

Written by Excelia, arbora partner in France

Coaching Structures

The current evolution of corporate coaching has entered a new phase: that of implementing coaching structures within corporations. Beyond the occasional or regular practice of individual or team coaching and executive support, corporations are currently examining the best means for rationally integrating coaching into its management practices to benefit all employees potentially involved. An analysis of needs and an assessment of the effectiveness of the approach are areas still being explored.

Let us imagine a company as a house being enlarged or redesigned (its organization) or that shows some chipped paint or minute cracks ...

Its inhabitants, whether owners or tenants, call upon craftsmen – coaches – whose particular skill is not to reinforce the foundations or repair the first signs of wear to the building, but to allow the inhabitants of the house to find their toolbox and remember how to use their own tools.

During the first “works” stage, the craftsman-coach has a few means of approaching the task and may proceed in various manners:

- Starting with individual coaching, then with two persons, three persons and so on, allowing the relevant employees, operational managers and HR participants to discover and appreciate the approach, he often creates a first series of individual coaching sessions, the rules and framework of which remain somewhat experimental;
- Via medium term team building or team coaching, he offers an alternative that leads to a reflection on the meaning to be given to team activities (and their existence as well?), potentially leading to behavioral training (for management, in communication, etc.)
- Via the coaching of executives, he allows for the approach to slowly trickle down to intermediate management.

Based on these first experiments in the coaching arena, the Corporation is now moving towards a phase consisting in the practice of coaching.

Because, as it finds the work of the craftsman-coach effective, it can now ask: what should we do about this so-called coaching that allows for complicated objectives to be achieved easily? How should we connect the various walls built brick by brick on the initial construction site? This is when the structure of coaching issue arises.

To see coaching in terms of a structure means providing solid foundations for the entire organization by addressing the following questions:

- What is expected of coaching?
- How does one access coaching? Does N+1 recommend it? Does N-1 ask

- for it ? Does the HR Director encourage it? Etc.
- Who are our coaches? What motivates the selection?
 - And for the long term, why not have internal coaches trained and supervised by recognized specialists?

But to return for a moment to the house metaphor, if the company's head is not the coaching project overseer (or motor), the house lacks its roof. Which means that the works are useless as they are subject to any change in weather! The demonstrated commitment of the President and Executive Committee to the project is an essential condition to coaching becoming effective throughout the company.

Interview

Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun, Associate Director of Excelia, has recently published « L'Art de coacher » (The Art of Coaching) (Interéditions)

Internal coaches may handle 60% of corporate missions.

Excelia has developed an original theory on coaching structures. In support of companies using this approach, we assist in re-thinking coaching, while they help us renew it in a dialectic movement based on viewing coaching not as a tool or method, but a collaborative project.

1. Does internal coaching conflict with the "coach's positioning" ?
For many years, we thought so. Or perhaps certain coaching currents thought so. After having trained many internal coaches, our answer is "no". Internal coaching does not conflict with the basic coaching principle when a precise framework, distinct contract and specific training are provided to the internal coach.

2. What makes an internal coach effective?

A clear positioning, with precise game rules and knowledge on topics such as:

- Compliance with precise confidentiality rules. These rules lead to the reporting issue: What are his reporting duties? Who does he report to?
- The coaching location: The internal coach cannot use his usual office to coach;
- Managing conflicts of interest: an internal coach cannot coach someone on the same horizontal reporting line.

3. Is there a risk of internal coaching becoming a power tool or a tool that serves power?

To this crucial question, our answer is "no". Coaching is the point where the corporation's goals, the individual's objectives and the coach's know-how come together. Without this combination of three elements, coaching has no foundation.