

Title:

Dysfunctional leadership behaviours in organisations; a view from the professional coach.

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study reviews definitions of the emerging concept of dysfunctional leadership and describes the incidence and type of dysfunctional behaviours which are raised within the context of 'one-to-one' coaching sessions. Following interviews conducted with experienced coaches working as external providers, the study concludes that dysfunctional leadership behaviours appear frequently as the main theme in coaching discussions. The study finds that it is the core management behavioural competencies that are lacking in middle and senior managers, despite the increasing incidence of interventions which purport to develop leadership and management skills. It also finds that coaching delivered by external providers is an effective intervention to address the dysfunctional leadership behaviours, and that coaches use a variety of strategies to support the coachee, the most effective being those that develop self-awareness in the coachee.

Key words

Coaching, dysfunctional leadership; coaching strategies; leadership behaviours

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in dysfunctional leadership behaviours prompted this study as has the emerging concern that coaches may be complicit in the discussion of unethical and dysfunctional behaviours through concealing such behaviours, or simply failing to challenge (Blakely & Day 2012). As coaching practitioners the authors had experience of working with dysfunctional leadership behaviours and so were prompted to design a study to firstly identify whether coaches recognise dysfunctional leadership behaviours as an issue for coachees. The

study also sought to identify what type of dysfunctional leadership behaviours were raised in the coaching sessions, the prevalence of dysfunctional leadership behaviours, and to focus on what strategies coaches use when such behaviours come to light.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dysfunctional leadership behaviours

Interest in exploring the ‘dark side’ of dysfunctional or destructive leadership behaviours has grown (Burke, 2006; Goldman 2009, Hogan & Hogan 2001; Hogan & Kaiser 2005; Padilla et al 2007; Einarsen et al 2007; Schilling 2009), in part due to various high profile scandals such as Enron (Spector, 2003; Quigley, 2009), although a cohesive definition is still lacking. Johnson & Huwe (2002) suggest that any behaviours which reduce trust and effectiveness are said to be dysfunctional. Dysfunctional leadership behaviours can be categorised on a spectrum, one end at which lie behaviours that are ineffective, incompetent, inappropriate and unproductive (Kellerman 2004:282). At the other end of the spectrum exist unethical and evil behaviours (Padilla et al 2007), referred to as the ‘dark side’ (Kellerman, 2004, Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly, 2004). De Vries (2001) observes behaviours of aggression, workplace bullying, and power misuse.

Goldman (2010) describes several cases where leaders with valued attributes and skills at the outset of employment become subsumed by problems caused by the symptoms of undiagnosed and untreated clinical psychiatric disorders, for example exhibitionism; body dysmorphic disorder and narcissism. The consequential dysfunctional leadership behaviours are outlined as arrogance, melodrama; impulsivity; volatility; mischievousness; eccentricity; perfectionism. McCartney & Campbell (2006) describe leaders who have become derailed

from their career trajectory when they display leadership behaviours that become increasingly dysfunctional.

Models of effective (functional) leadership tend to prescribe a common set of characteristics and behaviours, whereas when exploring what constitutes dysfunctional leadership it becomes clear that the behaviours described as dysfunctional vary greatly, reminiscent of Tolstoy's (1877:1) comment that "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"

Coaching

Coaching is a development process that involves structured interaction between two individuals. The coach can deploy skills and strategies to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders. Coaching can occur in a formal structured manner with dedicated time made available for the coachee, or it can occur informally in ad hoc conversations between colleagues. This study focused upon the formal structured approach to coaching, as this would facilitate access to data from credible and experienced coaches.

According to CIPD, coaching is used by 77% of organisations, most commonly to aid leadership development; increasing from 23% in 2009, to 61% in 2011 (Coaching Climate, 2011). Coaching was rated by 51% of those organisations as one of the most effective talent management activities for developing high-potential employees and growing future senior manager/leaders. (Learning and Talent Development Survey, CIPD, 2012).

Organisations can choose to engage and procure external coaching services or to select, train and deploy internal coaches. There has been an increased expenditure on professional/specialist coaching services, particularly for middle and senior leadership development purposes, with two-thirds of respondents saying that they use external coaches in some capacity (Coaching Climate CIPD, 2011). Coaching presumes that the coach supports the coachee in identifying their desired goals, and in assessing the enablers and constraints of these goals. If these goals are in some way connected to the presence of dysfunctional leadership behaviours (whether these are displayed by the coachee themselves, or in other members of the organisation) then being able to identify and support the coachee handle such behaviours should represent a useful intervention. Therefore coaching is well placed to offer insight into the levels of and impact of dysfunctional leadership behaviours in a number of ways:

Firstly the confidential nature of coaching relationships (De Haan, 2008) means that the coach is often the first person to hear about examples of dysfunctional or ineffective leadership as the coachee discloses behaviours of self or of others, that they may choose not to disclose to others in the organisation. The safety and security provided by the nature of a typical coaching contract and the trust that is built therein, is unique in providing a channel where difficult issues can be raised and resolved. These may be very sensitive issues which have not previously been surfaced even though they may be detrimental to the well-being of a number of employees. To take a simple example, where the boss is an alcoholic. Everybody is aware of it but there is no easy way of raising it, for fear of unintended consequences, it becomes 'the unmentionable' or to use another metaphor 'the elephant in the room'. The same can apply to dysfunctional leadership behaviours and the negative impact this can have on

others experiencing these types of behaviours. Coaching provides a 'watertight vehicle' whereby even the most sensitive of issues can be raised, in accordance with the codes of ethical practice that coaches operate under. Many formal mechanisms for discussing workplace issues exist, for example performance appraisals, project meetings, team meetings, and 'one to ones', which aim to identify and address workplace matters. In practice these channels are unlikely to encourage communication of the sensitive and difficult issues described above.

Secondly, the formal coaching contract provides dedicated time and opportunity for the coachee to reflect upon the current situation they are experiencing. The coach is therefore able to identify direct and indirect examples of dysfunctional leadership behaviours as the coachee describes their own and others' behaviours and actions.

Thirdly, dysfunctional leadership behaviours in an individual can be connected to that individual making inaccurate attributions. Leaders operate in new and often ambiguous work situations. If the outcome of such situations is negative, rather than positive, leaders are likely to seek an explanation, particularly if the outcome is also unexpected. They can then proceed to make positive or negative attributions as to why the negative outcome occurs. Leaders are likely to make negative attributions about a team member where they behave in a way which is different to the majority of the team or when they behave in a manner inconsistent from their usual behaviours (Harvey et al 2006). Coaching provides a means to explore the 'root' or real cause of such behaviours by alerting the coachee that they may have made biased attributions about a particular individual through the exploration and analysis of the causes of a particular situation or individuals behaviours. The coachee can be helped by the coach to determine whether or not the negative attributions they are making are accurate or not.

Fourthly, the work on leader-member exchange (Harvey et al 2006) recognises that there is an interdependence between leader and follower. Where the coachee brings to the coaching sessions the problem of having difficulty with a particular subordinate, the coach can help the coachee identify why the coachee has better quality relationships with one subordinate rather than another, through an analysis of the factors which impact upon high and low quality leader-member relationships, particularly when the leader has to handle a degree of conflict. A common coaching scenario is where a leader has productive relationships with some members of a team, whilst other relationships are more problematic to manage (Othman et al 2010). Coaches who have an appreciation of these factors are well placed to help coachees understand how and why dysfunctional leadership behaviours occur, whether these are displayed by the coachee or other organisational members.

Numerous studies exist on the quality of the relationship between coach and coachee, and its impact upon organisational outcomes (De Haan, 2008; Bluckert, 2005), although there are none that examine how coaching can add value through the discussions of dysfunctional leadership behaviours. Despite the reported popularity of coaching as a leadership development intervention and the view that coaching is a 'panacea' for all manner of organisational ills and problems, many organisations have fragmented evaluation processes and data on effectiveness is sparse (Coaching, The evidence base, CIPD 2012).

METHODOLOGY

A cohesive definition of dysfunctional leadership behaviours is lacking, as many behavioural descriptors of functionality and dysfunctionality exist; some of which are grounded in the leadership literature and some of which are not. A grid (fig. 3) was developed where

behavioural descriptors could be classified under broad headings meaningful to the research participants. Descriptors with very similar meanings were discarded to avoid confusion and overlap and only those behaviours which were likely to be discussed with some sense of clarity in the coaching relationship were included.

Behaviours which were judged as difficult for the coaches to identify due to multiple interpretations, were excluded. For example, impulsive behaviour may be viewed by some as desirable and entirely functional, whereas by others and in a different organisational context, the same behaviours may also be viewed as counter-productive and dysfunctional. The same paradox applies to descriptors such as 'perfectionism'. Also excluded were behaviours such as those resulting from the clinical disorders observed by Goldman (2009) such as arrogance, melodrama; volatility; mischievousness; eccentricity. Narcissism was included in the study as this behaviour was felt relatively straightforward to define. Narcissistic leadership is the exercise of power for strictly personal or selfish ends; as a grandiose sense of one's own importance; over whelming fantasies of success/power. (Ouimet, 2010).

The research participants were 10 experienced coaches operating across a range of organisations including both the public and private sector, and in a variety of geographical locations across the UK. The coaches were selected on the basis of having significant experience in the coaching process and therefore maximising the provision of examples of dysfunctional leadership behaviours. Eight coaches were selected who operated as external coaches. Two operated as coaches internally to their own organisations. External coaches are suggested to be more likely to offer rich descriptions of dysfunctional leadership behaviours in the coaching relationship, as they are less constrained than their internal counterparts. Internal coaches may

choose to underreport incidences of dysfunctional leadership behaviours, or simply may not have gained the trust of their coachee who in turn may have chosen not to reveal such incidences. All the coaches had a minimum of three years coaching experience and six of them had 10 or more years' experience. Eight of them were undertaking continual professional development by participating in regular supervision with other coaching supervisors and/or had achieved qualifications in coaching. From this profile, the participants in the study were deemed to be both appropriate and credible given the purposes of the research.

The grid shown in figure 2 acted as a prompt for the participants, allowing a focused discussion and the structured reporting of behaviours. It is recognised that providing such classifications could lead participants and cause them to omit behaviours which were not on the grid. In order to compensate for this, participants were asked an open question about other examples of dysfunctional leadership which were not shown on the grid. Prior to the study ethical approval was sought and subsequently participants were contacted a few weeks prior to the interviews, where the broad aims of the study were described.

During the interviews participants were asked to review their coaching experiences with middle and senior managers as coachees, and consider if they had experienced dysfunctional leadership behaviours, related to either themselves or to someone else with whom they had a working relationship. The foremost method of collecting information used was that of Critical Incident. Coaches were asked to recall particular incidents of coaching middle and senior managers, where the focus of coaching was dysfunctional leadership behaviours. If a participant reported an incident or single case where behaviours from different categories were observed or discussed, these were classified under both categories. It was important that participants spoke

freely and did not feel constrained by allowing only one classification, nor feel they were focusing too heavily on one category.

FINDINGS

The incidence of dysfunctional leadership behaviours

When the 10 coaches were interviewed about their coaching experiences, the incidence of the issue of dysfunctional leadership behaviours was found to be high. They were asked to report how often the subject of dysfunctional leadership emerged as a focus within their coaching sessions. Seven out of 10 coaches said it came up more than 50% of the time, and of these seven, five said it came up more than 75% of the time.

The 10 coaches interviewed generated 22 incidents where coachees had raised the issue of dysfunctional leadership behaviour. These incidents actually derived from 9 of the coaches. Interestingly, only one of the 10 coaches was unable to describe any incidence of dysfunctional leadership behaviours, stating that if this type of behaviour did occur in the organisation, the individual/s concerned would be 'performance managed' out of the organisation.

Of the 22 incidences raised, a majority of 64% were the coachees' own dysfunctional leadership behaviours, whilst a significant minority of 23% were attributed to the dysfunctional leadership of the coachees' line managers and the remaining 13% were those of other employees who worked with the coachee in question (See Figure 1). This first figure is unsurprising since the reason someone signs up or is referred for coaching is usually as a result of a significant issue connected with their role, the nature of the work to be done and/or relationships within the organisation. Rather more surprising is the second figure suggesting

that coachees are also on the receiving end of dysfunctional leadership behaviours from their line managers and seek ways of dealing with this through the coaching process. The types of dysfunctional leadership behaviours that coaches described in the interviews fell into the categories shown in Figure 2.

Micro managing

Coaches described incidences where they had identified dysfunctional leadership behaviours connected with micro-managing, occurring in the individual coachee as well as in others in the organisation. Coach 3 (case 1) gave an example where the coachee talked about her goals in regard to her work situation. The coach recognised that many of the behaviours she described in her line manager were in fact defensive and micro-managing behaviours, which ultimately were preventing the coachee achieving her goals. In coach 10 (case 2) the coachee was a manager who was abrupt and over critical. The coach (who knew her) observed her behaviour and gave her some direct feedback about this behaviour.

Bullying

Verbally abusive and bullying behaviours were also described. In coach 4 (case 1) the coachee had been referred by her manager on the basis that she used problematic and inappropriate behaviours such as being stroppy, argumentative, and continually challenging. The coach quickly realised that it was in fact, a case of the coachee being bullied and there were examples of senior managers putting her down in meetings and lots of demands for extra work. In coach 10 (case 1) the coachee who was referred for coaching, saw his bullying behaviour as firm management and was in denial about it.

Disorganised

Coaches also reported behaviours which showed lack of competence in basic management skill areas such as communication and organisational ability/prioritising. The latter type of behaviour is illustrated by coach 2 (case 2) who described a coachee who had volunteered for coaching as she was having problems delegating and this was causing her difficulties in working excessive hours, impacting upon her home life and work output.

“this wasn’t massive dysfunctional leadership , but in terms of leadership it was about control and delegation” (Coach 2,case 2)

Coach 7(case 3) also described an example of this. The coachee managed the administration function for an academic division in a university. His boss, an “eminent academic” was responsible for signing off a particular process every year but would typically delay this task, viewing it as low priority and would “leave the papers in a pile on the floor” whilst the coachee was being chased for the papers by another department in the university.

Poor communications

Not communicating well or frequently enough were also commonly reported. Coach 1 (case 1) described a coachee who was referred with a history of poor communication skills. The coach went on to observe this directly when attending Board meetings where the coachee was present. Coach 5 (case 1) described a coachee who had a problem with the way a subordinate manager communicated. The latter displayed a lack of commitment, failure to follow through on actions and was abrupt in e mail communications.

Other behaviours

There were a further two incidences classified as poor delegation skills, and the remaining 20% of incidents spanned a range of different categories of dysfunctional leadership behaviours. (Fig.2)

In one case, a coachee told lies and was Machiavellian in approach (Coach 3, case 2). The coach, a HR director initiated coaching after she directly observed dysfunctional leadership behaviours in the coachee at a Board meeting.

“ this was a tough coaching assignment – I was acting as an internal coach so risky for me. It didn’t work out – he left the organisation” (Coach 3, case 2)

Coach 2 (case 1) described a coachee who had been promoted into a deputy leader’s role and was experiencing some difficulties in her new role. The coachee had chosen to discuss her problematic situation in her role with many others, including the coach, and repeatedly told the coach just how effective she was in her role. The coach viewed these behaviours as overly attention seeking and need for approval, and categorised these as “childish in nature”. This coach also reported the coachee showing “an abdication of leadership “, demonstrated by the coachee constantly seeking advice from others and hiding behind e-mail communications whereas a more effective leader would have held face-to-face communications.

The types of dysfunctional behaviours the study did not find

Out of 22 incidents described, there was no incidence of behaviours shown in Figure 3

STRATEGIES USED BY COACHES

Developing Self-Awareness and Obtaining Credible Feedback Strategies

The starting point for the coaches deciding which strategies to use with a coachee would typically depend on an assessment of how self-aware the coachee was about their leadership behaviours. Whitmore (2009:6) regards awareness as the first key element of coaching and states “the skill of the coach is to raise and sustain awareness.....in those areas where it is required”. Stokes & Jolly (2010:250) support this with “know yourself” as an essential first step in coaching senior executives to lead effectively.

The level of self-awareness displayed by a coachee can be enhanced through seeking and receiving feedback from other people they interact with in the workplace. In this study, such feedback typically came from those employees who worked for the coachee. In the interviews, the coaches identified a number of different strategies when considering the issue of dysfunctional leadership behaviours. The strategy most frequently used by the coaches was the one whereby they assisted the coachees to obtain credible feedback about their leadership behaviours from other people in the organisation. This took a number of different formats, ranging from the more sophisticated assessment tools e.g Strengthscope and 360° feedback, through to the coaches asking subordinates more informal questions about the coachee’s leadership behaviours. An example of a more informal approach adopted by one coach is given below:

“I ask three questions-What do you value about this person?

What would you like them to start doing or do more of? What would you like them stop doing or do less of? Any other

comments? I find this gives you everything you need to know”

(Coach 10, case 1)

The resulting feedback then helps the coachee develop their knowledge and awareness about the nature of their leadership behaviours.

Many of the coaches discussed the use of various psychometric instruments with coachees as the basis for developing their awareness and receiving feedback on leadership behaviours-these included MBTI,(Myers Briggs Type Indicator) Firo B, and also the Thomas Kilman instrument. It appears that these instruments add value to the feedback process through their objective nature, especially when the data is considered in conjunction with 360° feedback. Coach 9 (case 1) also used MBTI to help the coachee identify if they preferred a task or person-focused approach in their leadership role:

“I use Myers Briggs, it’s useful and indicates the way they communicate and behave with others”

Feedback about dysfunctional leadership behaviours could also be obtained directly from the coach listening to and observing the coachee in the coaching sessions or other work situations. For example, in a coaching session, coach 1 (case 1)-gave direct feedback following direct observation of the coachee at a Board meeting:

“I saw you in dispute with another board member which got very personal, and your aggression became a barrier to you being able to make a rational judgment” Coach 1 (case 1)

In another case, the coach gave specific and direct feedback about the effect that a coachee's behaviours were having on other people in the workplace:

“I am hearing that your behaviour is having an effect on others and it has been presented to me as being down to you. You can choose to do with this information whatever you like, but this is the effect your behaviour is having on others”. (Coach 1, case 2)

In a further example, the coach knew the coachee from previous work he had done with the organisation. The coach gave some direct feedback and then followed this up with some 360° feedback from other employees:

“Because I'd observed her behaviour, I told her that I felt she was a very honest person, if something was wrong she would say it. But if you give this feedback directly, it can come across as confrontational. She did click and was responsive”
(Coach 10, case 2),

Coach 8 (case 2) decided to give the coachee some direct feedback that she was experiencing as the coach in the sessions. The coachee in question would not accept the complaints he was getting from his team about his management style, he was in constant denial and sought to provide the coach with justifications for the reported poor performance. As an example, the coach provided feedback to the coachee that he didn't appear to be listening in the coaching sessions.

”The coachee sat back and said.... ‘My father –in-law calls me arrogant, do you think that’s what he means?’... It was a major critical moment in my coaching. From that moment onwards, he said ”How can you help me to change. I want to do something about this”

Coach 2 (case 2) asked the coachee to read the job description for her new role and deconstruct the tasks she was spending her time on. In so doing, the coachee realised that she was actually attempting to perform the tasks which she should have been delegating to others and then overseeing. This successfully identified the dysfunctional behaviours of poor delegation, and how the opposite of this was a prerequisite for the coachee becoming a more effective leader.

Coach 3 (case 2) asked the coachee to carry out a diary planning exercise to identify how much time he spent doing tasks alone, rather than involving others. This exercise acted as a catalyst for the coachee to acknowledge the dysfunctionality of his own poor delegation skills.

In summary, there were a number of methods identified for developing awareness about coachees’ behaviours and a variety of ways in which a coachee could receive feedback, both formal and informal and direct and more indirect. From the cases discussed, this experience often represented a ‘dawning of realisation’ about the significance of the effect one person’s behaviour was having upon another person/s.

Managing Upwards

Over a third of the reported incidents of dysfunctional leadership behaviours were attributed to someone in a close working relationship to the coachee, typically the coachee’s own

line manager, rather than the coachee's own dysfunctional leadership behaviour. Interdependency exists between a leader and a follower, as the power of a leader after all comes from the followers. If a leader feels his/her power is at stake, they may adopt more defensive/directive behaviours to remain in control. The follower then has a choice whether to comply with this behaviour or to resist it and learn to manage it more appropriately. It is this latter option where the coach can provide helpful interventions.

The strategy adopted by coaches in these cases, was one of exploring with the coachee how they could 'manage their boss' and develop ways of coping with the effects of dysfunctional leadership behaviours which they were often experiencing first hand. In one example, the coach helped the coachee deploy coping strategies and other techniques which can be described as 'managing upwards'

"It became apparent from everything my coachee was telling me that the Director was close to bullying in the way he was behaving towards her and towards other members of staff"

(Coach 9, case 1)

The coach's strategy was to help the coachee think about how to use her assertiveness and influencing skills to handle her boss. In this case, the coach used role playing of scenarios of how she might handle the boss' aggression, through asking him questions, listening, summarising and coming in quite firmly herself.

Coach 8 (case 3) was a further example of the managing upwards strategy, whereby the coach used a scenario based approach to deal with the bullying behaviours of the coachee's line manager. In fact, her line manager was bullying and putting pressure on her about how to

performance manage members of her own team. Rather ironically, this resulted in the coachee herself receiving an allegation of bullying from a member of her own team. The coach's strategy was to consider how she managed members of her team, what worked well, what not so well and in so-doing re-build her own confidence levels.

“She started managing upwards more carefully, standing much more firmly against him”

Coach 1 (cases 1 and 2) used questioning techniques to support the coachee in managing upwards

“Whose behaviours can you change?”

“Whose behaviours can't you change?”

“What happens if you change in a small way... ? “Let's see what the reaction is?”

“What are the costs of doing so? “

Such questions conveyed to the coachee that changing their own behaviour is a choice whereas they may not necessarily be able to change the behaviours of others in the organisation. In these cases, the coaching strategies adopted were to provide support to the coachee in managing these situations. This involved the coach helping the coachee to firstly develop awareness and then an acceptance of the fact that the dysfunctional leadership behaviour of the person concerned, was unlikely to change.

Further to the above, coach 4 (case 1) helped the coachee identify behaviours in her manager which exemplified workplace bullying, by asking her to describe specifically the behaviours the coachee observed herself in this person.

“What specifically does this person do?”

“How often?”

“How do these behaviours affect you?”

The coachee responded that she received frequent ‘put downs’ in meetings, aggressive e-mails communications and unreasonable levels of work. This evidence helped the coachee identify for herself that she was being bullied.

In a similar case, coach 7 (case 1), the coachee described a situation where her boss deflected everything she said/presented to him (usually in the form of financial documentation), disengaged himself from her and was disinterested in her and what she wanted to raise with him. She felt very frustrated and unable to get on with her job. The coach’s strategy was again to use questioning techniques to get the coachee to identify exactly the nature of the manager’s behaviour, and thus to recognise what it was that differentiates their own way of doing things from that of their boss. The coach went on to ask the coachee to consider what was it that her boss wanted to see from her and how he wanted information presented.

Such examples of the coach’s use of questioning techniques with the coachee, resulted in coachees developing awareness and learning how to manage the dysfunctional relationship rather than the dysfunctional leader per se.

Other strategies

The coaches reported a variety of other strategies which helped coachees to develop more understanding of their leadership behaviours. These included visualisation techniques, storytelling, Johari window framework, transactional analysis and meta-mirroring. For example, coach 2 (case 2) asked a coachee who was struggling to cope with the demands of a new role, to create an image of herself 12 months hence, to help her consider the gap between her actual and desired state. Coach 3 (case 2) used stories to help an inexperienced leader consider his own leadership behaviours compared with those that might be displayed by famous leaders known to the coachee. This strategy is used to enable the coachee to stand back and reflect upon alternative approaches and therefore make more informed choices about the behaviours required to manage a situation. Coach 7 (case 4) used “In a perfect world question” for a leader who was struggling to cope with the demands of relocating her team to a new floor in the building.

“Imagine you’ve moved to the 5th floor, you push open the doors
on the first day and what do you see?”

DISCUSSION

Type and prevalence of the dysfunctional leadership behaviours raised in coaching sessions

When the coaches were asked to identify the exact nature of the dysfunctional leadership behaviours discussed, an interesting if somewhat surprising and disturbing picture emerged. Rather than the coaching of middle and senior managers being concerned with identifying and developing competencies and behaviours relating to strategic leadership issues, it appears that time was spent in discussing more of the basic operational issues which are more often associated with

competent management practice. The high incidence of behaviours such as micro-managing and the excessive need for control, poor organisational abilities and lack of communication skills, indicate that it is the basics of effective management that appear to be deficient in many of the cases mentioned, rather than a lack of more strategic leadership abilities/competencies.

Some 80% of the incidents raised focused around dysfunctional leadership behaviours which were mainly concerned with a leader's felt need to be in control and dominate issues. This is reflected in the work of Stokes and Jolly (2010) who highlight the need to feel powerful and the need to dominate and control others as some of the common problems facing those who aspire to leadership. One can surmise that the felt need by managers to feel, in this sense powerful and 'in control', can sometimes backfire as subordinates perceive this as overbearing and over-critical behaviour which damages rather than enhances the manager-subordinate relationship.

Several coaches identified that others in the organisation were also displaying dysfunctional leadership behaviours indicating that dysfunctional leadership runs throughout organisations, and is not confined to the middle and senior management population.

Over a third of the reported incidents of dysfunctional leadership behaviours were attributed to someone in a close working relationship to the coachee, rather than the coachee's own dysfunctional leadership behaviour. Of particular interest was the fact that nearly a quarter of the coachees themselves had been on the receiving end of dysfunctional leadership behaviours from their own bosses.

It appears therefore that dysfunctional leadership behaviour is fairly commonplace in many organisations, across both the public and private sectors. Most of the coaches were easily able to identify instances where the issue had been the subject of coaching sessions.

Coaching in organisations is frequently seen as being targeted at the most senior levels of executive leadership, who have responsibility for strategy and the future direction of the organisation. However, the evidence from this study demonstrated that the coachees were mainly middle/senior managers, indicating that dysfunctional leadership behaviours occur throughout the organisation and not just at the top. This raises the question of whether or not those at all levels in the organisation have adequate training and development in fundamental management and leadership skills.

Many dysfunctional leadership behaviours are not meant to be intentionally malicious or even dysfunctional on the part of the leader. Coach 3 (case 2) reported a coachee with poor delegation skills. The coachee was a technical person working in a highly scientific environment. He was referred by his Managing Director on the grounds that he lacked credibility to progress to Director level. The coach discovered that the coachee was not intentionally putting followers down, and had no malicious intent to be dysfunctional (Einarsen 2007). However, the effect of this behaviour was to limit the potential of a team of highly able people by not allowing them to take decisions and being too controlling.

Definitional issues were raised as to what could be classified as dysfunctional leadership behaviours. In discussing a coachee who was referred to the coach by HR due to the coachee's reported low level of commercial awareness, antagonistic behaviours towards his team and poor administrative effectiveness, the coach reported:

“ I noted all kinds of horrendous HR practices going on in this organisation, for example the fact that an individual is appraised by someone who is not close to their work, and judgements are

therefore made which are inconsistent and unfair. This organisation has a culture where line managers abrogate responsibility for people management “ (Coach 1, case 2)

The failure to take responsibility for actions, was not listed on the grid given to participants, but may constitute dysfunctional leadership behaviours. For example, although silence in itself is not dysfunctional, refusing to speak up in meetings, communicating with teams; or disinclination to make decisions could all be described as being dysfunctional leadership behaviours, as they may indicate that an individual is failing to take responsibility for actions. The study found an example of a coachee who chose not to communicate with team members with regard to their performance.

The paradox is noted that the simple absence of functional leadership behaviours (such as effective e-mail communications) rather than the presence of the more destructive ‘dark side’ behaviours, (such as bullying) can also be defined as dysfunctional leadership.

It appears that the most frequent types of dysfunctional behaviour identified above, were not only seen to emanate from the individual managers themselves, but were also, in some organisations, taken for granted as ‘normal’ behaviours. For example, Coach 1(case 1) was an organisation where the coachee (a senior manager) was referred for coaching with a history of poor communication skills. The coach directly observed this behaviour by the coachee, when he sat in on some of the Board Meetings. In addition, he observed that the communication skills of many of those present at these meetings were poor, citing use of aggression, statements made as accusations and overly personal criticism. In another incident, the dysfunctional controlling behaviour of one manager resulted from his own line manager’s dominant style and the perceived

need to replicate this. (Coach 8, case 1) It therefore appears that some dysfunctional leadership behaviours may have become embedded as part of the usual day-to-day organisational practice. The fact that these behaviours are seen as part of the culture serves to justify and support those behaviour patterns, which would otherwise and more objectively be considered to be negative and destructive in nature.

“It was distressing to see poor leadership behaviours rewarded...that kind of behaviour in another organisation could cause someone to have a nervous breakdown or leave their job” (Coach 9, case 1)

It was also interesting to note that in some cases coachees took on the burden of the dysfunctional leadership themselves and became complicit in ‘covering it up’ and somehow protecting the inadequacies of senior colleagues, until they reached a point where they sought help to resolve this problem through the intervention of the coach and the coaching process. In one case, the coachee would regularly apologise on behalf of his boss and “absorb the flack” for his leader’s dysfunctional behaviour, arguably due to the culture where such behaviours were accepted by the organisation concerned.

The possibility that dysfunctional leadership behaviours arise as a learnt response to the environment within which leaders operate (Balthazard et al 2006) , offers one explanation for the cases where the coachees behaviour was influenced by other, more senior people in the organisation. One coach observed

“I would say dysfunctional behaviour is a learned response to the environment and if the organisation teaches you to behave like this then this is how you do behave” (Coach 1)

The prevalence of dysfunctional leadership behaviours found in the study suggests that the majority of organisations tolerate some degree of dysfunctional leadership behaviour.

Strategies used by coaches

If coachees are aware that their behaviours are dysfunctional in some way, then this raises the question of what is to be done to manage and modify these behaviours, so that they shift towards the more functional end of the spectrum. Coaching can certainly support the coachee in making such a shift although it is not the only vehicle. The finding that so many of the core competences of people management and leadership skills are lacking in a significant minority of the cases raises questions about the efficacy of any previous management development interventions undertaken by those who are displaying dysfunctional leadership behaviours. For those who have not participated in such development support, it is perhaps unsurprising that they lack some of these ‘basics’.

It is interesting to note the last item on the grid of dysfunctional leadership behaviour which was “Does not learn from previous mistakes, repeats errors. lacks self-awareness. cannot reflect and learn”. (see Figure 3) None of the coaches identified lack of self-awareness as a dysfunctional leadership behaviour in itself, although paradoxically so many of the strategies they used, were aimed at developing and increasing levels of self-awareness. This suggests that it is a significant factor in the strategies used for improving dysfunctional leadership behaviours.

Therefore developing sufficiently high levels of self-awareness is likely to generate benefits throughout an individual's managerial career.

The incidence of dysfunctional leadership does not appear to be directly connected with the coachees level of self-awareness. In some cases coachees were highly aware, in some cases they were completely unaware of the behaviours displayed and the effect they were having on others. In some cases there was a complete denial by the coachee that their behaviour is dysfunctional. Where coachees are unaware of the behaviours they are displaying and the impact these behaviours are having on those around them, then this represents a greater challenge for the coach. Therefore it is important that coaches are skilled in using techniques of developing self-awareness in the coachees.

The strategy of direct observation highlighted that communications skills of senior people in the coachee's organisation were poor, including behaviours such as aggression, accusatory statements and damaging personal criticism. In both cases of communication skills issues, it is interesting to note that it was the coach, not the coachee who identified through direct observation and subsequent coaching discussions that there are cultural factors which operate to reinforce and sustain the dysfunctional communication practices that the coachee had been referred for. In the majority of cases the coach does not have access to the behaviours which occur in real life workplace situations and so it appears that such direct observation is a helpful intervention. This raises the possibility that in the initial contracting process, the coach, client and organisation could consider whether granting access to observation of day- to-day organisational practices, communication styles and meeting protocols, would benefit the coaching outcomes.

Some space for reflection exists in a formal coaching session but for many coachees, deeper insight is gained by private reflection outside the coaching space. Such strategies were used effectively by coaches. The study did not explore in depth strategies connected with outside reflection outside the coaching session. Although the coachee may gain the insight necessary to effect substantial and helpful change, what seems perfectly possible in the structured and isolated coaching relationship may prove somewhat more challenging when faced by the realities of organisational life and recalcitrant managers. Given the incidence of dysfunctional leadership behaviours found in those who were not part of the coaching process, this may impede the coachee making the changes required to their own or others behaviours.

The wide range of different strategies utilised in the study appears to reflect the coaches preferred 'tried and tested' techniques based on their extensive experience of handling different issues.

CONCLUSIONS

The subject of dysfunctional leadership behaviour is often raised in coaching sessions which implies that this is a problematic issue within organisations.. It is often difficult for those internal to an organisation to deal with such issues which therefore frequently remain unaddressed. (*'the elephant in the room'*)

The study was based on a small sample of coaches operating predominately as external providers of coaching services to an organisation. The levels and prevalence of dysfunctional behaviours which may occur in coaching relationships where coach and coachee are part of the same organisation remain unexplored. The lack of confidentiality and trust is likely to prevent an

internal coach being able to challenge the coachee, be sufficiently detached to offer an independent perspective and also to avoid collusion with the coachee.

An appropriately skilled and qualified external coach is likely to be able to quickly identify the relevant information regarding the organisational culture, and to more readily offer a detached perspective than their internal counterpart who may find it problematic to avoid collusion.

Difficult issues are raised in the coaching sessions which are unlikely to be raised elsewhere. The confidential nature of the coaching relationship means that such issues cannot be taken outside of the coaching relationship, and so there is a question of whose responsibility it is to manage the behaviours of those who are not within the coaching discussion. In an ideal world, the offending people or groups within the wider organisation would be held to account for the display of such behaviours but this is not possible for the coach to ensure.

The study identified that the coaching process is an effective intervention to support individuals with the consequences of experiencing dysfunctional leadership behaviours, whether this is connected with themselves or others. As a purely descriptive study, the aim was to identify through rich description, the type, level and prevalence of dysfunctional leadership behaviours. No assessment of the longer term effectiveness of the coaching strategies identified has been made, although some tentative explanations are offered as to the causes of dysfunctional leadership behaviours. Given that there is no single definition of dysfunctional (and consequently no single response to it, future research could explore whether different types of dysfunctional leadership behaviours require different types of coaching strategies.

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Figure 1 - Owner of Dysfunctional leadership behaviour

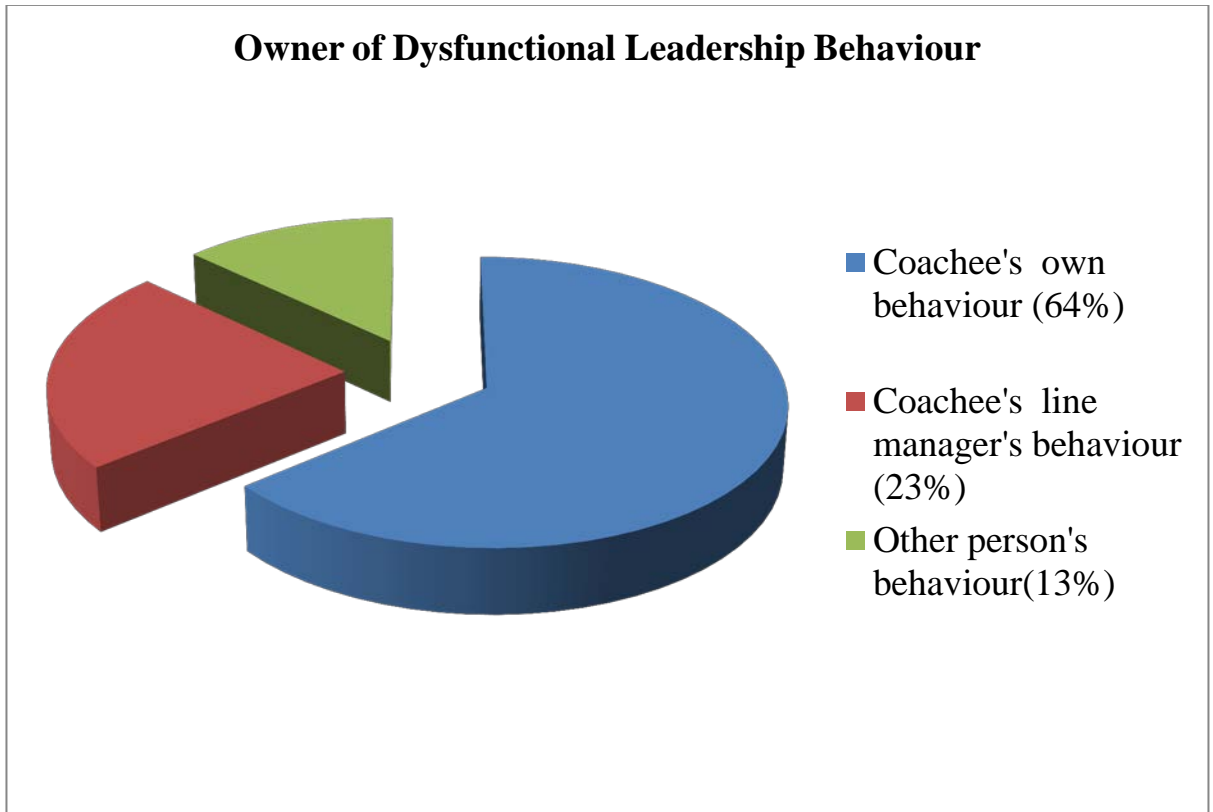


Figure 2 Types of Dysfunctional leadership behaviours identified

Broad Category of Dysfunctional Leadership Behaviour	Descriptions of behaviours	Frequency of occurrence
Micro-managing	Puts followers down. Is overly critical. Expects failure from followers – Is a theory X manager. Constantly checks follower’s work- micro management. Has excessive need for control	4
Bullying	Verbally abusive behaviours. Bullying behaviours	4
Disorganised Poor communications	Does not set priorities. Does not meet deadlines. Is disorganised. Makes things overly complicated. Does not communicate well or frequently enough. Does not say what they mean.	5 4
Other behaviours	Need to do everything themselves. Poor delegation	2
	Denies (or justifies) failure of self and team	1
	Incompetent – lack wills or skill to create effective action. Does not support /back up employees as	1

appropriate to a situation	
Childish - Needs immediate gratification and constant approval. Is too eager to please	1
Tells lies. Indirectly manipulates others; Machiavellian in approach to role. Is two-faced.	1
Is overly task focused. Shows callous behaviours for example, is uncaring and ignores others needs. Holds a grudge, cannot forgive and forget. Might be as strong as desire for revenge. Is narcissistic. Has an over inflated opinion of self. Arrogant. Constantly talks about self. Has excessive need for admiration	0

Figure 3 Types of Dysfunctional leadership behaviours not identified

<p>Has a silo mentality – manages without regard to other teams/depts./units</p> <p>Lacks follow through from words to action.</p>
<p>Is inconsistent and unfair. For example, has favourites, and operates an in- group/out – group set up. Treats team members inconsistently, e.g. through pay awards/recognition.</p> <p>Have ‘knee jerk’ reactions, resulting either in being too quick to assign blame, or over reacting to events. Gets stressed easily. Lacks self control. Is unpredictable or impulsive.</p> <p>Is reckless, Takes inappropriate risks- believes that things will be Ok, rather than logically analyse what has happened before.</p>
<p>Does not have the ability to see problems or opportunities on the horizon. Is limited in thinking style, struggles to see the ‘grey’ preferring to focus on the ‘black and white’. Is rigid, inflexible and will not yield.</p> <p>Cannot handle paradox, especially in complex situations or ‘double binds’ Is resistant - either passive or visibly to change.</p> <p>Does not learn from previous mistakes, repeats errors. Lacks self-awareness. Cannot reflect and learn.</p>