

DOES LEADERSHIP COACHING IMPROVE ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE?

by Glenn Williams



The economic downturn of 2009 led to unprecedented challenges in global competition that created high levels of anxiety and uncertainty. This significantly affected stakeholder expectations that resulted in organizations tightening their budgets and standards of governance.

As companies tried to do more with less, employees were being asked to carry more load and stress in the midst of declining morale, frozen retail spending, and overwhelming job losses. While some were being made redundant or offered early retirement, some organizations saw the wisdom of acquiring and developing leadership talent.

They did this through a range of development interventions that would set them apart from the competition once the economic tide turned. They also didn't want to see the loss of their own leadership talent being acquired by other companies who saw an opportunity to address their own leadership deficiencies.

While the emergence of executive coaches increased during this time, some businesses remained sceptical about the value coaching was claimed to add to the bottom-line, particularly when there appeared little attempt to measure its impact on outcomes.

At its broadest level, coaching is generally defined as a "process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective" (Peterson and Hicks, 1995, pp. 41).

While research into the effectiveness of behavioral feedback as a method of management development has been relatively weak and inconsistent, some results show that when it is coupled with leadership coaching, subordinates indicate a small, but significant, improvement (Kochanowski, Seifert, and Yukl, 2010, pp. 363). This was further strengthened when leaders provided opportunities, encouragement, and incentives to apply the feedback.

Another key factor to delivering effective coaching, is to ensure that those receiving the coaching believe the primary motivation is "to help the employee rather than the organization" (Sue-Chan, Chen and Lam, 2011, 488). However, from a development perspective, even though the primary goal must be individually focused, it must be clear that the organization will ultimately benefit.

To better understand the impact of leadership coaching, Right Management conducted a global study of more than 28,000 employees in ten industry sectors in 15 countries.

The results provided a compelling case for leadership coaching that showed when leadership development was in alignment and informed by their organization's strategy, culture, values, processes and structure, coaching became a powerful mechanism for impacting the organization (Right

Management, 2009, pp. 10). Leadership coaching, therefore, should never be delivered in a vacuum.

What's the bottom-line?

Coaches need to be accountable—not for the behavior of their clients, but for ensuring they are equipped with strategies that empower them to deliver agreed business outcomes. Below are some questions to reflect on:

- Am I open to the idea of appointing a coach that can empower my team to focus better on delivering business outcomes my company has identified?
 - What concerns do I have, or what constraints do I need to overcome in order to help me get more out of my leaders? What would I hope to achieve?
 - What are the benefits of appointing an independent leadership coach in contrast to appointing an internal resource?
-

References

Kochanowski, Susan, Seifert, Charles F., and Gary Yukl. (2010). Using Coaching to Enhance the Effects of Behavioral Feedback to Managers. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*. 17.

Peterson, D. B. and Hicks, M. D. (1995). *The leader as coach: Strategies for coaching and developing others*. Minneapolis, MN: Personnel Decisions).

Right Management. (2009). Aligning Leader Coaching to Business Outcomes: Australia and New Zealand. *Leadership Insights*. 10.

Sue-Chan, Christina, Ziguang Chen and Wing Lam. (2011). LMX, Coaching Attributions, and Employee Performance. *Group & Organization Management*. 36, 4.