

**RESEARCH REPORT 2020**

# Coaching Maturity in Organisations

Where are organisations  
now and where will they  
need to be?

Research conducted by Associate Professor Be Pannell  
Commissioned by The Stephenson Mansell Group



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“Coaching needs to be more than an individual exercise. You need to involve the whole organisation so that you develop a culture defined by a common language and shared outcomes.”

HR Director

# SUMMARY

Coaching has come a long way over the last 20 years. What was once seen purely as a remedial intervention is now increasingly viewed as a highly sought after strategic intervention to support leaders in their growth and development.

Today the vast majority of organisations utilise coaching in some form, and 95% of our research respondents indicated they use coaching within their organisation.

The need for organisations to successfully navigate the emerging landscape of complexity, disruption and ambiguity has never been greater.

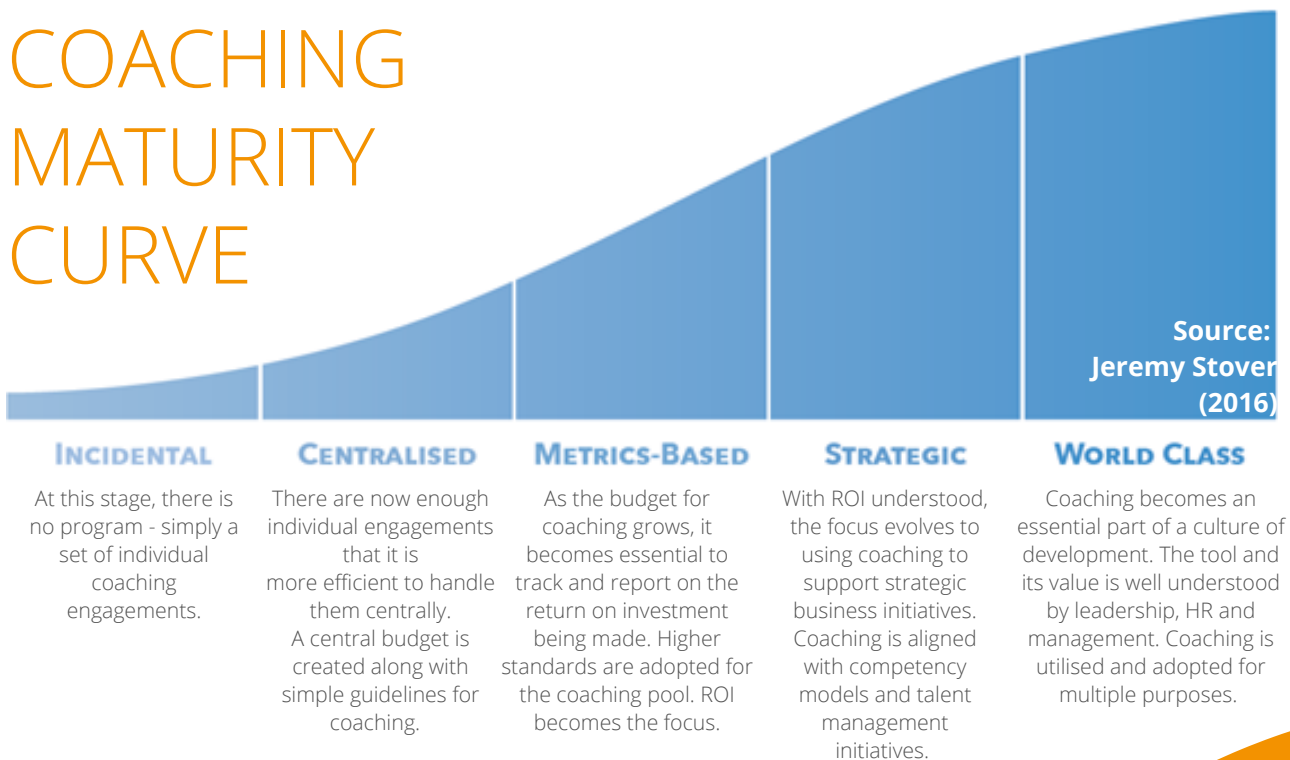


As the vanguards of this change, leaders are expected to lead the charge into this new normal with agility and confidence.

Organisations are constantly having to find new ways of working to keep pace. The way organisations utilise coaching is no exception and significant changes are needed to ensure that coaching is able to provide the support required for organisations to thrive.

Stephenson Mansell Group (SMG) commissioned this research project to investigate how coaching can be used to address these emerging challenges, and tangibly shift performance, as well as to conceptualise what the future of coaching would need to look like for leaders and their organisations to thrive in this new world.

# COACHING MATURITY CURVE



Our research revealed that the majority of the organisations that participated sit on the lower half of the coaching maturity curve (refer page 15). Lower levels of coaching maturity tend to focus on remedial and participant focused behaviourally based coaching that is not centrally managed nor aligned with an organisation’s strategic goals.

This individually-focused approach clearly benefits the participating executive but cannot necessarily shift the dial organisationally where impact is going to be required increasingly.

However, there are a small number of organisations that have been able to move through the *ad hoc*, centralised and metrics-based coaching to sit at the higher end of the maturity curve, demonstrated by operating at strategic and world class levels.

The majority of the organisations sit on the lower half of the curve

The key findings from this research reveal that in these more mature coaching cultures, coaching is:

## Strategic not tactical

Coaching is a strategic intervention that directly supports the business strategy.

## Most effective when used at all levels

Maximum benefit is achieved when coaching is used at all levels of the organisation and takes into account the entire organisational system and context.

## Visible on a dashboard

A high performing coaching culture needs to be visible.

## A fundamental skill

Coaching is a fundamental skill that executive leaders need to have.

## Endorsed from the top

Effective leadership capability starts at the top, with the CEO and Executive team.

## A means to build leadership capability

Functional leadership capabilities are built via coaching.

## Developmental not remedial

Coaching is viewed as a developmental intervention rather than a remedial one.



Overall, many organisations are failing to capture the full benefits of coaching when they focus on an individual, particularly when this focus is *ad hoc*. Although individual coaching is effective, evidence from these surveys and interviews, combined with current research into the coaching maturity curve, organisational coaching and coaching cultures, demonstrates that systemic coaching interventions offer longer-term organisational developmental and performance improvements.

# DOES COACHING WORK?

Many leaders wanting to bring about performance improvements and cultural change in their organisations rely on executive coaching to do this. But there is a threshold question: does coaching work?

A meta-analysis of empirically valid studies of professionally trained coaches showed that “coaching has significant positive effects” on outcomes such as performance improvement, attitudes towards work, well-being and coping, “with effect sizes ranging from 0.43 to 0.74” (Theeboom, Beersma, & van Vianen, 2013, p.1). Another meta-analysis of workplace coaching effectiveness showed positive effects in both individual and organisational outcomes, with effect sizes from 0.36 to 1.24 (Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2015), where any effect above 0.4 is statistically significant.

In a randomised controlled study (n=41), coaching was shown to enhance resilience, well-being and attainment of goals via increases in self-insight, confidence and management skills, while reducing stress and depression (Grant, Curtayne, & Burton 2009).

Another quasi-experimental study (n=60) demonstrated that those coached had significantly higher attainment of goals than the control group (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006).

Recent research revealed that benefits of leadership coaching are often more evident over time, as the leader needs incubation time to consolidate their personal learnings (Spence, Stout-Rostron, Van Reenen, & Glashoff, 2019). Sherman & Freas (2004) argue that these personal learnings are then applied in organisational contexts and require senior management engagement in the coaching program to ensure their long-term success.

**YES IT DOES!** However, what needs to happen for coaching to meet future needs?

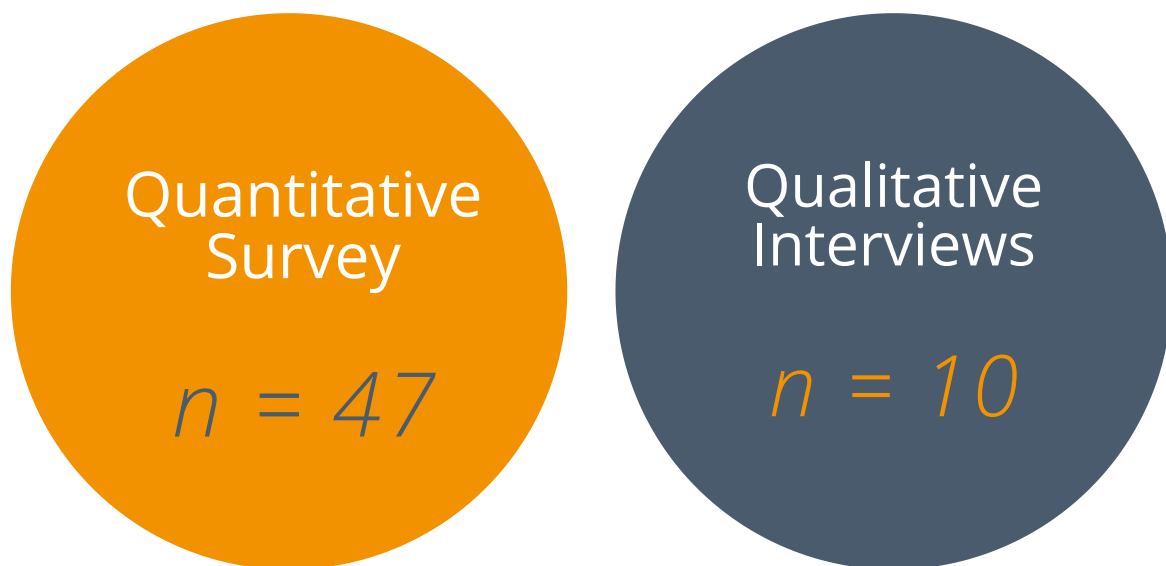
This is the question our research seeks to address.



# METHODOLOGY

From June to July 2019 a quantitative survey was distributed, asking CEOs, HR Directors, Talent Managers and Learning and Development Leaders how and why they use coaching in their organisations.

*The majority of the 47 respondents were from organisations with 200+ employees, each respondent having more than 20 years experience in these fields.*



During this same timeframe, and from the same pool of people, 10 semi-structured and confidential interviews were conducted of approximately 40 minutes each. Interviews were transcribed and transcripts were reviewed to identify themes and anomalies in the responses. These themes were checked against the data and other validated research on this theme, at two separate time intervals, to ensure they were a valid and reliable interpretation of what was said (a methodology outlined by Creswell, 2014, Rapley, 2013).

# CURRENT STATE OF COACHING IN ORGANISATIONS

## HOW MUCH COACHING DO ORGANISATIONS DO?

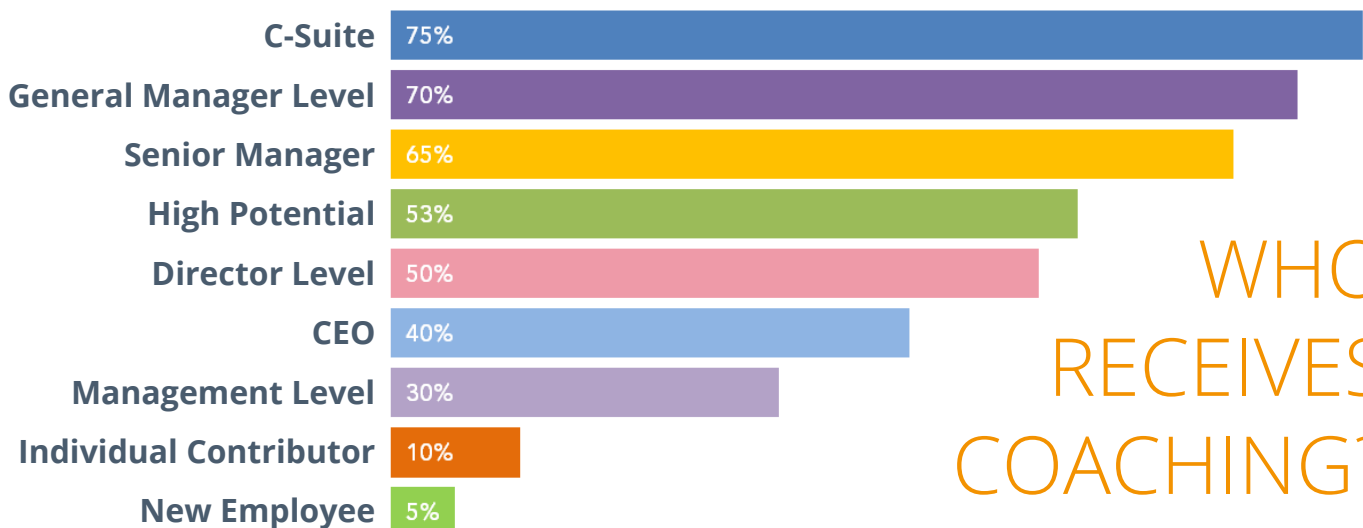
95 % of respondents use coaching

68 % Use coaching between 1-30 times per year

32% use coaching more than 30 times per year

The majority of coaching is clearly focused at the senior echelon of the organisation's leadership. Despite being offered at multiple levels, one of the major challenges being faced is how to scale it.

This is indicated by the statistic that 68% of the organisations have no more than 30 coaching engagements per year.



## WHO RECEIVES COACHING?

# USE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COACHES

93 % use external coaches

35 % respondents use internal coaches

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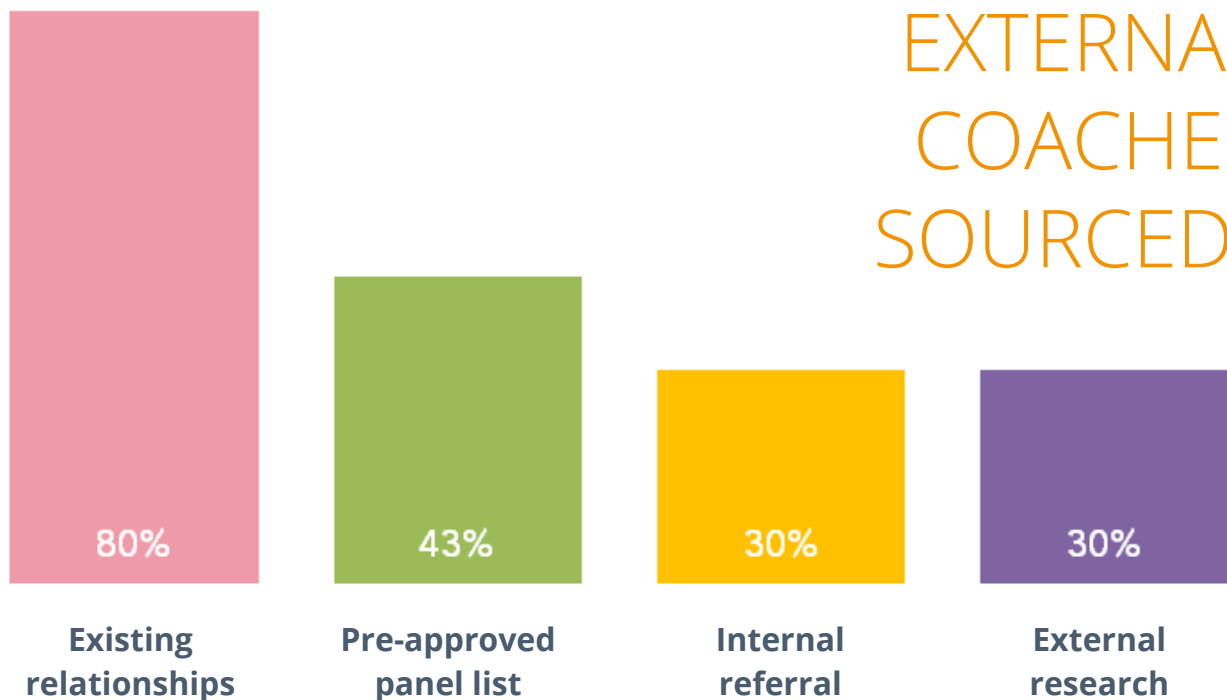
In organisations that use external coaches:

58 % use 1-3 coaching providers

17 % use 3-5 providers

25 % use 5 or more providers

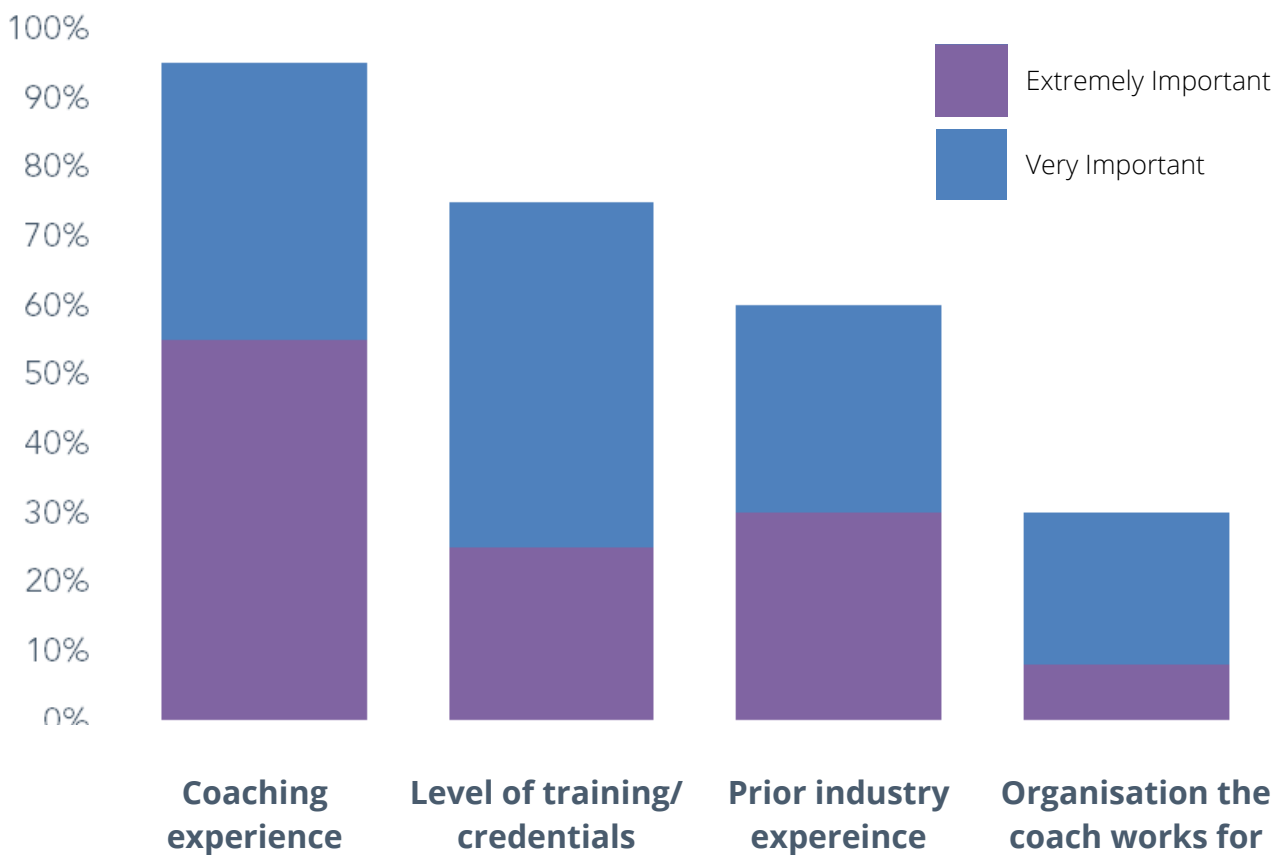
## HOW ARE EXTERNAL COACHES SOURCED?



The data, combined with insights from the interviews, points towards organisations wanting to have more control over coaching. This is being done to ensure that qualified coaches are doing the work within the organisation and enables HR to have better visibility of the engagements. This is seen in a move towards coaching panels with a limited number of approved, qualified, providers.

# WHAT IS IMPORTANT WHEN SELECTING A COACH?

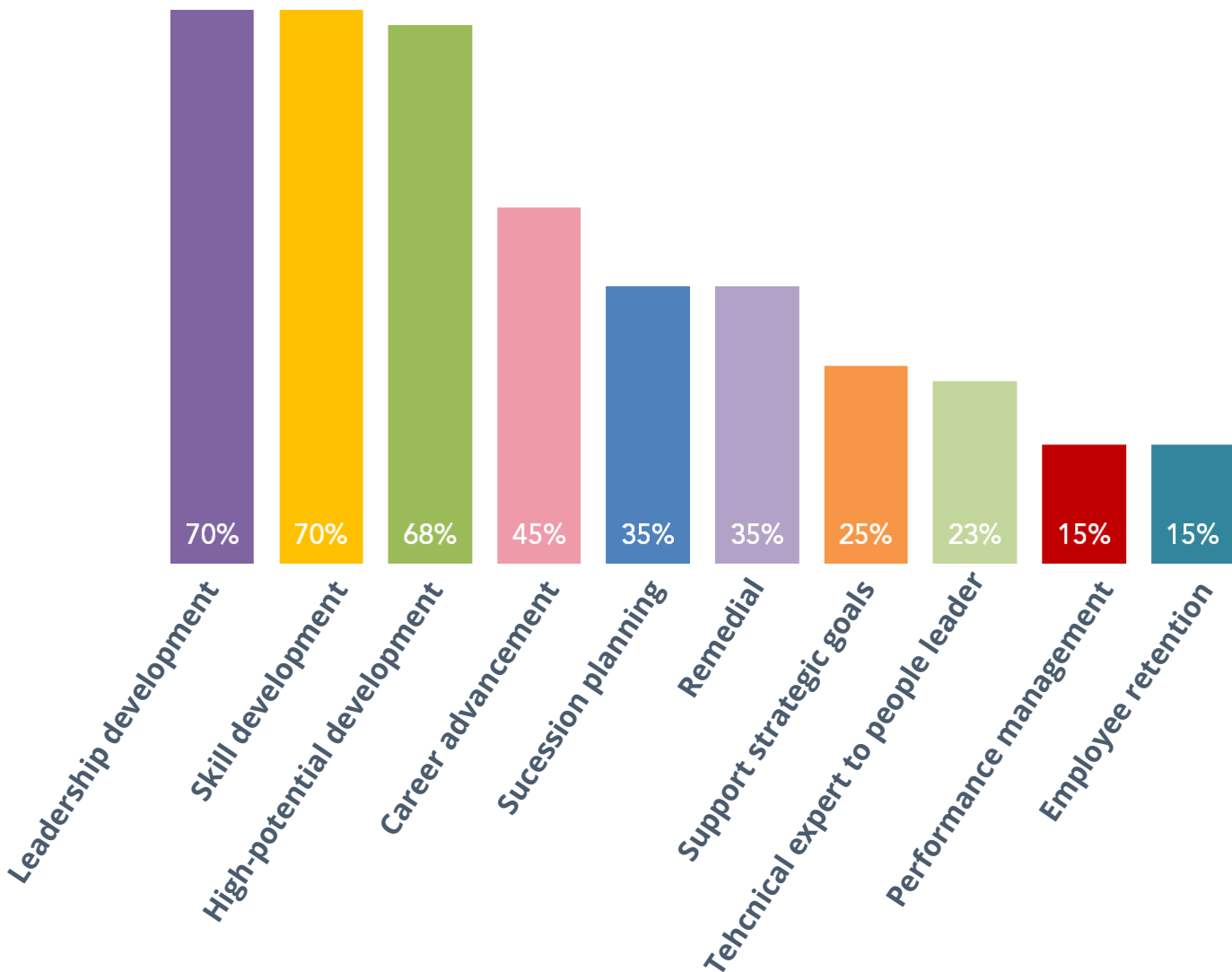
Over 90% of respondents identified that the experience of the coach is either extremely important or very important when selecting a coach.



# WHAT IS COACHING USED FOR?

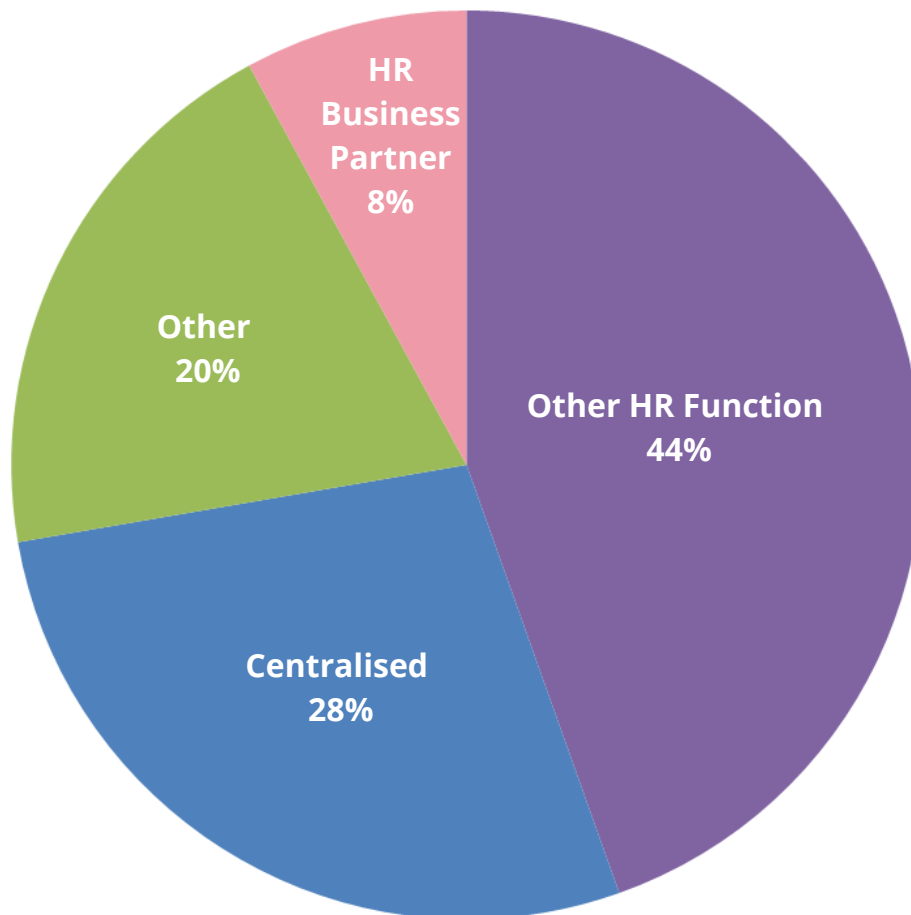
Organisations surveyed are increasingly using coaching for developmental purposes with leadership development, skill development and high-potential development scoring the highest.

Nevertheless to move up the maturity curve to either strategic or world class requires organisations to utilise coaching to support strategic goals, which currently only 25% of organisations are doing specifically.



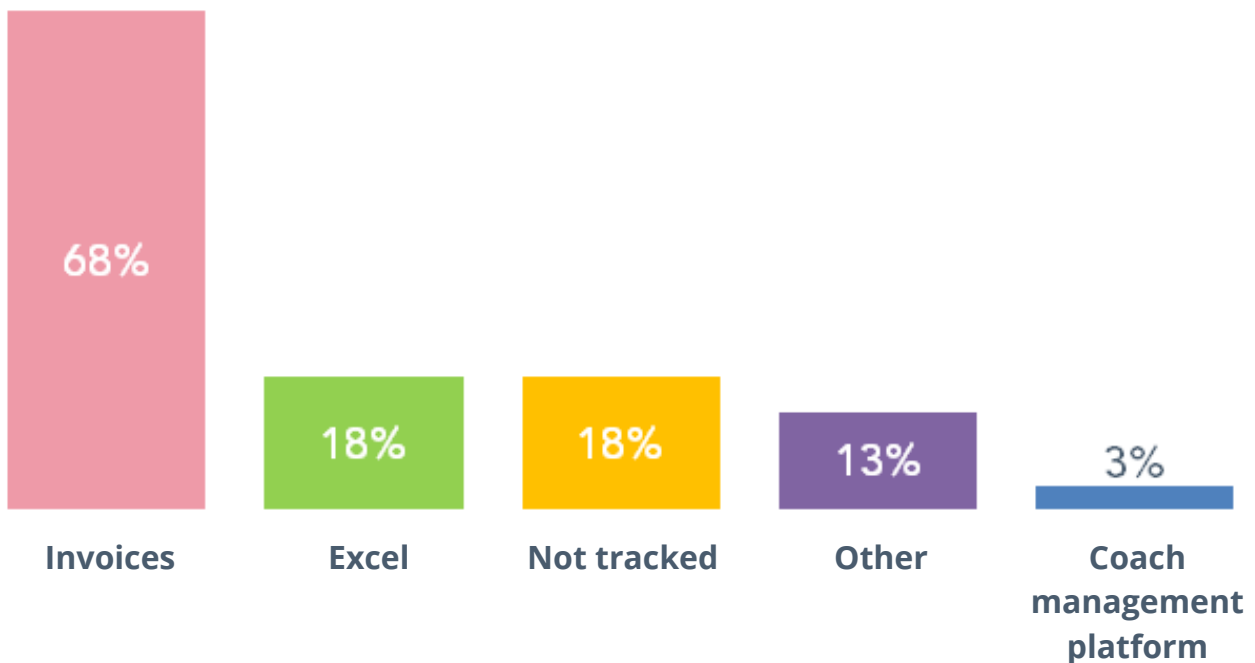
# HOW IS COACHING MANAGED?

Organisations struggling to embed a high-performance coaching culture consistently failed to centralise the management of the coaching programs.



Other responses include *ad hoc*, per department and "don't know".

# MEASURING IMPACT COACHING SPEND



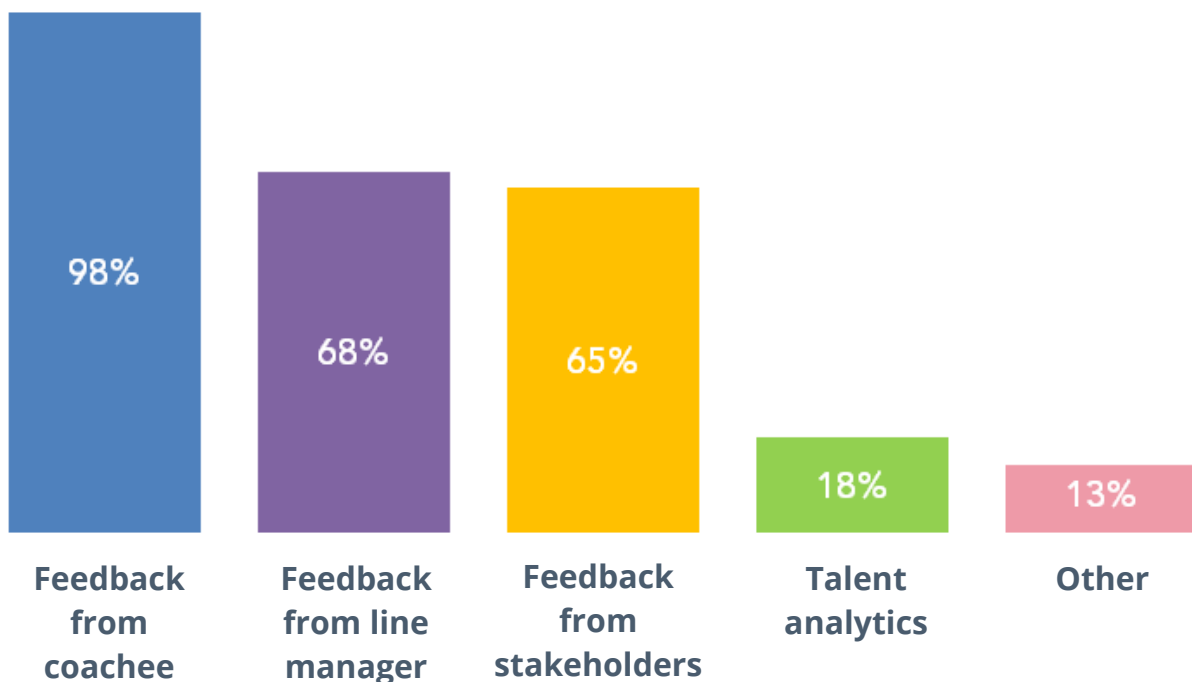
From the survey it is evident that the most frequently utilised method to measure coaching spend is via invoices, whilst 18% of respondents do not track spend at all.

When it comes to return on investment, it is certainly important to understand how much is being invested. Yet, some organisations were not even able to answer the question “How much do you spend on coaching each year?”

However, we question whether spend is an appropriate measure of coaching as, on its own, spend does not provide any insight into the impact of coaching.

# MEASURING IMPACT FEEDBACK

The survey revealed that 98% of organisations get feedback from the coachee. Feedback from the line manager and the key stakeholders is also obtained but nowhere near as consistently. In most cases, the line manager is involved in a three-way discussion at the beginning of the coaching engagement to discuss and agree on the areas of focus for the engagement. From an individual development perspective, this measure can provide insight. However from a systemic standpoint it offers little to no insight on the impact of coaching holistically.



That overall organisational measures of coaching efficacy are rare is further borne out by the fact that many organisations do not centrally track coachee goals or goal attainment. In response to the question of who has visibility of the coachees' goals, 90% responded with the line manager, 45% said HR is provided with an overview, 10% included the CEO and 15% said there is no visibility of goals.



# COACHING CULTURE

Interviewees were asked:

“When you think about your organisation’s culture around coaching and people development, what words come to mind to describe this?”

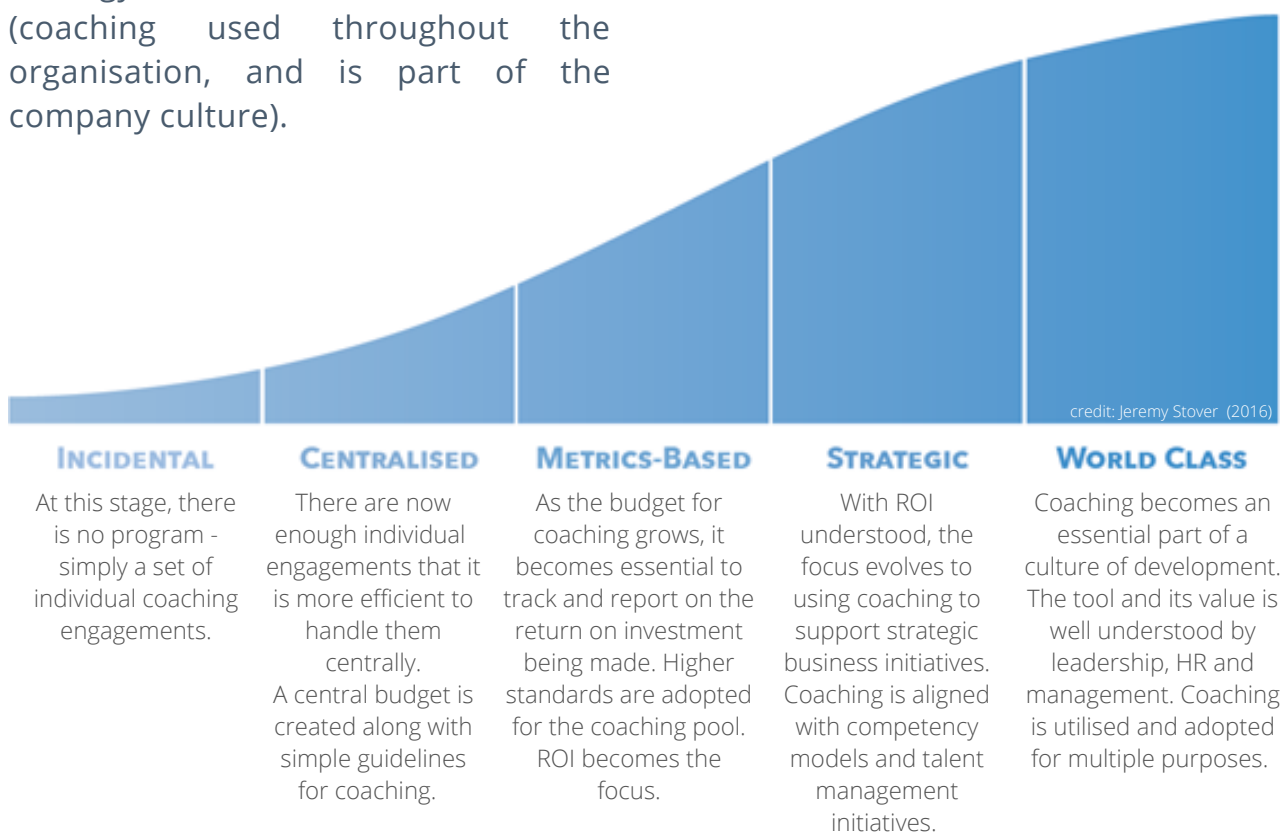


These results indicate that most organisations are struggling to develop a systemic coaching culture.

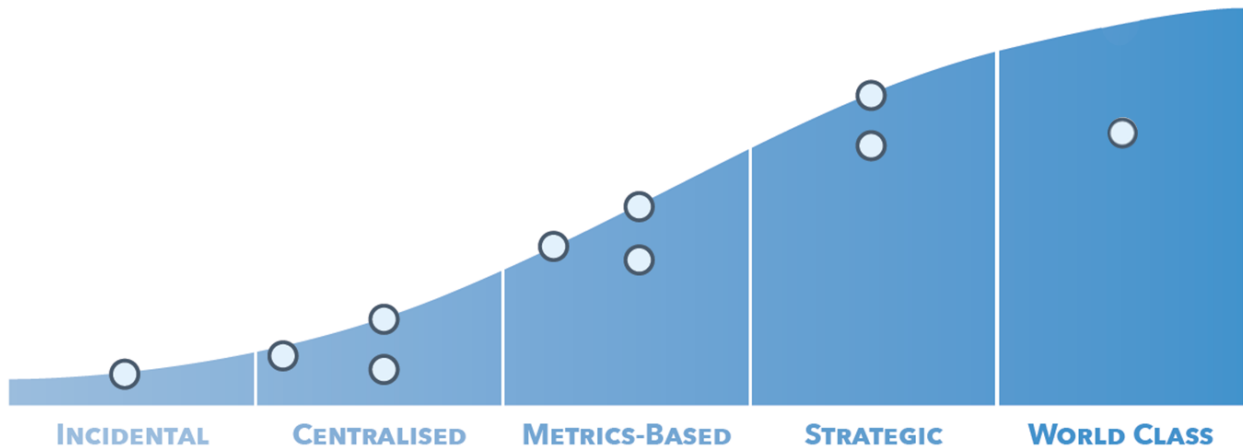
# THE COACHING MATURITY CURVE

## STOVER'S MODEL

According to Stover (2016), organisations progress through various stages of maturity in their use of coaching, moving from incidental (*ad hoc*), to centralised (program based), to metrics-based (cost management and performance output), to strategic (linked to company goals and leadership strategy) and then world class (coaching used throughout the organisation, and is part of the company culture).



# FINDINGS



Interview data was mapped onto the coaching maturity curve, where each dot represents a particular organisation.

These findings reveal that **world class coaching maturity is difficult to achieve** as it requires an organisation to have embedded a coaching culture that includes centralised management and evaluation, and availability of developmental coaching at all levels with the organisation.

Organisations with **lower levels of coaching maturity tend to focus on remedial and behaviourally-based coaching that is not centrally-managed nor aligned with an organisation's goals**. Higher levels of coaching maturity are evident when coaching is developmental, systemic and strategic, used frequently throughout the organisation, and managed centrally.

This is rare!

Also, **driving cultural change within an organisation requires interventions across the organisational system**. The interviews revealed a direct link between working with an external coaching organisation in a strategic capacity and coaching maturity. Additionally, when an organisation has a senior executive - ideally the CEO or equivalent - driving the coaching program, embedding coaching conversations in strategic and business-as-usual activities becomes more likely.

# OVERALL KEY FINDINGS

The key findings from this research were that in more mature coaching cultures:

## **Strategic not tactical**

Coaching is a strategic intervention that directly supports the business strategy.

## **Most effective when used at all levels**

Maximum benefit is achieved when coaching is used at all levels of the organisation and takes into account the entire organisational system and context.

## **Visible on a dashboard**

A high-performing coaching culture needs to be visible.

## **Fundamental skill**

Coaching is a fundamental skill that executive leaders need to have.

## **Endorsed from the top**

Effective leadership capability starts at the top with the CEO and Executive team.

## **A means to build leadership capacity**

Functional leadership capabilities are built via coaching.

## **Developmental not remedial**

Coaching is viewed as a developmental intervention rather than a remedial one.

The quotes from research participants on the following pages support these key findings.

COACHING IS A  
STRATEGIC  
INTERVENTION THAT  
DIRECTLY SUPPORTS  
THE BUSINESS  
STRATEGY

“We wanted to make sure that each of the executive leaders was a high-performing executive leader and, within their development plans, they have components about how they build their functional leadership capabilities. As well, they all have access to an executive coach.”

CEO

“The need for new and agile ways of working is driving culture change, and coaching is a key part of that strategy.”

HR Director

MAXIMUM BENEFIT IS  
ACHIEVED WHEN  
COACHING IS USED AT  
ALL LEVELS OF THE  
ORGANISATION AND  
TAKES INTO ACCOUNT  
THE ENTIRE  
ORGANISATIONAL  
SYSTEM AND CONTEXT

“Our focus is on developing leadership capabilities at all levels in the organisation, and coaching is a key part of that strategy.”

HR Director

“Coaching needs to be more than an individual exercise. You need to involve the whole organisation so that you develop a culture defined by a common language and shared outcomes.”

HR Director

## A HIGH-PERFORMING COACHING CULTURE NEEDS TO BE VISIBLE.

Organisations struggling to embed a high-performance coaching culture consistently failed to centralise the management of the coaching programs, making coaching is visible.

“Decentralised coaching management leads to a lot of duplication and extra spend.”

HR Director

“If it’s not centralised, it’s not possible to measure ROI or any other type of measure of coaching effectiveness.”

People and Culture Manager



## COACHING IS A FUNDAMENTAL SKILL THAT EXECUTIVE LEADERS NEED TO HAVE

“All of our Senior Executive team have received coaching and a number of them have been trained to be coaches. They see this as a vocation and are very much committed to it.”

HR Director

“I view being a good coach as being a fundamental skill that an executive leader needs to have, and so organisationally we need to build that capability for all of our leaders over time. And hopefully by teaching executive leaders these skills, they then apply what they have learned and on-teach others.”

CEO

# EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY STARTS AT THE TOP

When senior managers are engaged in a coaching-based leadership development program, they drive coaching conversations in the organisation's culture.

"To enable us to build good leadership capability, we need to - starting from the top - build people as effective leaders, and coaching is a critical component of that."

CEO

"We try to build into the agendas of our monthly one-on-one meetings a discussion about how people are adhering to the values of the leadership team."

CEO



## FUNCTIONAL LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES ARE BUILT VIA COACHING

“Coaching builds self-awareness and understanding of (the leader’s) impact on others.”

HR Manager



“Coaching is about building depth that’s demonstrated via change in behaviours, stronger capabilities and improvement on the feedback that the individual receives.”

Head of Group Talent

“Coaching has really enabled leaders to get clear on the difference between executive leaders and managers, and at what level they should be operating...and a much greater sense of what they should and shouldn’t be doing, what their role entails and where their strengths are...so the executive team is not firefighting, but doing their jobs effectively.”

HR Senior Leader

“We’ve got loads of people who get sucked into a level of operating way below what they should be because they have incompetent leaders underneath them, and without effective coaching they won’t ever bring themselves above the whirlwind.”

CEO



COACHING  
IS VIEWED AS A  
DEVELOPMENTAL  
INTERVENTION  
RATHER THAN A  
REMEDIAL ONE

“Mindset is a really big thing here. If a leader has a blind spot, but is open to change, coaching is not perceived as remedial.”

HR Director

“Coaching helps high performers to take on a bigger role, rather than coaching being used as remedial.”

Head of Talent

“Remedial coaching tends to focus on the short term.”

Head of Talent

“Remedial coaching is seen as a bit of an insult.”

HR Manager

“We’ve moved from a remedial coaching model to a developmental one.”

CEO

# BARRIERS

Creating a coaching culture is not easy. We asked participants what some of the barriers are to creating an organisational coaching culture and they responded as follows:

- 1 Resistance to coaching due to perceived lack of time, not wanting to take time away from the business.
- 2 Day-to-day distractions impacting coaching engagements.
- 3 Cost of individual executive coaching.
- 4 Training considered a discretionary spend, and so budgets are cut when things are tight.
- 5 An existing culture of 'command and control' that is not open to coaching.
- 6 Different physical sites, so difficult to centrally manage.
- 7 Resistance to centrally managing coaching engagements.
- 8 Staff not trusting the coaching process, and not understanding the value.
- 9 Lack of alignment between coachee, coach and/or line manager.

As Clutterbuck (2013) explains, shifting mindsets to a mature coaching culture takes time and requires an environment of psychological safety, which entails practices that allow individuals to speak up and be listened to, even when their views may be contrary to popular opinion.

Additionally, until coaching in the organisation is viewed as supporting organisational goals, rather than as discretionary spend, it will be difficult for an organisation to develop a strategic or world class coaching culture.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS AND CONCLUSIONS

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Utilise coaching as a strategic intervention within your organisation, closely aligned to the company's values and strategy.
- Engage senior management, ideally at CEO level, to support and drive leadership capability building.
- Executive leaders need to allocate time and resources to developing coaching leadership skills.
- Manage coaching engagements centrally, tracking both spend and impact.
- Roll out organisation-wide interventions where possible, rather than thinking of coaching in an *ad hoc* way.

## CONCLUSIONS

Many organisations are failing to capture the benefits of coaching when they focus on an individual, particularly when this focus is *ad hoc* and remedial.

Although individual coaching is effective, evidence from this study - combined with contemporary research into the coaching maturity curve, systemic coaching and coaching cultures - demonstrates that systemic coaching interventions offer the organisation longer-term developmental and performance improvements.

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# ABOUT

**stephensonmansell**

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The Stephenson Mansell Group (SMG) is one of Australia's most established executive leadership development firms. Over the last 20 years, we have worked with over 6,000 leaders across more than 600 organisations and 30 of the top 50 ASX listed companies.

SMG has 50 coaches, mentors and facilitators based in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Singapore giving us the capacity to deliver Australia-wide, and into New Zealand and Asia.

SMG specialises in executive coaching and mentoring, a range of leadership development programs (including top team effectiveness and high potential talent development) and whole-of-organisation cultural change programs.

SMG has developed a reputation for industry thought leadership in coaching and leadership development. Founding Partner Virginia Mansell has authored a critically acclaimed book *The Focused Executive* in 2009 (revised 2014). Virginia and others in the firm are sought-after speakers and presenters at various industry events and forums.

In 2017, together with two of Asia's premier leadership development companies, SMG founded the Centre for Integral Leadership Asia to support leaders across the region.

SMG has international affiliations with several global organisations in the field of leadership development including The Centre for Creative Leadership and the Centre for Coaching, which is part of the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

A commitment to ethical behaviour flows through SMG. We were a member of the Working Committee which prepared Australia's first guide to coaching in organisations published in June 2011.

## Virginia Mansell

### Founding Partner

0412 353 456  
vmansell@smgrp.com.au

## Joe Fischer

### Senior Partner

0432 504 831  
jfischer@smgrp.com.au

## Mehul Joshi

### Senior Partner & Head of Leadership Practice

0447 235 486  
mjoshi@smgrp.com.au

## Richard Clarke

### Head of Coaching & Mentoring

0412 220 637  
rclarke@smgrp.com.au

## Andrea Corcoran

### Queensland State Director

0418 397 688  
acorcoran@smgrp.com.au

## Heather Linaker

### Queensland State Director

0411 587 838  
hlinaker@smgrp.com.au

## Chris Goris

### Leadership & Program Consultant

0418 640 261  
cgoris@smgrp.com.au

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# A WORD OF THANKS

This research project would not have been possible without the support of the organisations that took part in the survey and the clients who were interviewed. SMG would like to thank all involved for their valuable contribution to this investigation into the current and future state of coaching within organisations.

Our thanks also to Dr Be Pannell for conducting this research on behalf of SMG which has resulted in an important addition to evidence-based research in the field of organisational coaching.



**Virginia Mansell**

Founding Partner



**Joe Fischer**

Senior Partner

## ABOUT THE RESEARCHER



**Be Pannell, PhD**

Associate Professor

With expertise in senior management, psychology, neuroscience and education, Dr. Be Pannell brings more than 20 years of experience working with thousands of people in the field of adult development.

Be's PhD topic examined advanced levels of leadership development and she was awarded the University Medal for an outstanding doctoral thesis. She has been invited to present her research at international conferences and has been researching, lecturing and supervising in these fields at universities for the past 15 years. She is an Honorary Fellow at Victoria University, Melbourne.



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SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • BRISBANE • PERTH • SINGAPORE  
Suite 1, 2/3 Shore, 13 Hickson Road, Walsh Bay, NSW 2000, Australia  
T: +61 2 9950 2000 F: +61 2 9950 2099 E: [info@smgrp.com.au](mailto:info@smgrp.com.au)