

Reflective Coaching Versus Directive Coaching in the Management of the Organization

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Abstract

This article tackles the coaching process in managerial context from the viewpoint of the role the human resources heterogeneity plays within an organization. It puts focus on the analysis of various types of reflection over a classical managerial process, as well as on the propagation of the reflective style across the organization structure. The article approaches the role of creation looking at the management completed by coaching, from the stage of drafting the strategy to be applied in the organization to the manner of analyzing and communicating the achieved results on the hierarchy ladder, in relation with how all types of participants in the managerial process understand their competencies.

The final part of the article tackles the need to identify a common ground for thought and action by members of the organization, taking into account various levels of training, personal and professional aspirations.

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JEL classification: M12, M14.

Introduction

Given the numerous changes in the approach of the human resources topic worldwide, and of management in general, coaching is no longer seen as an instrument meant merely to smooth out the rough edges within an organization. Coaching has evolved as an objective necessity in relation to the executive management's ambitions, even more so as it has proven its efficiency in times of change, transition and crisis.

Whether managers are faced with a career decision, a work problem or a major change in their private lives, the coach can offer them a sort of guidance and the feedback they need to assist them on the self-knowledge path and to perceive the realities in the organization.

Coaching can be implemented in a variety of ways in an organization, both by calling in external coaches or by having an internal coach, who is either specifically appointed as such by the organization, or sporadically takes the role of the coach as an employee or manager in the organization.

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This latter, informal way of coaching is the most widespread across organizations, and often it is unconsciously practiced out of desire to assist the interlocutor through dialogue in overcoming a difficult situation.

Figure 1 describes ways of exercising coaching, both among various hierarchy levels as well as within one hierarchy level, thus disseminating an attitude bent on dialogue, analysis and reflection which generates the coaching culture. Furthermore, it also describes the situation when the organization resorts to an external coach.

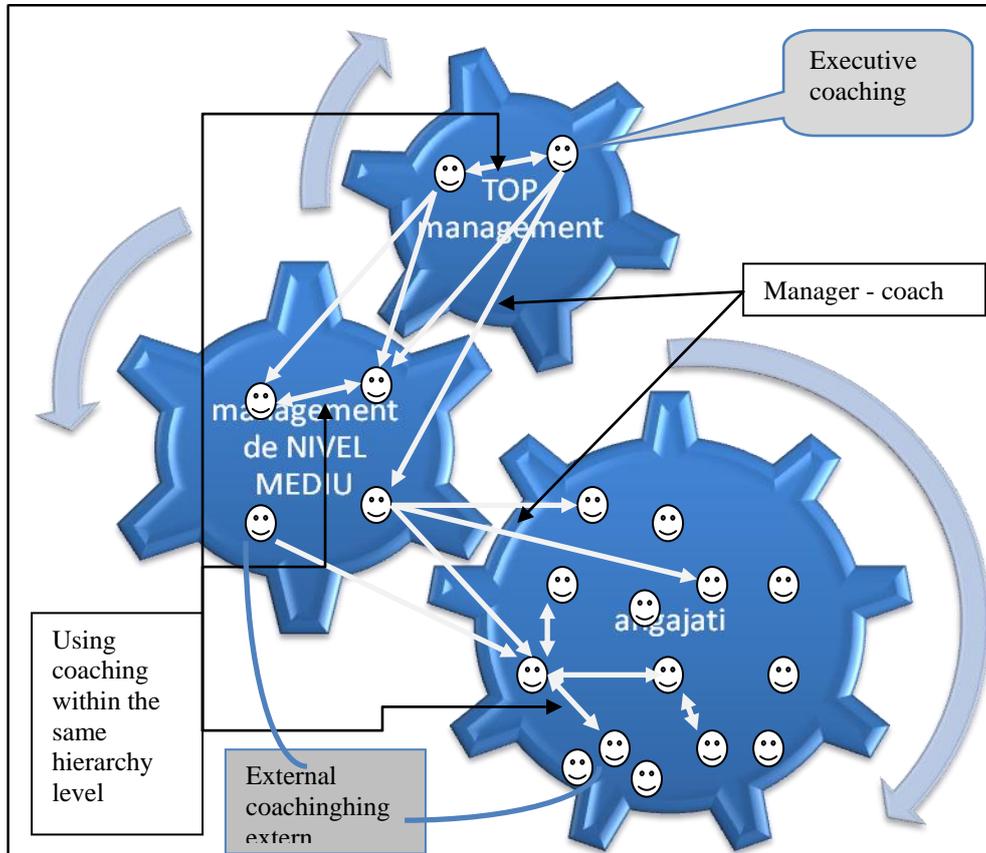


Figure 1. Example of using coaching within an organization

As depicted in Figure 1, coaching the personnel in an organization is a complex process that sets in motion an entire mechanism.

Reaching new targets and maintaining organizations competitive, given the constantly dynamic overall climate, entails the adoption of a management policy in which the informative as well as the innovative component play an important part. This implies the adoption of management policies that are permanently changing while “change is fuelled by chaos but also by a genuine network of complex theories. These perspectives lead to understating the organisation as a complex

system whose behaviors require a predictable organizational framework with certain limits,” said de Buono (2004, p. 277).

1. The concept of reflective coaching

Coaching in organisations which targets managers, irrespective of the form it takes, implies a relation of individual collaboration between the coach and the manager, with the aim of causing in the latter durable behaviour changes and a transformation of the quality of work and/or personal life. Although coaching for managers in the organisation always focuses on the individual’s professional life, the guiding sessions are often meant to develop their inter-personal abilities, to achieve personal change and development (Zeus & Skiffington, 2008, p.13).

The continuous improvements, reflections and how to manage all these personal and inter-personal discoveries can be confusing for the coach if they take place aside from the professional life (Hernez-Broome, 2010, p.160). The permanent commitment of the two parties in the coaching relationship is an important professional foundation in practising this, creating at the same time a solid platform for the continuous professional and personal growth of both the manager and the coach.

This relation can also serve to smoothen, shed light upon and keep tabs on those parts of the manager’s self which are ordinarily hidden and unknown, thus facilitating the understanding and the vision of the coach on the entire coaching process (Wilson & Gislason, 2009, p.9). The aim of the coaching process is to identify the weak and strong points of the manager as well as the faced challenges so that later they can resort to a third very professional and impartial party under fully confidential terms.

Coaching specialists explore the clients’ values, motivations, vital purposes, professional challenges and significations, their creation power and the speed of adapting to the society and the environment. A potential dilemma appears when clients sense that their own system of values is in conflict with that of the organizations they work in. The ethical, moral or religious convictions of the individuals are an intrinsic part of their system of values (Roston, 2009, pp.251-253) and consequently when managers express a series of inner preoccupations regarding these dissensions, during a coaching session, the first analysis focuses on comparing their system of values with that of the organization. The coach’s most recommended approach would be to analyze the managers’ motivations regarding their work and to what extent these are interfering with those of the organizations.

Thus, the coaching process is based first and foremost on communication, by respecting the principles agreed by the parties involved. Making sure there is an inter-personal reflexion during a reflective dialogue throughout the coaching process “guarantees the birth of a challenge, through which a double learning loop is created, which results in accumulating knowledge and potential,” said Brockbank and McGill (2006, p. 53).

The reflecting coaching concept is based on the reflexions of the clients, in close connection with their strong but also weak points. As Fanasheh (2005, p. 32) says, “one of the most important parts of reflective coaching is communication.” The reaction of each partner in the dialogue is important for both interlocutors, the exchange of information being mutual during the dialogue and implicitly, during the coaching process.

A particular form of coaching aimed at top managers and the executive level of an organization is executive coaching, which represents a reflective process by definition which can lead to the desired efficiency in reaching targets (Dembkowski & Eldridge et al., 2006, p.118). According to Moral și Abbott (2009, p. 34), executive coaching today represents a cultural phenomenon that corresponds to “an archetypal need in work life today: that of a quiet, reflective space – a sanctuary – in which to chew the fat, be challenged in one’s assumptions and asked reflective questions to get one to think differently”

By implementing this procedure from the executive level down, profound changes take place in the organization, including the influence on the organizational culture.

By “taking” the reflective style “down” the hierarchy ladder, the reflective style can be transferred in time on subordinates. Burgoyne points out that, when practitioners convey plausible solutions thorough certain ways of achieving results, they become practitioners of the reflective-type (Prosser, 2005, p. 102). It is a must to dedicate a distinct part to the management’s communication with the rest of the organization during the executive coaching process, focusing on the manner of speaking and on the predominance of the reflective dialogue in the organization.

2. Reflective coaching versus directive coaching

Coaching can reveal the ethical problems of managers and organizations alike (Mietusch, 2010, p. 15).

Promoting awareness of individual and organizational values leads to new values which can be created by focusing the attention to the consequences and responsibilities of fitting behaviors.

An important feature of managerial performance is the preoccupation for dialogue, communication. A set of managerial behaviors splits coaching in two different forms: directive coaching and reflective coaching. The latter involves structured discussions (Buchner, 2008, p. 49) which imply involvement, testing, sharing, reflection and overview, being conceived for both managers and employees.

Directive coaching is familiar exclusively to managers, as this form of coaching can be found more frequently in their activity, compared to reflective coaching, and at the same time, being less open to communication, encouraging the manager to take just a few minutes to explore the answers of the subordinate, in face of a problem or an opportunity.

From analyzing the work schedule of various managers, it became apparent that they find it difficult to take some time for reflection, being mostly bent on action and transferring the reflective style to the lower hierarchy levels.

Reflexion can exist at three levels, irrespective of the previous managerial experience: (Brockbank & Beech, 2002, pp.24-25)

- Reflection for improvement- during the dialogue, a process or situation will be analyzed, described in a comparative manner using the acquired theoretical elements.
- Reflection for transformation- in which the interlocutors must act carefully, and trust plays an essential role.
- Reflection for understanding a process- which often represents a goal, but detachment from the subject under consideration is important in order to carry out an objective analysis.

Furthermore, reflection represents a cyclical, even cybernetic, learning process, generating new ideas depending on the values of the receiver, with whose help information is filtered (in a sensorial, affective, olfactory, experimental way etc.). According to Hay's vision 2007, p. 23), "The reflexion process can be divided into permanently revolving cycles:

- Capturing the events during which it appears;
- Reviewing the specific events;
- Reviewing a series of events to identify the envisaged model of thought;
- Drawing conclusions on the de facto elements;
- Planning specific events;
- Implementating a new way of thought.

As one can notice from the stages mentioned above, the completion of the reflection process takes place at the same time with a learning process based on creative self- analysis. Once the process completed, the process will be re-started in the newly created context, this time having another data (information) at the entrance in the 'mixer' of the reflection process, therefore the process can be considered a cybernetic one. In essence, the two styles of coaching at management level, reflective and directive, can be distinguished in the manager's attitude towards this process of learning, acceptance and understanding of a perception that is different from their own.

In the business, and implicitly managerial climate, burdened with stress and tension, the comprehension of simple but decisive phenomenons can be affected. This is why executive coaching can represent a fortunate choice, because it starts with a self-knowledge (self-evaluation) chapter, of identifying the elements of conscious and unconscious thinking.

Brunning (2006, p.107) described executive coaching with a metaphor, calling it "a crucible for the transformation of thinking taking place between two people. This metaphoric approach relies on the ability to plumb the unconscious and the infinite."

3. The managerial style completed by coaching- from strategy to its effects on the organization

A distinctive element in the coaching process between the manager and the employee, in which the manager takes on the role of the coach and the employee that of the client (a process which represents coaching-improved management), is the Socratic Method. This method, suggestively called after the ancient philosopher Socrates, consists in asking questions with the role of exploring the ideas of the interlocutor, meaningful questions that give sense and orientation to the dialogue, the principle underlining this method is non-contradiction.

One of the parents of coaching, Sir John Whitmore (2002, p.46), believes that the effective questions asked during the coaching sessions are “the heart of coaching,” starting from the grounds that the beginning of any process is based on a series of questions. Most of the coaching processes include both questions and techniques of active listening and reflection, but only a small part of these places the focus on gradual questions. In this context, Fournies (2000, p.109) proposed an advanced analytical coaching process, in order to find answers about the unsatisfying performance in the management of an organization.

He suggests a set of 17 questions aimed for managers, starting with basic ones (e.g.: do your collaborators know their performance is unsatisfying? Do they know what they should do? Do they know how they should do it?), and making reference to the consequences deriving from this (e.g.: Are there negative consequences, corresponding to the analyzed performance, on the collaborators?) and concluding with questions about options and alternatives (Ex: Could they perform if they choose this alternative?). This entire set of questions supplies an analytical system which allows managers, via a logical approach, to eliminate the potential causes of failure in reaching the targets, identify the cause and most importantly isolate it in the initial or preliminary stage of the management process.

The management’s perception on the management’s performance is interesting, in the sense that managers often tend to evaluate performance from the viewpoint of their previous experiences (which is natural, from a psychological perspective). This type of training can often be seen in middle managers whose previous experience, accumulated during the professional path prior to their current hierarchy position, coincides with a point of view formulated from the position of employee, not that of the manager (Buchner, 2008, pp.159-160).

Middle managers who are in their first management position in their professional career, but who still possess a high degree of reflectivity in analyzing the managerial act, will perceive their own situation from the perspective of employees who report to their superiors and for a better understanding and description they will display an excessive degree of sensibility and involvement when they are discussing about performance with their subordinates.

This can be an opportunity which can render the managerial activity efficient, provided they acquire self confidence in making decisions. With a higher understanding of these predictable aspects from their experience of subordinates,

managers can play their role more efficiently adopting a series of well-thought and tactful actions in certain more delicate situations, which can happen during discussions about performance that they have with their subordinates.

It is difficult to imagine any significant entrepreneurial process that could not benefit from the implementation of coaching principles and reflection opportunities. The same reasoning applies generally to drafting strategies, because at its core, strategy is made up of reflection, planning and careful monitoring (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005, p.33). Each dialogue about outlining a new strategy needs four steps that make up the GROW coaching model:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What is our real situation?
- What should we do to reach our targets? Are we really suitable for these targets?

Drafting the strategy takes place in two contexts:

- Planned events where people come together in consultation sessions and adopt strategic decisions, without affecting daily operative decisions.
- Ad-hoc events- an incremental diffusion and an infusion of ideas and long-term consensus.

Both ways of outlining the strategy have their disadvantages, which can be overcome totally or partly by applying the coaching processes. A subjective strategy tends to provoke rash and forced decisions as well as compromises, and it is to be expected that there will be opinions at opposite poles to the detriment of reflection. Through an approach enriched with coaching, this process is slowed from the top down, and a more profound reflection is facilitated, and consequently, a stronger consensus due to promoting intuition to the detriment of opposite opinions.

Seen as a conceptual instrument, any model of coaching chosen for implementation has the role to ease the steps of the investigation process, which is crucial in the perpetual learning of the efficacy of coaching. (Lennard, 2010, p. 4). Since a model makes the entire image clear and emphasizes the specific coaching elements, each of the models can also be used as a spring board for questions like: What are the limits of coaching? What kind of basic practices should I use and why? Where should I pay more attention? The answers can suffer changes during or even due to the reflection on coaching, through the coaches' evaluation of their own practices.

As a result, given that a coaching process is in fact in a work in perpetual progress, this can modify and refine in time. From this point of view, it is very important both for experienced practitioners and those who are being initiated to develop their own work frameworks.

The coaching process is not only aimed at the executive management but also the employees and the teams alike. For managers and the executive management, an internal and external action, which is socially responsible and sustainable throughout the entire scope, is necessary.

Regarding employees, coaching can encourage the understanding of their behaviors and values which are later compared to the values of the management and the organization.

Regarding the relation between professional competence, managerial efficiency and dialogue, Hunt and Weintraub (2010, p. 56) defined the role of the coaching manager: “a coaching manager should take a competency model from the shelf and talk about it.”

An entire series of coaching managers perform excellently as shown by a scrutiny of their subordinates’ competencies, giving special attention and encouraging their interlocutors in describing the significance of these competencies for themselves in particular.

Adopting decisions on time is a component that can be interpreted in a simplistic manner at first sight but, depending on the profile of the activity, the moment when the decision is made may have greater importance than the decision itself (e.g: the decision of a manager who runs an emergency medical service compared to the decision of a marketing manager).

If the coaching manager can define what the “super-employee” does to obtain efficient results and at the same time, can motivate the average number of employees to go towards that goal, the potential gain can be enormous. In this analysis, three levels of efficiency should be taken into consideration from the viewpoint of the desired competencies: the high efficiency level, the moderate efficiency level and the low efficiency level (employees who need help). As a result, coaching can only be efficient if all performers know what they are fighting for and know their competencies well.

Conclusions

Pragmatically speaking, the adoption of a managerial style completed by coaching presupposes an entire chain of reflection and creation actions, adapting to a particular management process and the team to be led. An element that is at the onset of every system is the creation or definition, but also reporting to a model of competency. Naturally, analyzing the feasibility of the chosen model in the framework where it will be applied is also a must, depending on the available material, moral and temporal resources for reaching the proposed targets.

The new management approach guides all the participants in the managerial process towards introspection, and the first step towards reaching the targets of an organisation is the awareness of the need to direct all the efforts to a common goal. Such human resources capabilities can be reached only with the help of managerial aptitudes and efficient communication, cumulated with a profound understanding of the expectations of those around, which makes it easier to identify the way to motivate and inspire them.

The integration of coaching principles and instruments in the implemented managerial style paves the way to efficiency by acknowledging the human resources as the key of an organization to reach its targets, whilst applying a coherent strategy and implementing a durable system of values.

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