**Embedding a Coaching and Mentoring Culture Strategy into an Organisation**

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**Abstract**

The coaching and mentoring sector has vastly grown in popularity worldwide. These two approaches are well established ways for organisations to build strong workplace cultures and are very effective in developing employees’ skills and knowledge as well as enhancing their confidence and overall performance (CIPD). There are many other benefits to using both coaching and mentoring within the organisation and this will be addressed further throughout this paper.

This paper will explore the benefits of having a coaching culture embedded within an organisation and the value add it produces. It will also discuss various coaching models, such as the GROW model, and provide examples of successful coaching programs.

**What is a Coaching and Mentoring Culture?**

A coaching and mentoring culture is when an organisation incorporates and influences coaching and mentoring practices into their core values and business strategies. Inspiring them to be used as the predominant form of conversations, employee interactions and activities throughout every area of the organisation. Enabling leaders to coach, motivate, and develop their employees, but also influence coaching and mentoring practices to happen amongst all team members and peers.

Defined by David Clutterbuck & David Megginson (2005)“*It’s like the genetic engineering – using the coaching virus to effect and bring about subtle changes in the operation of every cell in the corporate body”.*

**The difference between coaching and mentoring.**

Coaching and mentoring are usually grouped together, as if they are the same thing, and many find it difficult to distinguish the difference between a coach and a mentor.

They both share some commonalities, for instance, they usually both take place as one to one interactions that pursue to support the individual/client to grow and develop their capabilities (Parsloe, Leedham, Newell, 2022). Both mentoring and coaching are excellent learning approaches that can develop and improve individuals’ performance. They help organisations and businesses achieve their goals and objectives and support their employees with personal development and in turn, cultivating a more positive and engaging work environment.

However, although both coaching and mentoring have their similarities, they are two different approaches, that are used for different purposes. The following explanations will explain this in more detail.

**Mentoring**

*“The activity of supporting and advising someone with less experience to help them develop in their work”* as defined by The Cambridge English Dictionary.

Derived from Greek Mythology, Mentor was an older wise man, who was asked by Odysseus to guide and advise his son throughout his absence during the Trojan war (Homer., 2011).

The word mentor has historically evolved to inform the idea of mentoring, were a more competent and experienced individual will build a relationship and provide support and guidance to the more junior or less experienced individual to further develop their skills and knowledge within a specific area or role.

In today’s organisations, mentoring programmes are becoming very popular and are usually, set up internally. The mentor role is typically a person who already works at the organisation and has a wealth of understanding and expertise required in their role to demonstrate and hand down their knowledge and skills to develop their mentee. It is usually an unpaid part of the role and happens during working hours (Mertz, 2004).

Mentoring is a directive approach, where the mentor tends to do most of the talking during meetings and may tell the mentee (person being mentored) what to do and how best to do it. There are no qualifications required to become a mentor.

**Coaching**

*“The job or activity of providing training for people or helping to prepare them for something”* as defined by The Cambridge English Dictionary.

The word coach is derived from a metaphor applied back in 18th century England. Students would use coach as a slang verb to refer to their tutors, because tutors quickly and comfortably carried students to their goal of passing exams, just as the horse drawn coach would comfortably carry its passengers to their desired destination (Hendrickson, 2008).

Nowadays, coaching can be described as a facilitating relationship provided by an individual who is usually (but not always) an external provider to the organisation or type of organisation of the individual being coached. It concentrates on the enhancement of the individual’s performance and supports the individual with self-motivation and autonomy to reach their desired goals.

Coaching is a non-directive approach, allowing the coachee (person being coached) the opportunity to do most of the talking and conceivably come up with their own actions plans and ideas, the coach is there to facilitate this to happen by asking specific questions and prompts (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2018).

Coaches tend to have professional qualifications in coaching and their services are generally provided from an external source. Coaches have many skills and techniques which will allow the coachee to reflect and become more confident in their decisions and actions required to achieve their goals.

**How will a coaching culture benefit the organisation?**

Since the global Covid pandemic, organisations have seen massive changes to the way their people work or want to work.

People have been revaluating their working life and how they want this to look like and include. New hybrid working and virtual meetings has meant that employee collaboration and engagement has become more of a challenge. Resulting in, some teams or individuals feeling isolated, unheard, and not part of the bigger organisational picture (Caplin, 2003). All of which, is very demotivating to the individual and can lead to poor performance, low morale, and wellbeing or even resignation.

Coaching has been around for a long time, and vast amounts of research has been conducted over the years confirming the benefits and positive outcomes it has had on leadership and management, team collaboration and personal development (Whitmore, 2009).

In recent years, coaching has been used as a management tool and has gained considerable importance in both large and small organisations. In today's dynamic business environment, employers are searching for ways to improve the performance of their employees while enhancing their skills and abilities. Coaching is a process that enables employees to achieve their maximum potential by setting realistic objectives, identifying barriers to progress, and providing feedback and support.

Thus, having a coaching culture in place and aligning it to the organisation will provide all of the benefits that coaching has to offer but will also create an organisational culture where people feel that they have a voice, they will feel safe in their environment, communications will be more productive and reflective, teams will collaborate more effectively and will naturally want to learn and support each other.

Leaders will radiate compassion, and authenticity, they will incessantly support their teams to address any personal or workplace learning and development, instilling a positive and enjoyable working environment where employees will feel valued and trusted.

Individuals will feel empowered to improve their personal development and succeed in their overall performance goals, providing them with a sense of self-efficacy and conviction in their role. Coaching will become the natural way of doing business.

**Measuring the impact of Coaching on the individual.**

It will take time to allow the effects of coaching to take place but a way of measuring the impact it has on individuals is much easier and may be quicker than the impact it has on the organisation.

This is because an individual can monitor and evaluate their own changes in behaviour, attitude, development etc. Coaching models can easily be used to support the coachee and will provide them with tangible evidence of their progression on their coaching journey.

The GROW Model (Whitmore, 2009) is one of the widespread models used in coaching and enables the coachee to set achievable goals and enables them to really think of how and when their desired goal can be achieved and what success looks like. It consists of 4 elements made up from the acronym GROW:

1. **Goal** – What do you want to achieve?
2. **Reality** – Where are you now?
3. **Options** – What could you do?
4. **Will** – what will you do?

Cognitive models, such as the ABC Model can be used in conjunction with the GROW model to support any adverse cognitive behaviour or emotional beliefs the coachee may have about certain situations or conditions and will provide a way of rationalising any unhelpful thoughts or beliefs and empower them to move forward and succeed in their goals.

**Measuring the impact of Coaching on the organisation.**

Measuring the effect that coaching is having on the organisation will need time to allow the impact of any changes to take place. Goal setting is a tangible way of measuring and validating the impact coaching is having on the organisation’s culture, growth and overall success.

The OSCAR Model (Gilbert & Whittleworth, 2009) is one of the key models to measuring and managing performance and outcomes within organisations and is most effective when used working towards long term goals and outcomes as a framework. It enables the organisation to set milestones, as well as understand and measure progress. It consists of 5 elements made up from the acronym OSCAR:

1. **Outcome** – What is the desired outcome? What are the short, medium, and long term goals? What does success look like?
2. **Situation** -What is the current situation? What is the reality? What is currently happening?
3. **Choices and Consequences** – What choices are there available? what consequences are there for each choice available? What would be the impact on the employees and organisation? Which choices have the best consequences?
4. **Actions** -What immediate actions should be taken? When will they be taken? What is required to support the process? Are the actions SMART (specific, measurable, accurate, realistic, and timely)?
5. **Review** - How will the progress be reviewed? When will it be reviewed? Have the actions been moving towards the goal? Is there adequate resources and support for the process?

Other ways of measuring the impact of the coaching culture would be to conduct an employee wide survey asking them about their coaching journeys and how they feel it is supporting the organisation. This data collected could then be amalgamated into a SWOT Model ready for analysis to further understand any potential threats or opportunities that may have not been considered, the SWOT analysis will also enable the organisation to understand what the strengths and weaknesses are from having coaching in the organisation and if the organisational goals are understood and attainable from the employee’s perspective.

Having these models in place will enable the organisation to start to see the impacts that coaching is having on individuals and the organisation positive behavioural and attitude changes towards how their employees engage and interact within their daily working environment, which will lead to positive responses, open discussions and employees actively wanting to support the organisational needs and business progression.

**The barriers and challenges faced by organisation and employees****.**

There are several barriers that can prevent effective coaching within organisations and its employees. These barriers often arise from communication breakdowns, a lack of trust between coaches and employees, or resistance to change. This section will focus on 2 barriers for each organisation and individuals:

**Organisational Barriers:**

* **Lack of time and resources:** Time is a scarce resource for coaches and employees, and coaching often gets neglected in favour of more pressing organisational matters. Key stakeholders, Coaches and employees must find ways to prioritise coaching activities to ensure they receive the necessary attention.
* **Resistance to change and a lack of “buy in” from the top down:** Employees may resist coaching because they feel uncomfortable with the feedback or because they do not see the benefits of coaching as this has not been demonstrated from the top down. Key stakeholders and Coaches must work with across the wider organisation to identify any concerns to the change and address them to build trust and commitment amongst employees.

**Employee/individual barriers:**

* **Communication breakdowns:** Communication breakdowns between coaches and coachee can hinder effective coaching, leading to misunderstandings and ineffective feedback. Coaches must work to establish clear lines of communication and develop communication skills to ensure effective feedback**.**
* **Lack of engagement:** When coachees are not engaged, coaching becomes ineffective. Coachees may lack motivation, have low self-confidence, or not see the relevance of coaching to their role.Coaches must address these issues with the coachee and create a coaching environment that fosters engagement and motivation, It is beneficial to have a Coaching contract wrote up that provides the basis upon which the coach/coachee relationship is built. The contract will provide the agenda for coaching and promote responsibility from both coach and coachee perspective.

**The foundations needed to create a Coaching Culture.**

Research states that it is important that the organisation will need to have 3 key elements in place so that a coaching culture can endure any challenges and continue to thrive. Peter Hawkins (2012) refers to these elements as the 3 Foundational Pillars:

1. **Coaching Strategy** – This needs to be created with the collaboration of all business stakeholders. There must be a clear business strategy on which to build the coaching strategy.
2. **Aligning the coaching culture to wider organisational changes** - this needs to be continuously updated and aligning to the fast demands and changes happening within the organisation in which it operates.
3. **Coaching infrastructure** – this is ensuring that all coaching activities are established and maintain the correct governance and management.

**Next steps for embedding a coaching culture.**

Once the 3 key foundational elements are established, they will support the creation of the coaching culture framework, that will provide the stages required to develop and grow a thriving coaching culture. Hawkins reports that there are 7 steps required to creating a coaching culture, although they do not have to be followed in a linear order (Hawkins et al., 2006).

1. Developing an effective panel of external coaches.
2. Developing the internal coaching and mentoring capacity.
3. The organisations leaders actively support coaching endeavours and align them with the organisational culture change.
4. Coaching moves beyond individual formal sessions to team coaching and organisational learning.
5. Coaching becomes embedded in the HR and performance management processes of the organisation.
6. Coaching becomes the predominant style for managing throughout the organisation.
7. Coaching becomes how an organisation does business with all its stakeholders.

Applying these ‘7 Steps Model’ will provide the essential resources, knowledge and guidance needed to develop a coaching culture.

**Step1 - Developing an effective panel of external coaches.**

In the first instance, it is useful to have a collection of associate certified and experienced coaches that will be able to provide executive and workplace coaching to all employees who are selected to become internal coaches. They will be able to work with all leadership and key stakeholders that will receive training to become an internal coach and provide them with essential experience as a coachee and an insight of the knowledge and skills required for the role.

It is good practice that people who want to become a coach/mentor should have the experience of being a coachee and experience what it means to be coached or mentored.

Allowing the key stakeholders to have this coaching experience will in turn, enable them to see its potential and will promote the sense of ‘buy-in’ to a coaching culture.

It will also enable the new internal coaches the experience of being a coachee but also understand what skills are required to become an effective coach.

**Skills required to become an effective Coach**.

It is the Coaches responsibility to create a coaching environment that promotes trust, engagement, and communication, while also setting clear objectives and continually evaluating and adjusting the coaching process to ensure its effectiveness. For coaching to be effective a coach will need to:

* **Build trust:** Coaches must establish a relationship of trust with coachees. They should listen actively and provide feedback that the coachee can use to develop personally and professionally. Coaches should also ensure confidentiality to build trust and establish an environment that is safe for coachees to share their concerns.
* **Set clear objectives:** Coaches and coachees should set clear coaching objectives laid out in a ‘Coaching Contract’ and ensure that each coaching session has a clear focus on achieving those objectives. This will help to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that the coaching process is effective.
* **Evaluate and adjust coaching policies:** Coaching policies and procedures should be evaluated regularly to ensure that they are effective and align with the organisation's goals. This includes reviewing coaching objectives, providing feedback on the coaching process, and making adjustments where necessary.
* **Become a member of an affiliated coaching body:** It is important that the coach acts in ethical accordance with coaching sessions or any interactions as a coaching facilitator. Having a membership into a professional coaching body will provide the coach with a code of practice and regulations of ethical standards to follow. This will also certify your coachees of your professionalism, experience, and reliability.

**Step 2 - Developing the internal coaching and mentoring capacity.**

It is important that any potential coaches are equipped with the skills and behaviours listed above but also have access to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that look at various types of workshops and training sessions such as but not limited to: active listening and communication skills, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness and inclusion, working with different personality types as well providing accredited level 2,3 and 5 coaching and mentoring programmes.

All coaching professionals should continuously improve their knowledge and skillset and keep updated with new methods and theories and actively manage their own CPD accordingly, however this should be supported by the organisation (Caplan, 2003).

**Reflective practice after each coaching session.**

Coaches need to be non-judgmental and aware of their own biases. Regular reflective practise will enable the coach to analyse their behaviours and beliefs and set them aside during the session, so has not to come across as biased or judgmental towards the coachee, as this will result in a negative coaching session for both coach and coachee. Kolb’s Reflective Cycle (Kolb, 2014) is widely used however there are other various models of reflective practice to choose from (Thompson & Thompson, 2008).

**Step 3 - The organisations leaders actively support coaching endeavours and align them with the organisational culture change.**

This step is mostly focused on the leadership teams and senior executives within the organisation and looks at adapting the way they lead their employees. To create a change in an organisational culture there must be a change in leadership behaviours and values.

Access to various leadership programmes that aim to integrate authentic and compassionate leadership skills along with agile emotional intelligence and coaching skills to create a coaching leadership approach, will support and drive the way forward for a coaching culture to flourish.

**Step 4 - Coaching moves beyond individual formal sessions to team coaching and organisational learning.**

This is the step that sees coaching starting to become an everyday occurrence and more often in an informal context. It is when the coaching culture starts to become ‘the norm’. It is the way that all employees engage with and interact in a coaching manner. The way that people collaborate and communicate with each other, ad hoc learning will take place using coaching practices and people are building compassionate and supportive relationships with others.

CDS DS are able to integrate coaching techniques and psychometrics to provide support in building an understanding of the different behavioural styles and how to build better working relationships as well as support team cohesion.

**Step 5 - Coaching becomes embedded in the HR and performance management processes of the organisation.**

This step is the one that ensures that all the coaching activities are aligned with the HR strategy. Coaching should be part of all HR processes and people performance management.

Internal validation processes need to be managed to measure the quality and impact that coaching is having on the employees as individuals but also the overall impact on the organisation. This can be accomplished through HR online surveys, Feedback forms, performance management 1-1’s and focus group sessions.

**Step 6 - Coaching becomes the predominant style for managing throughout the organisation.**

This step sees all leadership and management styles make a shift into predominantly using a coaching style to lead and manage their people. However, depending on the size of the organisation it may not be time effective to put all leaders and managers on a fully accredited coaching course.

This will require the organisation to tailor their leadership and management programmes and workshops to integrate the coaching skills required to support their daily way of managing their employees.

**Step 7 - Coaching becomes how an organisation does business with all its stakeholders.**

This step focusses on the organisation, and how the coaching culture surges into everything and everyone they interact with. All internal and external sources, people, stakeholders, investors, partners, suppliers, and communities.

Once the coaching skills are happening frequently internally, these skills will become the ‘normal’ everyday way that the organisation runs all of its business and services, this can be measured through customer and employee surveys and various types of qualitative and quantitative methods and measurement.

The data collected will enable the organisation to understand how well the coaching culture is working as well as understanding if there are any gaps or further development required.

**What happens next after the steps are completed?**

The organisation needs to understand that once coaching and mentoring practices are in place it will take time and commitment from all employees for it to become a fully embedded coaching/mentor culture, it is not something that will just keep going. It requires continuous maintenance and development, making changes if something does not seem to work but also being transparent about what is working and the benefits it brings. Always seeking to develop coaching skills and keeping up to date with new theories and practices.

It is valuable to remember that the most significant thing for any organisation is their people, they are at the forefront of the coaching culture. Having a coaching culture embedded within an organisation can provide numerous benefits, including improved performance, enhanced skills and abilities, increased retention, and improved communication and teamwork. Coaching is a personalised development tool that enables employees to work on their specific areas of improvement and continue learning throughout their career. It is important to work together to set the foundations of a coaching culture future.

The organisation and its people are the ones that will innovate and inspire coaching practices to drive forward, supporting their organisational growth and succeed using their core values and principles to achieve their goals and ambitions.

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