



Developing Robust Coaching Practices as a Competitive Strategy

Coaching individual select employees may benefit the chosen few, but what about everyone else? It is strategically smarter to develop a coaching culture so that the entire organization benefits.

What makes a high performing leader who can inspire employees, get results in half the time it takes others, and is often the first to deliver innovative solutions? Leadership training is important, but a high performing leader is someone who is able to coach others to deliver their best performance.

Though formally coaching an individual has historically been used as a process for correcting certain behaviors, it delivers limited results. A coaching culture is one in which leaders and their employees develop the skills that coaching is intended to develop – the ability to identify and analyze a problem or issue, develop solutions supported by action plans, and make effective decisions that support organizational goals and objectives. People across the organization contribute, adopt a continuous learning perspective, and collaborate, all of which goes beyond problem solving.

First, leaders must be coached to understand the behaviors that drive a coaching culture, like encouraging people to fully participate in finding options to achieve high performance.

Recognizing a Coaching Culture

To best understand the difference between coaching leaders and coaching leaders who then develop a coaching culture, one needs to first recognize what defines a coaching culture.

An organization that develops a coaching culture has leaders who empower employees by working with them to identify challenges, develop options for solutions, set goals, develop action plans, and create accountability. The leader and the employee learn from each other because all employees see themselves as leaders who make a significant and measurable contribution to employer success.

This type of culture is much more suitable for the millennial generation of workers who want to know how their work matters and want the latitude to develop their full capabilities. A fully developed coaching culture places the organization at the top of the coaching progression model in which coaching is integrated into all interactions internally and externally.

The least developed coaching process engages coaches on a one-on-one basis. At the top of the progression model, the well-developed coaching culture is seen as giving the organization



a competitive edge because it is results driven, promotes innovation, and improves employee engagement.

All Hands on Deck

As organizations attempt to manage continuous change, they need everyone contributing their maximum capabilities. All employees should be learning, contributing, sharing, collaborating and giving their best performance. Isolating employees in their jobs and not encouraging them to be part of the change journey in an ever-changing business environment just does not make sense in today's business environment.

In a coaching culture, leaders, managers, and their staff engage each other and stakeholders to promote the highest organizational performance. It is a culture of shared values in which coaching is considered a key competency, and coaching behaviors encourage continuous team and individual development. It is a collective culture in which people are engaged to voluntarily contribute as a team member. In this kind of culture, people have a belief in lifelong learning and that collaboration can deliver the best that people offer.

How is such a culture developed?

A coaching strategy needs to be developed first otherwise the approach is haphazard and likely to continue coaching to a few select leaders. Developing a strategic coaching approach means strategy is linked to the organization's mission and values, giving context for the culture. The strategy is linked to the policies on talent leadership and development.

Coaching is also linked to adapting to and managing continual change, a characteristic common to most businesses today. Another way of looking at this linkage is that coaching needs to promote the behaviors and decisions that fit business conditions. Change is a constant, and businesses regularly adapt their strategies to remain competitive. The coaching strategy must be part of the change process to keep continual learning and development relevant. This is perhaps one of the most difficult challenges to developing a coaching culture. Leaders are coached to manage change, and they in turn must apply the same principles.

Weaving Coaching into the Fabric of EMPLOYEES' Decision-Making

The best way to manage the challenges of instilling a coaching culture is by developing a community of practice and a group of employees committed to promoting it. In other words, there must be a formal and informal coaching structure. Coaching leaders and managers, and then expecting them to sustain the effort without organizational support, is not likely to produce desired results.



Organizationally supported coaching becomes part of the fabric of decision-making and operations as it helps to develop a resilient and agile workforce. It becomes a shared value. Leaders agree on the desired outcomes and how the coaching strategy will be kept aligned with organizational goals.

In the formal structure, measurement and accountability for meeting formal goals are implemented in leadership's performance evaluations systems. Producing metrics also ensures that learning and knowledge transfers remain relevant. In the informal structure, leaders and managers coach on a day-to-day basis and adapt as needed, becoming a self-sustaining process that creates value.

There is no one right way to develop a coaching culture. It is a journey. Most coaching consultants recommend developing a framework for transitioning to a coaching culture. The framework could begin with the development of senior executives, add a group of internal coaches from across the organization, develop frontline managers and supervisors with basic coaching skills, integrate coaching training into professional development programs, and integrate coaching into the general workforce. It is a step-by-step process that develops the right leadership mindset, drives coaching behaviors, and integrates coaching into daily operations in order to fully leverage its benefits.

The next generation of coaching is not reserved for C-suite executives. It is an organizational strategy for developing the mindset and behaviors of all employees. It is also an engagement strategy for an era in which research shows only a third of employees are fully engaged in their organizations.

Developing a coaching culture harnesses the collective power of innovation and the capabilities of talented employees, enabling the organization to better manage continuous change and to achieve future goals.

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