

## **Embedding a new coaching culture at Vodafone**

How do supervisors and team leaders learn to coach colleagues effectively in a frantic workplace? Whilst learning and development (L&D) professionals are well-aware of stubbornly-low returns from 'learning off colleagues' or training, can large companies get past trial-and-error approaches? Could coaching be better enabled by learning platforms that inspire a change in the organisation's culture and reinforce managers' coaching sessions on the go?

### **Creating a flexible coaching culture**

Claire Barron, Vodafone's Customer Experience Academy Manager, wanted to get past these pitfalls and achieve something simpler and more dynamic: "When we asked front-line supervisors 'what's stopping you coaching?' they mentioned three things," she explains: "'I don't know how' was first, 'not confident' second, and 'not enough time' third."

Not surprisingly, many Vodafone business units' efforts boiled down to pragmatic but limited approaches; store managers observing colleagues or call centre supervisors scheduling employee coaching sessions during the working day.

These roadblocks were also dissipating the impact of Vodafone L&D's own high-quality coaching content: "The lack of confidence was frustrating," Claire says. "We have some fabulous coaching content - video tips on conversation-starters or listening to customers and so on - that was under-used."

Claire's team wanted to meet these challenges by embedding a coaching culture across all business units and territories using a mobile coaching app. "Coaching is crucial, she says. "But it has to be practised so it becomes instinctive. We wanted something to hand for supervisors to deliver coaching methods, simply and repeatably - and ultimately, contribute to a better digital experience for our service users."

### **Nimble app development**

Claire took the conundrum to Tim Thomas-Peter and Scott Bamford, directors of Ambidect, the global innovator in learning and development platforms for businesses, which helps large companies to optimise talent development.

"Vodafone is good at coaching," explains Tim. "But the Achilles' Heel is that busy supervisors often lack immediate ways to reinforce their efforts or have a handy memory-jogger when doing live coaching. There was a gap to close."

Co-director Scott observes that in big companies, supervisors can mistake line management for dynamic coaching: "Corporates are drawn to employee performance management tools which focus on negatives. A flexible app could help supervisors to boost colleagues' skills through using good and bad results."

After initial fact-finding, Claire commissioned an application called Vodafone Coach, based on Ambidect's Learn With Mobile software, as part of the company's global customer care programme. Although primarily a coaching tool, Coach was very flexible in its design, incorporating full mobile learning capabilities.

Claire gathered retail, online sales and call centre experts to help Ambidect deliver a flexible app through nimble development processes. Stakeholders and designers workshopped ideas, for creativity and to identify barriers to uptake at an early stage.

Within weeks, a prototype Coach app was presented to VIP stakeholders, including sales and call centre teams, receiving real-time feedback for ongoing, final-stage refinements.

Accessible on device or desktop, the new Coach app takes each manager through a planned observation, staff coaching and feedback process. As well as boosting supervisors' know-how, the app supports more consistent live coaching sessions even in high-pressure work environments.

And where managers are already proficient coaches, the Coach app reinforces their work with new learning assets and user prompts. Supervisors can record sessions for management and self-improvement.

### **Breaking down barriers to coaching**

Enthusiastically received by Vodafone stakeholders, the Coach pilot app has already been introduced as a prototype in various global territories.

Claire explains: "We're very excited about Coach's potential; everyone who's seen the app is impressed. Our supervisors, irrespective of their location, can now gain a better understanding what's holding them back and break down barriers to better and more consistent coaching."

Claire says: "Ambidect's development team worked brilliantly in developing this app in six months flat. The design quickly got us hooked and colleagues are asking when they can have it."

Tim at Ambidect is taken with the possibilities the app is opening: "Coach delivers content very flexibly, helping managers break old habits and develop better coaching methods. Vodafone supervisors now have a reliable way to reframe difficult coaching questions or think on their feet in live coaching sessions - they are upskilling in the busiest workplaces."

The new Coach app and sister Way of Care customer care learning version (also from Ambidect) have transformed Vodafone's specific L&D options for frontline personnel - a singular breakthrough in such busy environments: "We're instilling a coaching culture for team leaders and supervisors," Claire comments. "This will drive incremental improvements by 80,000 personnel, benefiting our business and improving the customer experience."

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### **About Ambidect**

Based in Congleton, UK, Ambidect is the global innovator in learning and development platforms for businesses. It has a long track record of developing highly-flexible cost-effective learning platforms and information systems, for global enterprises, mid-size firms and UK public organisations. Its management and development team has over 40 years' expertise in software engineering, open source development and global information delivery.

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