

Improving work/life balance and go ahead spirit through the use of distance coaching, digital tools and increased use of feedback principles

A pilot project

Summary

16 destination managers and three overseas service managers of TUI/Fritidsresor participated in a 6-week pilot program with distance coaching using the smartphone application Viary. The goal was to improve work/life balance and go ahead spirit among the destination managers, as measured on a 1-5 scale by items from the employee questionnaire *Blue Voice survey*.

Work/life balance was unaffected with 3,5 and 3,6 as pre and post mean values. Go ahead spirit improved from a mean value of 4,2 to 4,7. 81,9 percent of the destination managers reported having recieved better and more frequent feedback from their overseas service managers during the pilot than they usually did. 83 percent of the destination managers and 100 percent of overseas service managers recommended that TUI/Fritidsresor should continue with distance coaching and Viary.

Background

The challenge of managing overseas employees in a large tourism-services industry is far from simple. The overseas service managers of TUI/Fritidsresor, based in Stockholm, are set to coordinate multiple travel destinations and their management. Each major travel destination has its own destination manager, who lives on-site and is in charge of the company's operations on that particular location. For the overseas service managers, providing adequate and immediate feedback to the destination managers from across Europe can be a difficult task indeed.

TUI/Fritidsresor and Psykologifabriken have worked together during the winter and spring of 2012 to improve communication and feedback between destination managers in Europe and overseas service managers in Stockholm. The means to achieve this were educational workshops, distance-coaching and the use of the smartphone application Viary.

Purpose and goals

The overarching goal of the project was to increase work/life balance for destination managers in Europe as well as strengthening the go ahead spirit, both of which are closely tied to the corporate values of TUI/Fritidsresor. A further goal was to improve communication between overseas service managers and destination managers.

Method

The project included educational as well as coaching components. Based on a collaborative case formulation between overseas service managers and organizational consultants from Psykologifabriken, a project plan for the intervention was formulated.

Initially, the overseas service managers recieved training in the psychology of behavior and feedback in a workshop format. An important part of the workshop consisted of specifying the vague concepts of "work/life balance" and "go ahead spirit" in terms of tangible and concrete behaviors. This process enabled overseas service managers to become more aware of which behaviors were most central in the successful attainment of the goals of the project.

These targeted behaviors formed a "central package" on which destination managers received increased feedback and coaching. As an example from the category "work/life balance" the behavior "do 20 minutes of exercise" was selected as embodying the category, and "visit a hotel manager" was a behavior that fell within the category of "go ahead spirit".

Work/life balance, key behaviors

1. Do 20 minutes of exercise.
2. A full day off with no work related e-mails or phone calls.

Go ahead spirit, key behaviors

1. Visit a hotel manager.
2. Complete an important but not urgent work task.

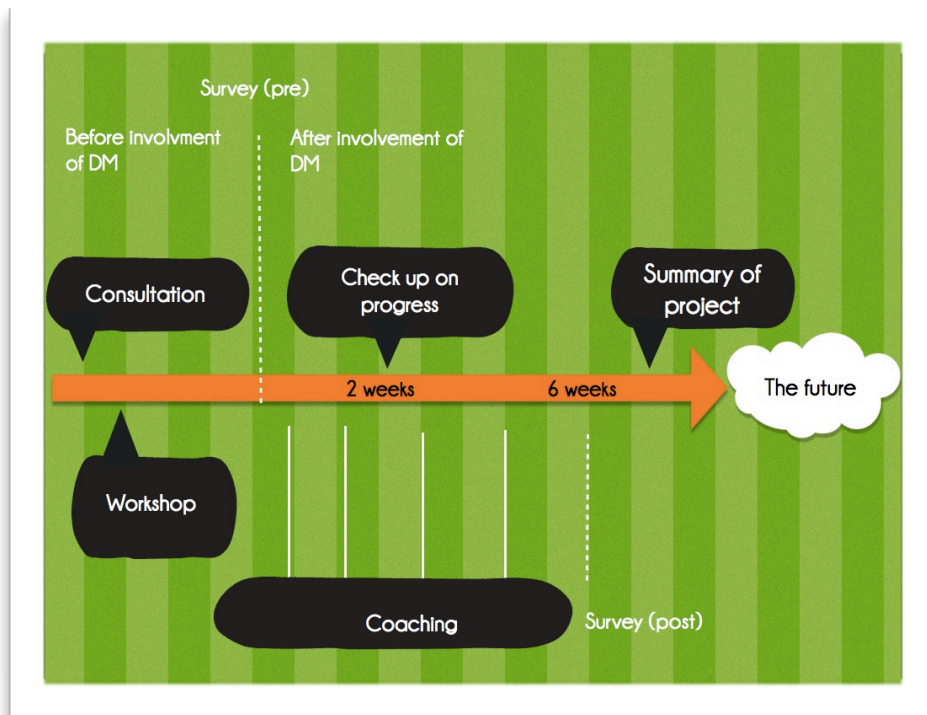
The managers also received training in the use of the mobile application Viary, which was used as a tool to track desired behaviors performed by destination managers.. The use of the application and its accessibility provided a possibility for more immediate feedback. It also helped bringing the behaviors that were important to the destination managers to the attention of overseas managers.

A two-hour introductory workshop was held with the destination managers in Stockholm. This created a good opportunity to introduce the project and increase willingness to participate, as well as to increase the destination managers' understanding of feedback principles.

The active phase of the project then ran for 6 weeks, during which the destination managers registered their performed behaviors in the digital application Viary. The overseas service managers tracked their activity and provided feedback through Viary, as well as by distance-coaching via digital telephone service Skype. On average, the coaching sessions were performed 3-4 times, for about 20-40 minutes, with each individual manager.

During this phase, psychologists from Psykologifabriken coached the overseas service managers in Stockholm on usage of feedback principles and how to provide better opportunities for growth for the destination managers. This coaching was performed in the same way as the manager-to-destination-manager coaching, i.e. remotely.

The procedure of the project, with the planning and education phase and the active 6-week phase is depicted below.



Results

The project was evaluated using selected items relevant to the two areas of focus from the yearly employee questionnaire Blue Voice survey of TUI/Fritidsresor. In addition to these items, the project was also evaluated through survey questions on the subjective experience of various aspects relevant to communication, and the experience of being a part of the project.

All measurements were conducted before the start of the project and repeated during its last week. The results were gathered using online surveys. In general, results on all measures were very high from the start, implying that TUI/Fritidsresor is a well-liked employer as well as an organization that manages its personnel successfully.

Work/life balance key behaviors were performed 161 times.

1. "Do 20 minutes of exercise." Performed 84 times.
2. "A full day off with no work related e-mails or phone calls." Performed 33 times.

Go ahead spirit, key behaviors were performed 180 times.

1. "Visit a hotel manager." Was moved to category "Relationships".
2. "Completed an important but not urgent work task." Performed 63 times.

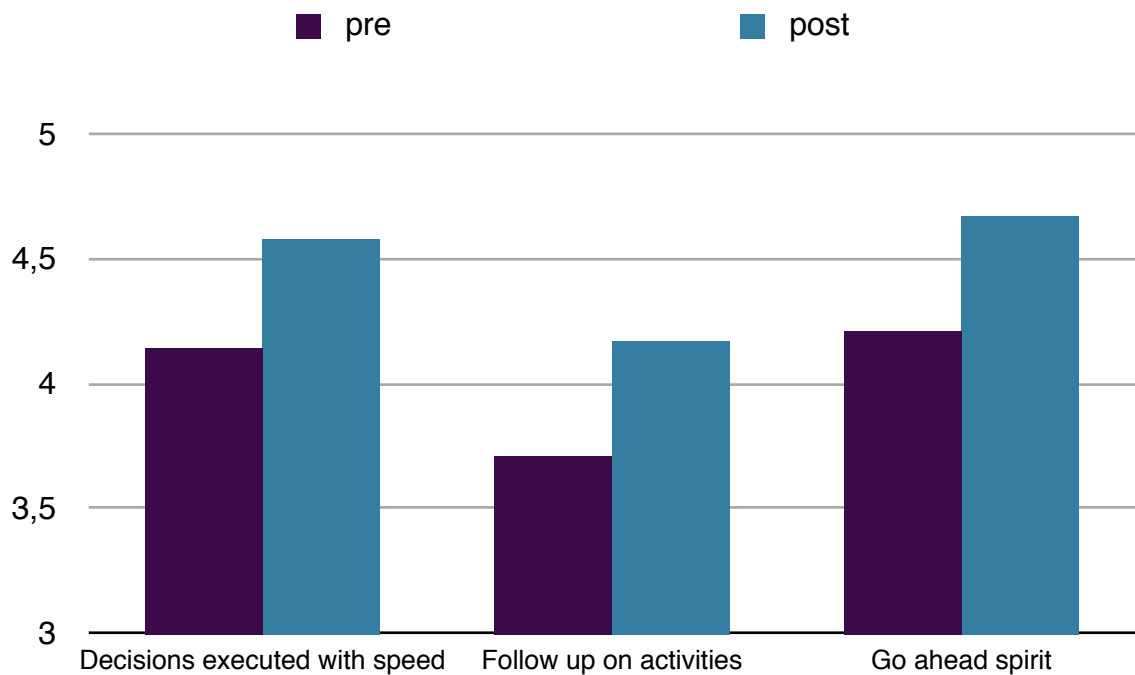
Items from Blue Voice survey that were used in the evaluation (measured on a 1-5 scale):

1. Are decisions executed with sufficient speed in your team?
2. Have you, during the last six weeks, had a good work/ life balance? *
3. Is the work well planned in your team?
4. Do you have sufficient follow up on activities in your team?
5. To what extent do you consider that your team has a go ahead spirit?

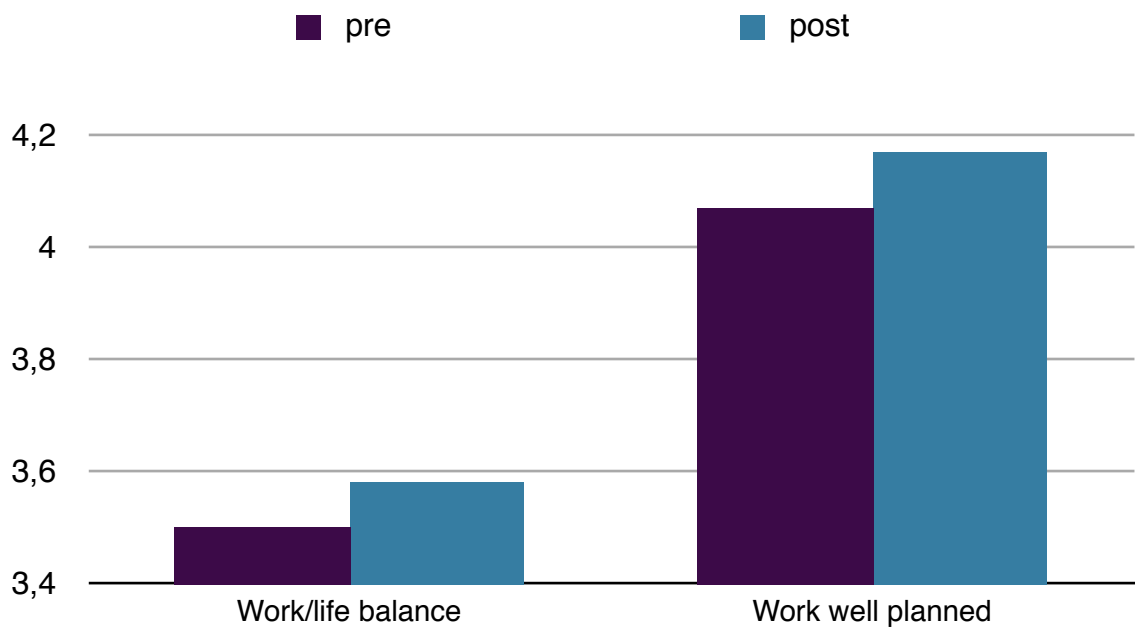
Presented below are the measures with the largest and the smallest effects. (DM = destination managers; OSM = Overseas service managers)

* The time period was changed to match the pilot project.

The parameters with the largest effect (DM)



The parameters with the smallest effect (DM)

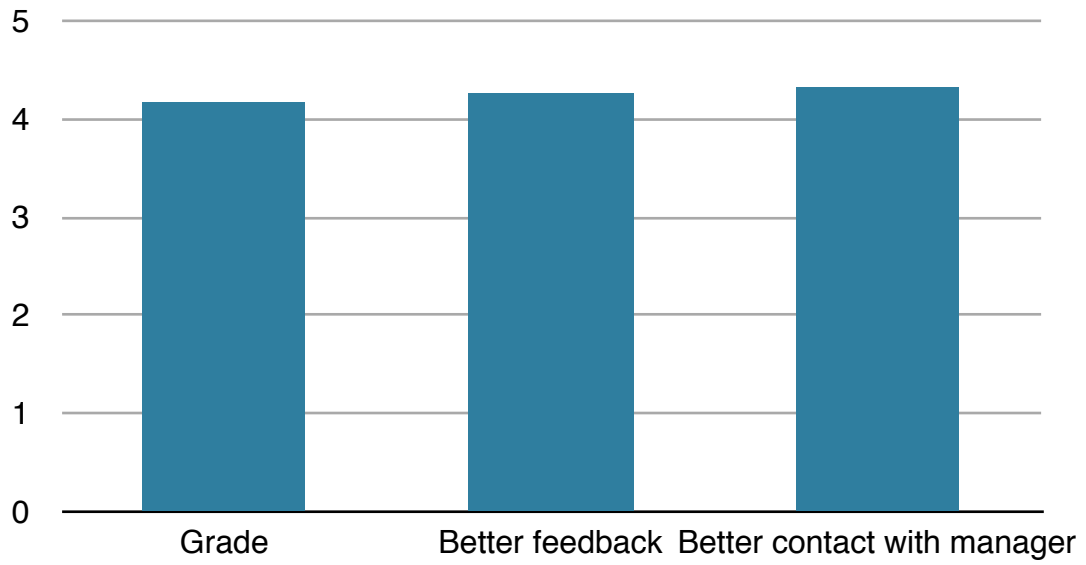


Evaluation

Besides the items from the Blue Voice survey, data was also gathered asking the participants about their opinions of the pilot project. The ratings ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

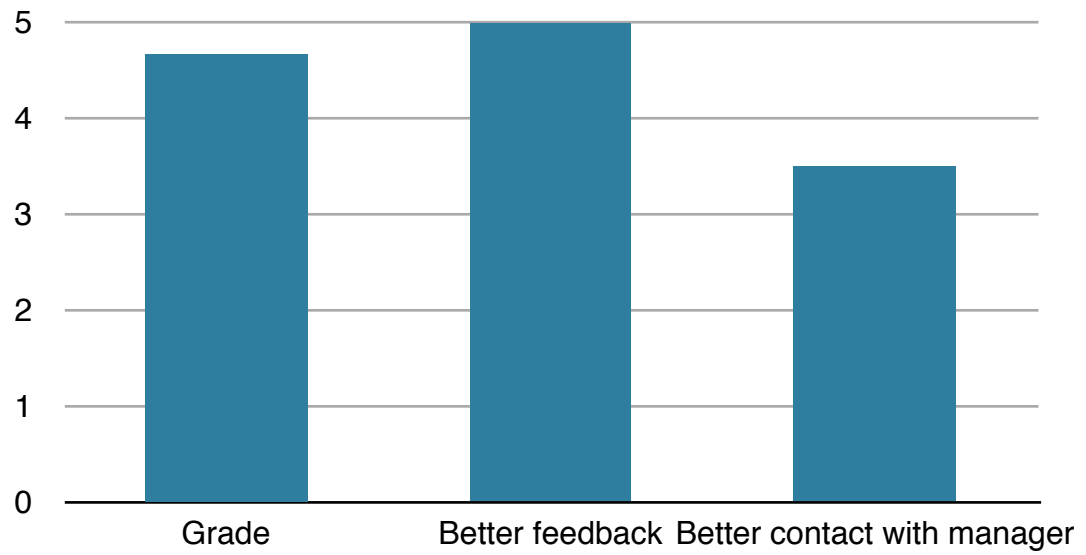
■ post

Evaluation of grade, improvement of feedback and better contact with manager after the pilot. DM



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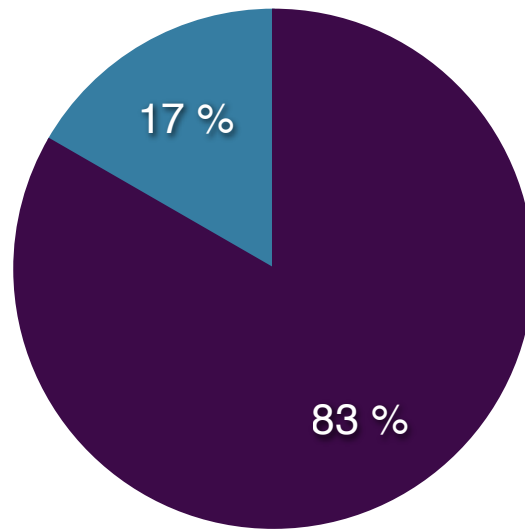
Evaluation of grade, improvement of feedback and better contact with DM after the pilot. OSM



● Yes

● No

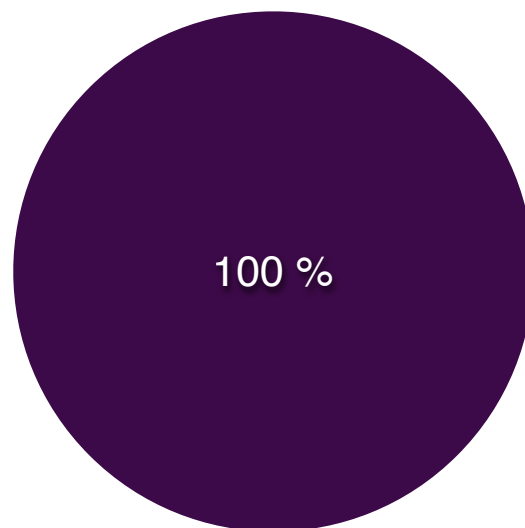
Do you think that TUI Nordic should continue with distance coaching and Viary after the pilot? DM



● Yes

● No

Do you think that TUI Nordic should continue with distance coaching and Viary after the pilot? OSM



What was good about the pilot? (destination managers)

"A reminder to yourself that you have to relax as well, not only work, and that way you're better set for work"

"That you have to summarize the working day in a different way than before. This makes you realize things you might not have thought about otherwise. The positive feedback gives a happier and more satisfied team"

and a better working climate. It gives a closer contact between members in the team overseas and in Scandinavia."

"It was interesting to see that you don't need to see each other everyday to receive feedback in a good and constructive way"

"Made me aware of being proactive"

"I noticed that I should give more feedback, I haven't been active enough for it. Work/life balance is not that optimal for me. Very good reminder for very important tasks."

"Started to think about what to concentrate on"

"Closer contact with manager. Daily feeling that someone follows up on what you do."

"Simple way to focus on beneficial behaviors. /.../ fun "competitive" way to see the progress when logging it /.../ nice to have coach talks with the manager"

"That you identify desired behaviours"

"The good thing is that we tried it and that it is a supplement to other types of coaching."

What was good about the pilot? (overseas service managers)

"All the support that we have had from you, and how you have adjusted yourselves to our 'world'. It has been brilliant!"

*"Fantastic coaching from Christian!"**

What could have been done better in the pilot? (destination managers)

"Maybe the behaviours could be adapted to each individual along the way. Start with general and adapt so it fits each person even better."

"Technical issues"

"Destination change time could be better coordinated. There might be long periods without internet connection and that should be planned better."

"Difficult to say too much since it has been going on for a very limited time."

"It feels like a reporting tool more than a coaching tool."

"All technical issues should have been investigated before it was implemented. It cost time and frustration."

What could have been done better in the pilot? (overseas service managers)

"I think everything has worked well!"

"The timing was not optimal since it collided with the start-up of the summer season."

* Referring to Christian Walén, consultant from Psykologifabriken.

Other suggestions, questions or comments (destination managers)

"We should use the same system in destinations where teams are spread out over a large area. It could be set up between destination manager and team managers that are far away in their own resorts without a daily contact face to face."

"It has not changed the way I work. I have just reported some of the things I do. Personally I prefer talking to people rather than reporting and getting questions through an app."

"I think that a distance coaching has its advantages but it can never substitute the phone or face to face feedback. I think distance coaching should be a complement to the more personal coaching."

"There should be an option to respond to the feedback in the app."

Discussion of result and further aims

In general, the outcome of the project can be deemed successful. The subjective ratings all point to a positive experience of taking part in the project, for destination managers as well as overseas service managers.

The aims and goals of the project were met during the active phase, and the added goal of creating a better dialogue and closer relationship between destination and overseas managers were clear from the evaluation.

It is advisable to continue to develop the findings from the project, not as an ongoing management strategy, but rather as a tool to focus on certain aspects of work during peaks, in the same format as the current project. When the work peak is over, the data is analyzed and the active phase evaluated. The project then "rests" until it is time for the next active phase, perhaps with a different focus. Adding further training for destination managers in the use of psychological principles such as feedback might also be a worthwhile goal to pursue, seeing as the destination managers themselves have managerial responsibilities towards their on-site personnel.

Adding increased feedback to relevant behaviors serves to increase the rate at which those behaviors are performed. A framework for focusing on certain aspects of work/life and work-related tasks, with an easily managed and concrete behavioral point of view, might very well be beneficial to make TUI/Fritidsresor an even better organization.

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