



Article

Cultivating a Coaching Culture in Your Organisation

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A coaching culture goes beyond individual and team coaching as it's an 'always on' style of leadership, and encourages a belief system that becomes the "way we do things around here"

Indulge me for a moment and think about the things that concerned you in your work life before the current crisis. Were you concerned about any, or indeed all of these?:

1. Customer experience
2. Risk of errors
3. Profitability
4. Employee retention into the future
5. Employee well being
6. Engaging your employees
7. How you are responding to the changing landscape?

And what about now, in the current world crisis, have any of these concerns gone away? Or do some of them concern you even more?

I will revisit these 7 areas later in this article. In the meantime, let's talk about cultivating a coaching culture in your organisation. It may seem like an indulgence in these times, however I believe that it is even more important now than ever. In part 1 of this article, I will explore what is a coaching culture and why it matters; the business case. In part 2, I will go on to explore what a journey toward cultivating a coaching culture might look like and share some case examples of such journeys.

What is a coaching culture?

Simply put *'a coaching culture is one where not only formal coaching occurs, but where most people use coaching behaviours as a means of leading others'*, Fiona Eldridge.

In his book *The Heart of Coaching*, Tom Crane says *'a coaching culture is present when all members of the culture fearlessly engage in candid, respectful coaching conversations, unrestricted by reporting relationships, about how they can improve their working relationships, and individual and collective work performance.'*

All have learned to value and effectively use feedback as a powerful learning tool to produce personal and professional development, high-trust working relationships, continually improving job performance, and ever-increasing customer satisfaction.'

If you unpick this definition of a coaching culture, how would it be to have this culture in your organisation? What difference would it make to you, your managers and teams and the organisation? What difference would it make to your customers, your users, your stakeholders?

As I think about this definition, a quote we all know well comes to mind *'success is a journey, not a destination'*. So where is your organisation on this journey? Where would you like it to be?

Some of the typical behaviours in organisations with a strong coaching culture include:

- Within specific areas, employees are invited to come up with their own solutions and ways to achieve the set goals
- Managers are applying coaching skills and a coaching attitude during team meetings and conversations across the organisation

- Within set boundaries, people are involved in decision making processes and feel more committed and involved
- Problems are explored in a non-judgmental way, by asking the question 'what can we learn from this for the future'.
- Employees recognise their own responsibilities and challenges and are the leaders of their self-developmental journey.

Is cultivating a coaching culture, or enhancing the coaching culture you already have, something you believe will benefit your organisation? You might believe it is but are you 'pushing an open door' so to speak? If not, you might need to make a business case to get the commitment you need to move forward.

The Business Case for a Cultivating Coaching Culture

You may have attended the recent IITD member event where Donald Taylor shared the results of his annual Global Sentiment Survey 'What will be hot in L&D in 2020?' where he shared that the number 1 response, in Ireland, was coaching & mentoring. Of course that was completed by L&D professionals, but what will convince your organisation leaders that it makes sense?

Would your organisation leaders be interested in a culture that has the potential to result in:

- Improve organisation results
- An ability and appetite to adapt as needed
- A commitment to the process of development and learning by all
- Increased productivity
- Greater employee happiness at work
- Open communication
- Greater trust and respect
- Improved working relationships
- A conscious focus by all on developing talent at all levels
- People showing greater compassion for each other

Research from Centre for Creative Leadership, The Behavioural Coaching Institute, Eldridge and Dembowski and Sherman and Freas indicate that a coaching culture positively impacts all of these.

Getting back to the 7 concerns you considered earlier, all of those are impacted by employee engagement as you will see in the table below. Cultivating a culture of coaching within an organisation has quickly becoming a key enabler of enhancing employee engagement.

Risk / Challenge	Impact of Employee Engagement	Source
1. Customer Experience	CX Leaders have 60% more engaged employees than their competitors	Temkin Group
2. Risk of errors	Disengaged Employees have a 60% Higher Error Rate	Achievers.com
3. Profitability	Highly Engaged Companies Result in 21% Greater Profitability	Gallup
4. Employee retention in the future	37% of Engaged Employees Are Either Open to, or Looking for New Opportunities, Compared to 73% of Actively Disengaged Employees	Gallup
5. Employee well being	1 in 5 highly engaged employees are at risk of burnout 89% of workers at companies that support well-being initiatives are more likely to recommend their company as a good place to work	Harvard Business Review American Psychological Association
6. Engaging your employees	85% of Leaders Say Employee Engagement Is a Priority, but Only One-Third Make It One	Dale Carnegie
7. How you respond as a manager	Managers Account for a 70% Variance in Employee Engagement	Gallup

We often hear about the 5 generations at work. Which of these generations is most prevalent in your organisation? Millennials make up around 30% of the workforce. They want real-time feedback. They want coaching, they actually know what coaching is, and they are expecting to have those types of conversations with their manager,

What about your performance reviews? Do people look forward to them? When you build a coaching culture, that empowers everyone to be able to have real-time, powerful conversations in the moment to address challenges, behavioural issues, and also give that positive feedback, the focus on formal performance reviews reduces and conversations are more meaningful.

A coaching culture drives engagement, which in turn drives all sorts of positive behaviours that result in the likes of increased profitability, less errors, enhanced customer experiences, creativity, flexibility and agile responses.

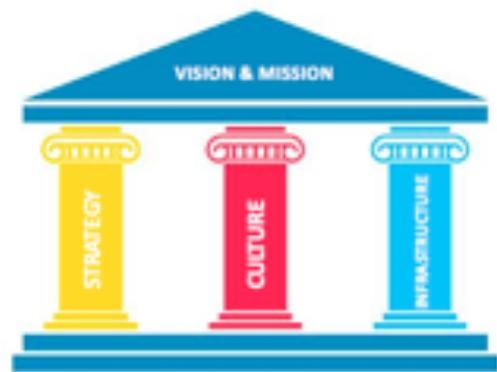
What a journey toward cultivating a coaching culture might look like

It's different for everyone. There is no one way. Some of the considerations include:

- What is your organisations strategy that the coaching culture needs to support?
- What is the culture like now?
- How committed are the leadership to cultivating a coaching culture?
- What is driving the journey?
- What is your starting point? What is happening already coaching wise?

The three pillars of an organisation, to achieve their vision and mission are: strategy, culture and infrastructure.

To cultivate a coaching culture, which is aligned to the organisation wide strategy, these 3 pillars are also used.



1. The coaching strategy:

This is not just another policy document. This strategy should be firmly grounded in the organisation's mission and the current business strategy. This should be developed collaboratively and constantly updated as the context changes and develops and should be communicated throughout the organisation, so it is recognised to be an enabler of strategy.

2. Aligning the coaching culture to the wider organizational culture change effort:

This ensures you are cultivating a coaching culture that is aligned to the wider changes in the organisations culture. Cultivating a coaching culture is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. So, a key part of it is creating a culture of continual learning and development that will enhance the capacities and capabilities of the organisation as a whole.

3. Coaching Infrastructure:

This acts as an anchor to all activities of coaching at work, that establishes and maintains the necessary governance, management and involvement of all stakeholders and provides a sustainable, robust and integrated operation. Some key aspects of building such infrastructure include

- Having a strong steering/sponsorship group, that drives the strategy
- Having management group that coordinates and integrates all coaching processes and activities
- A community of practice for those who are providing the coaching. They are the true partners in creating a coaching culture.

Peter Hawkins, in *Creating a Coaching Culture*, suggests these stages, but also cautions that everyone is different, and the same journey does not work for all.



At Invisio, we have partnered with organisations at very different stages in cultivating their coaching culture. In some cases, it has started even earlier than Peter Hawkins suggests, with developing managers to have impactful coaching conversations every day, with their peers and team members in the normal flow of their work.

Remember success is a journey and not a destination and the journey always starts with one step. Where are you now on the journey? What one step could get you started, progress from where you are or develop your culture even more?

Case examples of such journeys

Below are just 2 examples of organisations we have worked with to cultivate a coaching culture. Both took very different approaches, as they were very different in terms of the organisation itself, their strategy and culture and their people.

Case: A well-known major player in Financial services, employing 1100 people globally.

The Kick-off Point: The business had a problem centred around the readiness of their leadership teams, at all levels, to deliver on the business strategy and engage and retain their talent. The main concern was the need to distribute leadership throughout the business and reduce the concentration of leadership around the senior teams.

The Journey: Over a number of years we had coached 50+ leaders in the business. This led to the commitment of the leadership team to build a coaching culture across the business in a way that was sustainable and driven and resourced from inside the business. Over a number of years, we worked with the business to cultivate a coaching culture as the foundation of leadership and beyond, at every level.

This included a practical, short coaching programme to develop internal coaches and supporting these coaches through their development and application. To date, 80+ internal coaches have been developed, who work to a customised coaching programme, each taking on one internal coaching client, from a different team, every 6 months, as well as using the coaching skills with their own teams.

This has since expanded to incorporating a coaching approach to all development programmes e.g. performance management, succession planning, career conversations, team and one to one meetings and

leadership development programmes. Coaching has been integrated into all HR policies and procedures. It is continuing to become 'the way we do things around here'.

The Follow Up: As a result of the success of this coaching culture journey, and to enable the ongoing sustainability of this, we have worked with the client to develop internal capabilities to run the coaching development programme, and now support that team (mainly HR), to develop and support internal coaches

The Impact: The company has reported the following business impacts:

- A significant shift from centralised to distributed leadership
- A more attractive environment for younger generations who expect to be coached
- A more robust business in which everyone is encouraged and enabled to coach and develop others, including peers, to enhance distributed knowledge and skills
- A significant increase in employee engagement
- A positive impact on key business performance metrics

Recently the outgoing CEO commented that the development of this coaching culture has been transformational for the business in enabling its leaders to grow the business and has made his job a lot less stressful.

Case: Food & Drink Distribution Organisation, employing over 5,000 people

The Kick-off Point: The organisation was on a journey to shape their culture to deliver on their ambitious growth strategy and to work on developing a pipeline of internal leadership talent, with the right growth mindset to deliver into the future. The culture shift journey had been ongoing already for 2 years, however most of the leaders had come from within and had brought elements of the previous culture with them into their leadership roles.

The Journey: Over the past 15 years, we had coached a select number of senior leaders. This had sparked the interest, in some of the leadership team, in coaching as a potential to unleash talent. A lot of discussion had taken place on how to build on that, to start to cultivate a coaching culture. It was agreed, that given the current culture, it needed to be visibly supported by the leadership team and so the first step was to develop the coaching mindset and skills of a small number of senior leaders, to act both as one to one and team coaches.

This included a development programme over 9 months, which was paralleled with those leaders coaching the next level down both as individuals and as a team. Each leader coached managers that did not report to them and cited this as integral to their development. One to one coaching sessions were recorded, and detailed developmental feedback was given, and team coaching sessions were observed, also with feedback. The programme was accredited which gave it great kudos with both the participants and the organisation.

The Follow Up: A decision was taken early on to run another programme, as soon as the first one finished. There was huge demand for this programme, for just a small number of places, based on the success of the first programme for the leaders own teams. All of the leaders from the first programme volunteered to contribute to the second programme, based on the business benefits they experienced. The organisation continues to develop its coaching culture using these leaders as ambassadors.

The Impact: The company has reported the following business impacts:

- Excellent feedback from the managers who were coached by the leaders, on the impact it had on their leadership development and their understanding of and preparation for the next level of leadership
- Accelerated promotion for several people
- Leaders who were developed used the coaching skills and approach in their own teams, and reported tangible positive business outcomes

In both of these case examples, neither would say they 'have' a coaching culture. Both see it as a journey and are continuing the journey.

Let me leave you now to ponder of these 2 questions:

- What now for you and your organisation?
- Where to on your journey?
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Find out more about Coaching by Invisio at invisio.ie/coaching

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