COACHING – THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATIONAL METHOD

PhD Student FLORINA PAŞCU
Babeş - Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca, Romania

ABSTRACT: *"Coaching is one of the well-known educational methods used nowadays in developing soft skills, social skills and managerial skills. The last research shows that, after the IT industry, the coaching activities are the second more explosively developed and profitable field in the world. The question that raised from this is: "What is happening in our society that cause this acute need of developing new skills?" The 21st Century brought so many changes for society, institutions and organizations which are now looking actively for new and efficient educational methods that can help people to develop new skills and adapt more easily to change. Coaching became the best solution for many organizations when it comes to adapting to changes. This paper explores the changes that have occurred in the last years worldwide and presents a case study about this famous educational method called coaching. What is coaching and what makes this educational method to be chosen in times of change? One of the answers may consist in the versatility to be used face to face, online, by phone, one to one or in groups and the advantage of providing at the same time a feeling of support, guidance, knowledge, trust, motivation and empowerment. Using coaching as an educational method promotes a new pattern of communication in organizations and helps obtaining ownership, resilience and proactivity when facing changes. Skills as ownership, resilience and proactivity are one of the most desirable abilities when it comes to changes and are not easy to develop with habitual educational methods. Coaching, an educational method borrowed from sport and used in organizations mainly in the last 50 years, brings us the hope in obtaining the skills we need to face the changes that are coming to the world."*

Key words: *coaching; peer-coaching; blended educational method; soft skills; social skills; change; adaptation;*

1. Introduction

The 21st century has seen significant shifts in educational methodologies, driven by advancements in technology, changes in societal needs, and a better understanding of how people learn. Some of the most important changes in learning and training employees in the realm of integration of technology in learning are marked by the online learning platforms. The rise of e-learning and online platforms has transformed the way education is delivered, making the learning process more accessible. Platforms like Coursera, Udacity, and edX provide a wealth of resources and courses from top universities, allowing learners to study at their own pace and with the widespread use of smartphones, mobile learning (m-learning) has become a significant trend, enabling learning anytime and anywhere.

Starting during the pandemic, the online have had a wide spread in all the aspects of our society and education is not an exception. Nowadays, a combination of online and face-to-face learning is more frequently used, allowing a more flexible and personalized learning experience. In so called „flipped classrooms" traditional lecture content is delivered online, and classroom time is reserved for interactive, hands-on learning, enhancing student's engagement and participation.

Education is now more focused on Lifelong Learning because of the rapidly changing job market which requires individuals to continually update their skills. Lifelong learning has become essential, with an increasing number of adult learners pursuing education throughout their careers. Organizations are investing more in employees training and development programs to ensure their workforce remains competitive and skilled.

Personalized learning experiences are increasingly requested by organizations in order to better meet individual learner needs, preferences and progress. This approach helps create more effective educational pathways and learning

experiences based on real-time feedback and assessments, providing tailored content and resources to meet specific learner requirements. The main trends of learning programs are holistic skill development, soft skills and and interdisciplinary learning competencies. There is a growing recognition of the importance of soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, alongside technical skills. In the same time modern education promotes cross-disciplinary approaches, encouraging learners to integrate knowledge from different fields in order to solve complex problems.

Competency-Based education is another trend that focuses on mastering specific skills and competencies rather than traditional time-based learning metrics. A new approach in education are so called Collaborative Learning Environments which promote peer learning and community building. There is a shift towards collaborative learning, where learners engage with peers and experts to co-create knowledge. Social Learning Platforms have a similar function, using tools like social media and online forums to facilitate collaborative learning experiences and allowing learners to share insights and resources. The online learning platforms make educational globalization now possible. The internet has made educational resources from around the world accessible, enabling learners to benefit from diverse perspectives and knowledge bases. This globalization also fosters cross-cultural understanding. Programs such as international internships and study abroad initiatives have expanded, providing learners with global experiences that enhance their education and employability. These changes reflect a broader trend towards more flexible, accessible, and personalized learning experiences that suits the needs of 21st-century learners.

The integration of technology and a focus on continuous learning will likely shape the future of education and training for years to come. The paper presents a case study as an example of a succesful implementation of a blend of new learning methods in an organizational development program.

2. Litrerature review

The most important competencies to develop in the 21st century. The demand for soft skills has become increasingly important as

workplaces evolve and become more collaborative and dynamic. Various reports IBM, 2020 [McKinsey & Company, 2021] [World Economic Forum, 2020] [LinkedIn, 2023] show some of the top soft skills to develop in order to adapt to the increased organizational and economic changes:

1. *Communication Skills:* verbal and written communication, the ability to convey ideas clearly and effectively is crucial in almost every field and active listening to enhance relationships and helps in understanding others' perspectives, which is vital for teamwork. Effective communication fosters collaboration and minimizes misunderstandings.

2 *Collaboration and Teamwork:* the ability to work well in diverse teams and appreciate different viewpoints is increasingly vital in a globalized workforce and solving conflicts and navigating disagreements constructively is a key aspect of teamwork.

3 *Adaptability, Flexibility and Embracing Change:* is the ability to adjust to new situations and challenges is essential in a rapidly changing world, especially in technology and workplace environments.

4. *Emotional Intelligence (EQ)*: understanding and managing emotions, involves recognizing one's emotions and those of others, which is critical for interpersonal relationships and effective leadership.

5. *Critical Thinking and Problem Solving*: The ability to analyzing informations, think critically and solve problems creatively is essential in navigating complex challenges and making informed decisions.

6. *Creativity and Innovation*: The ability to think outside the box, to generate new ideas and develop innovative solutions is increasingly valued in many industries.

The development of these soft skills is crucial for adapting to the demands of the 21st-century workplace and enhancing personal effectiveness. Fostering these skills can lead to improved collaboration, innovation, and overall success in various professional settings.

New aproach to the concept of education. In the 21st century there are new approaches to how society sees the concept of education. One of them is Carol Dweck mindsets theory which creates a new mental frame for education and the other one is Hugo Kher's intrinsec motivation

theory which changes the ideea of how to motivate someone to learn.

Carol Dweck's theory primarily revolves around the concept of „mindsets", which are the underlying beliefs individuals hold about their abilities and potential. The author work, especially outlined in the influential book „Mindset: The New Psychology of Success"(Carol S. Dweck, 2006), distinguishes between two primary mindsets: *the fixed mindset* and the growth mindset. The main characteristics of Growth Mindset: belief in development - individuals with a growth mindset believe that intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication, effort, and learning, they embrace challenges and view failures as opportunities for growth; *focus on learning* - this mindset fosters a love for learning and resilience, encouraging individuals to take on challenges without fear of failure. They are motivated by the process of learning rather than solely the outcome; *responses to feedback* - people with a growth mindset tend to accept constructive criticism and use it to improve, viewing feedback as a valuable resource for growth; *resilience in the face of failure* - people with a growth mindset view failures as learning experiences rather than as setbacks, they are more likely to analyze what went wrong and adjust their strategies accordingly, fostering resilience and a willingness to try again; *positive self-talk* - those with a growth mindset tend to engage in positive self-talk, reinforcing the idea that they can learn and improve, this contrasts with negative self-criticism often seen in those with a fixed mindset; *inspiration from others* - rather than feeling threatened by the success of others, individuals with a growth mindset are inspired by it, they see the success of others as a source of motivation and a roadmap for their own growth.The main characteristics Fixed Mindset: *belief in static abilities* - those with a fixed mindset believe that their intelligence and talents are innate and unchangeable. They often avoid challenges and may feel threatened by the success of others; *fear of failure* - a fixed mindset leads individuals to view failure as a reflection of their abilities, causing them to shy away from situations where they might not succeed; *avoidance of feedback* - individuals with a fixed mindset may be resistant to feedback, viewing it as a personal attack rather than an opportunity for improvement. Dweck's research has profound implications for education and leading people. Teachers who foster a growth mindset in their classrooms encourage students to embrace challenges and see effort as the path to mastery. This can lead to improved student performance and engagement. Educational techniques include praising effort rather than intelligence, teaching students about the brain's ability to grow and change, and creating an environment where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process. Promoting a growth mindset in organizational culture can enhance employee development, creativity, and collaboration. A culture that values learning and adaptability leads to increased innovation and job satisfaction. Leaders who embody a growth mindset can inspire their teams to take risks and innovate, leading to greater organizational resilience. Individuals can apply the principles of a growth mindset to their personal development, enhancing their relationships and self-esteem. This perspective encourages ongoing learning and personal growth, fostering better communication and understanding in relationships.

Hugo Kher is known for his work on "intrinsic motivation" (Kehr et al., 2022) (Rawolle et al., 2016) a concept that refers to engaging in activities for their inherent satisfaction and interest rather than for some external rewards. His insights are build upon foundational theories in psychology that explore why individuals are driven to pursue certain activities, particularly in educational and workplace settings. Intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual. It involves engaging in behavior because it is enjoyable, fulfilling, or interesting, rather than for external rewards (like money, grades, or praise). Key Concepts of Intrinsic Motivation are: *the role of autonomy* - one of the core elements of intrinsic motivation is the sense of autonomy or control over one's actions. When individuals feel that they have the freedom to make choices about their activities, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated; *the importance of mastery* - the desire to improve skills and achieve mastery in a particular area can significantly enhance intrinsic motivation. When individuals engage in tasks that challenge them and allow them to develop their abilities, their intrinsic motivation is strengthened; *connection to purpose* - intrinsic motivation is also closely tied to an individual's sense of purpose. When people see their actions as meaningful and aligned with their values, their motivation increases.There are

multiple applications of Hugo Kher theory in education and workplace. Educators can foster intrinsic motivation by creating learning environments that promote autonomy, encourage curiosity, and allow students to pursue their interests. This can lead to deeper engagement and better learning outcomes. In organizational settings, companies prioritizing intrinsic motivation tend to see higher levels of employee satisfaction and productivity. By fostering a culture that values creativity and individual contributions, organizations can enhance intrinsic motivation among employees.

The main educational methodologies. The 21st century has seen significant shifts in educational methodologies, driven by advancements in technology, changes in societal needs, and a better understanding of how people learn. Adult education employs various learning methods leverage adults' prior experiences, promote active engagement, and encourage practical application. The most well-known learning methods used today are:

1. *Experiential Learning* (Kolb, 1984) - is learning through reflection on doing, emphasizing real-world experiences and active involvement (internships, on-the-job training, simulations, role-playing). Key theorist is David Kolb, who developed the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), positing that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.

2. *Self-Directed Learning* (SDL) (Knowles, 1975) - learners take the initiative in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying resources, and evaluating learning outcomes (online courses, independent study, personal development projects). Key theorist is Malcolm Knowles, who popularized the concept of andragogy, emphasizing the role of self-direction in adult learning.

3. *Problem-Based Learning* (PBL) (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980)- learners gain knowledge and skills by working on complex, real-world problems, often in collaborative groups (case studies, project-based assignments, collaborative group work). Howard Barrows is the author who developed this method for medical education.

4. *Collaborative Learning* (Johnson et al., 1991) - is a type of learning that involves students working together to solve problems, complete tasks, or create products (group projects, peer teaching, study circles).This method emphasizes the importance of social interaction and the co-construction of knowledge.

5. *Transformative Learning* (Mezirow, 1991) - learning that challenges and changes the learner's perspectives, leading to a profound shift in worldview (critical reflection activities, discourse with others, challenging assumptions).

6. *Blended Learning* (Garrison & Vaughan, 2007) - refers to a mix of traditional face-to-face and online learning experiences as hybrid courses, flipped classrooms, integrating digital tools with in-person instruction.

7. *Andragogy (*Knowles, 1984) - is a method and practice of teaching adult learners, with a focus on the specific needs and characteristics of adults. Strat with the idee that adults are self-directed, bring life experiences to learning, are goal-oriented, relevancy-oriented, practical, and need to be respected.

8. *Technology-Enhanced Learning* (Bates, 2015) - use technology to support and enhance learning processes as e-learning platforms, mobile learning, virtual classrooms.

These methods reflect a range of approaches that cater to the diverse ways adults learn, emphasizing the importance of practical, relevant, and engaging learning experiences. Recent research and trends put the spotlight on personalized learning, gamification, collaborative learning tools, artificial intelligence (AI).

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model is the primary most used learning model in organizations. Kolb developed this model based on the idea that learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Kolb's model consists of four stages which learners cycle through to gain understanding and mastery. *Concrete experience* is the stage where the learner encounters a new experience or reinterprets an existing experience, it emphasizes direct involvement in activities and relies on feeling rather than thinking. Can be realised by participating in a group project, conducting an experiment, or having a hands-on learning activity. *Reflective observation* happens

after experiencing the activity, learners step back to reflect on what they have done and observed. This stage involves considering how and why the experience happened and what was learned from it. Writing a journal entry about the group project experience or discussing the experiment outcomes with peers are some of the methods used in this stage. *Abstract conceptualization* is the stage where learners use their reflections to conceptualize and create theories or models. It involves thinking and analyzing the experience to understand it and form conclusions. Formulating theories based on the results of the experiment or creating a plan for the next project based on the group's discussions can be an outcome of thid stage. *Active experimentation* when learners test their theories and concepts by applying them to new situations, leading to new experiences. This stage is about experimenting and implementing ideas in practice. Can be realised by conducting a new experiment to test the formulated theories or applying the new plan in another group project. Companies use Kolb's model to develop training programs that enhance employees' skills through experiential learning activities.

The 70:20:10 Learning Model created in the 1980s by Morgan McCall, Michael Lombardo, and Robert Morrison (M. W. McCall et al., 1988), is a framework for understanding how individuals learn and develop in the workplace. The 70:20:10 model is widely used in corporate training and development programs. The model suggests that effective learning is achieved through a combination of different experiences: 10% from formal education, 20% from social interactions, and 70% from on-the-job experiences. *Formal Education* includes structured educational experiences such as workshops, seminars, courses, and other formal training programs. These activities provide foundational knowledge and theoretical understanding, which are essential but not sufficient on their own for comprehensive learning and development. *Social Learning* involves learning from others through activities such as coaching, mentoring, feedback, and collaboration. Social learning helps individuals develop their skills and understanding through interaction, observation, and shared experiences. It emphasizes the importance of relationships and social networks in professional development. Experiential Learning emphasizes learning through doing. This includes on-the-job experiences, challenging assignments, and

practical problem-solving. Experiential learning is based on the idea that people learn best when they can apply their knowledge and skills in real-world situations.

55:25:20 Model is a more recent adaptation of the 70:20:10 model, the 55:25:20 model suggests that learning occurs 55% through *experiential learning*, 25% through *social learning*, and 20% through *formal education*. The 55:25:20 model reduces the experiential learning component to 55%, recognizing that while on-the-job learning is essential, there is value in placing a greater emphasis on social and formal learning. The slight reduction suggests a more balanced approach to support structured learning and collaborative experiences. In the 55:25:20 model, social learning is given a higher priority than in 70:20:10. This shift acknowledges the importance of peer interaction, knowledge sharing, and collaboration - factors increasingly facilitated by digital platforms and social learning tools in modern workplaces. Formal learning is doubled in the 55:25:20 model, reflecting the growing recognition of structured learning environments as beneficial for specific skill-building, certifications, and knowledge acquisition. With the rise of digital learning platforms, formal training has become more accessible and flexible, allowing learners to integrate structured learning more seamlessly into their development plans. This change reflects an increased focus on social and formal learning, adapting to new trends in workplace learning, such as blended and collaborative learning.

One of the best educational methods of this century is Blended Learning. This approach combines traditional face-to-face classroom methods with modern, technology-driven online learning. Blended Learning integrates online educational materials and opportunities for online interaction with traditional place-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of student control over time, place, path, or pace. Key components of this method are: In-Person Instruction (traditional classroom activities that allow for direct interaction with instructors and peers), Online Learning (digital platforms that provide resources, assignments, and forums for discussion and interaction), Self-Paced Learning (components that enable students to control the pace of their learning, often facilitated by digital tools). Advantages of this methods are: flexibility, students can learn at their own pace and revisit

materials as needed; accessibility, education becomes accessible to a broader audience, including those who may not be able to attend traditional classes due to geographical or time constraints; engagement, incorporating multimedia and interactive tools can enhance student engagement and motivation; personalization, technology allows for personalized learning experiences that cater to individual student needs.

A few examples of this methods are: "flipped classroom" where students watch lectures online at home and engage in interactive activities in the classroom, hybrid courses that blend online and face-to-face instruction, virtual labs, online simulations that allow students to perform experiments and practice skills in a virtual environment. As seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, blended learning models proved adaptable, allowing education to continue despite widespread disruptions. The future of blended learning includes greater integration of AI, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) to create more immersive and effective learning experiences.

Coaching is a highly interactive, personalized learning method that involves a structured relationship where a coach helps a learner or coachee achieve specific personal or professional goals. It has become an increasingly popular method in adult education, business, and leadership development, where the focus is often on improving performance, enhancing personal growth, and building specific competencies. Key aspects of coaching as a learning method:

1. *Goal-Oriented* (Whitmore, 2009) - coaching is typically centered on clearly defined goals set collaboratively by the coach and the learner. These goals guide the direction and progress of coaching sessions. John Whitmore's work emphasizes setting and achieving goals as a core element of coaching, particularly through the GROW (Goal, Reality, Options, Will) model.

2. *Personalized and Reflective* (Stober & Grant, 2006) - coaching is personalized to the individual's needs, experiences, and goals, making it an ideal method for adult learners who value relevance and practical application. It encourages learners to engage in self-reflection and gain insights into their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

3. *Skill Development and Accountability* (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) - through coaching, learners often build specific skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving. The coach provides feedback and holds the learner accountable for their progress, creating an environment of continuous improvement.

4. *Collaborative and Supportive* (Rogers Jenny, 2012) - the relationship between coach and learner is collaborative and supportive, creating a safe space for experimentation, open communication, and mutual respect. This allows the learner to explore challenges and opportunities with confidence. Rogers emphasizes the supportive and collaborative nature of the coaching relationship, which fosters a trusting environment for growth.

5. *Behavioral Change and Application* (Peterson & Hicks, 1995) - effective coaching facilitates lasting behavioral changes by helping learners aply new skills and insights in real-world settings. This practical application is critical to the success of coaching as an adult learning method. Peterson and Hicks discuss how coaching leads to behavioral changes by encouraging the application of learned skills to work-related situations.

Benefits of coaching in adult learning are: personal growth and self-efficacy, coaching empowers individuals to take charge of their own development, promoting a sense of self-efficacy and personal growth; adaptability, this method adapts well to various professional contexts and individual learning needs, making it valuable in a wide range of settings; enhanced engagement and motivation, the one-on-one nature of coaching keeps learners engaged and motivated, as they receive direct feedback and support from a dedicated coach. Coaching as a learning method aligns with adult learning theories such as andragogy, which emphasizes the importance of self-direction and practical relevance in adult education. Through a combination of goal-setting, reflection, skill-building, and feedback, coaching helps adult learners achieve meaningful, sustainable growth.

Peer coaching is a collaborative learning method where individuals at similar professional levels work together to help each other grow, develop skills, and solve problems. Unlike traditional coaching, peer coaching does not

involve a formal coach–coachee hierarchy. Instead, it relies on mutual support, feedback, and shared experiences, making it particularly effective in environments where teamwork and collaborative problem-solving are valued. Key aspects of peer coaching:

1. *Collaborative Goal Setting and Problem Solving [Robbins & Miner, 1993]* - in peer coaching, participants set goals collaboratively, and they work together to troubleshoot challenges and brainstorm solutions. This approach allows for a free exchange of ideas and fosters collective ownership over outcomes. Robbins and Miner highlight the value of goal-setting and collaborative problem-solving within peer coaching, as it helps peers establish shared objectives and work toward mutual improvement.

2. *Feedback and Reflective Learning [Ladyshewsky, 2017]* - peer coaching often involves sharing feedback that is constructive and supportive. Through mutual feedback, participants reflect on their strengths and areas for growth, which reinforces learning and self-awareness. Ladyshewsky discusses how peer coaching encourages reflective learning through ongoing feedback, helping individuals to gain insights and apply lessons to real-life situations.

3. *Non-hierarchical and Supportive Relationships [Parker et al., 2008]* - unlike traditional coaching, peer coaching is grounded in equality, with both parties assuming equal responsibility and contributing to each other's development. This non- hierarchical setup fosters a safe and open environment where participants feel comfortable sharing vulnerabilities and challenges. Parker, P., Hall, D. T., & Kram, K. E. [Parker et al., 2008] examine how the non-hierarchical nature of peer coaching enhances trust and emotional support, crucial for effective learning.

4. *Skill Development and Knowledge Sharing [Williams & Menendez, 2007]* - peer coaching is especially beneficial in knowledge-sharing environments, such as workplaces and academic settings, where individuals learn from each other's experiences and expertise. This continuous exchange builds a learning culture and promotes skill development across the board.

Williams and Menendez emphasize the role of peer coaching in creating a culture of knowledge sharing that fosters growth and professional development.

5. *Empowerment and Self-Directed Learning [Topping, 2005]* - peer coaching empowers individuals to take charge of their own development. Through this approach, participants gain confidence and become more self-directed in their learning, enhancing motivation and engagement. Topping's research identifies peer coaching as a way to foster self-directed learning and empowerment, allowing learners to pursue personal and professional growth proactively.

Benefits of peer coaching are: increased trust and team cohesion - working together as equals in peer coaching often leads to strengthened relationships and improved team dynamics; higher motivation and engagement - the collaborative nature of peer coaching boosts motivation, as peers feel accountable to one another and committed to their shared goals; enhanced problem-solving skills - the method promotes creative thinking and problem-solving, as participants benefit from each other's diverse perspectives. Peer coaching is effective in educational, professional, and organizational settings, particularly when the goal is to foster a collaborative learning environment and continuous development. This approach aligns well with adult learning principles by promoting self-directed learning and leveraging the valuable experience each participant brings.

3. Research methodology

This paper contain a case study that explores blended learning methods used in organisational training programs of the employees. The case study uses a **descriptive research design** and is based on **active research methods** with focus on real-world applications and changes to the field of new learning methodology. Data colleting methods are using: **observations** of behaviors and contents of the participants in the training programs; **document analysis** of the organizational reports, records, emails, training plans to understand the influencing factors and to have a training feed-back; **semi-structured interviews** that provide insights into participants' perceptions, motivations, and experiences; **surveys and questionnaires** regarding

participants perception about the training process. Data analysis techniques used in this research are: **thematic analysis** to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data, **content analysis** of the documents and surveys, **triangulation** to compare findings from survey data with document analysis results in order to verify consistency and enhance credibility, and **pattern matching and explanation building** used by comparing the observed data with predicted patterns based on theories, and developing a narrative to explain why certain findings emerged.

4. Case Study

Context of the Case Study.

This case study describes a training program initiated conducted in an international digital technology organization which activates in Romania (to ensure confidentiality the name of the company and location will not be revealed). This company has over 20 years of tradition in designing and implementing soft skills training. With the intention to develop a people-oriented leadership culture in the organization they created a well-structured strategy to grow employees into leaders who follow the organizational values of freedom, passion, mobility, pioneering, collaboration, safety, sustainability, development, collaboration etc. The strategy implied a training design structure that involved gradually all level managers and most of the experienced employees. For the first 1-3 years in the organization, employees receive guidance and different onboarding training to adapt to their role in organization. When employees get more experienced, they can enroll in a self-development training program addressed to all experienced employees with the aim of helping them choose they career path within the organization: expert, project management or management role career path. This self-development program helps participants receive basic skills to perform their actual task in the organization in terms of managing time, stress, resources, relationship and change. They are also given guidance on how to find new opportunities of development inside the organization as an expert in their working area or as project manager leading cross departmental / cross cultural projects, or the possibility to choose a managerial path. Within this program participants are defining their career vision, this

being the first step in becoming managers and leaders. The next dimension of the training design is a leadership program for beginner managers, where the target is to develop basic leadership skill and give the participants relevant tools to perform a managerial role according to the organization vision and values. In this program they continue to follow a similar structure and methodology as at the self-development program in addition they learn about coaching skills and experience individual coaching session. The next training design dimension is for experienced leaders addressed to employees in high managerial positions, which involves guiding and leading leaders. At this level they have access to training and coaching programs with the aim of acquiring high leadership and coaching skills.

Case Study Description

This case study has a focus on self-development training. The purpose is developing participants' autonomy and a sense of "leading self", using methodologies typical for personal development and soft skills trainings. The main aim of this training is to support the growth of participants in order to enhance their motivation, self-esteem and involvement in the company and guide them in choosing a further career path within the organization. The program is structured in 3 modules of class-room training (6 days) with a series of activities before, in between and after the modules, with a 4-month total training time frame. The target group of the training program were experienced employees having between 3-7 years of work experience in the company. The total number of participants in this study is 42, distributed in 3 training groups. The training program was structured into 3 modules of face-to-face training with a variety of topics and methods. The first step of the program, carried out a few weeks before the starting time, involved a series of pre-work activities that consist of a preparation meeting with supervisor / manager to agree about the training expectations, learning objectives and the necessary support and guidance participant need from his manager, and an initial interview with trainer on-line to know each other, to understand better the structure of the training program and share expectation and clarification of the learning process. The next step involves assessing the performance of the first two-day training module in the classroom. The topics of the first training module are: self analysis

with SWOT technique, winning self - confidence, boosting strength and developing a career vision, identifying a healty stress management approach, managing own resources and life balance management. The first module ends with a growth action plan. In between any of the modules participants have one month for the learning transfer in which they are requested to solve work tasks related with the training topics and to have a meeting with supervisor / manage for mentoring and individual coaching for choosing a career path. Also they have to continue digital learning & self-study, have a transfer coaching session with a buddy and be involved in community learning. The next step is the second training module with the topics of: effective communication, active listening, successful feedback and inspiring and convincing others and complete a self-evaluation questionnaire to understand his own personality style and the differences form other people personality styles and ends with a growth action plan and one month of learning transfer. The third training module follows, with the topics of: dealing with unexpected situations, successful conflict management, embracing change, networking and business relationships, leading bottom-up, recognizing achievements and growth action plan. The last step is the post-work program which involves an individual follow-up conversation with the supervisor, learning transfer of the personal action plan, continuing peer-coaching and community learning meetings.

The program uses a specific blend of training methods that can be recognized in 55:25:20 learning model. The formal education category includes balanced action – theory learning methods specific to the classroom trainings and workshops as: case studies, self-evaluation questionnaire, theory presentations, individual results presentation exercise. Social learning category includes free dialogue between participants, interactive activities, role play, simulation, mutual formal and informal feedback, collaboration on activities, peer to peer coaching and counselling, mentoring and individual coaching with the manager, peer counseling process, learning with a "buddy" and on-line community learning. On the job experiential learning category includes reflection & self – reflection, digital learning & self-study, work task problem solving, learning from mistake, personal growth action plan, learning on the job and

lerning from the role of peer - coach. All this variouse lerning methods followed the cicle of David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model creating a design in which the participants received theoretical concepts that they then experienced through concrete activities, followed by feedback and reflection and self-reflection exercises in order to finally extract learning points that they included in their personal development plans. Analyzing the structure of the programs described above, we can conclude that they can be included in the chategory of Blended Learning methods: the training modules of the program are part of the traditional classroom activities or In-Person Instruction that allow direct interaction with instructors and peers, it was also included Online Learning by using in company digital platforms that provide resources, assignments, and contact with managers and trainer for discussion and interaction, and at the cathegory of Self-Paced Learning we can include the individual digital tools that participants were using to perform their individual study (internet and AI as lerning resources) and organizational digital tools as internal chat platforms, data based with lerning informations, time management tools.

Coaching and peer - coaching is another new learning method used in this development program. Participants experience individual coaching approaches over the "before, during and after" discussions they have with their supervisor or manager. Because the managers have themselves promoted similar training program in their career path in organization it is easy for them to understand the challenges faced by the participants and guide them during the process. They were instructed into leadership programs to use coaching in current meetings with employees and because of this. the employees are not at the first contact with the learning method. They recognise it and react openly to coaching approach. Most of them perceive their managers being caring and suportive and they feel that they are listened to and can talk openly and freely in the discusion meeting. Having the communication role model of their managers,it was perceived as easy to use peer-coaching and peer-counseling in the discussions as learning buddys. Because they don't have a proper training in using coaching tools, they practice basic communication techniques learned in the training program: active listening, asking questions and offering / receiving constructing feedback.

Results Analysis

Results evaluation methods for the case study are: initial trainer and superviser interviews, self - perception questionnaire before & after program, program feedback questionnaire, participants observation during training and organizational official documents and individual action plan analysis. Relevant data about the structure of the participants group are described in Table 1.

The participants' group structure consists of 42 people with the average age of 30.9 years, the average work experience of 8 years and the average number of other soft skills training

manage working time and tasks in order to reduce stress and "to keep healthy work balance". This characteristics can be included in Carol Dweck's growth mindset theory regarding belief in development, focus on learning and receptivity to constructive feedback. All the programs' training described above are based on this developmental principles. Regarding participants motivation for attending the training program, most of them have been receptive to organisation invitation for developing, but it was less about taking personal initiative and ask for growth opportunities. They had good reviews about the program so they were curious and open to improve themselves, they

Table 1: Participants group structure

Average age of participants	Average work experience	Average other soft-skills trainings attendance
30.9	8.0	1.9

attendance of 1.9 courses. From these analysis it can be noticed that the group of participants are mixed ages, but most of them are young employees up to 30 years old. The average work experience of the group is 8 years, which shows that most of the participants don't have many years of work experience and some of them are in their first job. The fact that they declare they attended on average 1.9 soft skills trainings in their 1-3 years of experience is a proof that the company is investing in employees' growth and building an organizational culture of learning and development.

The main participants expectations regarding the training program which are extracted from the initial preparation documents are related to: self-discovery: "to know myself better", communication and conflict management: "to communicate better", "how to deal with bad attitude of the colleagues", stress management: "to manage stress", "tips & tricks for how to handle parallel tasks", time management: "to organize better my resources", "to prioritize better the tasks in progress and dealing with interruptions", "to get over procrastination" and regarding life-work balance: "to keep healthy work balance". From this it can be seen that participants are open to self-development and self-awareness and at the same time they are searching for abilities to help them self-managing work tasks and working time. One of the main concerns of participants is how to

wanted to have good performance at work in order to receive rewards or promotions and not necessary because they follow a personal purpose and intrinsic desire for personal development. One of the purposes for this program was exactly to trigger the employee's intrinsic motivation for development and to build a learning community and learning mindset.

From this graph we can see that 93% of the participant have completed a valid self - evaluation questionnaire and only 7% of the self-evaluation questionnaire are incomplete or invalid, showing that the results are representative for this target group (Fig. 1).

Similarly, the attendance to the training modules and activities has the same percentage, during these 4 months of training participants had the opportunity to compensate the missing attendance with one of the other two trading group, which lead to a high attendance percentage to this training. Their willingness to attend and to compensate the missing hours/days represented a valuable feedback about the importance and impact of the training programs in participants' perception.

As showed in the graph below, the "before and after" self-evaluation questionnaire analysis reveals an increased participants' perception about their wellbeing after attending the training program. All the items registered an increase, except the perceived level of stress which
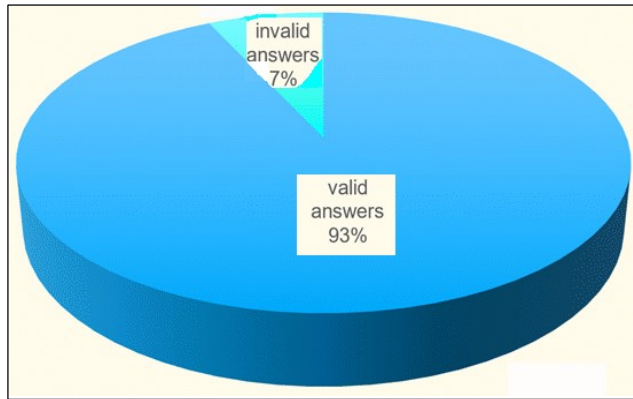
Figure 1 – Completed self - evaluation questionnaire

registered a decrease. The program fulfilled the most important participants' expectations: stress and time management, communication and conflict management, life- balance (Fig. 2).

percentage as "efficiency of communication" and "conflict management", which shows that the participants could find solutions in balancing work and private life time through communicating their
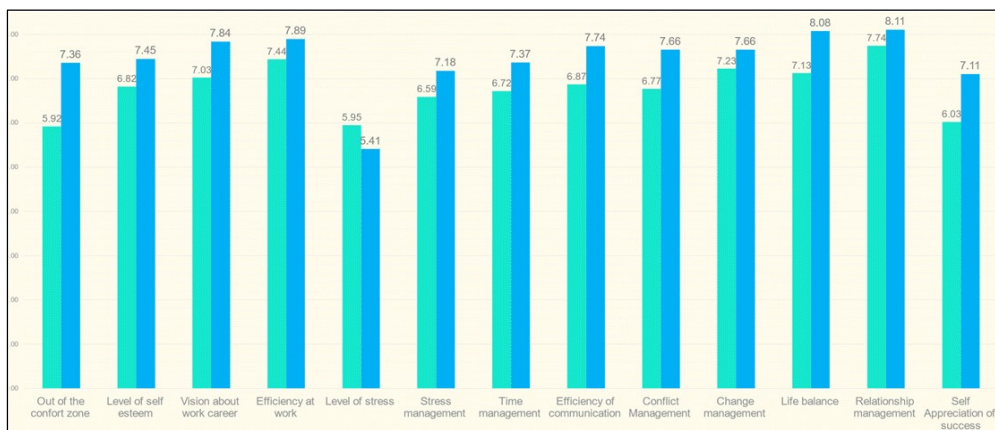

Figure 2: Before-After program average participants perception

The main effect that participants perceive after training is shown in the increased items "out of the comfort zone" with 24% and "self-appreciation of success" with 18% which reveals the interactive and challenging characteristics of the training program. A personal development program challenges the participants to express their more intimate thoughts and feelings in front of others and to become vulnerable in a group of people, which most of them didn't experience before the program. The groups consisted of a variety of organizational roles, with different work experience and ages, all of this being beneficial for the achievements, but in the same time quite challenging (Fig. 3). The "life balance" item increased with 13%, similar

needs to the manager and team members, in the same time using time management tools and managing stress and conflicts. This was one of the most important expectations of the participants which, due to their lack of work experience and efficiency have the tendency to spent long time dealing with job tasks and even taking them home after working hours, resulting in an increased level of stress over time. A good impact in lowering stress levels was defining a clearer career vision (12%). As a result of individual reflection and peer/group discussions during training and individual coaching with the managers, participants have decided the main direction of their career path in the organization and this helped them to be more oriented and focused on
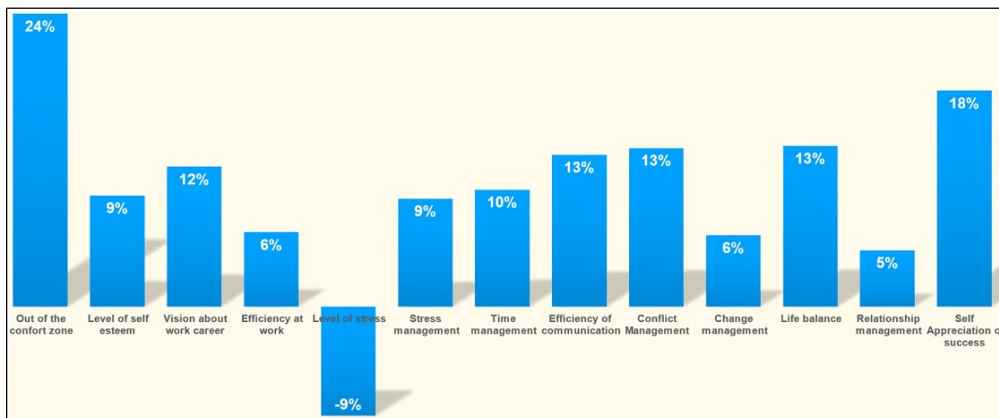
Figure 3: Percentage increase results

the performance they pursue. This also helps them to have a better appreciation of their success. Most of them have great performance at work mostly because of the high level of stress, and they end up not appreciating their achievement at their real value. We can see that there is a direct connection between increased stress management abilities (9%) and the decrease of perceived level of stress (9%). Because organization is facing a number of changes starting with pandemic period, in addition to many other internal changes occurring before and during the program, participants perceived their work as less efficient, with only 6% increase in efficiency. This had a direct impact on perceived level of self-esteem (9%) despite their increased ability to appreciate their success and despite the fact that training had a strong focus on boosting strengths and offering positive and constructive feedback to participants. In two specific cases self-esteem decreases after the training compared with the start evaluation, due to some stressful challenges the participants faced at work. This underlines the difficulty of keeping a high level of self-esteem during stressful periods and the necessity to build better resilience when facing changes. Relationship item has the lowest percentage mostly because of the participants' perceptions that they have already good relationships at work, and they do not focus during the practice on changing relationships.

Trainer observations on the participants' behaviors and difficulties during the classroom training period indicates there is a genuine interest among participants on being kind and therefore they were more open in expressing themselves and accepting a diversity of opinions and perceptions. Additional to this approach, most of

the participants showed a tendency to be critical of themselves and perfectionists, which had a direct influence on their level of self-esteem. The group and peer positive feedback exercise and the ones that boost strengths represented a challenge and had a direct impact of their inner state, recognizing the importance of a realistic perceptions of their achievements. In achieving better communication skills, the most challenging practice was the active listening techniques and the most appreciated one was the practice of presentation skills. During the peer discussions they could practice more active listening and prepare for achieving coaching skills in the future and because of a significant number of presentations exercise, they achieved more trust in becoming vulnerable and authentic when talking in front of a group of people. Another observation is about willingness to step out of comfort zone. Their openness during the training program showed that participants are receptive to change and to self-development and they are good at self-reflection and open to feedback, the only quality they need to add is a better resilience and a higher level of stress management.

Coaching and peer-coaching methods used in this program even though not performed by a coaching expert, had an impact in helping participants to clarify their training goals and objectives and at the same time defining their career vision. Discussions with supervisor / manager helped them understand their opportunities within the organization and gain the support they need to achieve the professional and learning goals. They also received relevant feedback which guide their further development. It helped also to personalize the learning process

and gain a positive perspective of how to conduct coaching discussion with their peers. The coaching discussion prepared them for the reflective and self-reflecting techniques used throughout the program and encouraged and empowered them to step out of the comfort zone and embrace change. The supervisor feedback helped them to have a more realistic appreciation of their achievements, abilities and skills. In the end it helped to promote a positive attitude towards learning and guide participants more closely into discovering their intrinsic motivations and visions. Peer-coaching was an attractive method to promote positive interactions and relationships among the participants. They had a receptive attitude towards this learning method and even though majority of them didn't know each other at the beginning of the program, till the end of the first training module they found a peer to work with during the training and also outside the classroom and they meet face to face or online, according to their personal work schedule. Except for the output, it was not possible to supervise their meetings in between the training modules, but because they continued their exercises in the classroom, it was possible to observe their attitude and implication. A relevant finding about the impact of this method was that till the end, most of the peers became close friends and expressed their intention to continue their connection outside the learning context. The only method that did not have a significant impact was the community learning initiative. Due the fact that this communities are internally initiated inside the organization and become available freely for all members and there is not a specific person to take the responsibility of organizing them, they did not became spontaneously functional. The organization offers all the resources and creates the context for this communities to exist, but because of the overloaded work schedule, the community meetings did not have place.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, a development training program that uses blended learning methods can have a positive and significant impact on participants' openness for learning and their perception of learning objective achievement.

The coaching learning methods bring clarity to participants' development objectives according to their vision and personal values. Managers practicing coaching techniques can create a trustful connection with the employees, which makes open communication possible, promotes feedback and support in difficult moments, promotes problem solving skills and critical thinking and lead them to find their intrinsic motivation at work. Feedback that supports this conclusion is the positive opinion that participants have of their managers. Peer-coaching leads to closer relationships among employees, mutual support and collaboration and can develop teamwork skills and diversity acceptance and integration, especially for companies working in multicultural context.

During an intense period of change, in order to help employees to adapt easily, a supportive and open communication between employee and managers is needed and a good way to achieve it is to implement one to one discussions employee – manager based on coaching skills as a current managerial practice. This case study reveals that too many changes at the same time can affect easily employees' level of stress, self-image and self-esteem, resulting in a decrease in performance and an increase in stress levels which can lead to mistakes, burnout and turnover, because life balance became an important objective for the young generation.

One of the most significant aspects of a successful development program is consistency in promoting and organizing long-term development strategies for the employees.

This case study shows the importance of creating a growing mindset among employees and an organizational culture of learning and development. This starts with the managerial focus on employee's development needs and with creating an organizational environment that facilitates participants learning objectives implementation into practice, supporting changes and constructive feedback. It's important that managers themselves become role models that can be followed by employees. Training programs using blended learning methods mixed with coaching techniques and proper supervision and involvement of managers into supporting and guiding the learning process represent a step forward in 21ˢᵗ century adults' education.

References

1. Barrows, H. S., & Tamblyn, R. M. (1980). *Problem-Based Learning: An Approach to Medical Education* . Springer.
2. Bates, A. W. (2015). *Teaching in a Digital Age*. Tony Bates Associates Ltd.
3. Carol S. Dweck. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House Publishing Group.
4. Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2007). *Blended Learning in Higher Education*. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118269558.
5. IBM. (2020). *IBM Annual Report* 2020.
6. Johnson, D. W. , Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (1991). *Cooperative Learning: Increasing College Faculty Instructional Productivity*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 20(4). https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.3640200401.
7. Kehr, H. M., Voigt, J., & Rawolle, M. (2022). *Implicit motives as the missing link between visionary leadership, approach and avoidance motivation, and vision pursuit*. Organizational Psychology Review, 12(2), 135–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/ 20413866211061364.
8. Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*. Prentice Hall.
9. Knowles, M. S. (1984). *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. Gulf Publishing.
10. Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience As The Source Of Learning And Development*. Prentice-Hall.
11. Ladyshewsky, R. K. (2017). *Peer coaching as a strategy to increase learning and development in organizational life–a perspective*. International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, 15(1), 4–10.
12. LinkedIn. (2023). *Workplace Learning Report* 2023.
13. McCall, M. W., Lombardo, M. M., & Morrison, A. M. (1988). *The Lessons of Experience: How Successful Executives Develop on the Job*. Lexington Books.
14. McKinsey & Company. (2021). McKinsey Global Surveys 2021.
15. Mezirow, Jack. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. Jossey-Bass. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369204200309.
16. Parker, P., Hall, D. T., & Kram, K. E. (2008). *Peer coaching: A relational process for accelerating career learning*. Academy of Management Learning & Education", 7(4), 487–503.
17. Passmore, J., & Fillery-Travis, A. (2011). *A critical review of executive coaching research: a decade of progress and what's to come*. Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice, 4(2), 70–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/ 17521882.2011.596484.
18. Peterson, D. B., & Hicks, M. D. (1995). *Development FIRST: Strategies for Self-Development*. Personnel Decisions International.
19. Rawolle, M., Wallis, M. S. v., Badham, R., & Kehr, H. M. (2016). *No fit, no fun: The effect of motive incongruence on job burnout and the mediating role of intrinsic motivation*. Personality and Individual Differences, 89, 65–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.09.030.
20. Robbins, A., & Miner, C. (1993). *Self-Coaching: How to Improve Performance on the Job and in Life*. Warner Books.
21. Rogers Jenny. (2012). Coaching Skills: *A Handbook*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
22. Stober, D. R., & Grant, A. M. (2006). *Evidence Based Coaching Handbook: Putting Best Practices to Work for Your Clients*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc..
23. Topping, K. J. (2005). *Trends in Peer Learning*. Educational Psychology, 25(6), 631–645. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410500345172
24. Whitmore, J. (2009). *Coaching for Performance: Growing Human Potential and Purpose*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
25. Williams, K., & Menendez, D. S. (2007). *Becoming Your Own Business Coach: Mastering Self-Management to Accelerate Your Growth*. PaperClip Publishing.
26. World Economic Forum. (2020). *The Future of Jobs Report* 2020.