Exploring Innovative Leadership Development Through Executive Coaching in the U.S. Federal Government

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the efficacy of executive coaching as a leadership development tool for federal supervisors amid the post-COVID-19 remote and hybrid workplace paradigm. Analysis of collected data reveals compelling themes, including enhanced self-awareness, emotional intelligence, time management, and communication skills, underscoring coaching's transformative impact on personal and professional growth. The establishment of trusting relationships with coaches and the provision of expertise in interpreting behavioral assessments contribute to fostering healthy organizational cultures marked by transparency and mutual respect. Executive coaching facilitates authentic conversations, enthusiastic support, and challenging reflective dialogue, enabling supervisors to navigate complexities with confidence.

KEYWORDS

Employee Development, Executive Coaching, Government Leaders, Government Leadership, Leadership Coaching, Leadership Development, Public Administration, Public Management

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis has presented an unprecedented challenge to the United States federal government and its extensive workforce, comprising over 2 million employees. This epochal event has not only necessitated the emergence of new imperatives but has also fundamentally reshaped the contours of government-public interactions (Partnership for Public Service, 2023). This examination seeks to illuminate the salient characteristics of the federal civilian workforce during this epoch, a considerable portion of whom have been at the forefront of combating the COVID-19 scourge. Consequently, a nuanced comprehension of the intricacies inherent in federal governance amid and post the COVID-19 era becomes imperative.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cohort of full-time and part-time federal employees represented a fractional proportion of the overall U.S. populace, constituting 0.6% (Partnership for Public Service, 2023). As the government escalated its response efforts throughout 2020, this percentage marginally increased to 0.7%, yet this augmentation in workforce density remains eclipsed by historical precedents set during prior crisis interventions (Partnership for Public Service, 2023). The occupational landscape within the federal workforce has undergone a discernible evolution, transitioning from predominantly clerical roles to encompassing a higher prevalence of

knowledge-based professions in professional and administrative domains. This evolutionary trajectory persisted unabated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Partnership for Public Service, 2023).

Notably, in March 2020, 67.2% of the full-time, nonseasonal permanent federal workforce was engaged in professional and administrative vocations, a figure that marginally rose to 67.6% by December of the same year. Concurrently, the proportion of full-time blue-collar occupations experienced a slight decline, decreasing from 9.1% to 8.8% over the same timeframe (Partnership for Public Service, 2023). Moreover, health-related personnel such as nurses and medical officers maintained a consistent representation, constituting 8.8% of the federal workforce in both March and December 2020. In juxtaposition, STEM professionals, encompassing technologists, biologists, and engineers, witnessed a marginal uptick in representation from 16.6% to 16.8%, primarily fueled by an expansion in the cadre of information technology managers (Partnership for Public Service, 2023).

Contrary to popular belief, the geographical distribution of federal employees diverges from the conventional perception of a Washington, D.C.-centric concentration. As of December 2020, slightly under 20% of the full-time federal workforce was stationed within the D.C. metropolitan area, while the remaining 80% were dispersed across the nation—an allocation pattern that has endured both preceding and throughout the pandemic era (Partnership for Public Service, 2023). Moreover, the demographic profile of the federal workforce skews older compared to the broader U.S. labor force. At the conclusion of 2020, individuals under the age of 30 comprised less than 7.0% of the full-time federal workforce, contrasting starkly with their representation of nearly 20% within the total U.S. employed demographic (Partnership for Public Service, 2023).

Critical agencies within the federal ambit, including but not limited to the Veterans Health Administration, Food and Drug Administration, National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and Small Business Administration, assumed pivotal roles in the government's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant economic ramifications (Partnership for Public Service, 2023).

The imperative for cultivating effective managerial leadership within government institutions has reached unprecedented levels of significance. Government leaders bear the weighty responsibility of stewarding vast sums of taxpayer funds and resources, a task that underscores the pivotal role of adept leadership in ensuring their judicious and efficient utilization (White, 2016). Indeed, the exigency for proficient leadership and sound managerial acumen looms large, given the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of governmental management practices (Goldsmith & Levensaler, 2016).

This evolving terrain presents a constellation of high-stakes challenges to the fabric and efficacy of leadership decision-making and developmental trajectories (Goldring, 2015; White, 2016). Alarming assessments from the Merit Services Protection Board underscore a pervasive deficiency in identifying and nurturing effective supervisors, with a mere fraction failing to meet the stringent criteria during their probationary tenure (Katz, 2018b). Katz (2018b) illuminates a systemic failure within government agencies to adequately address underperforming supervisors, indicative of broader deficiencies in managerial training and development across federal institutions.

Consequently, organizational leaders must adopt a proactive stance towards fostering robust leadership development initiatives and strategically engaging in programs aimed at nurturing and honing leadership competencies (Center for Leadership Studies, 2017; Ciporen, 2015; Gaddis & Foster, 2015). Such concerted efforts are imperative for mitigating the deleterious repercussions stemming from the dearth of effective leadership practices, thereby fortifying the resilience and efficacy of governmental institutions.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The exigencies wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic have magnified the imperative of effective management, particularly within federal agencies tasked with safeguarding public health, safety, and critical infrastructure. The aftermath of COVID-19 beckons a paradigm shift in work patterns,

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