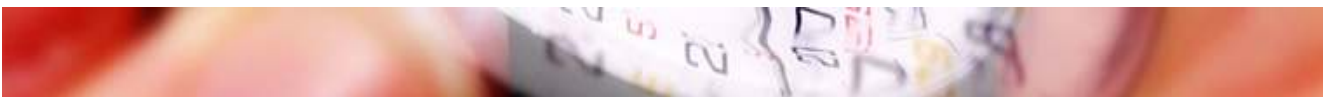




BATH CONSULTANCY DEVELOP FOUR KEY AREAS OF AN EFFECTIVE COACHING STRATEGY

With coaching fast becoming the focus of many leadership development programmes, Gil Schwenk, principal consultant at Bath Consultancy group, discusses the four key elements of an effective coaching strategy.



Coaching now accounts for a significant proportion of many leadership development budgets so organisations are rightly questioning the return on investment (ROI). I believe trying to establish a rock solid quantitative ROI for coaching is a rogue argument and will tie HR departments in knots as calculations will often be based on qualitative feedback and spurious assumptions.

However, there are four actions that will increase the value of coaching and optimise its contribution to the organisation's bottom line:

1. Align coaching to the strategic, culture and leadership outcomes of the organisation
2. Establish evaluation process at the outset
3. Provide supervision and continuous development so coachees gain value from every session
4. Harvest the learning from coaching.

Align coaching to the organisation

Since coaching is confidential, it can be difficult to link it to the organisation. If centred solely on the needs and goals of the individual, coaching is in danger of becoming an executive perk.

In every session there should be three parties 'present in the room' – coachee, coach and the organisation. To give voice to this 'silent partner', the HR department must clarify the organisation's needs with management and communicate priorities to coachees, internal and external coaches and even involve them in this process:

- The key strategic outcomes that the organisation is working to achieve and the extent of collaborative agreement about the strategic priorities
- The organisational culture that needs to be nurtured to achieve these strategic outcomes and what needs to shift to make this a reality
- The leadership behaviour required to achieve the desired culture and strategic outcomes.



Establish evaluation process at the outset

Evaluation starts from the moment the coaching begins. Increasingly organisations are using three-way contracting for coaching interventions to clarify the organisation's desired outcomes. Typically, this includes the coachee's manager or another significant sponsor.

As the coach explores the personal outcomes for the coachee, they should establish:

- How they tie into making you a more effective leader and stepping up to the desired organisational leadership behaviour
- How they will help shift you and your team positively and contribute to the shift in the wider organisational culture
- How they will enable your 'group' to be more effective and rapidly achieve the strategic outcomes

Coachee examples and stories can be used to document the achievement of the outcomes and attest to the leadership, cultural and strategic value of coaching.

Provide supervision and continuous development

Supervision helps focus on work objectives. It helps coaches have a better understanding of the client and the organisational system that they work in and raises standards by improving the quality and effectiveness of coaching. When supervising we constantly ask: "What is the change in you that will enable the client to make the change that will result in a positive shift for the organisation?"

Harvest the learning from coaching

Through the coaching process; coaches develop a deep understanding of the organisation's leadership behaviour and culture. Panellists at CIPD's Coaching at Work Conference in 2006 agreed it is acceptable to harvest data on organisational themes. This needs to be done with due concern for the individual's confidentiality and it must be for constructive organisational feedback and never punitive measures.

In our experience, when HR departments bring external and internal coaches together to identify and document organisational themes that have emerged from their coaching, it both demonstrates the value of that coaching and provides information that enables the organisation to be transformed.

There is no doubt that coaching will continue to play a major role in leadership development. Combining clear and defined outcomes, with regular coaching supervision, means that the value of coaching will be apparent and HR directors will not have to waste their time trying to establish specious arguments for the return on investment of coaching.



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