

Unintended consequence in implementation of work culture improvement program through peer-coaching in a sales and distribution center of a large multi-national high technology company



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the work culture improvement program (WCIP) by utilizing the peer-coaching method among sales supervisors in Sales and Distribution Center at a Large Multi-National High Technology company. The present study also investigates unintended consequences longitudinally using two stages of a qualitative approach. First, the WCIP, initiated and supported by senior management, was delivered by a Canadian-based consulting team was discussed as a case study. Next, an interview was administered among nineteen respondents with the use of ORID (objective questioning, reflective questioning, interpretative questioning, and decision-oriented questioning) framework. The R Statistics RQDA package analyzed the WCIP's impact using the Echo method of interview. Findings revealed aside from the improvements in interactions, the peer-coaching circle has turned the peer-coaching circle into a social group, an unexpected beneficial result. Furthermore, the nature of the work of the group, being in Sales and Distributions, forced them to a network to gather additional help and information. It appears that the result of the peer-coaching approach might be a function of the following factors: questioning methodology, nature of work, the frequency of meeting, and management support.

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1. Introduction

Market forces threatening the profitability of every organization have motivated the development of a Work Culture Improvement Program (WCIP) in the large multinational high-tech company (LHT). This paper analyzes the use of management-initiated peer coaching as an approach to bring changes. Further, the peers are sales supervisors in the Sales and Distribution Center of LHT. A significant amount of literature on culture change exists. However, only a limited number of longitudinal case studies of culture change on senior management (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; Hornstein, 2015) are known. Some

researchers have recognized the unintended consequences of change (Merton, 1957; March, 1981; Willis et al., 2016). However, the discussion has been at a conceptual level, and the number of empirical studies has been limited (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). Typically, the previous studies evaluate the change program concerning its objectives. However, the unintended facets of the change process had minimal attention.

The performance of sales supervisors who participated in the culture change program will be analyzed with the stated objective of making them "high performers." This paper will include how the "coaching" groups emerged and evolved its own "culture" and often continued voluntarily beyond the required timeframe and brief. Furthermore, it analyzes the impact of WCIP on two areas: First; change in the behavior of individuals, and, second; structural adjustment in the supervisors' regular activities. Also, some theoretical issues will be discussed in case study section related to culture change. This paper argues that studies usually ignore

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situational constraints that strongly influence culture and culture change, even though Lewin's (1951) model of change considers the adjustments of these constraints.

This paper is organized by presenting the literature review and followed by research method section. The case study, analysis and results of study are then presented and discussed, together with highlighting the conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature review

The concept of work culture gained popularity as the North American manufacturers tried to emulate the Japanese in the 1980s based on the assumption that their "culture" was responsible for the superiority of the Japanese production system. However, the early studies of North American firms' attempt at taking as a pattern the just-in-time production culture indicated that the difficulties of implementation were often related to "hard" constraints or mandatory requirements. The mandatory requirements might be in the form of daily production quota, performance evaluation system, and the lack of coordination among functional units (Safayeni and Purdy, 1991; Duimering and Safayeni, 1991). However, for many organizations in the West, changing the work culture provides a key towards being able to compete with the East (Hayes et al., 2017).

The general theories of change started with Lewin's (1951) three-stage model in which a successful change will require "unfreezing," "changing," and "refreezing." *Unfreezing* refers to the relaxation of the constraints on the socio-technical system, *changing* is learning a new pattern of behavior, and *refreezing* means adjusting the constraints to maintain and to reinforce the modified method of expression.

Lewin's model has remained as a useful way of viewing the process of change. Some researchers have observed that most models of change end up being Lewin's three-stage model (Hendry, 1996; Weick and Quinn, 1999; Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999; Brodnik and Lewin, 2017). There is also a recognition that difficulties in the implementation of the change process is either at the unfreezing or the refreezing stage. Jones et al. (2005) have pointed out the importance of being ready for a change in the context of the successful implementation of a new end-user computing system, and Buchanan et al. (2005) have discussed the difficulties of refreezing the modification in the organization. It is worth noting that Lewin's model of evolution has survived the test of time. However, the application of Lewin's field theory-the basis of his model-to the process of change is rare (Coch and French Jr, 1948).

One of the most preferred definitions of culture is by Schein (1993). Schein defined culture as shared basic assumptions within a group where the premises are learned and affect perception and behavior. The ingredients of shared assumptions include norms, values, mental models, and so on.

Thus, the concept of assumptions is the human understanding of a given situation. This broad definition could include most, if not all, human actions in organizations. This all-inclusive concept of culture has over-lapped with the idea of organizations. The language in the "typology" of cultures reveals this overlap. Rodrigues (2006), for example, has used the concepts of differentiation and integration (Martin, 2001) to explain culture change in a Brazilian telecom company; the same ideas were used by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) to describe properties of the organizational structure. Similarly, Claver et al. (1999) have used the idea of bureaucracy to describe a culture; the concept was invented by Weber (1947) to articulate the properties of a normative model for an efficient way of configuring organizations.

There is a non-academic market for favorite recipes for changing organizational culture to improve performance. However, the careful examination of the long-term effects of the change was often the opposite of the initial reports (Hitt and Ireland, 1987). Miller (1994) provided possible reasons for short-term success but long-term failures. Buchanan et al. (2005) and Johnson et al. (2016) have reviewed the literature on change and have identified the core difficulty for sustaining change happens during the Lewin's refreezing stage of the change process.

The studies of culture change at the managerial level have been relatively rare (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; Doppelt, 2017), particularly at the senior management level. One of the more novel mechanisms of changing behavior of senior managers by practitioners is executive coaching (Sherman and Freas, 2004). However, empirical studies on coaching are also quite limited (Joo, 2005; Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Feldman and Lankau (2005) have recognized this deficiency and pointed out that there is a need for a better understanding of why coaching can make a difference in the behavior of the senior managers. The Feldman and Lankau, (2005) study prompted us to search and know more about the dynamic properties of coaching, how do they translate to "better" leadership, and how does better direction make the organization more effective.

There are different definitions for coaching. Some have emphasized the relationship between consultant and executive (Douglas and McCauley, 1999; Feldman, 2001), whereas others have viewed it as a gradual process by which a person develops and becomes more active (Peterson and Hicks, 1995). The current debate in the coaching literature presents two options regarding from whom the feedback should come. The first option is from a professional consultant trained on coaching techniques with little or no knowledge of the business (Brotman et al., 1998; Kilburg, 1996; Sperry, 1996; Foss and Saebi, 2017). The second option is from a coach with relevant business knowledge (Diedrich and Kilburg, 2001; Corfield and Paton, 2016). Both types of information can be

useful, and there is no reason why they should be mutually exclusive.

Moreover, the literature often views coaching as a dyadic function. No research says that coaching needs to be a one-on-one process and hence it can also be within a small group. This kind (few in membership) of group setting for coaching is the basis in this paper.

Further, Hagen, et al. define formal peer coaching as the process of formalizing the voluntary, mutually beneficial relationship between two or more hierarchically equal peers (Hagen et al., 2017). Further, Hagen specified that the “stated goal, particularly related to performance improvement” is attained “through the use of the specific coaching processes and mechanism of learning, helping and support.”

As in any change efforts, this paper would like to present the idea of unintended consequences. The discussions claimed that any improvement program aimed at a particular complex system might generate unexpected results. Some of these results are beneficial, and some are not (de Zwart, 2015).

3. Research method

The academic research team conducted assessment study in two phases: at the beginning of the training the research team participated and observed one of the training sessions (Phase 1), and after eight months the research team conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 19 sales supervisors (Phase 2). Throughout the training, the Human Resources (HR) department provided the research team with self-assessment and attendance data of the sales supervisors. Thus, the data came from three different sources: the research team’s observations of the training, data provided by the LHT organization and the in-depth interviews with the sales supervisors.

On the eighth month, the academic research team conducted in-depth interviews with 19 of the sales supervisors who attended the Work Culture Improvement Program. Using the Echo method of interview technique, a massive amount of qualitative data was obtained.

The interview transcript contains information regarding supportive and unsupportive events that took place in their coaching groups. It also includes comments regarding issues relevant to sales territory management, sales force motivation and compensation, sales promotion and the possibility of a more significant commission.

The transcripts were analyzed line by line by the researchers independently and categorized based on their similarity. Themes are used to group comments for each question, which were then broken down into several distinct categories within each theme based on the agreement between the coders. The analysis was performed using the RQDA Package of the R-Statistics’ qualitative data analysis. The following section reports on the findings from

sorting the interview regarding themes, categories, and illustrations.

3.1. The case study: Situations and company perceptions

The focus organization of this paper is the Sales and Distribution Center of a large multi-national high-tech (LHT) company with over 30,000 employees. This organization, hidden under the alias of LHT, follows the functional form of organization. The hierarchy structure has several vice-presidents reporting to the chief executive officer forming the upper level of the management. Next to the vice-presidents are managers of various areas. The supervisors, reporting to the managers, are the staffs who make things work on a day to day basis. In the Sales and Distribution Center, there are approximately 80 supervisors. While no more than five supervisory levels covered the administrative tasks, most of the supervisors were covering various sales territories.

LHT’s management thought that having the work culture improvement program (WCIP) for the sales supervisors will have a significant impact in changing the culture of the organization. The focus on supervisors assumed that using the sales supervisors as agents of culture change within their business units was a very effective method to spread excellence throughout the company.

The Human Resource (HR) department together with a reputable consulting firm based in Canada designed the work culture improvement program. The HR department conducted initial interviews with a few sales supervisors across different functional areas and identified specific behavioral dimensions that are needed. Thus, during the training session, the following five behavioral aspects are presented to the sales supervisors as desirable attributes of a high performing leader:

- To be decisive even if there is opposition (decisiveness);
- To be able to take reasonable risks (risk taking);
- To be able to reach a clear understanding of various dimensions of the project from the beginning (onset clarification);
- To be able to learn and understand the interdependent processes needed for project completion (process understanding), and
- To be able to develop intense interpersonal relationships within the teams (relationship building).

The Canadian-consulting firm taught them the ORID method of peer questioning. In this process, a peer will help another peer go through a particular issue by discussing the following areas: objective, reflective, interpretative and decision-based questions. Facilitators noted the novelty and variability of every sales issue, by asking questions about the ORID process, the person with difficulty could sort his way out of the problem.

Further, the pilot group consisted of 45 sales supervisors. They were trained in small groups (10 – 15 members) in half-day workshops, followed by a 12-week peer coaching activity.

At the beginning of the workshop, each sales supervisor received a booklet containing the training material. The material included three self-assessment questionnaires to be completed on week 1, 6, and 12 of the training; a sample feedback questionnaire for supervisor's teams, and a description of typical and dysfunctional behaviors and their functional opposites as observed in the organization. The HR department provided templates for self-assessment of behavioral dimensions and information regarding the coaching circle along with expectations and instructions for effective coaching.

One of the sales supervisors introduced the training program on culture change. She addressed issues such as the changing external environment, increasing the competitiveness of the market, the LHT's loss of market share, the necessity of reducing costs, and becoming more efficient and competitive. To achieve these desired goals, the LHT's culture and the old traditions have to change. As the sales supervisors are the operational pillars of the organization, the best way of turning the company around would be to transform the sales supervisors into "high performing" leaders. The presenting sales supervisor identified and explained the five dysfunctional behaviors and their causes. Further, the sales supervisor presented five desirable behavioral dimensions, and he showed that these five desirable behavioral could be the means of overcoming the current ineffectual culture of the organization.

During the training, the sales supervisors were asked to assess their competence on each dimension and prompted to select two of the five aspects that they perceive requiring improvement. Each participating sales supervisor chose a project each on which he is currently working and requested to concentrate on improving the behavioral dimension selected for the next 12 weeks. The sales supervisor assessed their competency on the behavioral aspects of weeks 6 and 12. Further, the HR department distributed feedback questionnaires to their teams. Finally, two phone conferences with the HR department were conducted for the entire pilot group on the sixth week and twelfth week to discuss the features of the training and to provide feedback to the program organizers.

Next, the sales supervisors participated in exercises and discussions. In one of the activities, for example, they were split into small groups of three to four individuals, and each group generated a list of difficulties faced by the organization. Each group discussed its responses in the larger group. The trainer pointed out the need to respond positively and decisively that reflects the company's preparedness to fight for success in the competitive environment.

Towards the end of the training, the sales supervisors completed their first self-assessment questionnaire concerning their competency on the five desirable behavioral dimensions and selected two of those dimensions to improve upon within the next 12 weeks. The training session concluded by getting the sales supervisors to sign up for one of the coaching groups (five to ten supervisors per group) and finding volunteers to act as the coaching group leads.

During the next 12 weeks, the sales supervisors were expected to relate, apply and improve their chosen behavioral dimensions to the projects they were working on, meet with their coaching groups to discuss the challenges they encountered and received peer coaching.

At the end of the training workshop, all sales supervisors were assigned to a coaching group, referred to as "peer-coaching circle," with five to nine other sales supervisors from the group. Peer-coaching circles were set to meet every other week, and the sales supervisors were expected to share their practice of implementing the improvements to behavioral dimensions and then receive coaching from their peers. The consultant emphasized that effective coaching involves asking questions as opposed to providing solutions and encouraging an individual to realize on their own the cause of the problem and potential solutions.

The coaching circle leader was responsible for scheduling on every other week meeting and facilitating the discussions during the five 1.5-hour-duration coaching circle sessions. The consultant introduced the supervisors to coaching circles as a form of a peer support group where they could share their problems on tackling the behavioral dimensions and receive coaching. All supervisors were expected to provide coaching and receive coaching. Each participant could receive coaching when he or she had a problem and needed help. In the coaching process, one of the individuals was acting as "trainee" and shared his/her problems with the rest of the group. The group was expected to get coached by asking "coaching" questions as opposed to providing solutions.

The form of coaching that the LHT has selected for its supervisors is entirely different from the conventional types of coaching described in the academic and practitioner literature. It is worth pointing out that the LHT's supervisors in the pilot group never had any previous workshops or training on how to coach or conduct useful coaching sessions. The consultant gave them a list of coaching questions, an explanation of the idea of coaching, and a discussion of the ORID techniques. Thus, it is worth emphasizing that the members of a group had a similar problem, obstacles, and frustrations in their work. Further, no one had previous ORID or facilitation experience. The relationship within the supervisors' coaching circle was one "trainee" to multiple coaches, and each had opportunities to play both roles during the same coaching circle session.

The culture change initiative imposed the following guidelines on the participants:

- adjust the behavior based on the desirable “high-performing” dimensions without any change in the work environment;
- allocate 1.5 hours every week for their coaching circle meetings;
- keep the discussion point on the application of behavioral dimensions;
- adhere to coaching techniques described in their booklet and use a list of appropriate “coaching” questions.

Meeting with their coaching circles became a part of the supervisors' schedule, and it became the only mandatory requirement for them. All other conditions were merely guidelines for the supervisors to adjust their behavior in the desired manner. On the other hand, recommended behavioral guidelines never obligate the sales supervisors to comply.

The academic researchers did not participate in the identification of the program goals or the design of the training program. They were invited by the LHT as independent investigators to examine the training effects on the pilot group of sales supervisors with the intention to add value to the learning process through their investigations.

4. Findings

4.1. Training outcomes

At the beginning of the training, each supervisor selected two of the five aspects to improve upon. These dimensions were decisiveness, risk-taking, onset clarification, process understanding, and relationship building.

During the interviews, the research team asked the sales supervisors to provide examples of the ways by which they have become more active. These given examples were categorized based on the behavioral dimensions. The highest number of such improved occasions was reported on the relationship building dimension, followed by the onset of clarity dimension. The least amount of instances was published on the risk-taking and decisiveness dimensions.

It is interesting to note that, at start of the program, more than half of the participants selected the “decisiveness” dimension. But when prompted for examples of the situations that demonstrated their improved effectiveness, only 11% of the sales supervisors provided examples. This result was consistent with the self-assessment data collected by the organization, where the decisiveness dimension showed the least amount of improvement at the end of 12 weeks. There were minimal instances of development on the risk-taking aspect and it was rarely selected.

The sales supervisors reported that on an average it was easy for them to apply the behavioral

dimensions in 60% of their work situations. The sales supervisors attributed the ease of application to conditions which were under their control (e.g., relationship building within their teams), and to work with other sales supervisors who received the same training (e.g., onset clarity). A sales supervisor might be facing one or more difficulties from the following list:

- the necessity to challenge the hierarchy to impose a decision (e.g., decisiveness);
- dealing with people who have not received the training;
- attending to frequent crises;
- the complexity of the existing processes affecting comprehension (e.g., process understanding); and
- changing-personal-relationships due to highly distributed workforce.

The only requirement placed on the sales supervisors in this training was to attend their coaching circle meetings. Coaching circles were a significant part of the training and were the mechanism that facilitated the moving and refreezing stages (Lewin, 1951) of the culture change program.

4.2. Training perceptions

For clarity, the academic research team asked the participating sales supervisors to provide examples of supportive and unsupportive aspects of their coaching circle experience. Overall, the sales supervisors freely offered 87 favorable and 30 unsupportive instances of the coaching circle events, or every unhelpful example was matched with almost three favorable cases. All favorable circumstances from the coaching circles are placed into four general themes: work-enhancing, family-feeling, attitude towards coaching circle, and training-specific comments. Table 1 lists the categories within each of these themes, reports the percentage of observations for each category, and provides a typical comment for each type.

Table 1 shows that 85% of the comments were related to the beneficial impact of Peer-Coaching Circle (PCC) on work, family-feeling provided by the PCC, and the attitude towards the continuation of the PCC. Only 15% of the comments were directly related to training. Within the theme of ‘work-enhancing,’ the ‘consulting/ helping with issues’ category had the highest percentage of comments, followed by the ‘networking/ meeting new people’ and ‘learning about the company’ categories. The comments for the theme ‘family-feeling’ sub-divided into four categories of ‘enjoyment,’ ‘openness,’ ‘sense of community/therapeutic,’ and ‘valuable/not a waste of time.’ For the theme ‘attitude toward coaching circle meetings,’ most of the comments were made by those who continued their coaching circle meetings beyond the required 12-week period and a few others expressed interest in resuming their coaching circle meetings. The comments for the

theme 'training specific comments' were equally distributed between two categories of 'reinforcing

the behavioral dimensions from the training' and 'coaching experience.'

Table 1: Summary of comments regarding the helpful aspects of the peer-coaching circles (PCC)

Theme	Category	Comments
1. Work-Enhancing (40%)	1.1 Consulting, helping with issues	19%
	1.2 Networking/ meeting new people	12%
	1.3 Learning about the company	9%
2. Family-Feeling (28%)	2.1 Enjoyment	8%
	2.2 Openness	7%
	2.3 Sense of community/ therapeutic	7%
	2.4 Valuable/ Not a waste of time	6%
3. Attitude toward the PCC meetings (17%)	3.1 Extending meetings beyond the 12 weeks	13%
	3.2 Desire to continue PCCs	4%
4. Training specific comments (15%)	4.1 Reinforcing the behavioral dimensions from training	8%
	4.2 Coaching experience	7%

Table 2 reports the summary of the comments regarding the unhelpful aspects of the peer coaching circles which were much less frequent than the helpful comments.

The theme 'sales supervisor's busy schedule' constituted 50% of the comments. This theme is the most frequently mentioned difficulties which were related to scheduling the coaching circle meetings. Further, the category (too many dimensions to work on) follows, and subsequently, the group (multitasking during the sessions) follows. The peer-coaching circle attendance data collected by the HR department showed that there were some concerns related to scheduling. Even though the pilot group of supervisors was volunteers, the attendance at the coaching circle meetings was not perfect. The

average number of missed coaching meetings per individual in all groups was 1.4 (28% of the total number of sessions). From our interviews, the participants have sometimes failed to attend the peer coaching circles due to other pressing issues.

For the theme 'deviation from intended objectives,' which constituted 30% of the comments, the two frequently mentioned categories were 'venting sessions' and 'irrelevant issues' followed by 'lack of focus on personal development.' Finally, for the theme 'implementation issues,' the most frequently mentioned category was 'bumpy start in the coaching circles' followed by 'disciplines lack concrete actions,' 'no openness,' and 'short duration and too few meetings.'

Table 2: Summary of comments regarding the unhelpful aspects of the peer-coaching circles (PCC)

Theme	Category	Comments
1. Sales Supervisors' busy schedule (50%)	1.1 Scheduling/ time allocation difficulty	33%
	1.2 Too many dimensions to work on	10%
	1.3 Multitasking during calls	7%
2. Deviation from the intended objectives (31%)	2.1 Venting Sessions	14%
	2.2 Irrelevant issues	14%
	2.3 Lack of focus on personal development	3%
3. Implementation issues (19%)	3.1 Bumpy start in CC	10%
	3.2 Disciplines lack concrete actions	3%
	3.3 No openness	3%
	3.4 Short duration/too few meetings	3%

5. Discussion

The sales supervisors readily provided examples of more effective ways of handling various aspects of their work situations (Claver et al., 1999; Douglas and McCauley, 1999; Hendry, 1996; Willis et al., 2016). As this study has suggested in the findings section, the ease of application of a behavioral dimension is directly related to whether the constraint is hard or soft. For example, one of the behavioral aspects for which the sales supervisors had difficulty providing examples of improvement on was decisiveness. To be more decisive in a typical multifunctional meeting (with other supervisors and, possibly, managers and subject matter experts) is not accessible because the composition of the group creates hard constraints that make either decisiveness inappropriate or could result in strong opposition from the group. This repudiates the investigation of Hagen et al. (2017), which stated that the sales supervisors had no difficulty in

providing examples of improvement in 'relationship building', within their team. On the other hand, this paper found that due to the absence of hard constraints, the sales supervisors could readily organize personal meetings with their subordinates.

At the time of our interviews, 32% of the supervisors could not initially remember which two behavioral dimensions they were working on during the training without looking into their notes. From one viewpoint, Foss and Saebi (2017) stressed that such forgetfulness raises questions as to whether the behavioral aspects were still in practice. It is possible that, at least for some sales supervisors, the situation had gone back to "normal" (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). This research argues that one possible reason for this could be the lack of adjustment in the hard constraints of the sales supervisors' work environment. Nevertheless, all supervisors in the study reported that they have become more useful as a result of the training and their participation in the coaching circle. Thus, Brodник and Lewin (2017)

stressed there is a perception of a successful practice. The cause of this perception is important. It is essential to recognize that the sales supervisors were volunteers, which can be interpreted as “readiness for change” (Armenakis et al., 1993) and is equivalent, at least, to partial unfreezing (Lewin, 1951). The adequate “unfreezing” has long been recognized as a significant contributor to the success of any change effort (Lewin, 1951; Schein, 1979; Armenakis et al. 1993). Lewin (1951) stressed that being unfrozen indicates the willingness of the supervisors to try different approaches and their readiness to abandon their existing habits.

In this study, the peer coaching circle program mandatorily requires the participants to attend the regular coaching circle meetings. Johnson et al. (2016) agreed that the intended role of the coaching circles was to reinforce the application of the behavioral dimensions by providing peer support to the trainees. However, the coaching circles transformed and developed into a different mechanism. de Zwart (2015) stressed that the peer coaching circle dynamics deviated from the intended objectives in some ways. In our paper, the training specific positive comments regarding the coaching circles (Table 1, theme 4) were the least frequent (15%) instead of being the most frequent. The frequency of comments revealed that the most common beneficial effect of the coaching circles was receiving consultation and help with various issues that the sales supervisors encountered. Further, the supervisors viewed the coaching circles as friendly and open and a venue to meet their peers from other divisions of the organization while developing close relationships with them. The supervisor shared their experiences and realized that other supervisors also faced similar issues in their day-to-day work and, learned more about the organization itself (Martin, 2001; Miller, 1994).

Kets de Vries (2005) stressed there are two deviations from the intended peer coaching circle objectives. First, the coaching circle interaction was supposed to revolve around the behavioral dimensions (which often did not). Second, the coaches were expected to ask coaching questions and refrain from providing suggestions and sharing their experience with similar situations (which they reportedly often did). However, in our paper the supervisors did not perceive it as ‘deviation from the intended objectives’ of the coaching circles (Table 2, theme 2). One possible reason for not recognizing it as a deviation is the fact that the unintended coaching circle culture was a very positive and useful experience for them. In other hand, Feldman and Lankau (2005) asserted that the participants could achieve satisfaction and assistance different from the stated goals of the formal circles.

The deviation from the coaching process as described in the Canadian-based consultants’ training brochure occurred because both the coaches and trainees were all experienced in the job they were doing. Coaching in a traditional sense is typically conducted by a coaching specialist who

often does not have adequate knowledge of the business (Armenakis et al., 1993; Brotman et al., 1998). As a result, such specialist cannot provide specific suggestions for particular work-related situations but could help the “trainee” by asking perceptive questions. In the case of the supervisors’ coaching circle at the LHT, all members of the group had been working in their roles for a while; they all knew the business and acquired different levels of experience in various units of the organization. Therefore, the supervisors as coaches were well-experienced not only to ask perceptive questions but, also to provide tips and suggestions from their own experience when it was appropriate (Diedrich and Kilburg, 2001; Feldman, 2001; Schein, 1979).

From viewpoint of Weick and Quinn (1999) it was natural for this interactive experience to take place during the coaching circle meetings instead of asking little coaching questions. In our paper, the supervisors seeking help shared their specific issues with specific job situations. If others had experience with similar situations, it was only natural for them to share their expertise to help their peers (Joo, 2005). This exchange of knowledge is the basis for support group functioning (Corfield and Paton, 2016).

As a result, both softer constraints imposed by the training organizers concerning the coaching circle meetings, i.e., to keep the discussion around the behavioral dimensions and adhere to the described coaching strategies, did not work. Hayes et al. (2017) agreed with this kind of findings. Further, the result shows that the ‘supervisor’s highly positive experiences in the coaching circle led to the continuation of the coaching circles meeting even after the required 12 weeks of the training. Moreover, others expressed their wish to resume those meetings in the future. In this paper, the interaction aspect is 39% of the comments, while overall positive experience is 28%. Of the participants, 58% wanted the meeting to continue beyond the 12 weeks, while 16% of the participants wanted to have the meeting in the future. The coaching circles had developed their unique pattern of interaction and culture (Hendry, 1996; Johnson et al., 2016). The participants wanted the circles to be a regular feature within the organization.

The supervisors regarded their coaching circle ambiance as open and with a sense of togetherness (Willis et al., 2016). In our paper, the supervisors endorsed the open environment and sense of community in their coaching circles so that they all could uncover their problems, issues, and vulnerabilities in a job without fear, within the coaching circle. Willis et al. (2016) asserted that supervisors shared their difficulties and had opportunities to share their successes by giving tips and suggestions to one another. In our study, these interactions do not usually occur in the supervisors’ regular day-to-day activity and many experienced initial difficulties to share their problems. Some of the supervisors attributed this difficulty to a perception that individuals at the supervisor level

should have everything under control and if they have regular issues, then, most likely, they are unsuitable for their position (Peterson and Hicks, 1995; Schein, 1993).

Overcoming this initial difficulty of sharing their problems and asking for help from their peers helped the supervisors to bring informality and friendship into their relationship and get a better appreciation among one another (Buchanan et al., 2005; Coch and French Jr, 1948; Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). The present study also revealed that highly political nature of the “usual” interactions within the organization could be eliminated through the working of coaching circles. This result does not coincide with the results of Doppelt (2017), who suggested that it is no surprise that creating such an atmosphere of camaraderie improved supervisors’ work-related interactions with each other and resulted in generating a better working relationship with the peer coaching circle. However, our findings condones with the result of Hagen et al. (2017), and Hayes et al. (2017) who stressed that the enhancement of working relationships among the supervisors might have created a significant impact on their performances regardless of their improvement or a lack of development in the behavioral dimensions. On an average, 40% of all supervisors’ interactions are with other supervisors, and they perceive their interactions with other supervisors in the company to be very important (9 on a 10-point scale). Thus, if the training program managed to improve supervisors’ relationships with one another, then the achievement is synergistic (Armenakis et al., 1993). A new culture of openness, friendliness, support, and bonding has emerged within the coaching circles (Hayes et al., 2017). From the viewpoint of Kilburg (1996), he stressed that the formation of this culture has generated a more significant effect on the participants lasting longer than the intended lessons from the training, i.e., the behavioral dimensions. Any training program or organizational change initiative results in unintended consequences and these consequences are most often negative (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). In our study, there were unintended consequences as well, but the participants regarded them as highly positive and beneficial in organizational and personal perspectives.

While previous researchers typically identify unfreezing and refreezing (or lack of adjustments in the mandatory requirements) as causing the failure of a change program (Jones et al., 2005; March, 1981; Willis et al., 2016), this paper narrates how a single mandatory requirement resulted in unintended but positive cultural dimension within the organization. Recalling, the single compulsory requirement is to attend every session of the peer coaching circle.

6. Conclusion

This paper supports the notion that an attempt at culture change accompanies unintended consequences. In this paper, the coaching circle

culture emerged as a “counter-culture” where the norms of behavior were to solve various problems through honest discussions and mutual help. Such counter-culture was opposite to the LHT’s highly political culture characterized by hidden agendas, lack of trust, and lack of information sharing.

The positive results of the coaching circle culture were, in part, due to the supervisors’ readiness for change. In other words, the supervisors were “unfrozen” and willing to try and learn new ways. We do not suggest that a coaching circle within a small group will always result in a positive culture.

The construct of hard constraint has been used in this paper as a crude theoretical notion to draw attention to the mapping between culture as a social system and the structural properties of the work situation. This mapping is often missing from the scholarly discussions of culture.

It is possible to conduct coaching in a small group setting quite productively. Further, we found peer coaching to be an effective means of consulting, learning, and problem-solving. Moreover, we realized that a kind of mutual trust developed among the group of supervisors. Such confidence led them to think above parochial considerations igniting a spirit of cooperation leading to a positive culture of consultation and team thinking.

This paper also leads to the fact that attempts to force cultural change may not always give the intended results. The participants involved may not deliberately move along the charted course while they may unintentionally move or drift into the charted course, where natural interactions between the group members generate reinforcements.

Additionally, this paper suggests that the notion of managed cultural change, or official intervention to change culture can perhaps only ‘trigger’ the move while the magnitude and nature of change depend on informal interactions between the participants occurring within the managed training environment. In other words, cultural shifts are leveraged consequences that deviate from intended outcomes.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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