

Create value through coaching

Maximise your returns from executive coaching.

By Barbara Walsh

Perceptions of what executive coaching is and how it is used differ widely between organisations. In some, it is considered a perk of position, on the other end of the scale it can unfortunately still be perceived as a 'last-ditch' remedial intervention. However it is generally accepted that coaching will deliver value for the individual being coached.

There is often a lack of awareness, though, as to how the benefits of individual executive coaching programmes can effectively be realised across the wider system. At this stage, there is still largely an individualistic approach to coaching, and consequently the opportunity of leveraging the investment and using it as a driver towards the organisation's overall performance agenda is missed.

Taking a systemic approach to executive coaching can increase the effectiveness of key employees, improve the relationship between them and their organisations, and even enable beneficial culture change in the organisation.

Sandi Edwards of the American Management Association cautions, "Organisations need to avoid situations where knowledge is hoarded, activities are compartmentalised, silos are the norm, and people are competitive and motivated only by self-interest." This applies as much to coaching as to other initiatives.

One of the challenges organisations experience is determining where responsibility lies for the implementation and management of coaching in the organisation, as well as the analysis of the results of coaching engagements. Most do not know the extent to which coaching takes place, how it is being used, the costs and whether there is any alignment with business objectives.

A defined coaching strategy (which can be stand alone, but preferably is part of an Organisational Design leadership model or Talent Management strategy), and which is readily available to all stakeholders (including contracted coaches) will encourage delivery to organisational requirements.

This requires that policies or frameworks be designed which govern the contracting and use of coaching in the organisation. These should combine clarity of approach and accountability

with appropriate flexibility for situational adaptation. The coaching strategy should take into account the culture, values and processes of the organisation, and be managed to ensure consistency and quality.

Engaging key stakeholders in the process of shaping the strategy helps ensure it is conducted in a realistic, relevant and manageable way, and that spending will be targeted where the return to the organisation will be high. It is important that senior executives are seen to support coaching and provide a strategic structure for it. Human Resources, Organisational Design or Talent Management should own coaching, provide the practical structure for it and integrate it into performance management processes. This will make coaching business-like and normative. Line managers should be supportive of the coaching processes, and responsible for ensuring coaching is conducted as appropriate.

Dr Anthony Grant of the University of Sydney recommends that coaching should be 'a collaborative, solution-focused, results-oriented and systemic process'. Surveys conducted in areas where executive coaching is more established (North America, UK and Australia) show how integrating executive coaching with Human Resources or Organisational Design's People Development strategies results in system-wide learning and measurable benefit for the organisation.

At this stage, the value to be derived from using coaching to inform organisational learning in most South African organisations is not being recognised. Executive coaching tends to be a stand-alone process, often contracted on an ad-hoc basis. These organisations are sacrificing valuable opportunities. Another concern is that the absence of well-implemented coaching processes can negatively impact the experience of the coachee. ■

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References

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