

Coaching within an Organization: A Coaches Assessment

*Louis F. Chrostowski
Teachers College, Columbia University*

Abstract: "Coaching Within an Organization: A Coaches Assessment" focuses on what a coach should look for and assess to determine if a coaching engagement will be successful within an organization. Little has been written from a coach's perspective so themes have been extrapolated from available literature which looks at coaching from an organizational perspective. The themes identified produce a roadmap a coach can utilize to assess the probability of coaching effectiveness within the organizational context.

Keywords: Coaching Capability, Coaching Infrastructure, Coaching Culture, Coaching Strategy

Introduction

The list begins - "Executive Coaching: Practices and Perspectives" by Catherine Fitzgerald and Jennifer Garvey Berger. "The Art and Practice of Leadership Coaching: 50 Top Executive Coaches Reveal Their Secrets" by Howard Morgan, Phil Harkins, and Marshall Goldsmith. "Executive Coaching for Results: The Definitive Guide to Developing Organizational Leaders" by Brian O. Underhill, Kimcee McAnally, John J. Koriath, and Marshall Goldsmith. "Building Tomorrow's Talent: A Practitioner's Guide to Talent Management and Succession Planning" by Doris Sims and Matthew Gay. "The Strategic Development of Talent" by William J. Rothwell. And the list goes on and on....

A great deal has been written about leadership development, talent management, and executive coaching both from an organizational perspective and from a coaches perspective. Seen through an organizations eyes, the currently available literature will provide an organization with "best practice" to bring coaching into an organization or what's necessary to institute a full blown coaching initiative. Seen through a coaches eyes, the majority of the books, articles and papers primarily focus on how to be an effective or successful coach. As I embark on a journey to take me from an organizational role to an independent executive coach, what interests me is what falls in the middle – the relationship between a coach and an organization. Since, the majority of coaching engagements are within an organizational context, this

paper's focus is to identify the factors that a coach should be curious about and look for as he/she looks at potential coaching engagements.

Review of Selected Literature

To address the question of what factors a coach should look for and evaluate in order to assess the effectiveness of coaching within an organizational context and, based on that assessment, what pre-work or coaching approaches might need to be utilized to ensure effectiveness or success, data sources and literature were sourced from four different sources. Those sources included academic institutions, professional organizations, the web (Google scholar), and colleagues in the talent management profession.

In the search for books that might address this topic from an academic perspective, I conducted a search for those universities and colleges that have offerings in the talent management and coaching fields to identify relevant works from their faculty members. Those institutions included Columbia University, Georgetown University, Babson College, the University of Texas at Dallas, and others. From this search I was able to identify one book which served as the foundation for this paper. "The Coaching Organization: A Strategy for Developing Leaders" by James M. Hunt and Joseph R. Weintraub was published in 2007 based on the research they have conducted at organizations such as Whirlpool, Wachovia Bank, Children's Hospital, and Citizens Financial Group. The orientation of this book is one of an organization looking to build an effective and strategic coaching capability, either through the use of internal or external coaches, but the themes identified had relevance to the focus of this paper.

A search among professional organizations, such as the International Coach Federation, the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations, and The Executive Coaching Forum produced limited results for books, articles or papers that were relevant to this topic. One paper I was able to identify as extremely relevant is "The Executive Coaching Handbook: Principles and Guidelines for a Successful Coaching Partnership". This handbook was written by the members of The Executive Coaching Forum, of which

both James Hunt and Joseph Weintraub are founding members. The focus of the handbook, while relevant, is somewhat limited as it is about how to work within an organizational context and form a successful partnership with the client organization.

Based on the lack of directly related books, articles and papers that came through the sources referenced above, I enlisted Google scholar to do a search for other sources of data and information. This proved to be somewhat limited as the resources that surfaced through this search effort were primarily focused on building organizational capability for effective leadership development programs. While limited, some related articles were identified that add further color and data to what information was produced through other search efforts.

To further uncover material sources for this paper, I reached out to a network of senior professionals who work in the talent management field – academics, Human Resource professionals, consultants, independent external executive coaches – at organizations such as Avon, Constellation Energy, Old Mutual US, Lore International Institute, the Human Resources Leadership Forum, and others. These individuals were gracious to dig into their own personal files to share with me any relevant papers and articles, but again there was a lack of directly related material available. While a great number of good articles and papers were sent to me the emphasis again was on either building internal capability for leadership development or on the partnership between an external coach and an organization. What these articles did provide me was additional color and related concepts from an organization's perspective to address the focus of this paper.

Definitions

DEFINITIONS OF COACHING & EXECUTIVE COACHING	
Author/Source	Description
International Coach Federation http://www.coachfederation.org/ICF/For+Coaching+Clients/What+is+a+Coach/	<p>“Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.</p> <p>Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives.”</p>
J. Hunt and J. Weintraub (2007)	<p>“coaching can simply be viewed as an activity taking place within a relationship that promotes learning from experience in one or both of the partners in that relationship.”</p> <p>Developmental coaching</p> <p>“We define developmental coaching as relationship-facilitated, on-the-job learning, with the most basic goal of promoting an individual’s current or future work roles.”</p>
The Executive Coaching Forum (2004)	<p>“Executive coaching is an experiential and individualized leader development process that builds a leader’s capability to achieve short- and long-term organizational goals. It is conducted through one-on-one interactions, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organization, an executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum impact.”</p>

DEFINITIONS OF A COACHING CULTURE

Author/Source	Description
J. Hunt and J. Weintraub (2007)	<p>“A coaching organization makes effective and regular use of coaching as a means of promoting both individual development and organizational learning in the service of the organization’s larger goals.”</p>
P. Wise and L. Voss (2002)	<p>“Most coaching experts agree that organizations must provide resources to support executive coaching and recognize that it requires a long-term investment in order for it to succeed. Executives need follow-on coaching and reinforcement in order to sustain changes in behavior. In addition, professional development should be kept separate from performance because the high level of trust and openness required for development would be compromised if these two essential processes are mixed.”</p>
T. Jones (2007)	<p>“To benefit from the effort and commitment of having engaged employees, companies need to create a culture that supports and rewards coaching.</p> <p>If leaders actively show good coaching is important for the company by offering incentives and training sessions, managers will begin to have more authentic and productive conversations with their reports. Companies that fail to develop good coaches, on the other hand, will quickly fall behind competing businesses that do.”</p>

DEFINITIONS OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO COACHING

Author/Source	Description
The Executive Coaching Forum	<p>“Executive coaching is one of many approaches or types of interventions that can be used to promote organizational and leadership development. The goal of developing a single leader must always be pursued within the larger objective of organizational success. Since executive coaching should be conducted as one of the components of an overall plan for organizational development, executive and coach must both be aware of the larger objectives.”</p>
M. Effron (2005)	<p>The purpose of executive coaching (and all leadership practices) should be to align leader’s behaviors with what’s required to realize the business strategy. Leaders who are able to demonstrate behaviors that are supportive of that strategy should, on average, deliver superior results. This means that the behaviors you expect from your leaders, which are those you coach them toward developing, should related directly to the business strategy. ”</p>
S. Axelrod (2006)	<p>“The executive coach works to surface and integrate the developmental needs of both the organization and the individual executive. Indeed, the art of coaching often lies in the coach’s ability to understand and manage the needs and goals of these two clients. This requires a high degree of attunement to organizational dynamics and an ability to balance the needs for confidentiality and transparency as the coaching assignment progresses.”</p>

Origins / History

“The Future of Executive Coaching: Analysis From a Market Life Cycle Approach” by Suzi Pomerantz and Sheila Maher describes the coaching profession as one which has gone through three cycles: the introduction stage, the growth stage, and the maturity stage. The coaching profession’s roots can be traced back to the late 1950’s, with articles being written on the use of coaching as a management tool but coaching did not gain widespread attention until the 1970’s with Ferdinand Fournies book “Coaching for Improved Work Performance”. In the early 1980’s attention continued to increase on the use of coaching as a tool to improve work performance and team effectiveness, and from this several coaching training programs were started. The Hudson Institute began to offer coaching training programs in 1986, Success Unlimited Network launched coach training programs in the U.S. in 1987, and New Ventures West and the Newfield Network began their coaching programs in 1988.

Attention continued to increase and the coaching profession began to grow dramatically in the 1990’s. The Personal and Professional Coaches Association was formed in 1994, and later became the International Coach Federation, which has become the largest professional organization for executive coaches. During this time frame the use of coaches increased significantly although the field continued to be highly unregulated and lacking rigorous standards for coaching competencies and coaching processes. In effect, during this period, coaching became a buzz word in corporate America and came to be seen as a “perk” by senior executives.

As the economy began to slow down in the early 2000’s, the rate of growth in the coaching profession began to slow down and has entered what is described as the maturity stage. While there is greater competition in the profession, at the same time there appears to be a greater focus on standards – including credentialing – which is leading to improved products and services in the profession.

Related Concepts

As the coaching profession has grown and evolved, the field of talent management has similarly grown and evolved within the corporate organizational context. In the 1980's, personnel morphed into Human Resources and organizations began to look at the management of their people assets more strategically. This trend continued into the 1990's and the strategic focus of Human Resources continued to grow to encompass recruitment and retention, employee relations, rewards and recognition, employee communications, organizational design, succession planning, and learning and development.

In response to this trend, several organizations were formed to address the needs of organizations on how to strategically address their talent development needs. In the 1970's, The Center for Creative Leadership was founded by the founder of Vick Chemical Company. The Corporate Executive Board was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1983 to provide best practice information in the areas of strategy, operations, and talent management. Currently, 80% of the Fortune 500 is members of this organization demonstrating the level of interest held by corporate America on innovative and creative approaches to strategically lead and manage organizations.

In the 2000's the field has continued to progress in a more holistic manner. In "The Coaching Organization: A Strategy for Developing Leaders", by James Hunt and Joseph Weintraub, the authors research indicates that there has been a growing number of organizations and talent management professionals who have begun to develop a strategic approach to use coaching to address the developmental needs of senior executives and professionals. Organizations have moved away from the use of coaching as task focused or a reactive approach and have begun to develop an organizational coaching capability that is connected or linked to the organization's business needs, strategy and/or culture. These are organizations that have clearly articulated visions and strategies, have identified the skills and behaviors necessary to achieve desired outcomes, and have created the culture to support this. According to Hunt and Weintraub, "A coaching organization makes effective and regular use of coaching

as a means of promoting both individual development and organizational learning in the service of the organization's larger goals." To achieve this, organizations historically have used expert external coaches but in more recent years, such as GE Financial Services did in the late 1990's, they have begun to develop and deploy internal coaches.

For external coaches to be most effective it is critical that they work in partnership with their client organizations. The Executive Coaching Forum advocates that by creating a coaching partnership, a win-win approach is established in which "all partners plan the process together, communicate openly, and work cooperatively toward the ultimate accomplishment of overarching organizational objectives." This can best be described as where the coach works with the key stakeholders – the executive, Human Resources, and others within the organization - to create a partnership which ensures that the executive's learning, development and behavioral change supports the organizations business needs and strategic objectives.

Summary of Major Findings

As previously indicated, a great deal has been written from the organizational perspective on talent management and coaching as a tool to address talent management needs strategically; and, from the coaches perspective on what standards, competencies, ethics and best practices. Through a considerable review of available current literature, articles, and papers, very little has been written that directly provides a critical perspective or road map of what a coach should look for and assess to determine the approach one should take upon entering into a coaching engagement within an organization and to determine or predict how effective the coaching will be.

Based on these varied organizational and coaches perspectives, a number of themes do arise which a coach should be cognizant of when looking at a potential coaching engagement. These themes can provide a coach with sufficient data to determine the potential effectiveness of coaching within an

organization, and more importantly whether coaching makes sense at all. The coachee may be a willing and appropriate client, but the organization in which the coachee is employed may not be.

These themes, or factors, which can have a critical impact on the success of the coaching engagement and the value that can be added are:

- Culture
- Business context and strategy
- Human Resources context
- Prior organizational experience with coaching and development initiatives
- Knowledge and understanding of coaching

If a coach understands these themes and uses them to assess the potential of a coaching engagement and decides to move forward with the engagement, my belief is the level of success will be increased and the value to the organization heightened.

Application and Implication for Coaching Practice

Having worked within several organizations where I have designed, implemented, and assessed the success or value of several coaching initiatives, coupled with coach training through the Columbia Coaching Certification Program (CCCP), I have been able to develop a perspective of how to look at a potential coaching engagement and now identify what other coaches may want to look for to ensure a maximum benefit to the coaching client, the coachee.

In “Human Resources for the 21st Century” Marc Effron poses the question “What is the company’s strategy” for coaching and provides the answer that “The purpose of executive coaching (and all leadership practices) should be to align leaders’ behaviors with what’s required to realize the business

strategy.” If an organization has a clear, long-term vision, a sound and well thought out strategic plan, and achievable goals and objectives to support the strategy, the organization has a solid platform from which to work to identify leadership competencies and success factors. These competencies should be forward thinking to provide a basis for developmental coaching and for executives to set achievable and meaningful personal goals. Should an organization have these competencies in place, a coach needs to be cognizant of them in determining what the executive should focus on to maximize the effectiveness and value of the coaching engagement. For example, during the context phase of the coaching process it might be identified through the use of an assessment instrument or a 360 feedback assessment that the executive could benefit from working on analytical skills, a skill set that is considered a core competency of the organization. But if the coachee is not in a role where those skills are significantly important to the role they are in, the coach and coachee may determine that energy should not be expended in this area as there would be no inherent value to the organization in furthering its business objectives.

For coaching to be effective, it is well understood that there needs to be a high level of trust. This pertains not only to the relationship between the coach and coachee, but coaching can be most effective within an organization where there is a culture of trust and an importance is placed on values – values such as respect, accountability, and integrity among others – and decisions are made based on those values along with strategy and goals, and not on personal views and relationships. This is relevant to the relationship a coach establishes with a coachee in that the work they do together in partnership is consistent with the culture and values of the organization. The level of importance on organization places on values if not sufficiently high could also pose a challenge to a coach in his/her ability to adhere to a high level of standards of appropriate ethical conduct. For instance, if the organization is using coaching as a means to obtaining feedback or input on their employees performance as opposed to coaching against specific and measurable goals. This could pose an ethical dilemma for the coach and should be ascertained at the onset of the coaching to determine whether the coach can or will take on the coaching engagement.

Another significant cultural factor a coach should be cognizant of would be if the organization values its employees and is supportive of learning, change, and growth. The following are questions a coach should ask to determine if the culture of the organization is conducive to coaching and as a result how to best manage the coaching engagement:

- Does the organization value its employee's and their contributions?
- Is there an importance placed on the relationships between employees and their managers and peers, and does the organization foster teamwork and collaboration?
- Does the organization place value on performance and place emphasis on promoting from within the organization?
- Does the organization, through its vision and strategy, strive to differentiate itself from its competition?
- And, does the organization strive to create a high performing environment while striking a balance on investing in its employee's through learning and development initiatives?

These are all relevant questions that should be considered as a coach is looking at a coaching engagement as depending on the level of cultural fit coaching has within the organization, the answers will determine how a coach might want to consider moving forward. If the organization does not actively support learning and development nor promote from within, the coach may want to manage the expectations of the coachee as to what might be the outcomes of the coaching engagement. Or, the coach may decide to work with or influence key stakeholders in the organization about the need for and importance of cultural change (i.e., development of a robust performance management process, team coaching to build collaboration and open feedback, etc.).

In the majority of coaching engagements sponsored by an organization, the coach contracts with a key stakeholder (i.e., or the CEO or other senior executive) or Human Resources. Where the organizational client is Human Resources, the coach should well understand the position of Human Resources within the organization and how it is viewed. If Human Resources is not viewed as one of the strategic drivers of the organization, the coach may well want to understand why this is the case and look to develop relationships with other key stakeholders to influence the success of the coaching engagement. Where Human Resources is considered to be a critical function supporting a knowledge-based economy, the coach may well benefit from understanding the following:

- Does there exist a Human Resources strategy aligned with and supporting the overall business strategy of the firm?
- Is Human Resources receive CEO and/or executive support and are sufficient financial resources provided to support strategic Human Resource initiatives?
- Does Human Resources advocate the dissemination and communication of strategy to employees at all level, and do Human Resources practices “cascade” from the strategy?
- Has Human Resources positioned the organization to be “an employer of choice”? In other words, is it an organization that can readily attract and retain talent based on a successful business strategy, and having a culture that promotes and supports individuals who “want to be among the best and the brightest”?
- At what level does Human Resources implement “best practices” in the areas of development and competency models, talent management, feedback and employee communications, and rewards and recognition?

As an external coach develops a systemic perspective of coaching within an organization, an understanding of the role of Human Resources can provide the coach with a platform from which to work.

For example, if Human Resources is knowledgeable of and supports “best practices” and a holistic approach to talent management, the coach will know that the work they have been contracted to do is an important component of how the organization wants to develop its talent and build its talent pipeline. (i.e. filling gaps identified through talent reviews and succession planning exercises). If not, the coach may want to consider some “education” or advocacy of best practices to help move the organization forward, and in turn move forward the practice of effective coaching within the organization.

Another consideration to be taken into account is what has been the organization’s prior experience with coaching and learning/development initiatives. In organizations where very visible senior level executives, ideally starting with the CEO, have engaged with coaches then the tone from the top is that coaching is something one aspires to and embraces as it’s developmental, and not that it’s remedial and a signal “one is on their way out the door”. Not only is support from the top tier of an organization important, but their involvement and buy-in in determining who will participate in coaching initiatives is another key factor to look for. In organizations where senior executives and managers play a role in the coaching process, the effectiveness of the work between the coach and the coachee can be increased.

Beyond experience with external coaching, another relevant factor is whether internal coaching (either by managers or dedicated internal coaches) is valued and institutionalized within the organization. If these factors do not exist, a coach may well want to look at approaches to engage the top tier of the organization. As Marc Effron recommends in “Human Resources for the 21st Century”, to engage senior leaders “your best approach is to create a coaching business plan And present it to them with a comprehensible way to measure performance. In this plan, be clear about who will be coached and why and how you will be able to measure their success (how we will know someone has changed).”

Another area well worth exploring is what coaching practices an organization has put into place. As a coach is evaluating a potential coaching engagement within an organization, the coach should assess how advanced the organization is when it comes to implementing coaching initiatives and how it engages coaches. Questions that would be well worth asking would be:

- Who will participate in the coaching engagement and how are those decisions made?
- How will the coaching engagement be “managed” by the organization and who will manage it?
- Is the engagement part of a coaching initiative and if so how will the coaching engagement be integrated with the work of other coaches working within the system?
- What types of coaches are currently engaged or have been engaged in the past? What is the experience level of those coaches, and are they credentialed or accredited by a respected coaching organization?
- How does the organization source coaches? Does it rely on independent practitioners, or work with coaching organizations or networks?
- What type of coaching methodology, psychological or behavioral, does the organization subscribe to?
- What assessment instruments are used within the organization or what instruments will be required?
- Is there an established coaching process utilized within the organization? And are there standards in place as to the duration of a coaching engagement within the organization?

Answers to these questions will provide a coach with a perspective of how the firm looks at coaching best practices, and how the coach may want or need to tailor their approach to meet the organizations needs.

Based on the core competencies the coach is trained in, the principles that the coach follows, and the process the coach employs, the coach can determine whether they are a good fit for this organization or whether what the firm may require may not be aligned with the coach’s methodology and principles.

The last area a coach should question and evaluate is what the organizations expectations are. This can be critical to a coach's success working within the system, but more importantly to the client's success. In "Helping People Achieve Their Goal" by Marshall Goldsmith, he indicates that "An important part of this development process includes helping people set – and achieve – meaningful goals for personal change." If the organization places too great a demand on the coach which detracts from the actual coaching work or has unrealistic expectations of what is achievable, then the engagement may be doomed to failure. As mentioned earlier, trust and confidentiality are key in the coaching process and if the organization's expectations are that the coach will share specific data, and not themes, gathered during the coaching process then this may be an organization where the coach may not be able to adhere to an appropriate level of ethical conduct nor focus appropriate on the clients agenda. If these are the expectations of the firm, if the coach is unable to influence these factors then the coach would be well advised to disengage from the organization.

Conclusions

As I've explored what traits or characteristics a coach should look to identify to determine how successful coaching will be within an organization, I've better come to understand the challenges a coach faces if he/she is truly going to focus on the client's "agenda" while working within an organization. The competencies of adhering to a high level of ethical standards may very well come into play as the coach works to build commitment through involvement and move the client's agenda forward. As I've written this paper, I've also developed a strong appreciation for the work necessary to understand not only the client's needs, but also the needs and objectives of the organization in which the client works. Without a deep understanding of the characteristics previously identified and discussed, a coach's work is more challenging and the level of success may be hampered. The more a coach understands the importance of this, the greater the value he/she can provide the coaching client.

References

- Hunt, J.M. and Weintraub, J.R. (2007). *The Coaching Organization: A Strategy for Developing Leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stern, L., et al (2004). *The Executive Coaching Handbook: Principles and Guidelines for a Successful Coaching Partnership*. Boston, MA: The Executive Coaching Forum.
- Effron, M., Gandossy, R., and Goldsmith, M. (2003). *Human Resources in the 21st Century*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Corbett, K. (2008). *The 2008 Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey*. Cincinnati, OH: Sherpa Consulting.
- The Corporate Leadership Council research (2003). *Identifying "Best Fit" Coaches*. Washington, DC: The Corporate Executive Board.
- The Corporate Leadership Council research (2003). *Focusing Coaching on Business Needs*. Washington, DC: The Corporate Executive Board.
- The Corporate Leadership Council research (2003). *Optimizing Executive Coach Matching*. Washington, DC: The Corporate Executive Board.
- Wise, P. and Voss, L. (2002). *The Case for Executive Coaching*. Durango, CO: Lore International Institute.
- Axelrod, S. (2006). *The Essential Core of Executive Coaching*. New York: Axelrod Consulting.
- Sherman, S. and Freas, A. (2004). *The Wild West of Executive Coaching*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review.
- Myskowski, G. and Saunders, B. (2006). *Finding Atlantis: Creating a Coaching Culture that Will blow Away the Customers*. Durango, CO: Lore International Institute.
- Jones, Tegan (2007). *Creating A Coaching Culture*. Chicago, IL: Talent Management Perspectives.
- Maher, S. and Pomerantz, S. (2003). *The Future of Executive Coaching*. Forest Park, IL: International Journal of Coaching In Organizations.
- Goldsmith, M. and Goldsmith, K. (2006). *Helping People to Achieve Their Goals*. Hoboken, NJ: Leader to Leader Institute and Jossey-Bass.
- Goldsmith, M. (2004). *It's Not About the Coach*. New York, NY: Fast Company.
- Goldsmith, M. (2005). *Expanding the Value of Coaching*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Goldsmith, M. (2007). *Changing Leadership Behavior*. Burlington, MA: Linkage, Incorporated