



Successful Coaching

Demonstrating its value

THE INSTITUTE OF
LEADERSHIP
& MANAGEMENT

WHITE PAPER

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Overview

Coaching is generally expensive, time consuming and resource intensive yet many organisations and coach practitioners themselves struggle to demonstrate the value achieved. There are many different kinds of coaching available in the marketplace and many choices of practitioner to deliver a coaching assignment. Coaching, in its many forms, is a commonly used intervention in staff and leadership development.

A recent survey found coaching by line managers or peers as the third most commonly used learning and development practice, and coaching by external practitioners as ninth most commonly used. (CIPD, 2015) Whether internally or externally provided, coaching can be used at all levels of an organisation and for various reasons (ILM, 2011) While there are common views on what makes “good coaching”, there is no agreement on how to evaluate coaching’s effectiveness. Learning and development interventions need to justify their use and this paper will discuss the issues and current thinking on measuring coaching effectiveness and will suggest steps that can be taken to improve the way the way this is measured. It draws on interviews with participants in coaching interventions in 2014 and discussions at Institute of Leadership & Management workshops held during 2016 at a number of locations in the UK.

Different types of coaching

Coaching has grown from its historical roots in sport into a range of disciplines including business coaching, executive coaching, career coaching, performance improvement coaching, and life coaching. Whilst an assignment will often have some kind of improvement focus it may also have to deal with business related or personal issues such as how to improve strategic planning activities, handling stress, better time management, how to enhance a particular skill and so on.

Some ways coaching is used

- Outplacement and exit
- Interview preparation
- Promotion support readiness
- Interpersonal skills development
- Behavioural change
- Change implementation support
- Graduate development programmes
- Follow up on 360 degree outcomes
- New team support following merger, acquisitions, re-structure
- Succession planning
- Team performance improvement
- Transitioning
- Difficult workplace relationships

Why evaluation is important

Much has been written about how organisations can measure the return made on learning and development activities but limited evidenced research has been published on how such methods might apply to coaching. The growth of the coaching industry has been accompanied by a similar growth in coach training provision, and many different professional bodies now represent and support the sector. Yet despite these developments, the way in which the measurement of the value of such activities is undertaken is still fluid and imprecise. This is perhaps surprising given the level of investment. Many coach practitioners seem uncomfortable with the concept and language of hard measurement of outcomes in terms of a real ROI (Mulvie, 2015) and many appear to prefer to use softer, more qualitative approaches to evaluation (Sherpa Coaching, 2014).

Grant (Grant, 2013) highlighted the lack of empirical evidence for the efficacy of coaching but acknowledged it is a growing field. The factors that contribute to its effectiveness as a tool for management development have been the subject of investigation (Rekalde, Landeta, & Albizu, 2015). Evaluation plays a crucial role: not only does it provide justification for the intervention itself but enables communication with stakeholders across the organisation and may contribute to improving the practice and impact of individual coaches. Coherent and comprehensive evaluation will not only help explain and justify coaching in a learning and development arena that is under constant cost pressure, but it will also assist particular coaching interventions meet the highest and most appropriate standards.

Coaching has both a direct monetary cost and a less direct cost in terms of time and opportunity. Overall costs can be considerable even when external coaches are not used. Time spent by line managers in coaching their teams is time away from clients, income generation or service provision both for the managers and their staff. Indirect costs include the time spent by

stakeholders outside the immediate coach/coachee relationship. To ensure that coaching is placed in the organisational context and not become an isolated intervention, HR and line management involvement is needed and it becomes essential that the right management information is available to the right people in the most appropriate format.

Evaluation can provide focussed feedback to managers, coaches and coachees providing important data for critical reflection and improved practice either as manager or a coach. Assessment of coaching is essential to ensure that the right type of coaching and the right coach is being used. Without formal evaluation of the competence of the coach and the views of , and impact on, the coachee, inappropriate methods could continue unchallenged. Many organisations use coaches they already know or who are recommended without necessarily undertaking an evaluation of their work before they are hired, this is a known risk (ILM, 2014).

Methodology

Telephone interviews were conducted with 40 coaches and coachees, many of whom were either working on or had completed ILM accredited coaching qualifications. Interviewees were also asked what they understood coaching to be. Respondents were drawn from the ILM’s own coaching network. Just over half of respondents were male. The majority (90%) acted as a coach rather than as coachee. Coaches were both internatl and external and worked within a variety of sectors. Preliminary recommendations were discussed in two practitioner workshops held in London and Manchester where participants shared how they used coaching and the evaluation measures with which they were familiar.

What is good coaching?

One way of navigating the diversity of perspectives on coaching is to look at what is considered “good” coaching. Institute of Leadership & Management interviews and discussions with practitioners confirm previous findings and revealed a consensus around a range of factors. Good coaching revolves around personal interaction with success being linked to the relational nature of the intervention.

A strong theme which emerged from the interviews centred on the supporting and supportive role adopted by coaches, with practitioners describing good coaching as involving:

- The coach was ‘on the side of the coachee’
- The coach enabled the coachee to “see things differently”
- The coach assisted with refocusing and clarification of objectives
- The coach was not judgemental
- The coach could be trusted

Individual personal ratings by coachees can be supported by more objective measures that evaluate changes in their behaviour and performance. Hall et al (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999) and Wasylshyn (Wasylshyn, 2003) outline how coaching is claimed to increase a range of factors such as:

- Self-confidence
- Self-awareness
- Sensitivity towards others
- Flexibility and adaptability in relationships with others
- Job performance

Most frequently identified indicators of coaching success

1. Individual professional progression and performance
2. Personal development and confidence
3. Positive feedback from managers
4. Effect on management performance
5. Achievement of agreed actions and targets
6. Improved behaviour and attitudes
7. Better informed choices and decision making
8. Overall measures including engagement, retention, and staff turnover

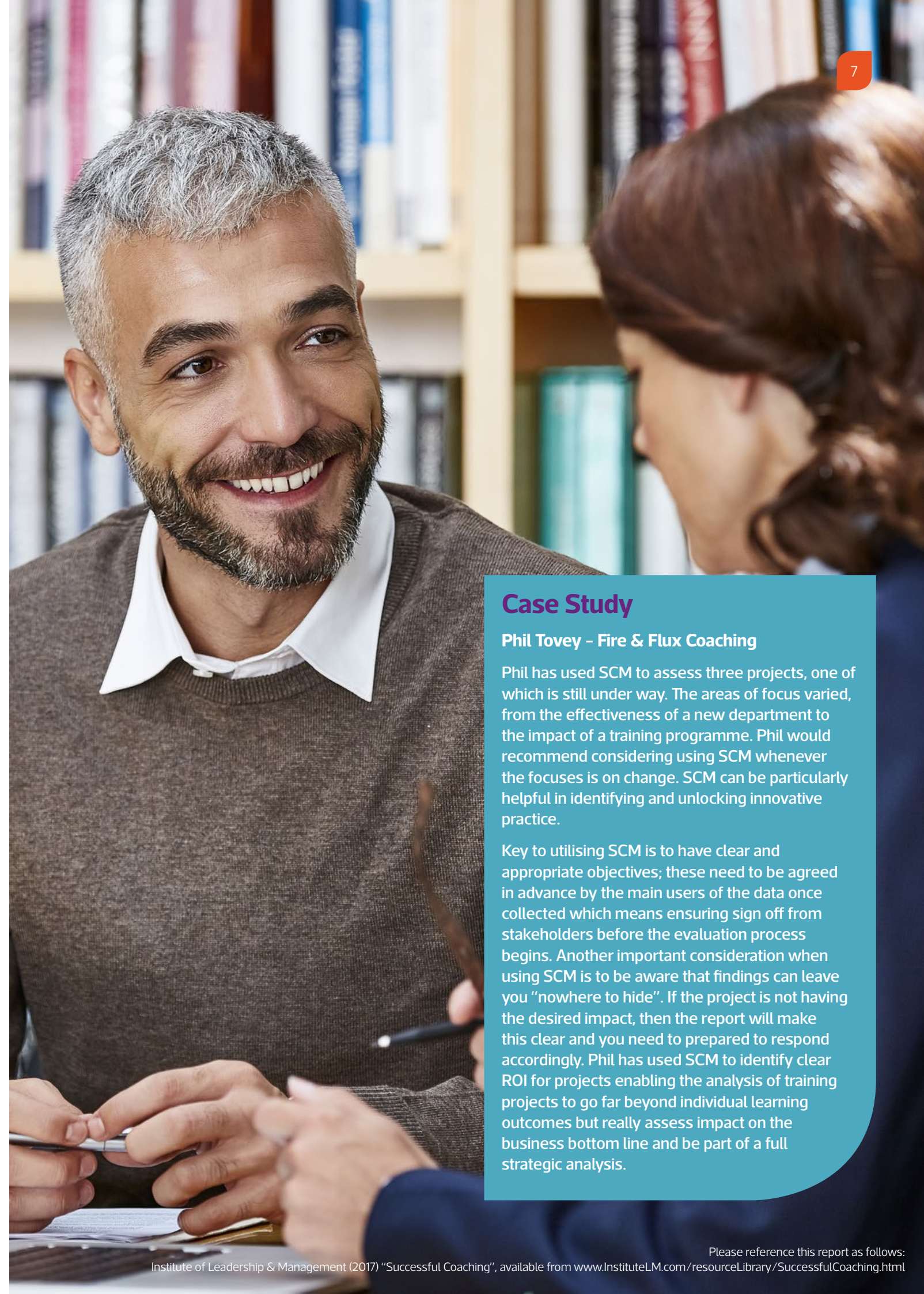
Good coaching is frequently explained in terms of individual improvement, but as a leadership intervention must also impact the performance of the organisation. The interviews identified over 25 indicators of coaching success demonstrating how successful coaching can meet this broader agenda and the range of measures needed to analyse any particular coaching intervention.

Case Study

Phil Tovey – Fire & Flux Coaching

Phil has used SCM to assess three projects, one of which is still under way. The areas of focus varied, from the effectiveness of a new department to the impact of a training programme. Phil would recommend considering using SCM whenever the focuses is on change. SCM can be particularly helpful in identifying and unlocking innovative practice.

Key to utilising SCM is to have clear and appropriate objectives; these need to be agreed in advance by the main users of the data once collected which means ensuring sign off from stakeholders before the evaluation process begins. Another important consideration when using SCM is to be aware that findings can leave you “nowhere to hide”. If the project is not having the desired impact, then the report will make this clear and you need to be prepared to respond accordingly. Phil has used SCM to identify clear ROI for projects enabling the analysis of training projects to go far beyond individual learning outcomes but really assess impact on the business bottom line and be part of a full strategic analysis.



Case Study

Nigel Standing, Group Head of Learning & Development for the City & Guilds Group

Nigel used SCM to evaluate a new leadership development programme for first line people managers. This high profile 5 month blended learning programme was designed to bring consistency across the organisation and embed a circle of continuous improvement.

The Brinkerhoff organisation undertook the SCM data gathering and analysis following the business sponsored pilot. The final report provided useful real world examples, from those that had attended the training, of how they had used the learning and built into their work practices. A follow up study is being carried out 10 months later to see how well the recommendations have been embedded into the programme which is now on its 3rd cohort.

Nigel considered SCM particularly appropriate for this type of programme because of its personal development focus; and illustrating impact through real workplace examples speaks to senior managers. SCM adds a new perspective, beyond traditional evaluation techniques, so Nigel would recommend consideration of SCM when evaluating any significant training or development intervention. Nigel cautioned that it is important to remember that any evaluation is a snapshot and ongoing analysis is needed as programmes develop over time.

Traditional measurement tools

Quantitative methods such as the Kirkpatrick Four Level Analysis are used to measure how levels of satisfaction with the intervention result in motivated changes in behaviour, attitude and performance. (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006) This allows the organisation to extract actual figures on outcomes achieved. Philips (2003) included a fifth level of evaluation.

A number of costs can be isolated, such as:

- Costs of developing the coaching assignment
- Costs of time of the coachee away from the workplace during the project (e.g. lost productivity costs)
- External fees of the coach if used
- Facilities and venue rental costs
- Travel, accommodation, meals cost for both parties
- Telephone costs
- Organisational project set up and maintenance costs
- On-going administrative costs for both organisation and coach

Some measures of return on Investment are flawed (Griffin, 2014) because although figures may be produced for increases in tangibles such as increased sales or reduced costs, they frequently neglect a key stage in effective learning namely the transfer of that learning to improved results. In other words it is difficult to quantify the connection between the learning which has taken place and the impact that it has had on behaviour and performance. This is as true for coaching as for many other types of development intervention.

Qualitative methods include the use of behavioural change data from performance appraisal feedback; 360 degree feedback; psychometric testing outputs from selection and assessment activities. 360 degree (multi-rater) assessment and feedback is becoming one of the most commonly used measures to demonstrate the effectiveness of leadership capability. Organisations may link the application of 360 degree feedback to a specific business need e.g. the need to develop a specific number of managers for the future. Problems do arise when raters perceive the data will be used for evaluative purposes and complete their reports accordingly.

More general performance data taken from HR systems on such things as recruitment, induction, absenteeism, exit interviews, talent management, employee surveys and engagement activities might also be considered in the broader sense of trying to measure the overall effectiveness of coaching programmes.

Whatever approach is taken it is necessary to isolate possible factors which have impacted on the result achieved. Different stakeholders will have different agendas to pursue and not all may have a strong focus on quantifying what has actually taken place (Phillips, Phillips, & Edwards, 2012).

Comparison of the different outcomes required by stakeholders

Coachee

- Personal development
- Improvement of difficult situation
- Better alignment with stakeholder outcomes

Line manager

- Improved performance of staff member
- Improved relationships with other colleague
- Talent retention
- Appropriate use of departmental L&D budget

HR

- Appropriate management of organisational learning and development budget
- Alignment with other organisational learning and development objectives
- Talent pipeline development
- Talent management

Senior management

- Wider impact on organisation
- Development of coaching culture

Coach

- Effective intervention for coachee
- Positive feedback on performance of coachee from other stakeholders

Measuring effectiveness

Having illustrated a wide range of tools and measures that may be employed in the evaluation of coaching effectiveness, measurement itself delivers a number of problematic issues. The individual nature and focus of coaching assignments means that capturing one person's view of effectiveness may not be entirely relevant to an overall evaluation of outcomes other than in broad terms.

Varied stakeholders have differing priorities and while their preferred outcomes may overlap, different stakeholders are likely to give them different relative focus and importance. (Mulvie, 2015) ILM Interviews and workshops emphasised how coachees place considerable weight on the relationship they have with their coach, which leads to coaches' behaviour and methods employed being paramount for many coaches. Other stakeholders will be more focused on the wider impact on organisational performance.

Once desired outcomes are agreed, measuring success can be challenging. Organisations routinely collect a considerable amount of data that could be used for evaluating the effectiveness of coaching. Staff turnover and responses to staff engagement surveys can provide insights into the impact of a coaching initiative. In considering the impact on individuals, and of a particular coach on a range of coachees, tailored management information is likely to be needed. A more focused scorecard will likely take time and budget to develop and may be constrained by the organisational culture and existing approach to management information. Where organisational management information is biased towards numerical representations and measurement, presenting success in a more discursive way could greatly reduce its impact. As coaching success is often focused on personal transformation, seeking a single figure to capture effectiveness is likely to exclude many important aspects.

The timescale for measuring outcomes also needs to be considered. The length of a coaching assignment varies depending on a range of factors, but can extend over a considerable period. What is impacted by coaching may lead to some immediate change or may not come into operation in the workplace for some time, and so full evaluation of the impact of coaching should therefore extend beyond the time horizon of the actual coaching sessions.

A further complicating factor is confidentiality (Mulvie, 2015) Coaching is personal, that some outcomes may be confidential needs to be considered and built into any data gathering and sharing process. Several practitioners raised the issue of confidentially acting as a barrier to measuring effectiveness, although with appropriate planning confidentially should not be an excuse to fail to measure effectiveness.

Why measure coaching outcomes

- To ensure best use is made of time and other resources
- To provide feedback to the managers being coached
- To provide feedback on the competence of the coach and the assignment overall
- To establish if further development is required
- To ensure that the right type of coaching has been provided or if some other development intervention is more applicable
- To link such measurement to other evaluation within the organisation's wider learning and development agenda
- To assess impact on performance
- To report on return on investment

Case Study

Dr Carina Schofield and Viki Holton, Ashridge Executive Education at Hult International Business School

Ashridge Executive Education has used a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, as well as a combination of the two, to evaluate our executive education programmes and assess the learning impact. We have also successfully used the 'success case method'. It involves administering an online survey followed by interviews with individual participants, resulting in a rich collection of data that can be analysed in a variety of ways.

One example of this method involved six clients operating in a range of sectors, industries and countries. This was a leadership development programme for mid-level managers and technical specialists which had been running for over two years. A number of cohorts had already completed one-week off-site events and then participated in follow-up action learning groups. The results were impressive not least because we could:

- Identify elements of the organisational culture that were either supporting or impeding learning transfer
- Ensure the programme was producing the intended outcomes and determine if it was having any unanticipated outcomes or effects
- Solicit recommendations on how the programme could produce greater impact.

The value of using the 'success case method' was clear both to us at Ashridge as well as to the clients involved in the study.

Moving forward on measuring effectiveness

One method of overcoming some of the challenges of measuring effectiveness is to use the Success Case Method (SCM) (Brinkerhoff, 2002). SCM offers a solution to the complexity of coaching evaluation because it:

- Focuses on change and development
- Accommodates the views of multiple stakeholders
- Uses practical situations and examples
- Relies on personal experience
- Harnesses the power of story telling

SCM goes beyond the use of informal qualitative data and should have an increased acceptance in organisations more used to quantitative management information, without overemphasising those quantitative methods which may devalue the analysis of the personal experience.

SCM has been used to assess the impact of a variety of programmes (see case studies). It starts by identifying the most positive outcomes using both quantitative and qualitative data. For example, the indicators of good coaching identified above, could be used to design a questionnaire circulated to a variety of stakeholders. Analysis of these questionnaires would identify individuals for participation in the next research phase which involves focusing on personal narratives and consideration of reasons for their changed behaviour; these individual “stories” explain why any change was a success (or not) via carefully documented interviews. As Brinkerhoff says “Our criterion for the veracity of a success story is that it must tell how a person actually used something, and the actual results they got, in a way that would ‘stand up in court.’” (2002:4). A document is then produced to communicate the findings to interested stakeholders where impact is the most important aspect.

The data and findings should be presented in such a way that stakeholders understand not only what successes (or failures) have been found, but also the range of factors that supported such outcomes. In most cases a formal report will be the appropriate method of disseminating the findings but consideration should be given to using more informal briefings.

Conclusion

Coaching must be evaluated if it is to maintain its prominence as a learning and development intervention. There are hurdles to evaluation, not least of which is the personal and confidential nature of much coaching. Primary research indicated the efficacy of coaching for leadership development. Coaching now needs to be evaluated alongside other leadership development approaches if it is to maintain, and grow, its prominence as an effective learning and development intervention. As this white paper has demonstrated, there are real hurdles to evaluation. Having identified 25 characteristics of good coaching an innovative and qualitative technique such as the Success Case Method enables inclusion of the voices of multiple stakeholders and offers impactful and in-depth analysis. This method of evaluation can be used to inform not only individual coaching delivery but wider organisational development and change enabling consideration and evaluation of coaching alongside a range of interventions.

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