

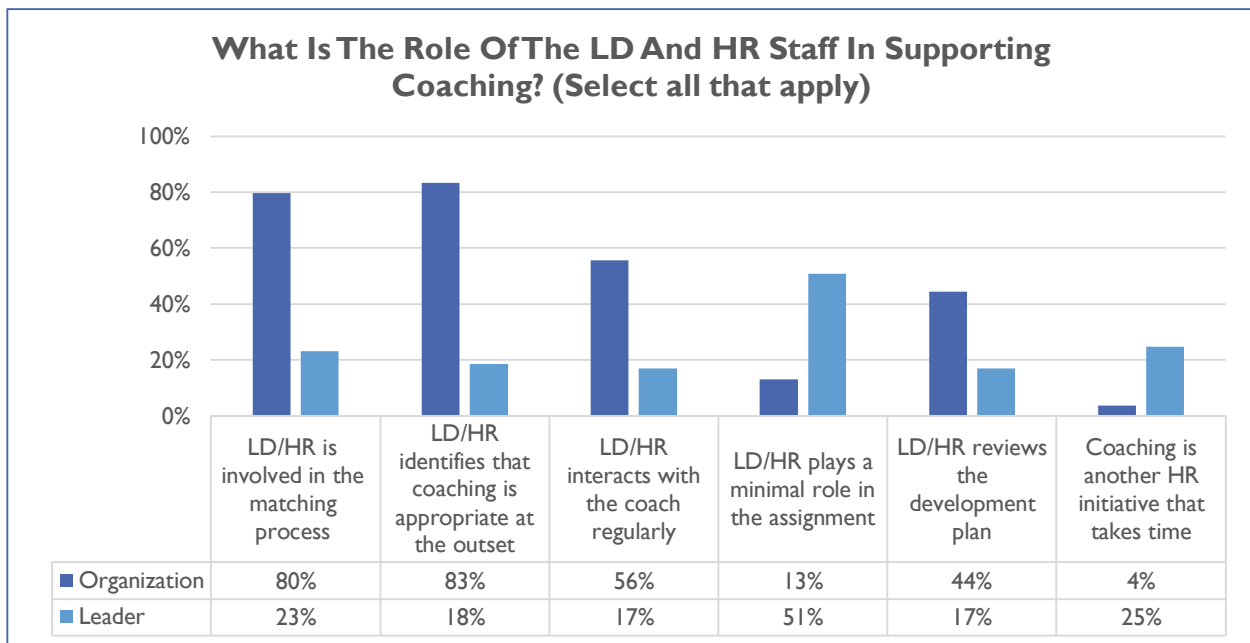
## Chapter 5: Internal Support / Internal Coaching

### Role of Leadership Development and Human Resources

Leadership Development (LD) and Human Resources (HR) staff are often involved in supporting and staffing coaching assignments. We asked organizations and leaders about the role that LD and HR plays, and provided them 6 answer options. We instructed respondents to select all options that apply. See Figure 34 below.

Notably, there are wide discrepancies between the leaders' view of LD/HR involvement versus organizations. It appears that organizations believe they are much more involved in the coaching process than leaders perceive. For example, 80% of organizations reported that *LD/HR is involved in the matching process*, whereas only 23% of leaders reported this. Likewise, 83% of organizations also reported that *LD/HR identifies that coaching is appropriate at the outset* [of an assignment] while only 18% of leaders reported the same. As another example, only 13% of organizations stated that *LD/HR plays a minimal role in the assignment*, but 51% of leaders reported this. Similar discrepancies were seen in our 2005 and 2013 studies, where trends in the data for this question were almost identical. This wide difference indicates that leaders being coached are underestimating how involved LD and HR are in the process.

Executives we've met over the years seem to prefer regular involvement from LD and HR, beyond just the initial identification and assignment matching. As one executive in 2005 told us, "They have been really terrific - my training and development people - about checking in and asking about milestones during the process. So, I give them very high marks for that." In addition, coaches feel better supported when there is an active involvement by LD and HR.



**Figure 34. Role of Leadership Development and Human Resources**

## Role of Boss

The researchers felt it was important to explore the role of the leader's immediate boss - an individual who often plays an influential part in shaping much of the leader's developmental environment. Coaches usually seek the active involvement of the boss of the person they are coaching. Leaders being coached generally prefer this involvement as well.

In 2005, 2013, and 2017 we asked, "What role does the boss play during the coaching process?" and allowed participants to select all answers that applied. See Figure 35 below. The most common response was that *Bosses approved coaching in the first place* (47-85%). The next most common response was that *Bosses review and approve action plans* (25-65%).

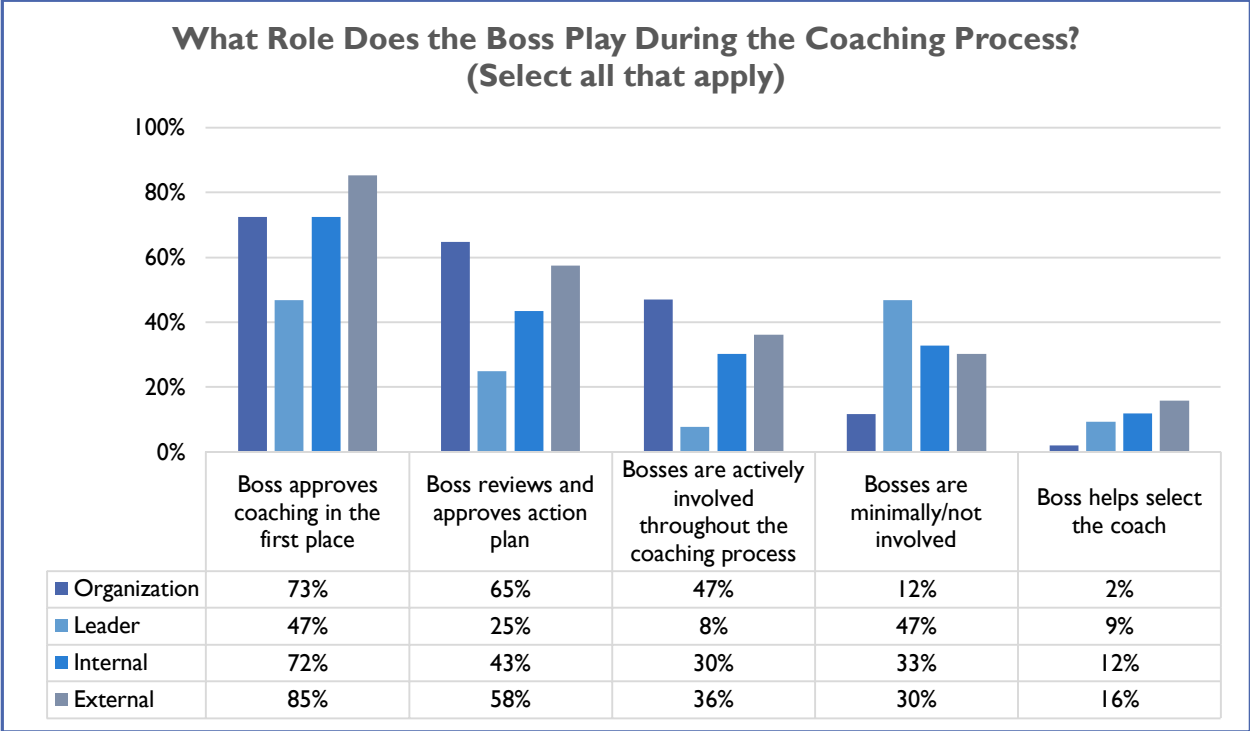
While some bosses see the value in coaching, others may not. One leader wrote "My boss (owner) was reluctant in approving the coaching process" but, in contrast, another wrote "My boss was very supportive".

Leaders believe that bosses play a less significant role than the organizations, internal, and external coaches all believed. For example, 47% of leaders stated that *My boss was minimally/not involved* [in the coaching assignment], but only 12% of organizations selected this.

In particular, large differences were seen between organization practice managers and leaders. For example, 47% of organizations believed that *Bosses are actively involved throughout the coaching process*, but only 8% of leaders selected this. Additionally, 65% of organizations selected *Boss reviews and approves action plan*, but only 25% of leaders selected this.

There were little differences seen between how internal and external coaches responded. Of note, though, is that 72% of internal coaches believed that a *Boss approves coaching in the first place*, but 85% of external coaches believed this. Since it may be harder to gain access to an external coach due to budgetary reasons it's likely that a boss's approval is required more often when working with an external coach.

One external coach stated "I encourage my clients to involve their boss as it is an opportunity to enlist the boss in their development, and we discuss ways they can do this. However, not all bosses have the time and interest and sometimes, my senior most clients show some reluctance to involve their boss systematically and on an on-going basis."



**Figure 35. Role of Boss**

## Internal Coaching

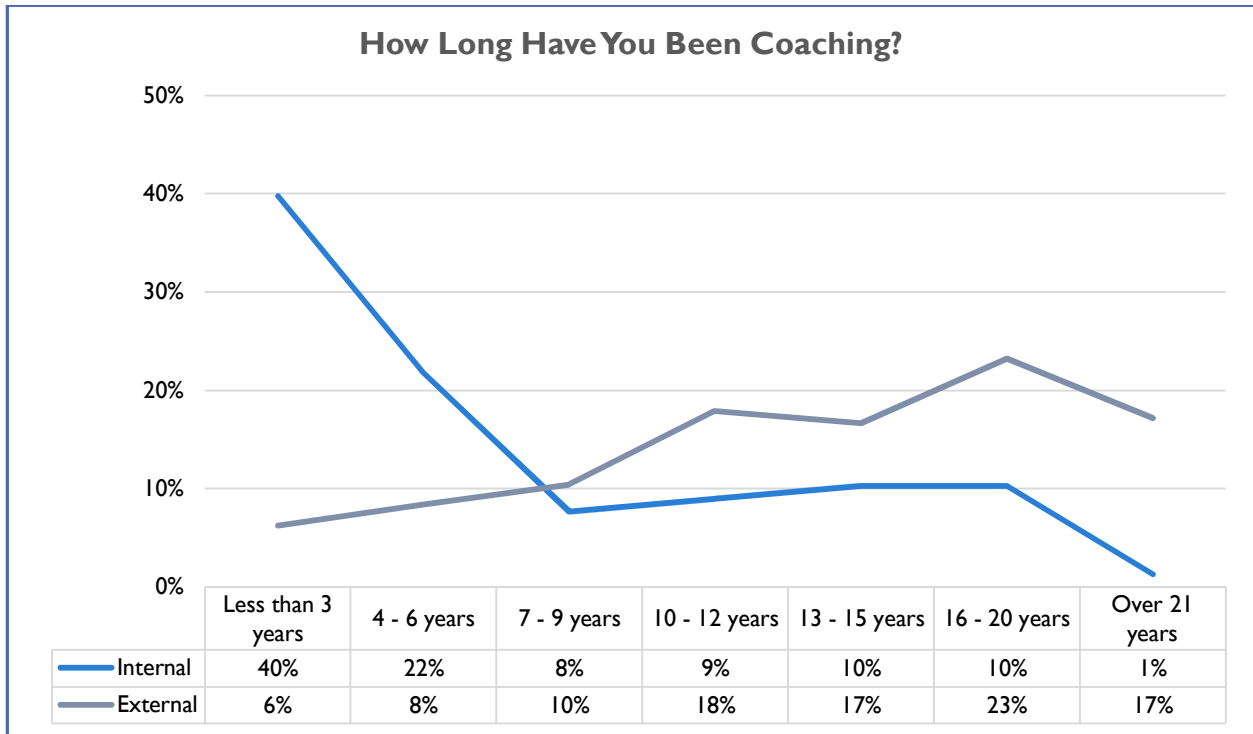
A fast-growing trend in the coaching field is the increased use of internal coaches to work with leaders within the organization, particularly at lower levels in the organization. Internal coaches often offer advantages such as better knowledge of a company's culture and politics, better cost and are perceived as more accessible. This practice is not without pitfalls, however, as will be described below.

Organizations (72%) indicated that they predicted their use of internal coaches to significantly increase over the coming years. (Although nearly 80% of organizations also believe that external executive coaching will continue to trend in the near future.) Regardless, we can predict internal coaching to remain a viable and complementary practice to executive coaching for many years to come.

## Internal vs. External Coaching Experience

Pertaining to the amount of years one has been coaching, there are dramatic differences between internal and external coaches. Roughly 62% of internal coaches reported having coached for 6 years or less whereas 57% of external coaches reported having coached for 13 or more years. More specifically, on average, internal coaches wrote that they had been coaching for 7.1 years and external coaches recorded that they had been coaching for 14.7 years. Figure 36 displays the percentage breakdown of the experience (in years) of internal and external coaches.

Something to note is that we added an extra year range, *16 - 20 years*, to this year's study to provide an enhanced view of how experience is distributed in later years. Interestingly, this novel range was recorded as external coaches most frequently submitted answer.



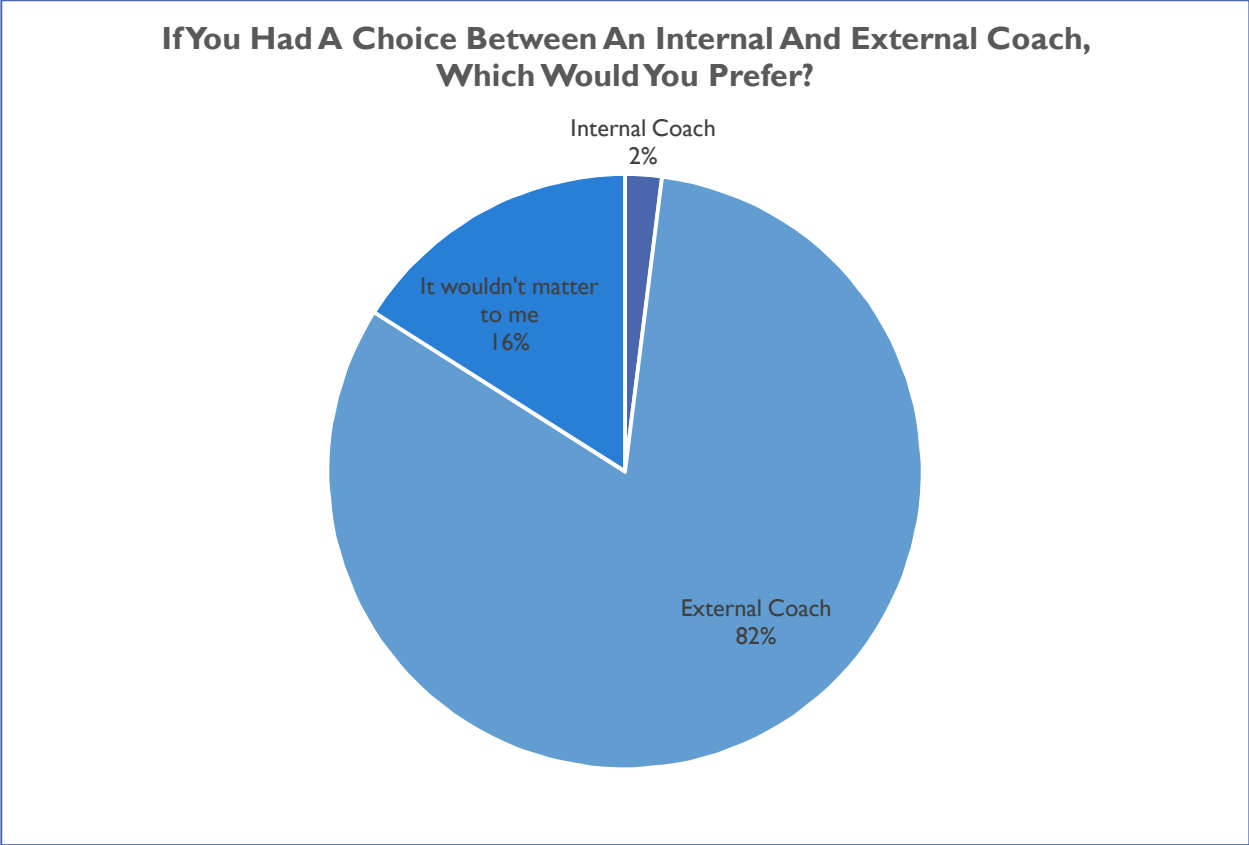
**Figure 36. Years Coaching**

To emphasize the large difference in years spent coaching, the most frequent response for internal coaches was *Less than 3 years* (40%) whereas for external coaches it was *16-20 years* (23%). These differences in longevity of practice are hardly surprising due to internal coaching only becoming prominent over the past decade or so. External coaching, however, has long been a business practice as a valued form of leadership development.

### Choice of Internal Versus External Coaches

Leaders were tasked with reporting if they would rather use an internal or an external coach. In 2005, 59% of leaders recorded that they would prefer to work with an external coach, which increased to 80% in the 2013 study. Almost exactly the same as the 2013 study's results, Figure 37 displays that the majority of leaders (82%) reported that they would prefer an external coach, 2% reported preferring an internal coach, and 16% selected *It wouldn't matter to me*. As is the case in 2017, 16% of leaders in 2013 also stated that it would not matter to them when choosing to work with an internal or external coach.

However, we must report that all, but three, leaders answering this survey worked with an external coach. This critical fact must not at all be overlooked while interpreting these data.



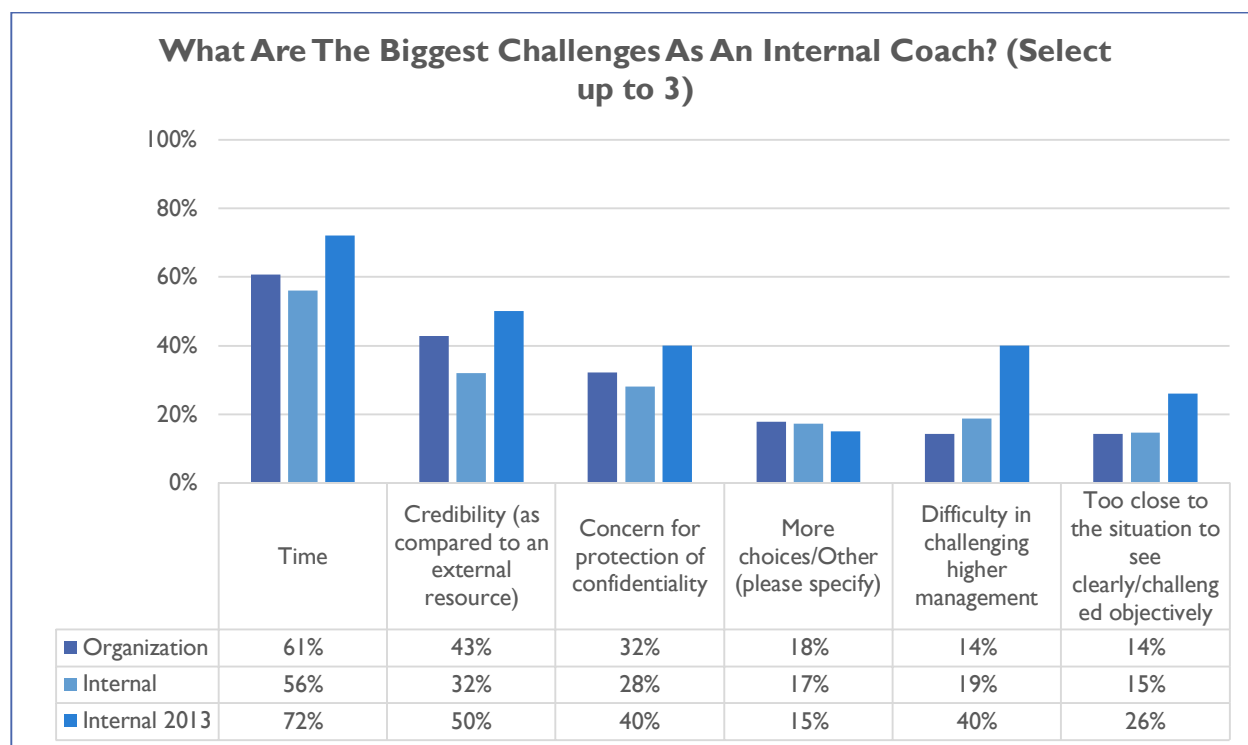
**Figure 37. Leader's Preference of Coaches**

When responding to this question back in 2013, leaders were asked to also comment as to why they would prefer an internal or an external coach. Though responses ranged from external coaches being able to provide insight from outside of the leader's current business environment, certain responses centered around the idea of enhanced privacy. For example, one leader stated, "Talking to an external coach provides more freedom of speech. Every internal one is a colleague and therefore subject to company internal politics."

This perspective is important as it may suggest that leaders will continue to select external coaches as a way to protect their desire for privacy. Having said that, internal coaching with very extraordinarily clear boundaries on confidentiality can still have great promise.

## Challenges of Internal Coaches

Organizations and internal coaches were surveyed about the biggest challenges internal coaches faced. Choices included *Time* (having enough time to coach while conducting the normal “day job”), *Credibility (as compared to an external resource)*, *Concern for protection of confidentiality*, *Difficulty in challenging higher management*, and *Too close to the situation to see clearly/challenged objectivity*. For the most part, both types of participants ranked each choice similarly, as displayed in Figure 38.



**Figure 38. Challenges of Internal Coaches**

*Note.* The criteria are listed in a ranked order from most challenging to least challenging as determined by the average of a criteria across both groups. Additionally, the 2013 survey asked participants to select the three most important factors whereas the 2017 survey allowed participants to select up to the three biggest challenges. This difference might account for why response percentages have dropped from the 2013 study, since participants were not forced to select three choices this year.

For both organizations and internal coaches, the top three challenges for internal coaches are *Time*, *Credibility*, and *Concern for protection of confidentiality*. This is interesting as it had been suggested in 2013 that leaders had possibly preferred external coaches due to a desire for privacy. Interestingly, the first, second, and third largest challenges are the same in 2013 and 2017 studies. *Time* has continued to be the top challenge for internal coaches in regard to the 2005, 2013, and 2017 results.

Interestingly, as designated by *Other* responses, internal coaches stated that a significant challenge for them was gaining support from HR/higher management to prioritize investment (e.g., budget, resources) to meet coaching demands. Additionally, some respondents stated that external coaches might be needed over internal coaches due to confidentiality concerns regarding the dual role of an internal coach as both a leader's confidant and fellow organizational employee.

"At times [organizations] need an external [coach] because of reporting relationships or conflicts of interest in coaching certain leaders."

- Internal Coach