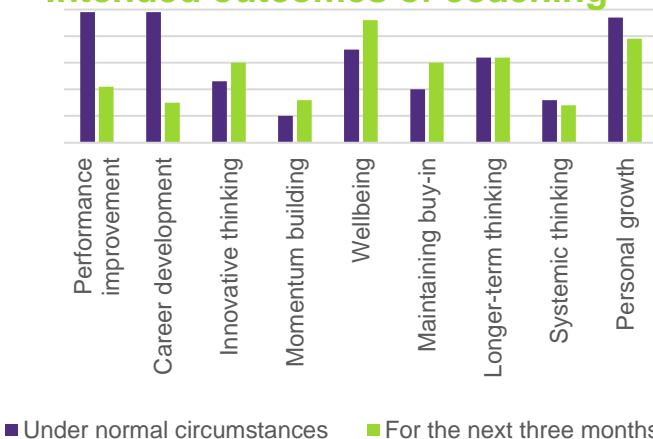
Coaching is needed now for wellbeing more than anything else...say most stakeholders.

Where coaching has traditionally held a place in people's minds delivering positive outcomes around career development and performance improvement, the data tells us that right now, these barely register on the agendas of those receiving coaching, with interest dropping by 69% and 57% respectively.

The primary value area of focus - perhaps unsurprisingly, due to its media coverage - is wellbeing. 70% of respondents agreed that, when it comes to supporting their people, it is important for:

- mitigating the potential of negative headlines and subsequent reputational impact
- ensuring in the coming months the organisation can respond quickly as business confidence starts to return

## Intended outcomes of coaching



However, this increase was not consistent. Where interest in wellbeing coaching for senior leaders doubled, it dropped by 11% among internal coaches, which is surprising. This highlights the increased importance of contracting the ground rules and scope at the start of an engagement: what are the important outcomes for the coachee? Doing this provides a powerful platform for open conversations, from which to build measurable outcomes.

# Headline findings

## Those receiving coaching want it to be highly relevant and available at the point of need.

As a general rule, coaching is delivered via a defined number of 1:1 sessions lasting 60-90 minutes each. During the pandemic, however, most respondents express a desire for coaching that is:

- **focussed on highly relevant topics**, namely resilient leadership and virtual leadership. Senior leaders have a strong preference for resilient leadership coaching – 33% more than virtual leadership coaching, which has been the immediate focus of many independent coaches.
- **available in more dynamic packages and on demand**. Circumstances are changing so rapidly that organisations are having to make more challenging decisions than previously, with less information, and on a much more frequent basis. Senior leaders therefore want shorter coaching sessions delivered more frequently and without the obligation to invest the time over several months, supported by the flexibility to access support in a more agile manner.

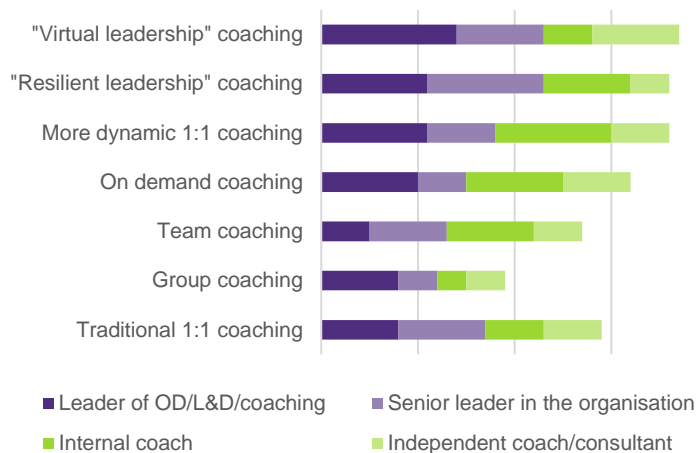
## Group coaching used to be perceived as delivering the best value for money, but that's no longer what leaders think.

Leaders of coaching in organisations recognise that delivering coaching to a group of individuals in one fell swoop gets the same level of coaching activity for a lower level of investment; but that is not the case in terms of the value received.

Senior leaders are more than twice as likely to see value in 1:1 coaching than in group coaching; more than half of senior leaders say their most valuable interaction would be 1:1 coaching.

That said, *group coaching* should not be confused with *team coaching*, which does deliver value during these times. Only 24% of senior leaders want group coaching but 47% want team coaching at this time.

## Most valuable coaching modes



## Coaches can have a tendency to look through rose-tinted glasses.

Where all those involved in coaching roles responded that coaching during these times should focus on building momentum in organisations, senior leaders showed far more caution, with only one third saying that this would be of help. This contrasted with an increased desire from all respondents for coaching around maintaining motivation and buy-in.

So, there is a risk in any coaching interaction that both the coach and those receiving the coaching will bring unstated assumptions into the room with them, and this is highlighted during these times. It is important for organisations to engage with coaches who are particularly agile and able to respond to their coachee's preferences. Coaches now need to recognise the commercial importance of the coaching being delivered.

## Next steps

Our research confirms that organisations should ensure that their senior leaders, and employees more widely, have access to coaching as well as other types of support.

We would be happy to discuss our more detailed findings with you and how they might apply in your context.

# Our coaching services

## Get deeper analysis

The full research that explores the data more fully with more detailed insights is available. If you would like to discuss this in more detail or have questions, please contact [sam.a.isaacson@uk.gt.com](mailto:sam.a.isaacson@uk.gt.com).

## Have a conversation

Our coaching services team would love to talk to you about how you could be increasing the value of coaching in your organisation. Please do get in touch.



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## About our client offering

Grant Thornton sits uniquely in the UK market as we employ more accredited coaches than any other coaching provider. We are a founding member of the ICF for Organisations, and our central team play important roles in shaping the coaching industry in various ways.

Our coach pool enables us to deliver a broad and deep coaching offering that is tailored for each of our clients, and flexible to work around you. Our entire network of more than 200 coaches are individually accredited by one of the leading professional bodies (typically the Association for Coaching, EMCC Global or the ICF), and are subject to our rigorous onboarding and ongoing QA processes.

Our coaching platform is used for management of all coaching engagements, and can be customised for our clients. This offers on-demand information about the coaching activity carried out by us, internal coaches and other providers, and can be used as a powerful enabler for quality assurance and benefits monitoring.

## What makes us different

We believe we stand out as a professional services firm offering high quality coaching. Four particular reasons for that are:

- **We have a coaching culture;** our core business development training programme was featured in the Ridler Report.
- **We are grounded in organisational reality;** as a professional services firm, all of our people are used to working in a commercial environment on a daily basis. We understand the links between coaching and sustainable business success.
- **Our focus is always on quality;** concepts of quality assurance, risk management and return on investment are in our DNA.
- **Our coaches truly love coaching;** the majority of our accredited coaches also have senior jobs within the firm advising our clients on a wide range of technical subjects. Their coaching therefore comes from a passion for the craft and a pleasure in seeing its impact.



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