

EXECUTIVE COACHING-IS IT THE ONLY COACHING?

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“Several studies on executive coaching have demonstrated that a well-executed coaching program can achieve between 500 and 700% return on investment”. (Steve Mitten www.principaleevolutions.com). Coaching has now become a part of the standard leadership development training for select executives and talented managers identified as highfliers or potential future business heads. Is coaching meant for some and not for others? Is it only meant for leadership development, elite executives and high fliers? Or is it needed more for not-so-high fliers and average or even below-average performers? Is everyone entitled to have a coach? Is it necessary?

It is argued here that executive coaching is only one form of coaching and organizational life requires many occasions when coaching assistance is needed. Though normally the boss or the boss’s boss is expected to be the best coach, power-distance realities in Indian culture pull down the possibility of the reporting or reviewing managers or higher-level executives from the same organization being accepted as coaches. Their effectiveness beyond performance coaching is debatable. It is precisely the power distance in Indian culture that has become a stumbling block in the effective implementation of performance coaching and feedback necessitating the introduction of 360-degree feedback, development centers, etc. supplemented by external coaching sessions.

Coaching is not a new concept or invention. In recent times it has acquired a new meaning and opened new opportunities to think conceptualize and act. In the mid-seventies when Larsen & Toubro introduced an open system of performance appraisal, L&T introduced “Feedback and Counselling” as a separate sub-system of their Integrated HRD system. It was given the same status as that of Performance Appraisal, Training, Potential appraisal, Career Planning and Development, and OD subsystems of HRD. A large number of Executives were trained in counseling skills in L&T.

Later in the eighties, the term counseling was replaced by coaching as for many counseling represented clinical (something wrong) connotations and was also somewhat of a taboo, despite its meaning focusing on helping, communicating, and influencing (*see Pareek and Rao, 1978 and 1990*). In the US, the term coaching became very popular and our article on Performance Counselling was re-written as Performance Coaching and was published in Pfeiffer’s Annual Handbook on Developing Human Resources.

In recent times the term “Executive Coaching” seems to replace all of them. It is understandable that Executive coaching as a term extends beyond performance coaching and is largely aiming at developing Executive Competencies or enhancing managerial and leadership competencies.

“Executive coaching, which surfaced as a leadership development practice over a decade ago, is now among the most widely used executive development techniques. Yet, despite its growing tenure as a leadership development practice executive coaching is still used sparingly in organizations and remains underutilized.”(McGovern, Joy and team, 2001 in the Manchester Review, Volume 6 No.1).

Perhaps these observations made seven years ago continue to be true though the use of executive coaching has grown since then and annual conferences and seminars are being held continuously and the number of people claiming to be Executive Coaches and CEO coaches as well as those training Coaches has increased internationally. This is gaining momentum in India as well. However, there is a need for more attention on what Executive Coaching can do, cannot do and how it fits into the corporate culture in India.

The need for coaching:

“Good leaders are more self-aware people”.

“The higher you go the lonelier it gets”. People will tell you what you want to hear rather than share their real feelings about you, your actions and decisions, etc. An effective manager needs to be sensitive to what people really feel and go beyond what they say. (You should be able to hear the unheard like the prince who heard the sound of the sun warming the earth and the grass drinking the morning dew).

This justifies coaching based on 360 Degree feedback. Such coaching can be undertaken immediately after the 360 DF and may last for one to three sessions at best. In the first session, the purpose is to explain and help the candidate interpret the feedback. The second session is to help the candidate review the action plans implemented, changes affected or changes in the approach etc. and the third is to review and learn lessons. The entire process could be spread across 6 months and may have at the most three sessions.

Change Management Coaching

“The more you succeed the more experienced you become and the more firm or rigid you could become”.

“Success sometimes is the first step to failure” or “Failure of success”

“A leader is one who continuously learns and changes”.

There is always an undiscovered part of yourself and only new and novel situations that you have not faced before could bring some of the talents to the forefront.

All these justify the use of coaching based on Assessment and Development centers.

These are some of the sayings that have relevance to executive coaching.

When do you coach?

There are eight different occasions for coaching. In each of these, the sources of information that the coach uses besides the coachee himself are varied. In all coaching, the coachee is the primary source of information and has to set the agenda and establish a contract (psychological and emotional) with the coach. The 8 different occasions for coaching are elaborated below:

1. When an employee faces a career choice. (New **career coaching or recruitment coaching**). This can be done by a career coach or a career counselor or an executive coach. For in-house moves and career options, seniors working as mentors and coaches from within the organization can be of help.
2. When an employee joins a new job or a place or a position or into a role (**induction coaching-integration assimilation coaching**): This is done as and when required and could be based on the use of psychometric tests, biographic understanding, BEI, etc. The HR department could have specialists to assist employees in this. A cadre of executives at senior levels could be developed as “Integration Assimilation” facilitators. Besides coaching skills, such facilitators should have an understanding of the dilemmas a person goes through in a new job and should be an integration specialist.
3. When a person or his organization desires to improve the performance of an individual in relation to his current role. (**performance coaching** see Pareek and Rao, 1990 Annual of developing Human resources by Pfeiffer and Jones, La Jola: California): This is done annually or half-yearly and in some

cases quarterly as a part of the PMS and is done by the boss but need not be restricted to the boss. External agents could be used for this purpose once in a while.

4. When a person has a lot more potential than what he has and he is not able to give his best (**potential development coaching** normally based on assessment and development center data). This is done after an ADC after explaining the implications of the ADC data, giving feedback, and helping in developmental plans. This can be done once followed by a follow-up coaching six months later.
5. When a person has problems with his colleagues, peers, juniors, seniors, or customers or gets into areas of conflict interpersonal tensions, etc. (**personal coaching**). This can be done any time and needs a trained behavioral scientist or a psychologist. May sue 360Degree feedback and BEI-based observations.
6. When the leadership potential of an individual needs to be developed and he needs to be helped to become a future leader (**leadership development**). This need not be linked to any event and could be done continuously. This could be done after a 360 or after an ADC. In this case, the coach needs special 360-degree feedback skills.
7. When a person needs to put to use the skills he acquired and he should plan strategies of developing his potential or managerial qualities after training (**management development or training coaching**). This can be done through internal coaches who work as change facilitators.
8. When a person expresses his intention to quit and the organization is keen to retain him (**retention coaching**)

Every top-level manager needs a sounding board or sounding body. The sounding body helps to clarify thoughts, rallies questions, provides alternate viewpoints, gets the individual to critically examine their thoughts, ideas, and approaches, and helps the individual make wiser choices based on the wisdom so gained. A coach is, therefore, one who can facilitate accomplishing one or more of the above.

Performance coaching is more purposive. Performance coaching is based on what the individual sets out to accomplish, what (s)he has finally been able to accomplish, identifying the reasons for success and failure, isolation of factors one can influence and manage (factors that contribute to the individual's success and failure) planning activities/strategies to leverage strengths and avoiding exposure of weak areas leading to failure and thus developing the individuals' leadership potential.

Coaching also means gaining insights into oneself and recognizing how one's actions, behaviors, qualities, traits, styles are influencing one growth through the impact they are making on others and the environment. Helping a person realize these requires a log of insights into human psychology, empathy, and experience. It is not merely a question of listening but also an issue of critical questioning, sensitivity to data, ability to see patterns, meaning in tapers, and point of fearlessly the implications.

Issues:

Is coaching meant for some and not for others? Is it only meant for leadership development, elite executives, and high fliers? Or is it needed more for not-so-high fliers and average or even below-average performers? Can everyone be entitled to have a coach? Is it necessary? The answer is obvious. Coaching is for all. If any, the weak performers and average executives need it as much as future leaders and those with potential.

Everyone needs a self-renewal opportunity and stimulation for self-renewal and development. As per the Johari Window construct, each of us has an open self that comprises aspects of our talent that are well understood by us and the others, a part well understood by others and not so well understood by ourselves

(blind spots), and another part not so well understood by others despite the insights we have about ourselves (private world) and a large part which we have not yet explored. A good coach should help us to discover what fits into each of these compartments of the Johari window.

A good coach helps us work out strategies to discover more of our talent through experimentation and dissemination. Our values, perceptions, and inhibitions may be preventing us from making the best use of the talent that we have. Moreover, we may not be aware of our blind spots and hence an external coach may be of help. In addition, a coach may be of help in facilitating the discovery of many unknown parts of our personality and talent.

To accomplish this, coaches need not be more intelligent, learned, and powerful than us. The coach needs to have coaching skills, empathy, and an understanding of the context in which we operate. The boss as a coach has some qualities. He understands our work culture and context and organizational realities and as a coach helps us align our individual and organizational realities and match talents to get the best out of each other. However, organizational coaches will have difficulties going beyond the organizational context.

Coaching is meant for every individual. Each of us should have multiple coaches, who may also change from time to time. A set of coaches for organizational events starting with Induction, to PMS, training effectiveness, and career coaching, and leadership development, and another set of coaches for our day-to-day growth including career planning and learning. Life is itself a school and learning opportunities are continuously coming our way. While we are our best teachers, other teachers can help us to teach ourselves better.

Hence, coaching is for all and there is not just one form of coaching but many forms. At least organizations can do well by preparing seniors to coach their juniors either from their departments or lines of business or from other lines of business and also provide line managers occasionally as coaches from other organizations, industry, and academics, etc. who are good listeners and at the same time facilitators of learning.

Appendix: Coaching Scenario from the West

(Given below are excerpts From "Trends in Executive Coaching: New Research Reveals Emerging Best Practices", HCI White Paper - December 12, 2007)

This article offers clear pointers in terms of how the coaching industry is shaping up in the US.

1. Executive Coaching is generally understood as a prime driver of individual effectiveness and linked to financial returns for the organization. In some ways, this has a direct bearing on some of the interventions suggested above which have high financial returns besides leadership development.
2. The typical Target population for coaching engagements: high-performing executives, high-potentials, those having problematic interpersonal behaviors.
3. The success of a coaching relationship depends on the match between coach and coachee and clearly articulating the Who? What? When? Where? Why? of a coaching relationship.
4. It is important to distinguish between monitoring (how to get things done in an organization) and coaching (how to succeed as a leader) since both have different objectives.
5. There is a trend towards embracing "On-Demand Coaching" Short-term situational engagements with narrowly defined & highly targeted outcomes. Example: Feedback and Action Planning post 360 DF/Specific Capability around some type of skill

6. Though coaching in Induction and career-decision making scenarios outlined in this article are attempted least often now, there is an indication that role-change and new hire transition coaching will only increase.
7. One popular and emerging coaching assignment is coaching for Team Effectiveness-creating a “we-centric thinking” by coaching the Manager and/or Team
8. Requests for coaching mostly come from the executive's boss and/or the HR business partner. Organizational culture makes a difference here-some executives ask for it themselves because the organization has a history of such practices.
9. Trends in sourcing executive coaches: Coaches are mostly independent trainers or sourced through external firms and less through an internal pool of coaches. Overall, external coaches are preferred, more for confidentiality reasons and for bringing an outside perspective and benchmarks. Internal coaches are considered for mid-level executives and in post-360DF situations.
10. The top 3 criteria for selecting a coach are:
 - a. Coaching methodology
 - b. Senior level business experience
 - c. Knowledge of industry and industry experience
11. Top 3 factors in making a successful match between coach and coachee:
 - a. Initial chemistry between the two
 - b. Business experience of coach
 - c. Functional experience of coach
12. Organizational factors that lead to successful match:
 - a. Establish coachee expectations
 - b. Prepare coach for an interview with the coachee
 - c. Allow coach and coachee interview to take place in person instead of phone
13. Length of coaching assignments-Most common duration is 4 to 6 months followed by 1-3 months. Some assignments even last a year
14. The frequency of Meetings is on an average of 2 sessions per month though the frequency is higher in the first few months
15. Nature of Meetings-A majority of sessions are conducted in-person though, a blended approach using both phone and in-person meetings is also common. A commonly-felt challenge concerning the blended approach is that the coach is unable to read the body language if conducting the session over the phone-a critical measure (at times) of noticeable behavioral change
16. Coaching Fees:
 - a. Charged as per a flat rate, followed by an hourly or monthly rate
 - b. For 6-month engagements, the fee range is between \$15,000 to \$40,000 for C-Suite executives; \$10,000 to \$30,000 for senior-level executives; and \$5,000 to \$20,000 for mid-level executives.
17. Top 3 Challenges in making the case for coaching:
 - a. Demonstrating ROI
 - b. Cost
 - c. Executives finding time for the coaching
18. A possible formula for Coaching Success, therefore, is Agreed Outcomes (deliverables) - Cost - Executive Time=Value
19. Coaching, as per the survey is known to deliver maximum value in 3 situations:
 - a. Helping teamwork more effectively.
 - b. Taking someone from being a good performer to a great one
 - c. Developing a high potential executive

20. When evaluating coaching effectiveness and ROI, the study revealed the top three measures of a successful coaching assignment are:
- a. Agreed-upon measures achieved
 - b. The assessment from the coach
 - c. Other people's observations of the changes.

References and other resources

Indian References:

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