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ADVISORY



## CREATING A COACHING ECOSYSTEM

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***Strategic shifts in organizations can set the stage for embedding a coaching ecosystem. We have identified five levers that ensure the institutionalization of coaching within the organization's DNA.***

### **The evolution of coaching**

The term coaching in organizations has evolved significantly. It was once used primarily to “fix” the performance of non/low performers. At some stage it became a prerogative of few senior, high potential employees who required a series of closed doors conversations to progress further in their lives and careers. The overall view around people and performance development has now evolved.

## Big shifts linked to coaching

Investing in a few High Potential leaders	Developing all the employees across the organization
Event based performance evaluation	Continuous, just in time performance conversation
Historical, post facto performance evaluation	Progressive/future oriented capability development
Rigid and force fitting evaluation exercise	Flexible and empowering ways of rewarding contributions
Highly structured, schedule- oriented and governance guided performance conversations	Tech enabled, flexible and employee-initiated performance discussions
Siloed performance discussions with limited/no use of the output	Performance discussions output becoming input to other parts of performance development

The organizations that have been able to make this transition and leverage the power of continuous performance conversations, have put in place a complete system using several pillars, guided by their strong set of leadership values and principles.

Usually the trigger for this change is linked to a shift in the business/strategic realities with a strong focus on new set of organizational capabilities that requires developing and retaining talent as a strategic priority. The leadership values and organizational culture further plays a critical role in ensuring the cascade and adoption of the proposed change over a period of time.

Some examples of strategic shifts are, a company that was earlier in pure play telecommunications now wants to be a digital infrastructure provider for large enterprises or a domestic pharma company into generics/API (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient) now wants to enter into international market through alliances.

### Five levers used by the organizations to create a complete coaching ecosystem are

**Leadership buy-in and Leadership fingerprint:** Top leadership team needs to lead and get involved from the design to the execution stage. This involvement needs to be in letter and spirit and has to be made continuously visible to the organization. What makes an organization's leadership character unique also needs to be defined and shared. Some companies call it leadership fingerprint, leadership DNA, leadership signature or leadership brand. This helps in creating a common language of leadership on the basis of which developmental edifice can stand and it also acts as a glue to hold the organizational culture intact.

**Capability Building:** Like in sports, if one needs to develop and hone a skill, one needs to devote time, energy and effort in the area of building that skill. Organizations use a gamut of interrelated activities like training their managers on basic coaching skills, asking leaders to share their experiences of coaching and being coached. Using a mix of internal and external coaches/facilitators to familiarize the managers about different types of coaching. Agreeing on a particular model/framework of coaching to bring in a degree of standardization. Creating mentors within the organizations to build and multiply the skill propagation. Using simulation methods, role plays, activities, online available courses like Skillsoft/MOOC to create a bouquet of offerings in this area. Selecting few managers who display great willingness and skill in coaching over a period of time, certify them as executive coaches so that the organization has an available pool of certified coaches. A lot of managers, if given the right support and infrastructure, display natural comfort in applying coaching skills as a part of their role.

**Communication:** Any big change effort needs a strong communication strategy, in this case the communication covers the purpose- why organization needs coaching skills? linkage of coaching skills to the leadership brand/signature, the details of the deployment process and even the progress measures/metrics that are agreed upon. The progress measures/metrics can be communicated at organization, business, department or leader level.

Some companies do a regular CEO/CXO level communication involving leadership café, fireside chats where top leaders talk about their views and experience of being coached, their most memorable coachable moment and how coaching as a culture is contributing to their business with respect to new ideas, breaking silos etc. Creativity, reach and depth needs to be managed while designing a communication strategy. Using company intranet to reach out to maximum employees as well as sharing amazing coaching stories, using new age communication tools like social media to create a community of coaches within the organization, are different ways of keeping the initiative alive and kicking till it gets embedded in the organization culture.

**Process and guidelines:** In order to institutionalize coaching in the organization, few things need to be answered for example who initiates the coaching process, some organizations agree that it's the employee who initiates as it links back to ownership and empowerment. How frequently the coaching conversation should happen (any guideline)? What should be discussed in coaching? Some would say primarily performance, others may say performance, future skills, career growth, value modelling etc.

Do we need a performance improvement plan separately or not? Who can act as a coach-Manager, HR, a separate team that is perceived to be neutral? How to judge an effectiveness of a coaching discussion? What metric would indicate that coaching culture is getting embedded? what data around coaching and at what level of aggregation, data needs to be shared (if at all one wants to share some data)? Do we need to link coaching process to other areas of performance management like year- end ratings, compensation etc. Few organizations design and share the broad areas of coaching that are derived from organization capabilities (current and future) and map the same to the year- end evaluations e.g. an organization may agree that coaching themes can fall under goal achievement, career growth, collaboration, continuous improvement and innovation. These four areas are extracted out of strategic levers and also form a part of the year end evaluations. This approach leads to integrated performance management; however, some organizations may not want to follow this route specially in the initial stage of embedding a coaching culture.

**Technology & measurement:** This gives life to the process part of the coaching system. It enables the ease of finding a coach, initiating a relationship, keeping a tab on records like last coaching conversation, progress around agreed goals etc. It allows the coaching system to learn and become smart by capturing feedback (if you want to), some organizations initiate an anonymous short survey after a coaching conversation. This survey is filled by both employee and the manager (who is the coach). This gives feedback on what is being valued by the employee in coaching conversations and also what coaching skills need to be honed to better prepare the managers.

The data gathered with respect to how many conversations done, what is being valued in coaching conversations, which business group is actively involved, can be used for various other purposes like input to leadership development, owning & driving leadership/performance behaviours at leader level.

### **Creating and testing hypothesis to measure the long-term impact of coaching culture**

Finally, to show a business connect, organizations can use data gathered over a period of 1- 2 years to create and test hypothesis. An example can be, analysis of coaching data and its linkage to employee engagement data, where the hypothesis can be 'consistent coaching conversations have a positive effect on employee engagement'. If the hypothesis tests positive, then one can extrapolate the analysis to comment that consistent coaching conversations have a positive impact on business performance, since the relationship between employee engagement and business results is already established through various studies done in the past.

In our experience, if organizations use the above-mentioned levers, they have a very high probability of creating and embedding a high-performance coaching culture.

***To know more about creating a coaching ecosystem, connect with us  
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