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EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF A COACHING PROCESS ON ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR AMONG SME EMPLOYEES

In today's fiercely competitive environment, SMEs do any efforts to increase their competitive advantage as much as possible. If the virtues of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) are present in an organisation; such as sportsmanship, conscientiousness, altruism, courtesy and civic virtue, employee engagement will be stronger. Moreover, it has been proved that an organisation's sustainable competitive advantage is rooted in the competence and commitment of the people it attracts and retains, that provides its unique 'human capital'.

According to international studies after coaching members of an organisation OCB indicators significantly developed. However, a domestic research on this topic is still scarce. In the SME sector, there is almost no data available related to this issue. The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of business coaching on the degree of OCB among SME employees. My research was conducted in the form of personal, individual coaching, supplemented by Podsakoff's questionnaire to measure OCB. Significant changes in some dimensions of the OCB were detected between the questionnaires completed before and after the coaching process.

Introduction

Nowadays the concept of organisational coaching and the coaching approach are becoming increasingly popular. In recent decades it has gained particular attention, especially among the private sector. The role of leadership has shifted from control to coaching. It can be seen as a management initiative that focuses on developing employees in order to improve their performance. It has also obtained increasing attention in Hungary. Now a significant number of larger organisations applies coaching. It is expected to become even more important in the near future. However, SMEs are still less aware of the potential of coaching. Although the relationship between coaching and employee behaviour has been studied in the literature, the focus on SMEs in Hungary is still neglected. In our case study, conducted among employees of two SMEs in the technical field, we investigated how employee coaching in the organisation influences the dimensions of organisational citizenship behaviour.

Organisational coaching

Coaching is a person-focused developmental tool that supports people to achieve their personal and professional goals (Whitmore, 2009). During the coaching process, the coach helps the client to better understand themselves, their strengths and to develop and exploit them to effectively

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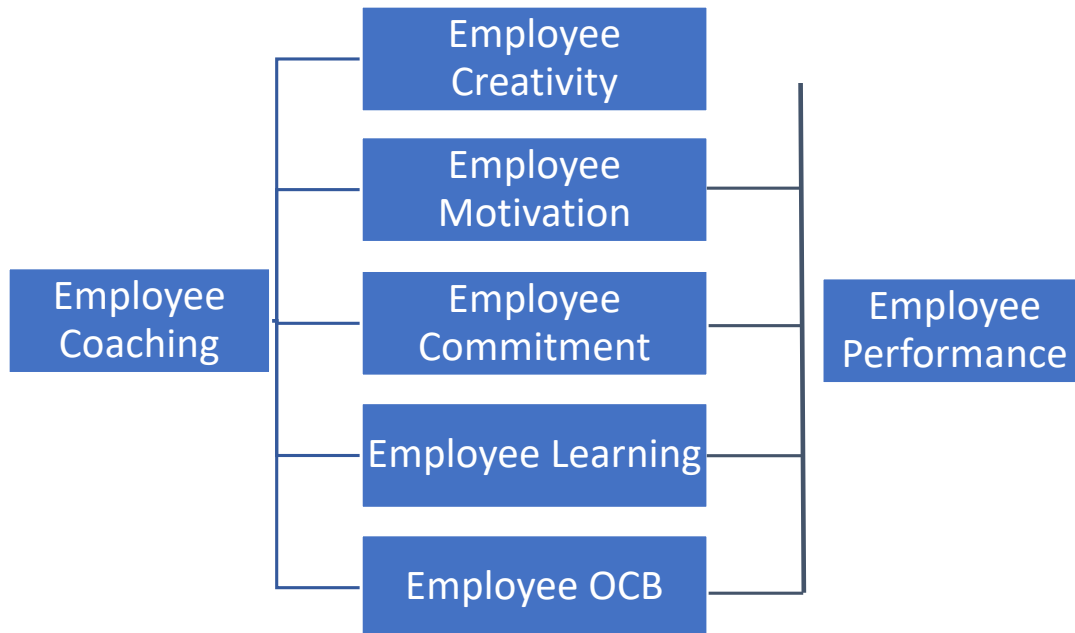
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cope with challenges and changes, and to manage their weaknesses. It also helps people to achieve their personal and professional goals, supports them to manage stress and conflict, and helps them to prepare for change and new challenges (Kilburg, 1996).

The aim of coaching is to increase an individual's self-reflection, self-direction and problem-solving skills, thereby enhancing their development and performance. Therefore, it can also play a role in the workplace performance appraisal system (Németh et al., 2016). Coaching is an interactive, personalised development process in which the coach helps the client to formulate and achieve personal and professional goals. This relationship is dynamic and often peer-to-peer, where the coach focuses primarily on activating and developing the client's internal resources (Whitmore, 2009).

In organisational coaching, the topic of discussion is specifically related to work, the workplace, career development. The conversations, which can take place in individual or small group formats, preferably at least 3-4 consecutive sessions, have a number of positive effects on the organisation. A coach can play an important role in an organisation by changing the perception of organisational policy and influencing how employees judge their own efforts in relation to their satisfaction level and effort (Raza et al., 2018). The individual coaching of employees increases their performance. It contributes greatly to solve workplace problems thus contributes to smoother work processes and improves the workplace atmosphere. It promotes individual career development and learning. It influences the employees' behaviour in a positive way, making them more creative and motivated (Maamari et al., 2022). It also benefits their attitudes towards the organisation, thereby increasing the emergence of organisational citizenship behaviour and as well as their commitment. It generates, therefore, a number of real-time cognitive and motivational changes, the practical effects of which are immediate.

FIGURE 1: IMPACT OF THE COACHING PROCESS



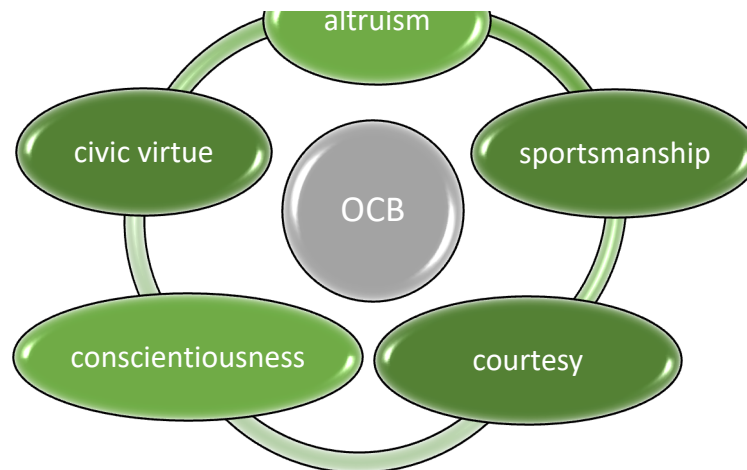
Source: own edition based on Maamari et al. (2022)

It follows logically that coaching directly affects workplace performance, while contributing to job satisfaction and loyalty (Balogh, 2024) and enhancing organisational citizenship behaviour. This has been demonstrated by several studies abroad, including Ali Özduran (2017) and Achi and his coworkers (2021).

Organizational Citizen Behaviour

There are several definitions of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) in the literature. Most define its manifestation in five dimensions. These are conscientiousness, sportsmanship, altruism, courtesy and civic virtue (Organ, 1988; Jan, & Gul, 2016).

FIGURE 2: DIMENSIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR



Source: Jan, & Gul, 2016 own edition

Conscientiousness means that a worker completes their work conscientiously even without supervision. Altruism means a helpful attitude, volunteering to help others and preventing the occurrence work-related problems. Sportsmanship means accepting other colleagues or work-related inconveniences and problems without complaining, but also includes fairness and honesty. Civic virtue implies loyalty as well as the support and defence of organisational goals and placing the interests of the organisation before one's own organisational interests. Furthermore, individual initiative implies extra enthusiasm and effort in carrying out tasks. An employee with civic virtue also participates in the management of the organisation even if this is not part of his job description and monitors potential threats and opportunities to the organisation. Conscientiousness means adherence to the rules and procedures of the organisation, even though there is no one to monitor it. Courtesy refers to good relations with colleagues. There are two broad categories of these behaviours: OCBI, individual manifestations: helpfulness and courtesy, and OCBO, organisational behaviours: conscientiousness, sportsmanship and civic virtue (Organ, 1988).

The connection between coaching and organisational citizenship behaviour

Several international studies have proved (Lee et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2018; Achi et al., 2021; Maamari et al., 2022) that coaching members of an organisation strengthens organisational commitment and significantly improves OCB indicators. Moreover, the coachee can apply their new knowledge gained by coaching to their daily tasks at work that can positively affect their performance.

Coaching also increases group cohesion, encourages transparency and improves group communication (Chahar et al., 2019) and actions that is the channel of how OCB can be implemented. Due to the coaching the employees' attitude turns to be more positive (Joo et al., 2012), while it also enhances self-reliance and trust (Meyer et al., 2004). These facts all together strengthens their engagement to their organisation and as a consequence of this their OCB dimensions improve.

According to Achi and Sleilati (2018) and Onyemah (2009) coaching reinforces employees' conscientiousness at work. It aligns employees' such values with organisational principles which constitute the basis of individual conduct. As a consequence of this employees' feeling of responsibility toward the organisation improves that ultimately benefits the firm by affecting employees' OCB and conscientiousness (Yuan, 2006).

Furthermore, Lo et al. (2006) argue that when management induces coaching, employees are more willing to put extra effort to accomplish additional tasks. Coaching on employees as mediated by OCB work beyond their job descriptions. Moreover, coaching increases employees' outcomes by encouraging the collaboration between colleagues, and therefore, develops employees' altruism. It also fosters the replacement of negative employees' attitudes by positive ones, improving employees' sportsmanship (Kruzela, 2006). Third, Kampa-Kosesch and Anderson (2001) emphasise on coaching's positive effect on employees' involvement and commitment to their jobs and organisations. With such bonds, employees are more and more incited to participate in organisational activities and meetings and to contribute to the organisational success. Employees' civic virtue behaviour is therefore enhanced, improving employees' organisational citizenship behaviour.

In summary, based on the above discussion, coaching develops all the five core dimensions of OCB; conscientiousness, altruism, sportsmanship, civic virtue and courtesy behaviours therefore it improves employees' organisational citizenship behaviour.

The importance of organisational citizenship behaviour in an SME

The importance of human resources has increased in recent years. Small businesses face an increasing challenge in attracting and retaining a well-qualified workforce that can accept and commit to the goals of the SMEs. This is particularly true in the eastern region of Hungary, where there is a growing labour shortage especially in the technical and engineering sectors due to the increasing presence of international companies. The success of a small company in the service sector depends strongly on the performance and efficiency of its employees (Szilágyi, 2023). Since the existence of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is associated with loyalty, it creates loyal employees who are committed to the company in the long term. Moreover, organisational citizenship behaviour can be a unique characteristic of a company providing special own human capital that can even generate a competitive advantage. In this way, a company can achieve long-term success. Furthermore, the importance of organizational citizenship behaviour is not only significant for organizations but also for employees, because as Kozák and Dajnoki (2021) wrote in their article, organizational citizenship behaviour of employees is taken into account - directly or indirectly - when evaluating performance (Kozák, & Dajnoki, 2021). Thus, overall the presence of organisational citizenship behaviour in a firm creates success, human capital and loyal employees (Szilágyi, 2023).

Research material and methodology

The research lasted three months. The sample was taken from two SMEs operating in rural areas and was drawn from their owners, who are also the managing directors, and their employees. Both enterprises are engaged in technical activities. The smaller company (hereafter: Engineering Ltd.) was established eight years ago and employs six people, all of them engineering graduates and men. The manager is 40 years old, while the employees are younger, young professionals aged between 23 and 26. Here the employees have been employed for 3-7 years. They perform exclusively engineering and design tasks. They typically fulfil individual tasks and have been working in the same position throughout their employment with the company.

In the other small enterprise (hereinafter referred to as 'Building Engineering Ltd'), a total of 20 people are employed, of whom 14 were involved in the sample. This organisation has been in operation for fifteen years, the age of the employees ranges from 18 to 33 years, while the age of the manager is 47 years. In addition to engineering design they also carry out construction and maintenance work. The employment period ranges from 1 to 15 years. The majority of the employees of this organisation are divided into two teams, the construction and the maintenance teams, while the administrative and design staff work individually. Four persons with university, seven with technical and three with apprenticeship qualifications participated in the survey at this building services engineering company. None of them has changed their job title during their employment with the company.

TABLE 1: DATA ON RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

qualification	number of employees	position	number of employees	year of employment	number of employees
vocational school	3	leader	4	≤ 2 years	5
vocational secondary school	7	administrator/ designer	6	≤ 6 years	8
university	8	technician	6	≤ 10 years	3
PhD	1	skilled worker	3	≤ 15 years	2

Source: own editing (2024)

The 19 participants of the two investigated companies first completed the questionnaire used by Podsakoff et al. to measure OCB in 2013. It contains 24 statements each of which can be paired with one of the five OCB dimensions, and they had to rate their individual fulfilment or non-fulfilment on a five-point Likert scale. Participants were then coached four times individually each. During the sessions a number of individual career-related and work-related problems were identified and addressed. At the end of this process, all the workers of the two SMEs repeatedly completed the same questionnaire applied at the first time, developed by Podsakoff et al. The results obtained before and after coaching were then compared on several aspects. The coaching was carried out according to the KATA method. Our aim was to reveal the goal to be achieved - broken down into smaller sub-goals if necessary - and to support the coachee with questions to find a solution. They tried this out until the next coaching session and reported on the results. If it worked we moved on to the next goal, if not, we looked for another solution for the problem. Eventually, through this process of achieving the goals, a new habit was established in the coachee's work. So the coach was responsible for sharing knowledge, the learning process was through practical experience. Then the learning of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycles became standardised as a new routine (Michels et al., 2019).

Our present micro-research is linked to the achievement of three main research questions:

Q1: To what extent are the OCB dimensions present in SMEs and what is the background?

Q2: Is OCB in domestic SMEs influenced by the process of organisational coaching?

Q3: Which OCB dimensions are positively - or negatively - affected by organisational coaching?

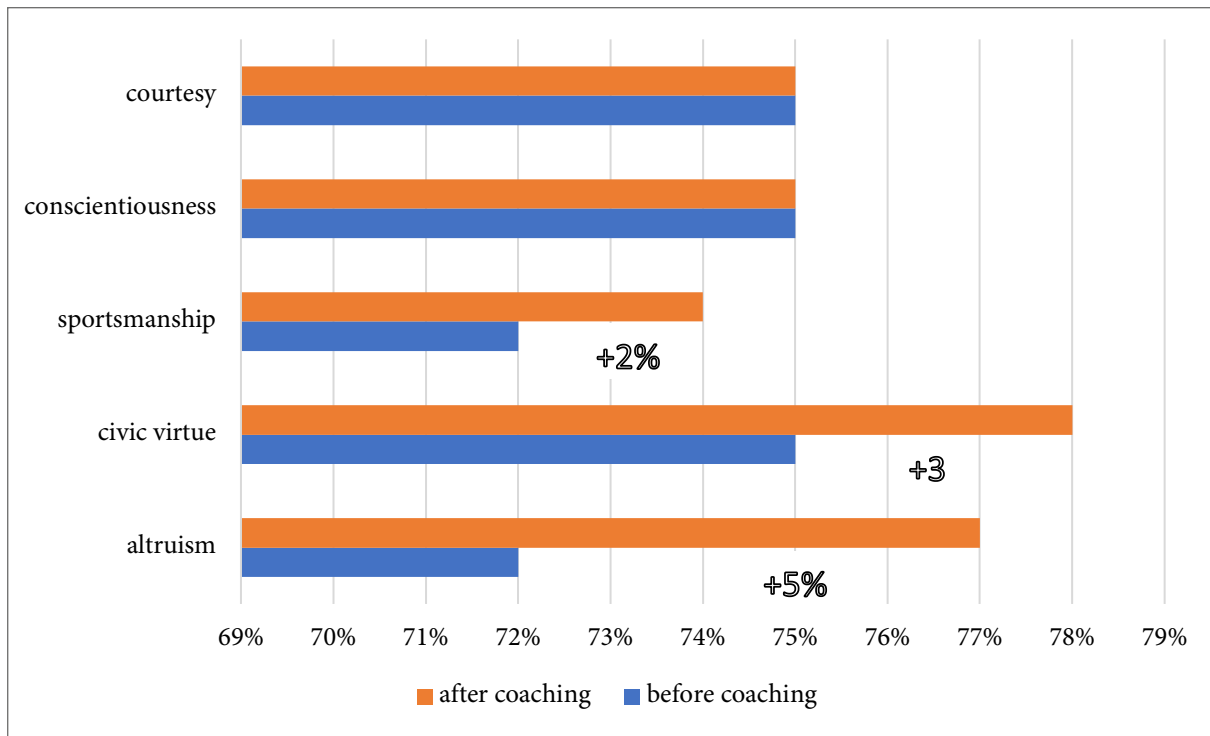
Analysis of research results, identification of changes

The completed Podsakoff questionnaires were evaluated. The results of our research sample were divided into five OCB dimensions such as courtesy, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue and altruism. We compared the average percentages before coaching with the average percentages gained after coaching that are indicated in Diagram 1.

Changes in OCB dimensions after coaching

In consultation with the managers, a threshold of 80% was set, above which the scores were considered good. Looking at the percentage averages, the average of all attributes is below the good rating both before and after the coaching process, but the positive change is clearly visible in the graph. In terms of OCB scores after coaching, there was an increase in the mean scores of the samples for three traits. These are sportsmanship, civic virtue and altruism.

DIAGRAM 1: CHANGES IN OCB DIMENSIONS AFTER COACHING



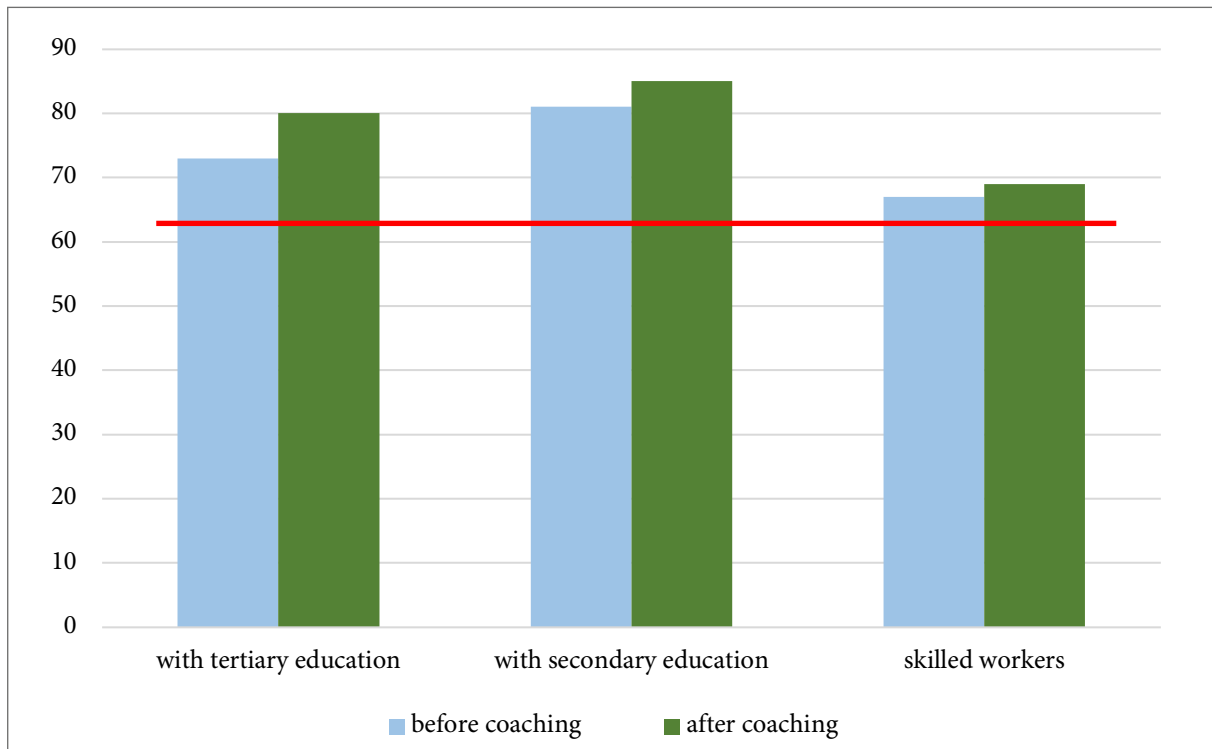
Source: own analysis (2024)

We then further disaggregated the developmental characteristics by educational qualifications, analysed them further and looked at possible underlying causes.

Changes in altruism as a function of educational qualifications

For those with secondary (technical) education, the level of altruism reached a threshold at the first measurement and increased further as a result of coaching. The average was lower for those with tertiary education, but reached 80% by the second measurement. For skilled workers, the average was and remained below 70% for both measurements, although there was also a slight improvement.

DIAGRAM 2: VARIATION OF ALTRUISM BY EDUCATION



Source: own analysis (2024)

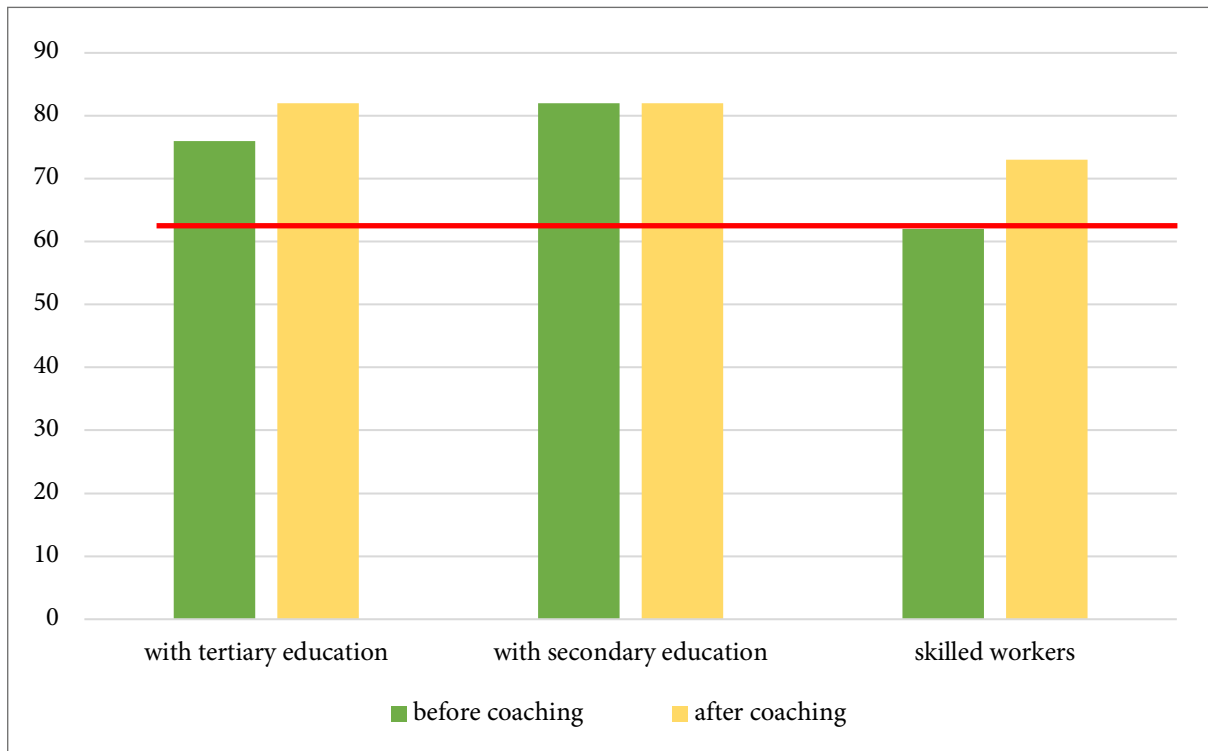
Men made up 98% of the sample. In general they are less likely to ask for help because of their gender, and they themselves are less helpful and more achievement-oriented.

The nature of the work and the length of time spent in school may be behind these differences. Graduate workers such as engineers are engaged in planning activities and work independently and alone. Technicians and skilled workers work together as a team and therefore have a more cooperative and helpful attitude. Nevertheless, skilled workers have a low altruism score. This may occur because, while technicians may have spent at least 13 and up to 15 years on the school bench, they have only 11. Yet the school community promotes and develops a sense of helpfulness. It provides individuals with a supportive culture in which their attitudes towards others are shaped, while they take on moral behaviours and activities (Balogh, & Hüse, 2017).

Changes in civic virtue as a function of educational attainment

The values of civic virtue that means the extent to which an employee considers the interests of his/her employer and tries to prioritise them before their own individual interests was above 80% for those with secondary education before and after coaching and remained unchanged. Both tertiary and vocational education scores increased. The latter group was particularly receptive with an increase of 11%.

DIAGRAM 3: CHANGES IN CIVIC VIRTUE AS A FUNCTION OF EDUCATION



Source: own analysis (2024)

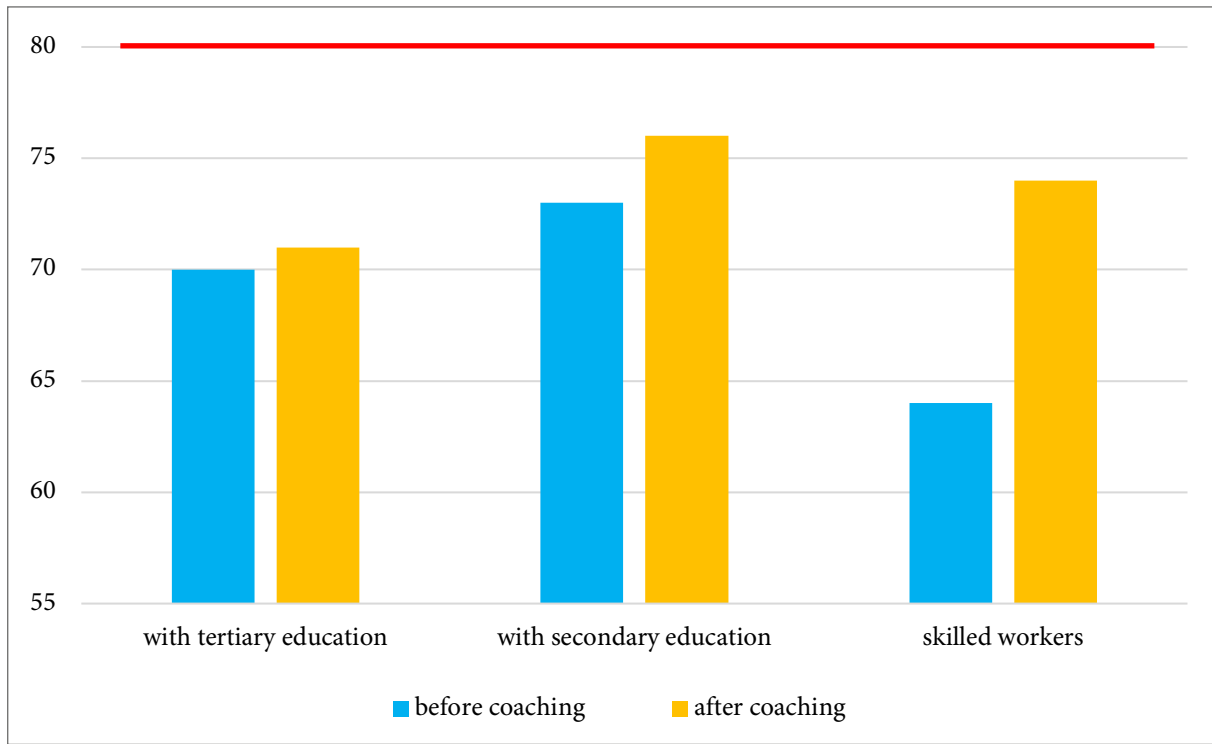
No correlation was found between length of service in the firm and values. Since almost all of them are Generation Z employees, we could not find a relationship for generational differences either. We therefore examined other demographic factors such as place of residence and environment. All technicians commute from small villages in Hajdú-Bihar County to work at the urban site. This means that their upbringing and family environment is different from that of the other two groups raised in the city. In the villages, there is a much greater sense of community belonging, acting for the community, taking account of community interests and the power of unity. The school plays a major role in this, as an institution that promotes education and is responsible for passing on culture, cultivating traditions and building community (Chikány, 2017). The disadvantages of the village are mostly compensated for by the community life and the tendency to cooperate (Ludescher, 2009). This approach is also conveyed by the village family. This is also reflected in the figures we obtained.

Changes in sportsmanship by educational attainment

Despite improvements in all three groups, the values of sportsmanship remained well below the threshold, both before and after the coaching process. Those with tertiary education are generally lower than the other two groups, with two thirds of them working in the younger engineering firm. In their individual planning tasks, there is less need for a sportsmanlike attitude towards their colleagues. However, for the group with a secondary education, who work in teams, this is the most important and is reflected in their values. Furthermore, the numbers also indicate the values that are emphasised in village and community education, such as honesty and fairness that are the basis of sportsmanship. As the resources of this status group include the transmission of cohesive village communities and solid family values (e.g. work education, respect and appreciation of work) which also shape children’s perceptions of work (Pusztai et al., 2023).

The receptivity of the skilled workers group to coaching is noteworthy, as they have experienced a 20% increase in this trait as a result of coaching during which time several individual workplace problems have been sorted out.

DIAGRAM 4: VARIATION OF SPORTSMANSHIP BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION



Source: own analysis (2024)

Overall, generational characteristics lie behind the low values of sportsmanship. Both Generation Y and Generation Z seek happiness in their lives that, unlike Generation X, they prefer to find in their private lives rather than at work. However, information from company managers revealed that workers are working very long hours. In fact, in the case of the building services engineering business, it is not uncommon for them to work in the countryside for up to a week, days away from their families. Although they are well paid for their work it is not enough for them because they do not have a work-life balance in their lives which is at the top of their values.

Conclusions

In the case of two SMEs in the technical field, this research involving coaching was a good opportunity to explore the social processes taking place in the organisation. The results of the research suggest that the coaching process may have been effective, as there were changes in some dimensions of OCB. However, it was not necessarily confirmed as a number of other factors were not examined that may have contributed to the results, such as current workload, stage of work processes or personal life events. However, it highlighted that there is a relationship between the coaching process and OCB characteristics.

Our survey shows that after the coaching, one OCBI, or individual manifestation factor, was higher; the employee's willingness to volunteer. In addition, two organisational behavioural, or OCBO characteristics; sportsmanship and civic virtue increased, too. The former has a significant role in teamwork and cooperation. During coaching, coachees reported that their relationship with each other improved, and that communication between them became more open and assertive.

The strong development of the latter virtue after coaching is important because, as Kozák (2020) states longer time spent in the organisation strengthens the civic virtue dimension. The longest time spent in the organisation, at least 3 years, is necessary for its development. So it logically follows that the process of coaching can accelerate this time which is important for the employer because it correlates with increased commitment and loyalty. In turn, it leads to a more active participation in the life of the organisation, by increasing the willingness to work - even through voluntary work - and in the day-to-day work.

The values obtained reflect generational characteristics. This means that 76% of the employees in the two organisations are Generation Z and 9% are Generation Y, according to Rokeach's values theory; they are aged 18-24 and 25-39 respectively. Their top priority in their norms is to achieve personal happiness, which, unlike Generation X, they seek in their private lives not at work. They are currently unable to achieve this because of the long hours they work in the countryside. This leads to the conclusion that if there is no change in their working patterns, they risk leaving their current organisation.

During the individual coaching sessions, a number of workplace problems were solved, which the coachees perceived as having improved work organisation and as having helped to advance the career development of several colleagues. This success was also reflected in the employees' self-assessments, as they all gave a higher score than their own starting score at the end of the coaching session when asked 'How do you feel on a scale of 1 to 10?'

Suggestions

Our study suggests that SMEs are not yet fully aware of the potential of coaching; that the focus of this process is on developing employees, improving their performance and attitudes. Thus, SMEs should open up to coaching.

The management of these two organisations should seek to reinforce the OCB values in their employees. In this regard, Bolino and his colleagues (2015) concluded in their study that "A more attractive work environment increases OCB." (Bolino et al., 2015). Indeed, the sites of these two companies do not display workplace ergonomics; the buildings are old and outdated. The office furnishings are not very aesthetic. The workshop and changing rooms are cramped and the poor heating strongly reduces the feeling of comfort in the cold months. In addition, there is no separate dining area. Although not all of the participants in the study spend their daily working hours there, it is important that the place is pleasant for them, a place where they are happy to come to day after day. Podsakoff and MacKenzie (2014) also confirmed that "A more conducive work environment improves employee morale." This means that they become more balanced, more trustworthy, more human, and these virtues are closely related to the dimensions of OCB (Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2014)

The two organisations should improve their sportsmanship indicators. I learned during the coaching sessions that they do not organise any team building activities outside the workplace, the only such activity is the end of year dinner. However, the shared experience and the programmes strengthen the sense of belonging and the organisational culture. This could also be achieved through joint training and flexibility on the part of managers. As Filep et al. have found, training that promotes a good working environment and higher quality service delivery creates a positive atmosphere for employees (Filep et al., 2023). Relaxation gives us the strength to carry on, and makes us more energetic and determined to get on with the job. It means a lot if a workplace also takes this into account, with a foosball table in one corner or a comfortable bean bag in the other, great for chatting, and free coffee in the morning (Ryan, 2012). So a good company culture is one that is integral and mindful of the physical and mental wellbeing of employees (Váczai et al., 2017).

In addition, the information obtained does not suggest that managers involve and listen to the professional opinions of employees in the decision-making process. Yet practices that increase participation (i.e. greater involvement in decision-making) can have a dual role. On the one hand, they can help employees identify and use resources to improve their performance, and on the other hand, they can be perceived as being supported and listened to by the organisation. They develop the perception that the organisation sees employees as partners and values them (Filep et al., 2023).

Limitations of the survey

Our survey was a case study with a sample of only 19 employees from two small companies. It can by no means be considered representative. It was a thought-provoking measurement in this area, which is less studied in Hungary. However, the results obtained point to the need for further research on this topic on a wider scale. It should be complemented by a control group measurement to provide more evidence on the relevance of the coaching process among SMEs and its impact.

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