

The Importance and Application of a Coaching Leadership Style

This 2025 review drew on a systematic search across four databases, narrowing an initial 132 records down to 14 high-quality studies, including three meta-analyses, on coaching leadership style published between 2000 and 2025.

What the researchers found

Bringing the studies together, the review found that coaching leadership enhances employee motivation, builds skills, promotes psychological safety and strengthens organisational adaptability, while also developing leaders' own effectiveness and emotional intelligence.

The strongest evidence sits in three underlying meta-analyses: Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen (2014) found coaching produced meaningful gains across performance, wellbeing and self-regulation; Jones, Woods and Guillaume (2016) confirmed consistent learning and performance benefits; and Cannon-Bowers and colleagues (2023), drawing on 96 effect sizes, found virtual and face-to-face coaching produced comparable results for engagement and wellbeing, good news for anyone leading hybrid teams.

Coaching Leadership

Colgate (2025): review of 14 studies on coaching leadership style

Organisation Gains



- Employee motivation
- Skill development
- Psychological safety
- Organisational adaptability

Leader Gains



- Leader effectiveness
- Trust and influence
- Emotional intelligence

Where it thrives

- Clear, shared expectations
- Effective face-to-face or virtual
- Learning-oriented culture



Where it struggles

- Mismatched expectations
- Rigid or crisis-driven culture



The review is equally honest about where coaching doesn't work well. It found that coaching can be a poor fit in rigid, high-pressure or crisis-driven cultures, and one large dataset it cites showed a small proportion of coachees, around 7%, reported negative outcomes such as reduced confidence or role confusion when expectations between coach and coachee weren't well aligned.

Why it matters

The finding that stands out most for this issue is the two-way benefit: coaching doesn't just develop the person being coached, it develops the leader doing the coaching. That reframes coaching capability less as a nice extra and more as one of the more efficient investments a leader can make in their own development. The boundary conditions matter too, and fit neatly with what we know from the EQ-i model: coaching leans on real capability, not good intentions, and a leader without the underlying emotional groundwork can do it badly even with the best framework in hand.

The Importance and Application of a Coaching Leadership Style in Businesses, Colgate, M. (2025). Businesses, 5(3), 32. doi.org/10.3390/businesses5030032