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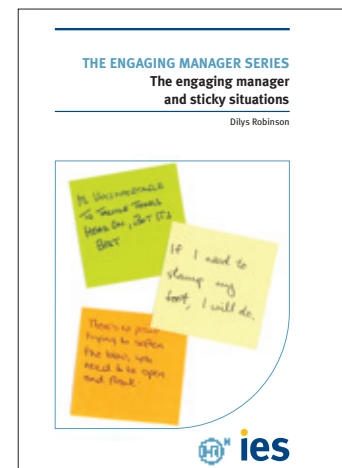
The Engaging Manager and Sticky Situations

Dilys Robinson,
Principal Research Fellow

There are situations at work that every manager hopes will not happen, but knows they inevitably will. Poor performance, unacceptable behaviour, a bad attitude, conflict within the team, breaking bad news – knowing that it is all part of the line manager role does not make it any easier to actually do. A very natural reaction is to do nothing, and hope the problem will go away. However, all the evidence points to the inadvisability of this approach. How should managers tackle sticky situations effectively, and plan those ‘difficult conversations’ with confidence?

Our *Engaging Manager* research focused on the good people management behaviours adopted by managers who are really good at engaging and motivating their teams. Even in high-performing, enthusiastic teams, however, problems can occur – and the team will expect the manager to deal with them. The latest report in the *Engaging Manager* series explores these situations, and describes how the managers in our research went about tackling ‘sticky situations’.

Our engaging managers were all very performance-focused, and believed in delivering their excellent results through their teams. They had high expectations of their teams and were clear about performance and behavioural standards. If a team member fell short of these, they did not allow the problem to fester by ignoring it, but instead tackled it promptly and effectively. Their willingness to prepare for difficult conversations, and their coaching style, helped them to get to the bottom of problems and set clear improvement goals. However, this did not mean that they could not get tough if they had to; all of our managers had, at some point, taken team members through disciplinary processes and most had managed



people out of the organisation if they did not improve. They did not enjoy doing this, and felt a degree of personal failure if they could not turn round a difficult individual, but they felt it was in the best interests of their team and their organisation.

The teams managed by our engaging managers were appreciative of this willingness to act, because they did not like the team's achievements to be tarnished by underperformers, conflict or poor behaviour. Senior managers also appreciated the effective ways in which the engaging managers tackled tricky situations – not least because it meant that they did not have to get involved and sort out the mess!

This report describes how engaging managers approach performance management, tackle poor performance and poor behaviour, and go about breaking bad news. It includes a list of top tips, based on these model behaviours – what to do, and what to avoid.

The report is now available from
www.employment-studies.co.uk/sticky-situations

In this issue

- 2 New coachee study reveals the barriers to effective coaching**
- 3 Knowledge Knibbles™**
- 4 IES reflects: Our views on people, organisations and performance**

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New coachee study reveals the barriers to effective coaching

We are contributing to an MSc Human Resource Management programme delivered by the Edinburgh Institute of Leadership and Management Practice to KPMG consultants. We have provided content for online Units, and are delivering master classes in the areas of reward, performance management and HR transformation.

Our second survey of the Bar for The Bar Council and the Bar Standards Board (BSB) was published in June in the report Barristers' Working Lives. The report provides a snapshot of the Bar and of aspects of barristers' working lives over the two years from 2011 to 2013.

Together with CIPD Consultancy, we have been supporting The London Borough of Harrow with its review of its HR function both in evidence gathering and in helping frame the target operating model.

We have also been working at Harrow Council with the Director of Resources Tom Whiting, and his team to address their challenges of succession planning and staff development and to embed still further the positive culture of employee engagement which their recent Gold Standard IIP award has recognised.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education has asked IES to run its second employee survey (we ran the first in 2012). This will involve questionnaire design, survey administration, analysis and reporting (with trends since 2012). In addition, we will deliver results presentations and focus groups with staff.

We have been helping the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) design and analyse the results of an employee survey on total reward.

We have jointly undertaken a project with Incomes Data Services (IDS) on behalf of the Office of Manpower Economics (OME) to examine practice on pay progression and quantify the extent to which progression takes place in the private sector.

IES provided a research background and conduct a number of case studies for the Local Government Association, as part of their aim to identify successful examples where councils have integrated working with health in the area of social care in a way which delivers positive outcomes in the community.

IES recently carried out research which took in a rare view from the coachee's perspective. The research confirmed that, for the vast majority of coachees, coaching is successful. Digging deeper, the study also made interesting discoveries about the barriers to effective coaching.

Most existing surveys are of the views of the coach, but this study, by the College of Business, Law & Governance at James Cook University (Australia) and the Institute for Employment Studies (UK), surveyed 644 industry professionals from 34 countries, who either had received or were currently receiving coaching. The researchers found that 89 per cent of coachees found coaching to be effective, while just 11 per cent said it was of limited use.

However, successful outcomes require confidence in the coach. The research found that the biggest single predictor of less effective coaching was difficulties with the coach. In addition, women are almost twice as likely as men to report the organisational culture as a barrier, particularly an unsupportive boss.

The findings have been published as two papers within the conference proceedings from 4th EMCC Research conference held last month in Paris.

Alison Carter, Associate Fellow at IES and co-author of the papers, said:

"We have empirically confirmed what everyone already 'knew': that coaching works. But the process of being coached is tough and not all employees expect this. We found that not all coachees are willing to put in the effort that is required.

"There is a widespread belief amongst coaches that 'barriers' are nothing to worry about: barriers are just issues that become part of the coaching conversation and the coach helps the coachee to overcome them. We were not satisfied with this and decided to find out how many coachees perceive they face barriers, which were the most commonly encountered, and which, if any, might adversely affect successful outcomes from their coaching."

Anna Blackman, Senior Lecturer, James Cook University and co-author of the papers said:

"Business coaching has become a popular tool for human resource management with a number of advocates making a variety of claims about its benefits and practice. Despite its popularity, until recently there has been little published systematic empirical research into business coaching. This study clarified factors that make coaching effective and should be included in the coaching process."

"Our findings challenge some existing assumptions. According to coachees the most important factors for a coach to have was experience in the coachee's industry, being honest and communicating clearly. This contradicts the assumptions of many coaches that industry experience is not necessary."

This is the first time IES and James Cook University (JCU) have collaborated on HR research. Drs Anna Blackman and Alison Carter met at EMCC conference two years ago where they were both presenting findings of previous research studies. They realised they shared a common desire to test out empirically the various claims made about coaching in work settings. Following the enormous success of this international study the organisations expect to collaborate again on other topics.

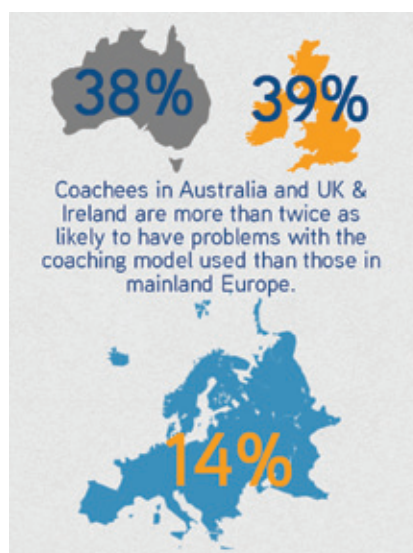
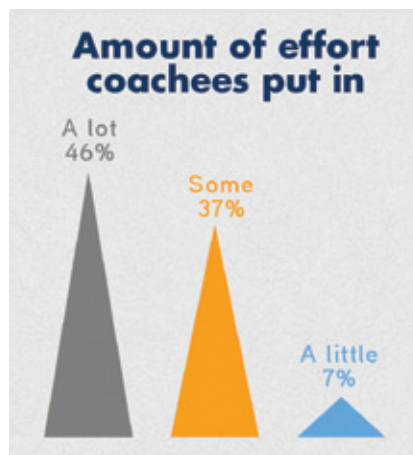
There are many claims and myths about coaching outcomes that have been made by coaches and coaching associations. As a result of their study from the coachee perspective, IES and JCU plan a series of papers to confirm or debunk these myths.

The initial findings were presented at the EMCC Research Conference at Cergy-Pontoise University on 26-27 June 2014. The papers were recently published in the Book of Conference Proceedings from 4th EMCC Research Conference, Megginson D

& Lindall P (Eds), by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), which can be purchased via the EMCC website: <http://www.emccbooks.org/book/book/2014-research-conference-book-duplicate>

IES HR Network members may download an exclusive copy of the paper from the IES website: www.employment-studies.co.uk/members

Future papers will present evidence about successful coaching outcomes in terms of organisational support, coaching context, and the characteristics of a successful coach.



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What subjects would you like to see?

We are expanding on the list below, and would like to find out whether there are any other topics you'd be interested in seeing on our list? Let us know by contacting Maggie Smith: maggie.smith@employment-studies.co.uk or 01273 763 449.

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- Outstanding leadership
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- Working with the psychological contract
- World-class HR

Keep an eye on the website to see new subjects being added all the time: <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/kks>

Our views on people, organisations and performance

Have you started reading our HR blog? IES experts are offering their insights into the most up-to-date thinking and their perspectives on current issues.

Take a look and see what you've been missing, at www.employment-studies.co.uk/blog

Here is a taste of what we've been talking about:

Strategic HR and lessons from history

Peter Reilly

'Now that it's September, coming back to work after summer distractions and in particular visiting the Edinburgh book festival, I started thinking about what have I (re)learned? One thing I've been thinking over is how do you understand the past?'

Using mediation to deal with conflict at work

Andrea Broughton

'Conflict in the workplace is a fact of working life at some point for most people. Dealing with conflict and in particular stopping it from escalating, ultimately to an employment tribunal, is a difficult task and yet an essential one, as conflict can cause a significant amount of disruption and upheaval for both those involved and their colleagues.'

'Bad News' and its Impact on Engagement

Dilys Robinson

'It seems that every week brings another bad news story to damage the reputation of many of our best-loved institutions. Is it surprising that our trust in the establishment has been shaken?'

You can't always get what you want...

Linda Miller and Dilys Robinson

'A casual reader of the HR press could be forgiven for thinking that the progression of women in the workplace is no longer an issue. A closer examination of the statistics, however, reveals that the picture is not quite so rosy...'

Employment Law and other statutory changes

Jenny Holmes

'As trailed in my blog post in September 2013, here is an update on employment law and other statutory changes that are coming into force with the beginning of the tax year on 6 April as well as a couple of other interesting changes due over the summer and into the autumn.'

Compassion: an on-trend phenomenon

Penny Tamkin

'Right now, compassion is trending. Google hits for 'compassion' in the UK show a steady rise over the last eight or so years.

The dictionary describes compassion as 'a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for someone struck by misfortune, accompanied by a desire to alleviate the suffering'. Evidence suggests that affiliative, caring, trusting, cultures with well-managed workloads are more likely to incubate compassion than harsh, coercive, disengaged, disempowered environments where work overload is the norm....'

Name calling

Peter Reilly

'I was taking part in a panel discussion at a recent conference. We were talking about the highlights of the event for us and invited the audience to join in. I was then rather surprised when we were asked whether Human Resources was the right name for the function and was it really an improvement on Personnel as a description...'



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Join the IES HR Network now and register for the IES Annual Conference on 16th October 2014. This year the focus is on Strategic HR.

Contact Emma Knight for more information:

emma.knight@employment-studies.co.uk or call 01273 763 406.



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