

# Leadership effectiveness through coaching: Authentic and change-oriented leadership

**Source:** PLOS ONE | **Author:** Halliwell, Mitchell & Boyle | **PMS Relevance:** PMS RELATED | **Type:** Research Study | **Geography:** Asia-Pacific

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## Executive Summary

This study addresses the mechanisms through which leadership coaching enhances leader effectiveness, a gap in an empirical literature that lags behind practitioner application. The authors — Halliwell, Mitchell, and Boyle (2023) — argue that coaching improves leader effectiveness primarily by increasing authentic leadership behaviour and leadership self-efficacy, which in turn elevate change-oriented leadership behaviour. To test this model, a quantitative pretest-posttest design was employed with multi-source data collected from 70 organizational leaders, their coaches, subordinates, and supervisors across two time points. Structural equation modelling using partial least squares (PLS-SEM) with latent change scores was applied. Key findings indicate that coaching-related increases in authentic leadership behaviour had the largest total effect on leadership effectiveness ( $\beta = 0.271$ ), while increases in leadership self-efficacy positively predicted change-oriented leadership behaviour ( $\beta = 0.242$ ) but not leadership effectiveness directly. Change-oriented leadership behaviour independently predicted leadership effectiveness ( $\beta = 0.382$ ). The study concludes that authentic leadership behaviour functions as a primary mechanism through which coaching builds effectiveness, with self-efficacy operating as an indirect pathway via change-oriented leadership.

## Key Insights

1. Coaching-related increases in authentic leadership behaviour demonstrated the largest total effect on leadership effectiveness after controlling for baseline scores, suggesting authenticity is a primary mechanism of coaching impact.
2. Leadership self-efficacy, while showing large effect sizes in mean change, did not directly predict leadership effectiveness — its influence operated indirectly through change-oriented leadership behaviour, implying a delayed or mediated pathway.
3. Change-oriented leadership behaviour served as a significant independent predictor of leadership effectiveness ( $\beta = 0.382$ ), indicating that coaching interventions oriented toward vision articulation, innovation encouragement, and environmental monitoring may produce measurable effectiveness gains.

## Practical Takeaways

- Organizations deploying leadership coaching for change management purposes may observe that targeting authentic leadership dimensions — such as transparency, balanced processing, and self-awareness — produces downstream gains in both change-oriented behaviour and overall effectiveness.

- The absence of a direct path from self-efficacy to effectiveness, combined with evidence of a delayed translation of internal cognitive change into observable behaviour, suggests that assessment timelines for coaching outcomes may need to extend beyond the typical post-intervention measurement window.

## Frameworks Mentioned

**360-Degree Review** — Multi-source feedback approach referenced in the context of leader development interventions and cited as a tool used in executive coaching effectiveness research.

## Critical Analysis

**Strengths:** The study employs a rigorous multi-source data design drawing from coaches, coachees, subordinates, and supervisors, reducing single-source bias. Latent change scores address regression-to-the-mean concerns inherent in raw change score analyses. PLS-SEM is appropriately chosen for a predictive, theory-building context. Post-hoc tests for common method bias (Harman's single-factor test and full collinearity VIF assessment) produced acceptable results. Transparency about competing interests and funding absence is noted. **Limitations:** The sample size of N=70 sits precisely at the minimum bound recommended by the ten-times rule for PLS-SEM, limiting statistical power and the ability to detect heterogeneity across leadership levels or coaching approaches. The absence of a randomised control group means causality cannot be established — observed changes between Time 1 and Time 2 may reflect experimenter demand effects, maturation, or concurrent organisational events. The coaching intervention was not standardised across coaches, and limited eligibility controls were applied. The study is predominantly drawn from Australian organisational leaders, limiting generalisability. The two-time-point design may be insufficient to capture delayed effects of internal cognitive changes on external behavioural outcomes, as acknowledged by the authors. **Potential bias:** The lead author's prior work on leadership coaching efficacy (cited as references 13 and 46) creates a degree of self-citation that, while transparent, warrants acknowledgement when interpreting the theoretical framing.

## Organizational Practice

Participating organizations engaged external, accredited leadership coaches (average 14 years experience) to deliver an average of six individual coaching sessions of 60–90 minutes duration over approximately four months. Coaching goals spanned developmental objectives (46%), skill development (30%), performance improvement (11%), and other purposes (13%). Coaches primarily identified their practice as informed by solutions-focused and adult learning approaches. Multi-source data were collected from coaches, coachees, subordinates, and supervisors at pre- and post-coaching time points via online questionnaires. Participants were predominantly middle managers (59%) from Australian organisations, with front-line supervisors (21%) and senior or executive managers (20%) also represented.

## Strategic Implications

The finding that authentic leadership behaviour mediates the relationship between coaching and effectiveness points toward a pattern where internally oriented developmental mechanisms — self-awareness, transparency, moral consistency — precede observable behavioural change, a sequence with implications for how organizations structure coaching program timelines and evaluation frameworks. The indirect pathway from self-efficacy through change-oriented leadership to effectiveness suggests that single-stage post-intervention assessments may underestimate coaching's full impact on leader performance. The study's framing of coaching as addressing the 'short-lived nature' of formal development programs reflects a broader trend in PMS literature toward individually owned, sustained development

interventions rather than episodic training. The significant association between organisational support and leadership effectiveness as a control variable also indicates that contextual factors within performance management environments interact with individual coaching outcomes.

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