

CHAPTER 6

Charting the Course

'If you built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; this is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.'

Henry David Thoreau

OVERVIEW

In this chapter we talk about charting the course towards a coaching culture and identifying specific actions that will enable progress in the desired direction. We start off with four broad areas of a coaching and mentoring strategy and proceed to give details on each of them. We then outline a process to follow in order to gain the commitment of key stakeholders and create a robust plan that is well suited to the needs of your organisation, its culture, and the business in which it operates.

The importance of having a detailed, multi-perspective and integrated approach, in which change is supported in both the short and long term, cannot be overestimated when planning to build and sustain a coaching culture. Even the best-intentioned initiatives are unlikely to have much impact if they are done in a random, uncoordinated manner or without considering the systems involved and the forces at play.

The main themes of Chapters 4 and 5 – identifying a coaching culture vision (A – aspirations) and establishing the starting point (B – baseline and context assessment) are a necessary preparation for this stage of the ABC-DE model (see Figure 6.1). The findings and documentation from the A and B stages will offer invaluable input for the stage we are discussing here, namely charting the course. Armed with this information, the coaching strategy team will be able to work with both general and specific foci to create a plan enabling the organisation to get to the desired level of a coaching culture.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL COACHING CULTURE STRATEGY

We will not pretend that we have found the right way to go about creating a coaching culture in an organisation. However, while analysing material gathered through interviews with hundreds of HR professionals responsible for coaching and mentoring, we noticed that successful organisations tend to focus on four main areas when strategising to cultivate a coaching and mentoring culture:

- **accessibility and relevance:** creating or increasing access to an appropriate and relevant coaching or mentoring modality
- **support and reinforcement:** building and sustaining the momentum for coaching and mentoring in the organisation
- **integration:** making coaching part of the way 'we do business around here'
- **measurement:** evaluating progress and effectiveness of coaching.

In this part we outline these areas, as well as their constituting components. Some of these components were first mentioned in the article 'What Every HR Director Should Know about Coaching and Mentoring Strategy' (Clutterbuck and Merrick 2014).

Figure 6.1 Charting the course in the context of the ABC-DE model of coaching culture planning and implementation

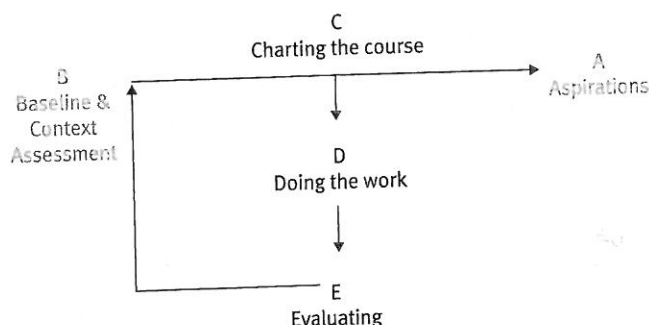
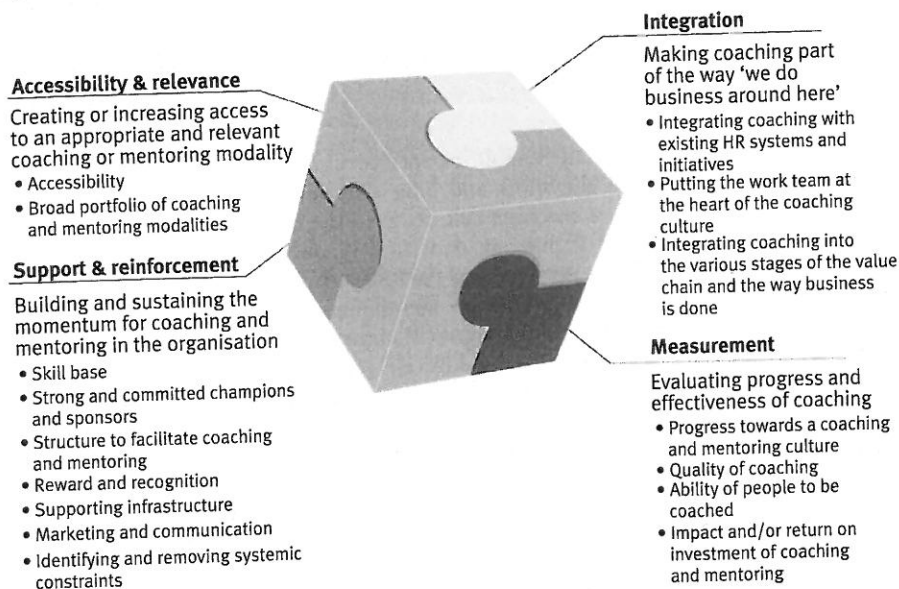


Figure 6.2 Main areas of coaching and mentoring culture strategy



ACCESSIBILITY AND RELEVANCE

Creating or increasing access to an appropriate and relevant coaching or mentoring modality

Accessibility

For coaching culture to take root and grow, coaching cannot be an exclusive offering reserved for the selected few. An important part of coaching and mentoring strategy is finding ways to make coaching available to more people, at various stages of their professional career.

This is linked to the next component – ensuring that there is a broad portfolio of coaching and mentoring formats and applications that can meet people's current needs.

A broad portfolio of coaching and mentoring formats and applications

There is a danger in using a limited portfolio of coaching formats and applications. It was perfectly captured by Maslow, who said that if the only tool that we have is a hammer, it can be tempting to treat everything as if it were a nail (Maslow 1966).

Rigid approaches based on a single coaching or mentoring model usually defeat the purpose of introducing them. Trying to force them to work in a context where they are not well suited can breed cynicism, if not outright resentment, among the recipients of coaching. For example, the popular GROW model is of limited use outside of skills and basic performance coaching. Solutions-focused coaching only works when people are looking for solutions to fixable problems, but is inappropriate when there is a need for reflection and deeper insight. Our research shows that, as coaches become more experienced, they develop more flexible, person-centred approaches.

For coaching culture to work in an organisation, coaches need to develop a portfolio of models which can be adapted to the complexities of the situations which organisations and people encounter.

Moreover, it is very helpful to have different coaching and mentoring modes that people can turn to, such as:

- externally resourced professional coaching/mentoring
- internally resourced professional coaching
- coaching by line managers or within work teams
- group coaching
- team coaching (someone external to the team coaching them collectively)
- developmental mentoring
- sponsorship
- maternity mentoring and maternity coaching.

This list could be further extended with items that serve a specific purpose, such as career coaching, ethical mentoring, diversity mentoring as well as different modes of delivery, for example, face-to-face, virtual, email and so on.

We will cover some of the above modes in more detail in Chapters 7 to 10.

SUPPORT AND REINFORCEMENT

Building and sustaining the momentum for coaching and mentoring in the organisation

Anyone who was involved in any kind of change, whether of a personal or organisational nature, knows that the initial excitement and enthusiasm can quickly fade away if not sufficiently sustained or reinforced. There are a number of components that can be included in a coaching and mentoring strategy to serve that purpose:

- skills base
- strong and committed champions and sponsors
- structure to facilitate coaching and mentoring
- reward and recognition
- supporting infrastructure
- marketing and communication
- identifying and removing systemic constraints.

Skills base

Perhaps the most fundamental of all components of a coaching culture strategy is building a skills base for coaching. As already noted in *Making Coaching Work* (Clutterbuck and Megginson 2005), in order to cultivate a coaching culture, everyone in the organisation will need appropriate skills to either:

- self-coach
- coach others
- be coached
- help promote coaching in the organisation
- adopt a coaching approach in a variety of situations and with a number of stakeholders.

Identifying the best way to create that skills base is one of the most important components of a coaching culture strategy.

Strong and committed champions and sponsors

Cultivating coaching culture requires a strong network of champions and sponsors, both within HR and the business.

Our experience of working with international organisations tells us that without that network:

- There is a wide variation of understanding about the nature and utility of coaching and mentoring across the HR and business community. It's not uncommon, for example, for people in different regions to have opposite definitions of coaching and mentoring.
- Particularly in HR business partner structures, time-pressed HR professionals don't have space or energy to become proficient champions of coaching and mentoring.
- Wherever purchasing of externally resourced coaching and mentoring services has been handed over to a purchasing department, there has been a substantial (and sometimes disastrous) slump in the quality of provision and relationships with external providers.

By contrast, some companies have been able to support gradual culture transformation by focusing on the role of senior line managers and HR professionals as champions of coaching and mentoring. They have devoted resources to educating business leaders and HR for various levels of involvement, but at a minimum with the skills and knowledge to help the business decide when coaching or mentoring will be helpful in resolving business issues ranging from retention of key staff to performance improvement for individuals.

Structure to facilitate coaching and mentoring

When a lot of coaching initiatives and modalities are being implemented in an organisation, establishing a structure which enables their facilitation becomes a must.

The role of head of coaching and mentoring is relatively recent but strategically important within HR functions of large organisations. There is a movement towards establishing professional qualifications in the role.

Additionally, it is becoming increasingly clear that it takes more than one individual to effectively facilitate coaching and mentoring within a large organisation. A lot of organisations have formed a coaching steering group, which includes various stakeholders, usually representing the whole organisational system. This steering group, in varying degrees and depending on individual roles, is usually involved in all the stages of our ABC-DE model, from coaching culture vision creation to evaluating progress.

Reward and recognition

It is true to say – even if slightly oversimplified – that culture can only be transformed when the new behaviours are perceived to (a) produce desired results and (b) be socially acceptable. An important element in creating that perception is reward and recognition.

More and more organisations realise that for recognition and reward to support the growth of a coaching culture, it needs to go beyond rewarding people for holding formal coaching conversations. As a result, organisations start looking at a variety of behaviours that are considered to be visible manifestations of a coaching culture.

We give examples of some of these behaviours in Chapter 1. However, it is important to remember that each organisation needs to define these behaviours itself, as they will depend on its vision and aspirations for a coaching culture.

A useful exercise, therefore, would be to identify:

- Which are the behaviours that you consider to be visible manifestations of your desired coaching culture?
- How can you ensure that these behaviours are sufficiently reinforced, recognised and rewarded by individuals, managers and the organisation as a whole?

Supporting infrastructure

Organisations that have been relatively successful in pursuing a coaching and mentoring culture tend to have a variety of different forms of continuous support. These might include:

- professional supervision – usually group supervision, intended as a source of regular skills development, as a safety check and as a means of identifying themes that need to be addressed
- a database of further reading and practical guidance usually held on the HR intranet. This can be supplemented by video demonstrations of coaching and mentoring good practice
- peer support groups, often in the form of action learning sets, or networks, which promote continuous learning in the coaching/mentoring role
- a progression path for those coaches and mentors who want to gain qualifications beyond the basic levels
- ‘on demand’ training and further education, via webinars and other electronic media
- coach development centres, to promote continuous skills development
- an online community of interest in coaching and mentoring, involving HR, line managers and invited external experts
- publications on how to maximise benefits of coaching and the dos and don’ts of being a ‘coachee’.

Marketing and communication

As with any organisational change, cultivating a coaching culture requires a robust and well-targeted marketing and communication campaign. While putting a coaching culture strategy together, it is worthwhile identifying the main objectives of your communication efforts, key messages, target audiences and the most appropriate means of transmitting these messages.

There is a wide array of available tools that can be used for this purpose, including:

- messages on the intranet
- leaflets and newsletters
- conferences
- emails and other forms of direct communication such as desk drops

- meetings
- informal communication.

We present the subject of marketing and communication in more depth in Chapter 12.

Identifying and removing systemic constraints

An important element of an effective strategy is creating a mechanism capable of identifying and removing systemic constraints in developing a coaching culture.

Getting regular feedback and identifying the most important limiting factors that stand in the way of people adopting a coaching approach or using coaching skills on the job can make a huge difference to the effectiveness of the coaching culture strategy.

A few examples of possible constraints could be:

- lack of skills and confidence in using or engaging in coaching
- lack of executive buy-in and support
- perceived lack of time to coach
- employee (coachee) excessive workload
- blame culture
- lack of private space to coach in
- systems and processes that don't support (or even hinder) the growth of a coaching culture
- senior management does not model the desired behaviours
- lack of reward or recognition for personal and professional development and other behaviours considered to be visible manifestations of a coaching culture.

A good illustration of identifying and removing systemic constraints comes from a professional services firm, which prepared for introducing its first mentoring programme by conducting a survey to assess how supportive the organisational culture would be. One of the biggest impediments was that staff were required to log every ten minutes of time so that it could be billed back to the appropriate client. However, there was no provision for assigning personal development time, so people felt they would be penalised for any working time spent on mentoring, or any other form of personal development. The leadership team recognised that it needed not only to give people an allowance of personal development time, but to create an expectation that this time would be used for either mentoring or some other form of formal learning in connection with job roles.

INTEGRATION

Making coaching part of the way 'we do business around here'

The embedded stage of coaching culture development (see Chapter 1) is the 'holy grail' of coaching in organisations. When this stage is reached, people at all levels use the skills of learning dialogue on an everyday basis and regularly engage in coaching with stakeholders inside and outside of the organisation.

If an organisation has an aspiration to attain the strategic and eventually embedded stages of coaching culture development, its strategy needs to contain components that integrate coaching with existing systems and weave a coaching approach into the fabric of everyday business dealings.

The most common elements of strategy that organisations employ to achieve this are:

- integrating coaching with existing HR systems and initiatives
- putting the work team at the heart of the coaching culture
- integrating coaching into the various stages of the value chain and the way business is done.

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training

Developing internal
capacity for
coaching

Integrating coaching with existing HR strategies, systems and initiatives

When putting together a coaching culture strategy, it is important to look at the existing HR strategy, systems and initiatives. There is no doubt that coaching should be aligned with the wider HR strategy. Moreover, looking at what is already there will allow the coaching approach, skills and mindset to be embedded into many existing HR systems, processes and initiatives, such as:

- recruitment
- onboarding
- talent and performance management
- succession planning
- learning and development
- exit management or outplacement.

Some organisations also attempt to link their coaching and mentoring strategy to corporate social responsibility objectives. For example, they promote cascade mentoring (where junior people mentored from above are expected to mentor someone in the wider community after six months – a very direct and immediate way of paying back). Other companies have opened out their training in coaching and mentoring to employees of charities.

Putting the work team at the heart of the coaching culture

Experiments in organisations including Asda (Walmart), University College London and PwC indicate that much can be achieved by building a coaching culture within the team. Integral to doing so are:

- educating everyone in the team about the value of coaching and how to coach and be coached
- getting everyone to take responsibility for both their own learning and the collective learning of the team
- giving the learning process sufficient time – coaching is a mindset, not an activity, and mindsets take months to acquire
- building comfort with coaching processes and behaviours by applying them consensually to real, tough decisions and challenges that the team faces.

When enough work teams establish a coaching culture, it creates the impetus for wider cultural change across the organisation.

An interesting observation that we have made is that some organisations decided to go about cultivating what is essentially a coaching culture within work teams without making a clear and direct reference to coaching. The most frequently quoted reason for doing so is what can be called 'coaching fatigue', caused by various coaching initiatives that had been undertaken in the organisation in the past.

We will talk more about creating a coaching culture within work teams in Chapter 8.

Integrating coaching into the various stages of the value chain and the way business is done

While creating a coaching culture strategy, you might want to look at how to integrate a coaching approach and philosophy into the way business is done in your organisation.

In *Making Coaching Work*, we identified the various stages of the organisation's value chain and business processes where a coaching approach could be useful. The view that we expressed back then can be summarised in the following statement: 'It is difficult to imagine any significant business process that cannot benefit from the application of coaching principles and opportunities for managed reflection' (Clutterbuck and Megginson 2005).

Not much has changed in the past ten years, apart from the fact that we see more and more organisations making conscious efforts to integrate a coaching approach into everyday business practices and processes, from team meetings to business development activities. In many instances, this integration is done in a discreet, seamless way; the word coaching is rarely used and the main focus is on enhancing work practices to achieve better results.

A good example of this is how the majority of professional services firms successfully weave a coaching approach into the process of business development. Some of their formal business development guidelines cover subjects not unlike the ones that would be discussed in a coaching training: how to build relationships based on trust, how to continually assess client needs and perceptions, agree on desired outcomes, focus the discussion on client needs, ask powerful questions, seek out feedback and so on.

MEASUREMENT

Evaluating progress and effectiveness of coaching

A good coaching culture strategy includes various ways of measuring progress. Some of the most common measurements include:

- progress towards a coaching and mentoring culture
- quality of coaching (both internally and externally delivered)
- ability of people to be coached
- impact and/or return on investment of coaching and mentoring (both internally and externally resourced).

The validity of these measures is gradually improving, giving HR the data it needs to demonstrate the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring interventions. In our experience, HR teams who introduce robust measurement, both as a formative process whilst the coaching and mentoring interventions are taking place and then as a final summative process, create a highly credible business case for more investment in coaching and mentoring.

The role of the coaching and mentoring steering committee is to integrate some or all of the above components into a coherent strategy. We will now talk about how this can be achieved.

Provided that the required preparation has been done and the coaching culture vision and coaching culture audit produced the desired results, it is not uncommon to create the first draft of the coaching culture strategy in a workshop, especially if it is then followed up by a series of shorter progress meetings. Figure 6.3 outlines a process for an effective coaching culture strategy workshop.

SET OBJECTIVES AND IDENTIFY EXPECTATIONS

One of the key success factors of any effective strategy workshop is being clear about the desired outcomes. Clear objectives inform decisions that you have to take before the workshop, such as:

- Who should participate?
- What will be the best meeting structure and flow?
- Which decision-making tools should we use?
- What pre-reading (if any) needs to be sent out?
- Who is the best person to facilitate the workshop?