



AI-POWERED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

# The AI Manager Coaching Playbook

How to use performance data and organizational network analysis to coach your team better — specific practices, not theory.

**70%**

of team engagement variance explained by manager quality

**98%**

review completion in 5 days at Thoropass

**100%**

top performer retention at Thoropass during Great Resignation

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INTRODUCTION

# The coaching gap most companies ignore

Most managers were never trained to coach. They got promoted because they were good at their job — a completely different skill from developing people.

Most companies don't bridge that gap. They promote someone, hand them a team, and expect the skills to transfer. They don't. The result: managers who mean well but default to telling. They solve problems instead of building problem-solvers. They give vague feedback instead of specific, developmental observations. They manage output instead of developing capability.

Two specific problems limit most managers: they don't see patterns across their team, and their feedback carries blind spots they can't detect on their own. AI addresses both.

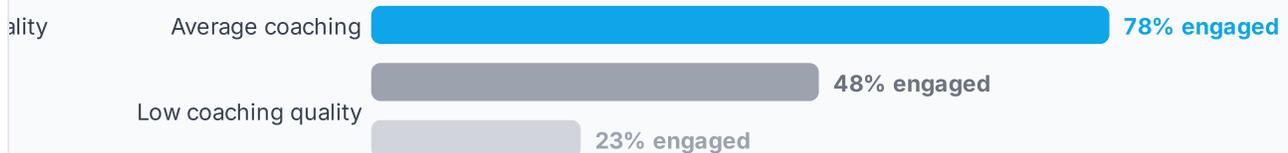
**What this playbook covers:** how to use performance data and organizational network analysis to coach more effectively. Not theory. Specific practices you can start this week.

AI doesn't fix every coaching problem. But it gives managers the data they need in the moment — before a 1:1, before a review cycle, before a retention conversation. That changes what happens in those conversations.

Confirm is the only mainstream performance platform with native organizational network analysis (ONA) built in. ONA maps the informal influence network — who people actually go to for help, decisions, and information — not just the org chart. That's the data managers can't get anywhere else.

### Manager quality impact on team engagement

Source: Gallup meta-analysis — manager quality explains 70% of engagement variance



*Figures are illustrative ranges consistent with Gallup State of the Global Workplace research*

*Manager coaching quality vs team engagement — based on Gallup research*

## PART 1

## Why manager quality matters more than anything else

Gallup's research is unambiguous: manager quality explains 70% of the variance in team engagement. Not company culture. Not compensation. Not perks. The manager.

**70%**

of team engagement variance explained by manager quality

*Gallup meta-analysis*

**#1**

Coaching ranked first among effective manager behaviors

*Google Project Oxygen, 2009*

**100%**

Top performer retention at Thoropass during the Great Resignation

*Confirm customer data*

The problem isn't that managers don't care. Most do. Three things limit them: they lack good data, they lack time, and no one trained them to coach. AI addresses the first problem directly — data.

### What the research shows

Google's Project Oxygen (2009) analyzed thousands of performance reviews and one-on-ones to identify the behaviors that separated effective managers from ineffective ones. Coaching ranked first — not technical expertise, not strategic thinking, not operational execution. Coaching.

“

*We looked for a solution that could help us identify key talent which would allow us to focus retention efforts on people who are mission-critical to the Business.*

**Joe Bast**

VP People & Operations, Thoropass

## PART 2

## What AI coaching actually does

AI in performance management gets a lot of hype. Most of it focuses on replacing humans. That's not what works in practice.

**What works:** AI as a data layer that surfaces things managers can't see on their own — patterns across dozens of conversations, feedback cycles, goal updates, and peer signals.

### Pattern detection at scale

A manager with four direct reports has 12+ weekly 1:1s per quarter, quarterly check-ins, peer feedback from 4–6 reviewers per person, self-assessments, and goal progress updates. No manager can synthesize all of that into a clear developmental picture. AI can.

- Who is receiving feedback and who isn't
- Which goals are progressing and which are stalling — and when they stalled
- Where feedback is specific versus where it's generic impressions
- Who appears in peer networks as a sought-out collaborator versus someone working in isolation
- Trend lines: is someone developing, plateauing, or declining quarter over quarter



*Prior to using Confirm, we didn't have good data and accurate measurement on who is best connected, who are people going to for advice and who needs help. Organization network analysis (ONA) is an absolute breakthrough with performance management; it is exceptionally insightful.*

**Joe Bast**

VP People & Operations, Thoropass

PART 3

## Coaching from data, not gut feel

The biggest gap in most manager feedback: it's based on impression, not evidence. "Sarah is a team player" could mean she helped three people unblock last sprint, or just that she's friendly in meetings. These have very different coaching implications. Vague feedback produces anxiety, not behavior change.

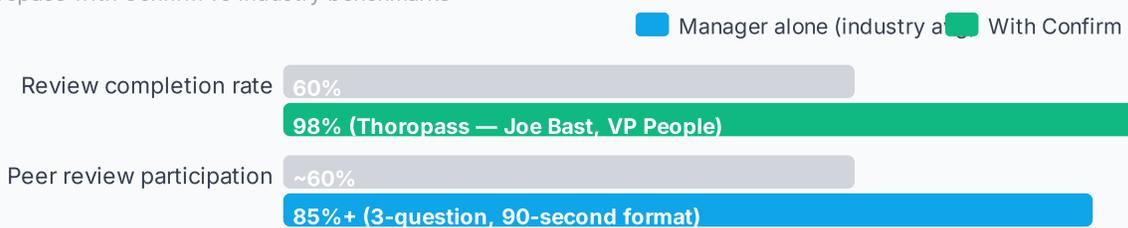
### The ONA signal managers can't get elsewhere

Organizational network analysis adds a dimension that no self-report or manager observation can capture: who actually seeks whom out. When a manager rates someone as "medium influence" but ONA shows that same person is one of the most connected nodes in the network — that gap is a coaching conversation worth having.

ONA also changes the before/after contrast that most managers experience through narrative alone. Without it, a manager says "I want to see you develop more executive presence." With ONA, they can say: "In your last four presentations, you got follow-up questions you hadn't prepared for. Peer data shows you're clear internally — stakeholder prep is the gap. What's different about how you prepare for executive meetings?" That's a coaching conversation.

#### What AI augmentation changes

Thoropass with Confirm vs industry benchmarks



Industry averages based on Confirm internal benchmarks and customer data

Confirm vs industry benchmarks — review completion and peer participation

## PART 4

## Bias in manager feedback

Manager bias is one of the most documented, least discussed problems in performance management. It isn't about intent — most managers trying to be fair still produce biased assessments, because bias operates below awareness.

### Four patterns that appear consistently in manager feedback

**Gender bias**

Men receive feedback on technical skills and leadership capability. Women receive feedback on personality traits and communication style. The content differs even when performance levels are similar.

**Recency bias**

Events from the last 30 days dominate performance conversations even when the review period is a full year. Strong Q3 work disappears behind a rocky Q4 — or vice versa.

**Similarity bias**

Managers rate employees who remind them of themselves more favorably. Same background, same communication style, same approach to problems. Difference reads as deficiency.

**Attribution bias**

When a high-performer makes a mistake, it's situational. When a low-performer makes one, it's dispositional. The same event produces different conclusions depending on the prior label.

### How AI surfaces bias without accusing anyone

Confirm's ONA data creates a specific check that no traditional review process has: it compares network centrality against manager ratings. If someone is highly sought out by their peers — a central node in the informal influence network — but rated as "low influence" by their manager, that's a signal worth examining. AI also flags when feedback language differs systematically across demographic groups, and when feedback clusters around recent events while ignoring documented progress from earlier in the period.

Network data catches the "quiet contributor" problem specifically — the engineer who fixed the architecture issue, the PM who held the cross-functional project together. Their contributions are invisible to manager observation but visible in peer networks. These flags don't accuse anyone; they open a question. The manager decides whether it reflects reality or a blind spot. That's more useful than bias training because it catches bias as it's happening — not six months later.



*Confirm is the first tool that lets me see the behavioral side with holistic evidence. I can quickly get the information to make decisions.*

**Joanna Yeoh**

Director of People, Nansen

## PART 5

# How Confirm works as an AI coaching layer

Confirm sits on top of your existing performance data and applies AI to surface coaching opportunities managers wouldn't otherwise see. It isn't a replacement for your HRIS or performance management platform — it's a layer that analyzes what's already there and makes it actionable.

## Core capabilities

### ONA — organizational network analysis

Maps the informal influence network by analyzing who seeks whom out for help, decisions, and information. Surfaces hidden contributors, identifies isolation risks, and gives calibration sessions a data anchor beyond manager memory. Native ONA — not available in Lattice, Culture Amp, Workday, or Rippling.

### Feedback analysis

Reads performance reviews, check-in notes, and peer feedback to identify patterns and surface developmental themes across a team. Flags feedback that is generic vs. specific, and tracks consistency across the review cycle.

### Goal intelligence

Tracks goal progress and identifies early warning signs. When goals stall, surfaces the pattern so managers can address it before review time — not discover it at the end of the quarter.

PART 6

# 90-day implementation roadmap



*When we learned about ONA from Confirm, it was magical timing. We looked at a bunch of platforms. I thought, let's see if any of these other platforms can do ONA for us as well. None of them could do it, not in that way, in such a fast, simple way. No one else could do it.*

**Sheena Blauvelt**

Executive Director of HR Specialties, USANA

The companies that get the most value from AI coaching don't try to change everything at once. They build the data foundation first, then use it. Here's the sequence that works.

<b>Days 1–30</b> Audit current state	<b>Days 31–60</b> Build the data foundation	<b>Days 61–90</b> Coach from data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Sample 10–20 recent reviews: are they specific or general impressions?</li> <li>→ Compare how different managers rate similar performance levels</li> <li>→ Check goal format: do they have a measurable outcome and a timeline?</li> <li>→ Map which teams have low peer feedback volume — those are your blind spot risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Implement structured check-ins with a consistent question format</li> <li>→ Run your first ONA pulse — identify who the informal network actually centers on</li> <li>→ Set up peer feedback with a short format: 3 questions, 90 seconds</li> <li>→ Calibrate goal structure: outcome + measurable signal + timeline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Weekly: 20-min data review before team check-ins</li> <li>→ Monthly: pattern review — who is developing, who is plateauing</li> <li>→ Compare ONA network data against manager ratings before calibration</li> <li>→ Quarterly: AI synthesis of trends before review cycles begin</li> </ul>

**The weekly data review is the highest-leverage habit.** 20 minutes before team check-ins. Look at: who hasn't received feedback recently, which goals are at risk, any ONA patterns worth exploring. This changes what happens in every conversation that week.

CONCLUSION

## Taking the next step

Most companies try to improve manager effectiveness through training. The problem: training doesn't change what happens in the moment. When a manager is sitting across from someone in a 1:1, they need relevant data — not a framework from six months ago.

AI coaching changes the information managers have when they need it most. Specific, evidence-based, pattern-aware data that no manager could compile on their own from dozens of conversations across a full quarter.

The managers who will develop their teams fastest over the next five years aren't necessarily the ones with the best instincts. They're the ones who combine good instincts with good data. ONA is the data layer that makes the invisible visible — the informal influence network that drives how work actually gets done.



*By using Confirm, we now know who the influencers are, the high and low performers, who needs help, and what to do to keep the best.*

**Joe Bast**

VP People & Operations, Thoropass

BOOK A DEMO

### See your team's coaching blind spots

Confirm maps the informal influence network, flags where manager ratings diverge from peer data, and gives every manager evidence-based prompts before their next 1:1. The only platform with native ONA built in.

[Request a demo →](#)

[confirm.com/request-a-demo](https://confirm.com/request-a-demo)

**100%**  
top performer  
retention

**98%**  
review completion

**90s**  
peer review time