

Professional Coaching: State of the Art, State of the Practice

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Summary

Coaches use a range of disparate techniques and have foundations in several different perspectives. Many of these coaching approaches are useful, and participants typically gain significant value from the process. However, coaches need to become more familiar with the fundamental processes of how people change and to develop a full repertoire of learning techniques to address those processes. Until they do, they will not achieve the powerful results that coaching can and needs to deliver.

Similarly, the number of organizations that use coaching is increasing rapidly, and a number of organizations have become more focused and consistent in their approach. The majority, however, continue to underleverage the ability of coaching to achieve organizational results. They need to link coaching practices more systematically to the organization's purpose and direction and to align coaching strategically with existing human resource systems.

Introduction

Executive coaching is flourishing, with organizations hiring personal coaches in unprecedented numbers. The field of coaching has deep roots in consulting, education, and counseling and thus is not a new field. There is little consistency, however, in how organizations use coaches or how coaches practice their profession.

Drawing on literature surveys, research, and professional experience, we summarize the current practice of coaching from the perspective of both organizations and coaches. We also propose how coaching might fulfill its potential and deliver greater results by moving toward the state-of-the-art.

State of the Practice and State of the Art

For Coaches	
Current Practice	State of the Art
1. Coaches often emphasize one side of the partnership	1. Coaches explore relevant information from all perspectives
2. Coaches often equate insight with learning	2. Coaches guide people through the entire development process
3. Definitions of coaching are all over the map	3. Definitions of coaching reflect the full scope of all the coach's roles
4. Coaches often draw from a limited toolkit	4. Coaches artfully leverage a repertoire of methods for learning

For Organizations	
Current Practice	State of the Art
1. Organizations make decisions about coaching on a decentralized, case-by-case basis	1. Organizations use coaching strategically—where the payback is greatest
2. Organizations are shifting from fix-it coaching to coaching specific groups	2. Organizations integrate coaching with their HR systems to meet organizational needs
3. Organizations select and manage coaches informally	3. Organizations build a pool of coaches they can count on
4. Organizations accept coaching as effective	4. Organizations systematically evaluate the results of coaching

Development Pipeline: Conditions for Development



These five factors define the conditions that are necessary for individuals, teams, and other work groups to develop in ways that contribute to organizational success.



1. **Insight:** People need to know *what* to develop. Individuals, teams, and work groups of every size need insight regarding:
 - What the organization needs from them.
 - How their responsibilities and actions connect to the organization's purpose and strategy.
 - Where they stand relative to the organization's expectations.



2. **Motivation:** People and teams need to know *why* it matters to them. When people perceive a personal payoff for development, it mobilizes their energy to work on things that matter to team and organizational objectives.



3. **New knowledge and skill:** People need to know how and where they can *acquire* new capabilities.



4. **Real-world practice:** People need opportunities to *apply* what they've learned and reflect on those experiences to guide their ongoing development.



5. **Real-world performance:** People need to *assess* if their development is having a positive impact on their performance. The process of consolidating and internalizing what has been learned ensures that using new skills becomes natural, repeatable, and self-sustaining.

GAPS Grid: Relevant Information for Development

	Where the person is	Where the person wants to go
The person's view	<p><u>A</u>ilities: What the person believes he or she can do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person's view of his or her capabilities and performance, especially in relation to what is required of him or her and what he or she wants to do. 	<p><u>G</u>oals and <u>V</u>alues: What matters to the person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The things that the person cares most about. • Includes his or her interests, desires, career aspirations, and values.
Others' views	<p><u>P</u>erceptions: How others see the person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How others see the person's capabilities and performance, including interpretations and assumptions regarding what they observe. 	<p><u>S</u>tandards: What matters to others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other people's expectations regarding the person's performance and behavior relative to given roles and responsibilities. • How others expect the person to contribute to the things the organization and team care most about, including team objectives, business strategies, market challenges, and organizational changes.

Integrating Coaching and HR Systems

Organizational Need	HR System	Type of Coaching
1. Ensure talent for current needs	Staffing	Transition coaching: Get people in new roles up to speed as quickly as possible
2. Learn new skills	Training	Targeted coaching: Acquire new skills to address changing job demands
3. Meet job requirements	Performance management	Performance coaching: Improve performance to ensure that it meets standard
4. Ensure future talent	Succession planning	Developmental coaching: Develop capabilities needed for future roles
5. Retain talent	Career development	Career coaching: Enhance personal satisfaction and long-term career opportunities
6. Build an effective organization	Organization development	Executive coaching: Ensure executive breadth and depth for building and leading the organization

Human resource needs have not changed in recent years, but the environmental pressures are radically different. Coaching, because it is so versatile and powerful, responds to two of those demands in ways that traditional approaches can't:

- Responding *quickly* to business challenges that require new and different capabilities.
- Providing just-in-time, *customized* development to meet the unique needs of individuals.

Six Questions For Selecting The Right Coach

1. What kinds of people have they worked with? What results did they achieve?

To make sure that coaches are familiar with the realities of your world, find out if they have ever worked to resolve issues similar to yours. You'll want to know that they have the qualifications to help you with your particular concern.

2. Where do they do their best work? With what kinds of people and topics?

The answer will indicate their ability to promptly identify your issues and adapt to your business or industry. Good coaches understand how business operates and will be able to quickly understand your challenges.

3. Who would they turn down and why?

Make sure the coaches recognize their own limits.

4. How will they determine what you need to work on?

Evaluate how thoughtful and strategic they are in zeroing in on important issues. Pay attention to how coaches partner with you to plan your development process.

5. How will they help you learn new ways to do things?

Choose coaches who understand how to help people learn. Listening, being an expert on a topic, and giving feedback and advice aren't sufficient. The best coaches translate insights and good ideas into practical steps that build new capabilities and stronger performance.

6. How will they ensure that you get results?

Determine up front how coaches will help you break old habits and put change into action. Find out what they will do to ensure you translate what you've learned into real, sustainable change.

Above all, a good coach is able to walk you through all the important steps to learning. Just knowing the particular topic you need to learn isn't enough. The coach's expertise must be in the learning process itself.

Coaching Strategies



1. **Forge a Partnership:** *Build trust and understanding so people want to work with you.*

When you apply this strategy, you can *avoid resistance* before it gets in your way. An effective partnership starts when you take their needs and concerns as seriously as you take your own.



2. **Inspire Commitment:** *Build insight and motivation so people focus their energy on goals that matter.*

When you apply this strategy, you tap into the kind of *motivation* that produces lasting change and significant commitment to meaningful objectives.



3. **Grow Skills:** *Build new competencies to ensure people know how to do what is required.*

When you apply this strategy, you find the most practical and effective ways to help people acquire what they need.



4. **Promote Persistence:** *Build stamina and discipline to make sure learning lasts on the job.*

When you apply this strategy, you help make sure that everything they've invested in development so far is worthwhile and that new behaviors stick.



5. **Shape the Environment:** *Build organizational support to reward learning and remove barriers.*

When you apply this strategy, you minimize the easy excuses that interfere with even the best of intentions, and you reinforce the importance of coaching and development.

Conclusion

Coaching can be a powerful tool that adds tremendous value to leaders and their organizations. At present, the field has much to learn about how to fully deploy coaching. Coaching will mature and endure as a powerful development resource if coaches and organizations are able to leverage the conditions that are critical for lasting learning.

Resources

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