

Coaching Using the Business Acumen Gauge

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In looking at the needs of a person seeking coaching, often the first steps are to identify the difference between what the person's needs and development opportunities are and what they or their manager describe as the issue or problem/s. While many individuals seeking coaching are involved in development or succession programs that have a battery of assessments to draw on, there are far more that seek support and development based on individual needs or interest. While there are many coaching disciplines that focus solely on the individual's personal needs, there is a broad demand for coaching that enables personal development and role achievement, particularly by those in the C suite or working to be promoted to it. In all roles, there is a requirement to manage and lead across the activities required to achieve the strategic goals of the organization. Business acumen is the framework of those activities, the questions are, what is business acumen, how important is each capability and is this what is being demonstrated?

Business acumen is what achieves strategy and supports the many activities, decisions and leadership behaviours that are required to be successful as a leader. It is not dependent on whether the individual is working in a for profit or not for profit environment, it is about business acumen, not profit generation alone. The need to demonstrate business acumen in alignment with role deliverables has been referenced, used in development programs and often taught in academia and by private providers. Unfortunately, there is no common definition that allows all of these approaches to deliver consistency and clarity to the individual striving to develop and achieve or those seeking to assess or develop them. Frequently what is called business acumen is financial literacy or strategy planning. While both are important they represent only a part of the discipline of business acumen.

The Business Acumen Gauge was developed as a direct result of this lack of a common definition and understanding in the literature and the application in the coaching industry, and as importantly, to provide the leaders striving to be better to have an objective, defined framework of capabilities that provides clarity of role expectation and demonstration of behaviours. The BAG has been used globally, across industries since its development, consistently delivering clarity and opportunity for leaders and their organizations to rapidly identify areas of alignment and gaps in the tactical and strategic capabilities the role requires, and what the individual is doing. There are eleven capabilities in the BAG, derived from exhaustive research. These are; Mindset, Foresight, Broadscanning, Strategic Alignment, Collaborative, Resource Management, Systems and Processes, Decision Making, Talent Development, Duty of Care and Financial Literacy (Part A and B). Having defined Business Acumen, the assessment methodology selected was that of an on line three sixty. Critically important in the design of the assessment is the two-step process of first – What is the rating of Importance in the Role? – for each of the eleven capabilities, and then – What is the rating of frequency of Demonstration of the behaviours that are part of each capability?

The first step – rating the Importance of each capability in the role – has been welcomed by both those being assessed and those seeking to use the assessment data in the coaching process. Universally there has been acclamation for this step as there is invariably concern or identified issues over the range of perceptions or understanding of what the role is intended to be focused on to

align to the organization's strategic goals. Once any areas of misalignment are addressed, the opportunity to focus on development areas of the individual is enabled. The coaching approach using the BAG is to work with the individual on those areas that offer the highest return for effort. This may mean a longer-term behavioural change with a series of steps or a short term targeted approach to tactical activities. Generally, a maximum of three areas of development are selected for the initial coaching program. Interventions can be developed for each development goal and the coach is able to use their array of knowledge, skills and supporting assessments in personality, emotional intelligence, executive presence, etc to support the development journey. One of the benefits of the BAG is that it is able to compliment many of the in situ assessments or development programs.

With coaching, the desire, need or expectation of measuring the change the individual has achieved (or not), either behavioural and tactical, can often be difficult depending on the assessment process, the coaching method being used and not infrequently, the changing needs of the role. Recently there has been an array of commentary on the challenges that organizations are facing in utilizing and maintaining value from the investment and reliance on competency frameworks that are static while the markets, industries and strategies that the leaders are responsible for, are far more dynamic, requiring constant review to ensure the strategic goals and role activities remain aligned. With the BAG, retesting is both objective and informative on changes achieved and observed in the coaching development areas, but most importantly on reconfirming if the importance of the capabilities in the role have remained consistent or changed due to internal or external organizational demands. With this process, behavioural change as agreed on in the coaching program can be recognized appropriately while confirming or resetting the behaviours needed to achieve the role from that point on.

What is frequently missing in the assessment processes that coaching is based on is the framework that links and aligns the strategic, tactical and behavioural requirements of a role. Without this, it is intrinsically harder to identify the "why, what and how" that most individuals expect and need to understand the value in the effort and challenge of change. With the BAG, this is addressed in an objective process that provides empirical data that reduces the defensive responses, provides opportunity for open dialogue between the individual, their manager and the coach on role areas that may appear misaligned but are in fact due to a lack of common perception or understanding, clarifies what is important and what are the best areas of development opportunity. With retesting, the BAG can separate change of behaviours and achievement of coaching while identifying the currency of the role requirements to set up the next phase of development.

Coaches work to enable the development of the individual who has engaged them for support, guidance, knowledge, challenge and behavioural change that will be sustainable and align with personal and professional growth. Coaching with the BAG provides the framework for this while also offering a level of clarity around the "why, what and how" that has not been offered until now.

David Ryan is the Managing Partner for Sloan Group International Asia Pacific, and the founder of Quad Assessments. David believes that leaders must understand themselves to be better able to lead and inspire others, while demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning.

He has worked with clients ranging from SMEs to global enterprises, has co-authored the assessment for Business Acumen (the Business Acumen Gauge), is an experienced executive coach, presenter and academic lecturer and has extensive experience in founding and building businesses.

He works with clients globally to guide their own learning and development journey as business leaders, addressing many of the challenges of the modern organization.

David holds a B Bus (Personnel and Industrial Relations) and an MBA from RMIT University in Melbourne, a Diploma (Company Director) and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He is also a Fellow of the Institute of Coaching, McLean Hospital, Harvard