TECHNOLOGY IN COACHING:
Ready To Upgrade?

In article 1 of this mini-series, we looked at leaders using technology such as mobile apps in their coaching programs, e.g., checking dashboards of their progress on their coaching goals. What else are leaders checking on their mobiles?

Like the market of apps, the People Analytics market is bursting with tools and dashboards. Some provide data that inform decisions about coaching, e.g., who "gets" a coach? Others provide data that give leaders and their coaches a more granular picture of the leader's baseline pre-coaching, progress during coaching and success post coaching.

About the Author

Carol has over 25 years' experience developing managers, leaders and teams. For every #PeopleAnalytics or #HRTech conference she attends, she's looking at ways to use data and tools to add color and metrics to executive coaching. Based on her tweets and follows, what did IBM Watson Talent infer about her at the London HR Tech Conference in March 2017? Adventurer!

Organizations make big investments in People Analytics and HRTech; they could get an even better return if they keep their coaches in the loop.

This three-part series on tech in coaching will cover:

Part 1:
Digital delegation using tools that complement 1:1 coaching

Part 2:
People Analytics and HR Tech: how can these enrich coaching?

Part 3:
Is the future of coaching digital?

People Analytics and HR Tech Markets Heat Up

Following the People Analytics and HR Tech market niche means digesting lots of buzz about new start-ups, best-in-category awards and acquisitions by one of the big players. Think of this article as your "express tour" of a dynamic market niche of tools that may be integrated with coaching, run independently of coaching or potentially disrupt coaching.

The buyers of the new tools from these niches — people in HR, learning and development (L&D) and talent roles — are often also their organizations' buyers of external executive coaching services. As they plan roll-outs of new tools, they should engage their external coaches as a stakeholder group.

But not just for a brief webinar about a specific new tool (though coaches appreciate these). Instead, buyers of coaching should keep coaches up to date on their journey along three interrelated paths. Hang in, there are a few trendy buzzwords on these paths.

Path	The Gist of the Path
1. People Analytics	Analysis of patterns in large sets of business and people data to: • support workforce decisions • identify most promising points of intervention • predict workforce needs and behaviors • measure impact of interventions
2. Consumerization of HR	• Digital tools and solutions across all areas of HR that meet or exceed expectations of consumer technology through mobile access and design that is engaging (e.g. social, gamification) and intuitive • Just-in-time access to support personalized through machine learning to users' needs and preferences • Continuous dialogue with employees across the full employee experience and facilitating continuous multidirectional feedback • Early days of chatbots handling HR queries
3. Democratization of data	• Transparency of data collection and analytic formulae • Employees empowered with 24/7 mobile access to their own analytics and broader people and business data • Visibility into employees' strengths, availability, assignments, achievements, and social capital (i.e. an open, intra-company LinkedIn)

Recent work by Cisco's Leadership and Team Intelligence team provides an example of movement on all three paths:

1. Analytics of excellent teams revealed key characteristics, e.g. safety and trust ("my team mates have my back"). (Morgan, 2016)

2. A promise from HR to delight people through digital solutions as compelling as the most advanced consumer digital platforms (they have coined the expression "digiti-light")

3. Teams and team leaders use these digital tools to access and share just-in-time information about where to focus their attention and how to better achieve their goals (Barozzi, 2016).

How does this impact coaching? As organizations apply People Analytics to more senior level employees typically "eligible" for external coaching, their investments in coaching will increasingly be data-driven. This builds confidence that their investments in coaching are matched to top priority talent segments and focused on top priority capabilities. Buyers should update their coaches on how they use People Analytics to determine which talent segment, 9-box or pipeline a leader is in and the common development needs of the segment. And they should take coaches on an express tour of the technology their managers use.

Your Express Tour

Continuous listening and feedback

That business traveler who puts his or her mobile on airplane mode only after a stern request from a flight crew member might be deep into the latest employee engagement scores. How have things moved on since last week? What's the tone of responses on the reorganization? What's going viral on social media?

Technology makes it possible for this global leader to do what management by walking around was meant to do — keep in touch and hear it first-hand, even if his or her team works from five sites around the world. The growth of this niche of the HR Tech market enables leaders to move quickly to identify actions with high probability of desired impact and committing resources to these actions.

Workometry's engagement analytics analyze tens of thousands of employee comments by focusing on the semantic meaning in comments instead of keyword frequency. They are also able to identify "perception contagion" by looking at patterns of perceptions across work relationships. With the capacity to analyze such high volumes of open text, they have developed a four-question engagement survey which they find typically leads to insights on about 80 topics.

Leaders working with Peakon's real-time dashboard have a new page, *Topics*, that summarizes comments from thousands of employees. There's a smart summary for each topic, e.g. Growth, that displays the comments most representative of the set associated with a Topic. The informavore leader can click through to the full set of comments. Leaders can let employees know they have been heard through an acknowledgment or use the *Conversations* tool for anonymous dialogue with an employee. In addition to displaying focus areas for each leader, Peakon points managers to a topical guide for their designated focus area. There's a guide for instance on setting objectives and key results (OKRs).

Feedback in all directions is also "going continuous", and not just at organizations that have dropped performance reviews or ratings. Tools such as Tap My Back and Zugata make it easier to give feedback on the go. Employees may create a team for sharing feedback or use the default set of people imported from email and project management tools. Your leaders can use the aggregated themes and trends in feedback at team or group levels to spot common development needs and underutilized strengths. They, or their teams, will also receive recommendations on internal mentors and learning content driven by Zugata's machine learning. Employees and their managers can also see updated and aggregated summaries of feedback and check their progress on skill sets.

For leaders working with a coach, these tools offer several benefits such as:

• The actions highlighted to improve engagement may provide opportunities to practice an approach or skill that is explicitly part of the leader's coaching agenda;

• Both leader and coach have access to an ongoing live feed of employee input about the leader; and

• When discussing engagement results and feedback posted about a leader, the coach has an opportunity to observe how the leader responds to feedback.

Personalized social learning at scale

Technology has made it possible to challenge the conventional wisdom of an inevitable trade-off between the scale of a L&D solution and its richness.

Let's say, Jane Smith reports to your UK GM and is using Everwise, a social learning platform. As an Everwise user, Jane has resources such as:

• Just-in-time mobile access to content personalized to her evolving skill set, preferences, role and circumstances, e.g. she's new to her role and has the challenges of managing up;

• Personalized suggestions for connections to peers, peer networks, and internal and external experts;

• A high touch introduction to one or more mentors, matched to Jane based on her learning needs, career goals and preferences in a mentor; and

• Prompts and tips across all resources and relationships on how to "take the learning back".

It's over to Jane to take the initiative to design her own developmental portfolio by selecting resources, engaging with resources served up to her and deciding when she is ready to access new content. It's also on her to make and nurture connections that build her profile, expertise and social capital — and make her more marketable internally and externally.

Your UK GM needs to support Jane in two key ways: creating her development goals, and spotting the large and small stretch opportunities for applying learning. The UK GM may know, e.g., about a new tiger team that's going to take on an issue that is a good fit for Jane.

It's too early to tell if this leap in scale will displace some external coaching for some leaders. As engagement and L&D tools are further enriched and the scale holds up, some organizations may rethink their use of external coaches. For example, they might offer an optional limited coaching package as a complement to large-scale solutions.

Embedded cognitive productivity tools

It's impossible to follow analytics without picking up the new jargon: *digital sediment; digital breadcrumbs; digital archaeologist*. We leave digital sediment everywhere, with every diary entry and email. This feeds Microsoft's Workplace Analytics, a cognitive productivity tool that resides in Outlook.

From its base in Outlook, it captures its user's data to create a picture of how he or she uses time and who he or she communicates with. Like Google's goals, it also hones in on that prized, elusive resource for leaders — open, unstructured time. Your time-poor leaders will receive the good or bad news on how often they manage to have "focus time" — two uninterrupted hours working solo. When they use their "focus time", they'll get a prompt to disconnect during these hours. Behavioral nudges utilizing social proof, e.g. "Julian, you've had x% fewer focus hours than other managers at your level", may soon pop up.

The dashboards generated from leaders' data show who's getting their attention, and who's on the side-lines — across emails, videoconferences, messaging and meetings. Embedded cognitive productivity tools give leaders the means to examine patterns among team productivity (based on communications and calendar metadata), engagement and performance. They have the means to experiment with variables such as team meeting times or formats, prioritize how they reconnect to people that show up as cases of inadvertent neglect, or look into costly over collaborations.

Personal analytics such as these provide a useful baseline for a coaching program, especially if they highlight the focus time needed to reflect on coaching sessions and experiments. Coaches working with leaders who need to build relationships across complex global matrices will also find that personal analytics tools do the work of reporting activity across relationships — so that the leader can focus on relationship quality. In the scenario of a leader up for promotion, recently promoted into a more complex role, a comparison of his or her analytics with those of top performers in that role may give him or her some tips on a successful transition.

Sociometric analysis of networks, collaboration and teams

I recently gave a leader feedback on her participation in a meeting with team members who dialed into a WebEx session from around the world. A simple click on a link in an email pulled me into an hour of fascinating team dynamics. While both the client and I found this valuable, and more practical than my joining them in Dubai as a coach-observer, my notes captured only a partial, subjective set of feedback.

The technology that takes us from this partial set of perception data to what Alex (Sandy) Pentland describes as "reality mining" is a small device equipped with sensors and microphones (Pentland, 2015). It's getting smaller and more powerful. Currently similar in size and shape to workplace badges, sociometric data collection devices are already on the march to:

• Expand beyond the current range of data capture on movement and interactions, and take on facial expressions;

• Become less obtrusive, embedded as wearables and stylish; and

• Take on consumer-friendly names, like Amazon's Echo, to displace the current negative shorthand "workplace sensors".

Humanyze has commercialized the sociometric technology which was originally developed at MIT. They work with teams, large groups of employees in settings such as call centers, and groups rethinking the layout of their workspaces (Waber, 2013). Using sociometric data, they work across the dimensions summarized below to improve productivity.

Networks	Collaborations	Team Dynamics
The informal structure: who interacts with whom, frequency of interaction and quality of interaction (inferred from tone of voice)	Contributions of team members within a team	Real-time feedback on meeting behaviors through data visualizations Mapping of micro behaviors to scales of factors such as introversion/extroversion or empathy
Size, strength or range of individuals' networks and aggregate of the team's network	Communications between team members	
	Intra-team communications Collisions: unplanned interactions that build relationships and create opportunities to exchange knowledge and ideas	Patterns that affect productivity, e.g., share of air time
Patterns in interactions and workspace layouts		The hard data of a hard day: the sociometrics of a day that the team rates as a day-from-hell
		Input to profiles of high-performing teams and team leaders

Sociometric analyses bring a powerful mirror to the study of individual and group behaviors at work. In the small example earlier of the Dubai meeting, a coach who expects to observe a meeting live or only works with video, may be seen as a "legacy coach". Capturing the big data of little behaviors also has potential use in the coaching market — in coach training, matching coaches to leaders and coaching research.

Communications analytics

Coaches work with leaders on their leadership narratives and the links between their values, and the vision they communicate to their different audiences. As they make the case for change and reinvention in their organizations, they often share their own experiences of change and personal reinvention. When leaders reach a new level — in their organizations or in their understanding of themselves as leaders — they change their messages and audiences and they likely need to change how they communicate.

Using predictive algorithms, Quantified Communications can test pre-delivery, how a leader's messages will land with specific audiences. Your leaders can also see how they compare to peers, top communicators and industry leaders. For example, in a rehearsal, a leader received high scores on perceptions of confidence, optimism and authenticity — based on her content. However, the breathy quality of her voice conveyed an uncertainty to her target audience. The impact of this perceived uncertainty, dragged her score down to 4.8 times less effective than the average TED speaker.

If you've invested in the latest technology for employee engagement analytics and leaders are presenting an engagement update at a global town hall, they can improve their score before they deliver. Your leaders will soon be able to copy/paste a presentation into an application that returns feedback on their content. Action plans to improve communications impact will, increasingly, be AI-driven — which means leaders know what to do differently straight away.

manager coach talent segment coaching Flight risk
Social learning People Analytics
digital sediment Continuous feedback consumerization of HR
Personalization algorithm HR tech Employee engagement
dashboard DIY sociometrics

Ready to Reconfigure Coaching?

The trends and tools highlighted in your express tour of HR Tech suggest potentially rich combinations with 1:1 coaching. Let's say a coach is about to start working with a new senior external hire or a leader promoted to a new role with a new set of internal stakeholders. This leader's transition coaching program could pull, for example, from many resources as shown below:

Useful to Know and Track in Transition Coaching	Possible Data Sources
Mix of meeting time and focus time; use of the latter for reflection and taking stock of the new role, boss and team	Time usage from analytic tools embedded in electronic diary
Development of internal network and alignment with new role	Communication tracking tools: email, voice and messaging
Collaboration patterns with new stakeholders	Sociometrics of flow, volume and quality of connections
Impact of new leader on team dynamics, engagement and productivity (if possible to compare pre-post hire)	Ad hoc and regular pulse checks and engagement dashboards
Feedback from stakeholders	Themes in internal feedback
Impact of communications on audiences, e.g. is the new leader accepted by audiences?	Impact of communications compared with internal benchmarks or industry peers
Early warning signs of "tissue rejection" of new leader; leader's perceptions of her assimilation compared to internal markers of acceptance by peers	Sociometrics of team meetings; inclusion on internal communications such as emails and invitations to meetings

In addition to data-driven decisions on the top two questions in coaching - who gets a coach and for what purpose – organization at advanced levels of People Analytics may also gain insight into other aspects of coaching such as the quality of internal coaching by managers. If an external coach is counting on high quality coaching by the direct manager of a coaching, it's important to know if that manager, or managers in general, are "showing up" in people data as valued coaches. Similarly, with tools such as those covered in this article, organizations can find their best internal coaches and study the factors that underpin their effectiveness.

With easier access to a wider set of data about leaders, organizations can study how leaders who have worked with coaches perform over the long term. They may also be able to identify markers of coachability through a composite of data such as feedback that comments on the leader as a role model of DIY learning or active use of the learning tools covered earlier.

Companies at advanced levels of People Analytics are also able to identify employees who are flight risks. IBM, for example, has a patent on a proactive retention algorithm which it uses to assess flight risk. It's still uncommon for companies to share information about specific employee flight risks beyond the direct manager and employee. It's also rare for external coaches to receive these data for the leaders they coach.

Buyers will get more value from their investments in HR Tech and coaching if they proactively update their coaches on the new technology their leaders use and encourage coaches to engage with these new resources. As they bring their organizations on the journey of people analytics, consumerization of HR and democratization of data, buyers should refresh their coach selection criteria to explore coaches' digital attitudes and practices such as how ready the coach is to:

• View technology — vendors, data and tools — as potential complements rather than as competition?

• Understand the types of people data leaders receive and use?

• Dial up or down on technology based on the leader's preference, e.g. a millennial or a seasoned executive?

• Rework his or her coaching process, e.g. are 10 stakeholder interviews and a detailed text report always useful?

• Help the client discover opportunities for coaching-related experiments in the actions suggested by dashboards?

• Take stock of what the leader's organization quantifies and how these data are used formally and informally in ways that affect the leader, e.g. is expansion of network considered in talent reviews?

• Curate around the gaps and point the leader to content or connections not available internally?

• Share feedback with buyers on whether technology is having the impact their organizations hoped for — is it empowering leaders, or creating dashboard-fatigue?

Analytics highlight the most promising areas for change and action. It's early days to know if they are compelling enough to help leaders bridge the intentions-action gap. Leaders may still need a human — coach, HRBP or consultant — at the juncture of insights from data and their readiness to act. However, as we will see in the third article of this mini-series, the alternatives to engaging a human on the journey are getting smarter.

Note from the Author

For coaches and organizational buyers of coaching services:

What tools are you using?

How do these fit with coaching?

We'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch: carol@carolbraddick.com

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