

Executive Coaching – Instrument for Implementing Organizational Change

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Abstract

Executive coaching has seen a real expansion worldwide due to a new approach of management in the age of information. It is an efficiently used method within organizations, with a view to inspiring top managers in implementing and ascertaining changes in the behavior of those around them, in order to initiate and uphold changes in the organization and improve results.

This article proposes two levels of analysis from the viewpoint of the implementation of coaching, and executive coaching respectively, in organizations, throughout the changing process: the analysis of individual perceptions and their effects among employees as well as the institutional, structural, approach of change at the level of the human resources in the organization, mentioning risks that can often be noticed in Romanian organizations.

The last part describes the perspectives from which mindful change is seen at the level of an organization, by describing the theory of mindful change meant to facilitate the interpretation and understanding of the way in which both people and organizations can approach change. This theory is instrumental in the coaching process. The final part of the work lines up a series of conclusions in approaching organizational change through the coaching process.

Keywords: *coaching, executive coaching, management, human resources, organizational change.*

JEL classification: M12, M14, M54, Z13.

Introduction

A real challenge of coaching is the organizational environment and the executive. When the latter faces a challenge in the management process, depending on the approach of the issue in question, it can spell opportunity or danger. In this context, making the decision to delegate competencies as well as identifying then people who should help in solving the problems is quite an art.

Over the past decades, it is become more and more obvious how hard manual labor is being replaced by knowledge-based activities. Management is no longer seen as responsible with maintaining the activity of the organization, but as an engine that drives the labor force. In essence, the management itself is undergoing a radical change process.

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Changes in the nature of labor are not just radical but omniscient worldwide, which encourages leaders to perpetuate the effects of this new approach of their operations in an arena of competition-driven battle. Globally, holding the secret of the competitive edge, which can be achieved by empowering the social fabric of the company, can represent a path towards new opportunities. Therefore, acknowledging the human potential of the organization as an engine of the very existence and development of the activity is inevitable. In this setting, coaching offers answers that help to overcome the professional obstructions specific to each hierarchical level in the organization.

1. The coaching concept in the setting of organizational change

Throughout the transition process of the organization, coaching is a method that has at its core respecting people and their individual feelings, as they are perceived as “not merely cogs in the business machine” (Goldsmith&Lyons, 2005). Rooted in the art of conversation, coaching evolves as a natural carrier of leadership.

In order to reach the proposed targets and implicitly, go through the vital steps for the process of change with the help of coaching, it is necessary to understand one’s interlocutor, with both limitations and strong points. The key to establishing a successful relation with new clients and also maintaining relations with existent clients is in the coach’s ability to enter the shoes of the interlocutors, to see the world from their perspective and understand their real problems. The present context of continuous change in the economic environment and the complexity of the transformation of the labor force have seen professionals in human resources faced with various situations regarding the competitiveness of their companies in report with the labor force demands and the targets of the organization. This fact led to a re-evaluation of the needs of the organization but also of its demand in the human resources domain.

To facilitate the understanding of the situations that arise in an organization, management theoreticians Bolman and Deal proposed the model of the 4 frameworks, evoking perspectives for organizational framework analysis which seem complex, ambiguous or confusing (Moral&Abbott, 2009). These four proposed analysis frameworks are:

- **Structural**- this framework refers to the architecture of the organization, including forging departments and work groups from the perspective of the roles and formal relations, the coordination, the quality of the control together with the messages concerning the targets of the organization and its mission. From this perspective, it is necessary to understand the position of the employee, whether a person or a group, within the organization both from the point of view of the formal relations as well as of the reports regarding the targets.
- **Psycho-social**- this framework sees the organization as a large extended family, whose members empathize with the human strengths, limitations, emotions, fears and desires. The analysis focuses on the needs and attitudes of individuals during the work process and the way in which these needs are satisfied.

- **Political**- the political framework sees the work place as a jungle. The organization represents a competition-driven environment with limited resources, contrasting interests and opinions in the setting of constant struggles for power, prestige and advantages.
- **Cultural (or symbolic)**- the analyzed symbolic framework includes information on the language of communication within the organization, the symbolic or legendary characters or events being promoted, the existence of strong departmental sub-cultures, the distribution of the management and employees according to sexes and their role in the organization.

Coaching providers should find this model useful, seeking to understand the perspective of the human resources departments, of the organization or the managers. Perceiving the human resources domain only from the perspective of just one of the above mentioned frameworks would lead to incomplete or erroneous conclusions and would drive coaching providers to wrongly interpret the situation or overlook certain factors that can be crucial. Therefore, a full picture, which takes into consideration the importance of each perspective at individual and group level but also the effects of obstructing one of the frameworks, is to be desired.

The desired and sustained changes in the behavior, thoughts, feelings or perceptions of an individual are highly discontinuous. In time, and with continuous effort, these changes appear intrinsically as emerging or catastrophic changes, but it is experience which has relevance and reveals the core of the necessity for change. Self- awareness or self-care and awareness of the social or natural context are at the opposite pole from the degree of surprise or discovery (Woodman & Pasmore & Shani, 2009). When people are much more attentive, they experiment the change process as a set of smooth and natural transitions. The coach can help a person to consciously perceive these intermediary steps. He or she can induce the steps through questions, displaying a supporting attitude or offering understanding.

The bond between the emotional investment and intellectual knowledge during the process of change represent individual, successful and accomplished fuels. Change in itself does not represent a lasting, repeatable or replicable process and will remain evasive in case the success ingredient has a momentary character (Doyle, 1999, p.47). Former American secretary of state Colin Powell described this state that is necessary for change or induces the achievement of targets in an extremely real and unpredictable way: “the alliance of the heart and mind” (Oren, 2003, p.176). When all these ingredients can be found in a coach, we, who are around, call them charisma, charm, leadership, presence or genuine care.

2. Change and executive coaching- sustainable processes in the development of an organization

The process of executive coaching represents basically a relationship, a dialogue which includes the insertion of coaching into the behavior of the executive, into the change process. Peter Bluckert established a set of six principles

with applicability to all types of coaching, being specific mainly in exercising the executive coaching process (Bluckert, 2006, p. 4):

- The transition from “saying” to “asking”
- Performance and potential
- Raising awareness and empowerment
- Shaping one’s own convictions
- Focusing on the business
- Frameworks of perspective
- Coaching as a way of thinking

The author believes that raising awareness is an essential precursor of change, nevertheless, it does not guarantee it, while inducing responsibility is the central point in coaching and the change process.

In the absence of a clear direction and suitable leadership, mid-level employees and managers can experience feelings of bitterness and frustration and hope for a change in the executive or leadership of the team they belong to. All these aspects can often trigger crisis. The lack of reaction to a crisis can be an option, but it is not recommended. The decision to start change is made function of the performances of the team or the organization. This organizational climate and this type of behavior of middle managers is often found in Romanian organizations, especially those with state capital, which would require the implementation of medium and long-term strategies in a climate of management continuity, vision and objectivity.

The executive coaching process “can be easily seen as an adventure in which the phenomenology of the coaching relation is examined” (Stober & Grant, 2006, p.278), in which subjects express internal turmoil of fear, anxiety and insecurity, while the purpose of this adventure is to gain courage and self-respect. In this way, the results of the change of the organizational climate, but also of the society and community the subjects live in, are generated.

In an organizational setting that involves focusing simultaneously on economic, social and environmental performances, reaching the sustainability of the change process desired by the organization implies identifying the optimum balance within a complex system which contains mutually dependent approaches.

Sustainable development represents a model of using resources meant to fulfill human needs both in the structure of the organization and from a temporal perspective.

In the upper part of Figure 1, natural resources are pictured from the point of view of sustainable development, while the targets of this sustainable development (economic prosperity, social equality and the quality of the environment) being pointed out on the left. Placing focus on the preservation of the natural resources, on the right, the elements of sustainability needed for maintaining the balance of the ecosystem (Woodman & Pasmore & Shani, 2009, pp. 158-162) are reflected, based on the three key elements: productivity, human use and natural disturbances. Moderately unsteady values can lead to a growth in productivity, but a rather high unbalance can have a negative effect of productivity.

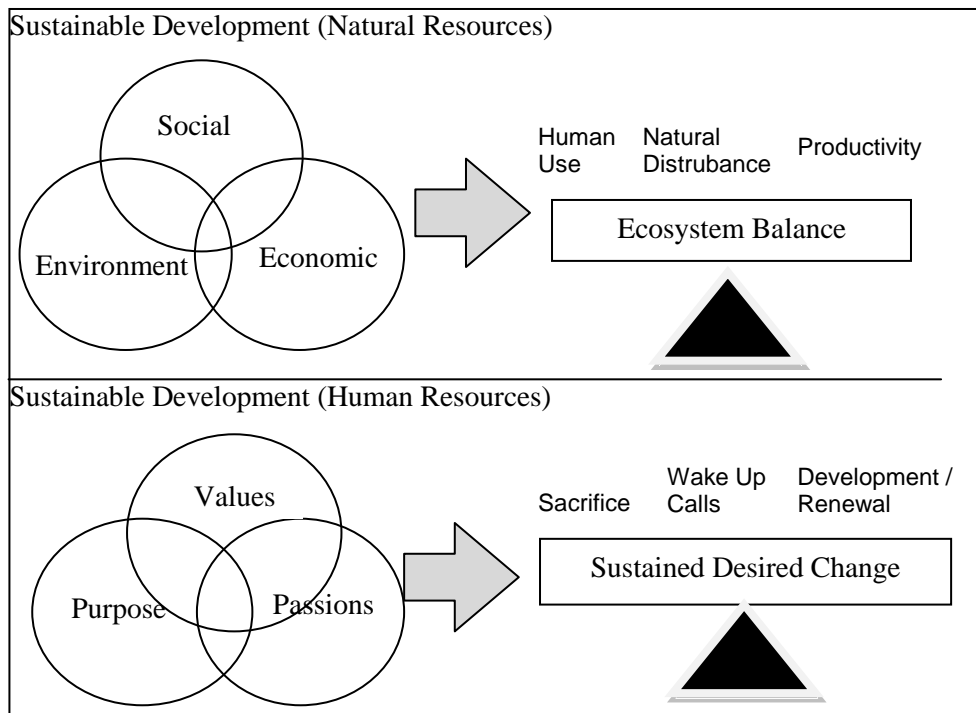


Figure 1. Example of sustainable development (Natural and Human Resources)

As illustrated in the lower part of Figure 1, sustainable development in the setting of human resources can be seen as the simultaneous fulfillment of several targets. As far as sustainable change is involved, there are other three domains that require balance, passion, desires and values in reaching the perceived goal, more than the economic, social and environment domains. These three domains are key components of a person's individual ideals and an important source of motivation for individual change.

The needed elements for maintaining the balance in reaching the desired change are elements that interact in supporting the human resources via a process that is similar to the one of balancing the natural resources. Development and renewal represent a process of reinforcing or repositioning the personal individual capacities and sacrifice refers to using these capacities for fulfilling the responsibilities and assuming accountability regarding crisis, obstacles and other types of stress that can affect efficiency over time. Insistences represent minor or major discontinuities in a person's behavior and can have both positive and negative effects.

3. Intentional change through executive coaching

The theory of intentional change (Boyatzis, 2006, pp.607-623), describes the essential components and processes that encourage the sustainability and desire for change in the behavior, thoughts, feelings and perceptions of a person. The theory of intentional change represents a window of vision, interpretation and perception of the way in which people and organizations can approach change and how it can become instrumental in the coaching process. The model comprises five stages or discontinuities, called “discoveries” (Kolb & Boyatzis, 1970, Boyatzis, 1999, Boyatzis, 2001, Goleman et al., 2002), namely:

- The personal ideal (1) - represents the point of departure in the personal development process (conceptually called the image of the personal ideal) which is reflected in individual aspirations. The development of this image has three major components: an image of the dreamed future, hope regarding the tangibility of this target and the inclusion of the identity of the target, which represents the foundation on which the desired image is to be built. The personal ideal is generated by the ideal of one’s own ego but also by dreams and aspirations.
- The current reality (2) - since the self’s evaluation degree is often evasive, there must be a pertinent evaluation reflected by what the others see and whom they suppose they interact with. This stage entails the evaluation of the weak and strong points of an individual and drafting a personal reckoning as a result.
- The creation of a development plan/survey (3) - it comprises the personal vision, the targets that make the object of the study and the actions carried out in support of these targets. They offer a setting so that the person can gather information with a view to reaching the desired future as well as measures that must be adopted in this respect, by pointing out some clear intermediary targets.
- The metamorphosis (4) - experimenting and practicing some new behaviors, ways of thought and feelings that support the survey plan. At its core, this stage aims towards the implementation of the targets and covering the actions pointed out in the previous stage while assuming the risks related to the new behavior patterns.
- The trusting relationship that encourages experimental development (5) - the entourage represents an essential part of our environment. Then relationships that bear the most influence on us often exist in groups that have a certain importance for us. These relationships and groups give a certain meaning, specific to our own identity, leading us to desired behaviors which also generate reactions and evaluations concerning our newly adopted behavior patterns. These interactions create contexts in which we interpret our own progress in relation to the desired changes, having a significant contribution in formulating the ideal.

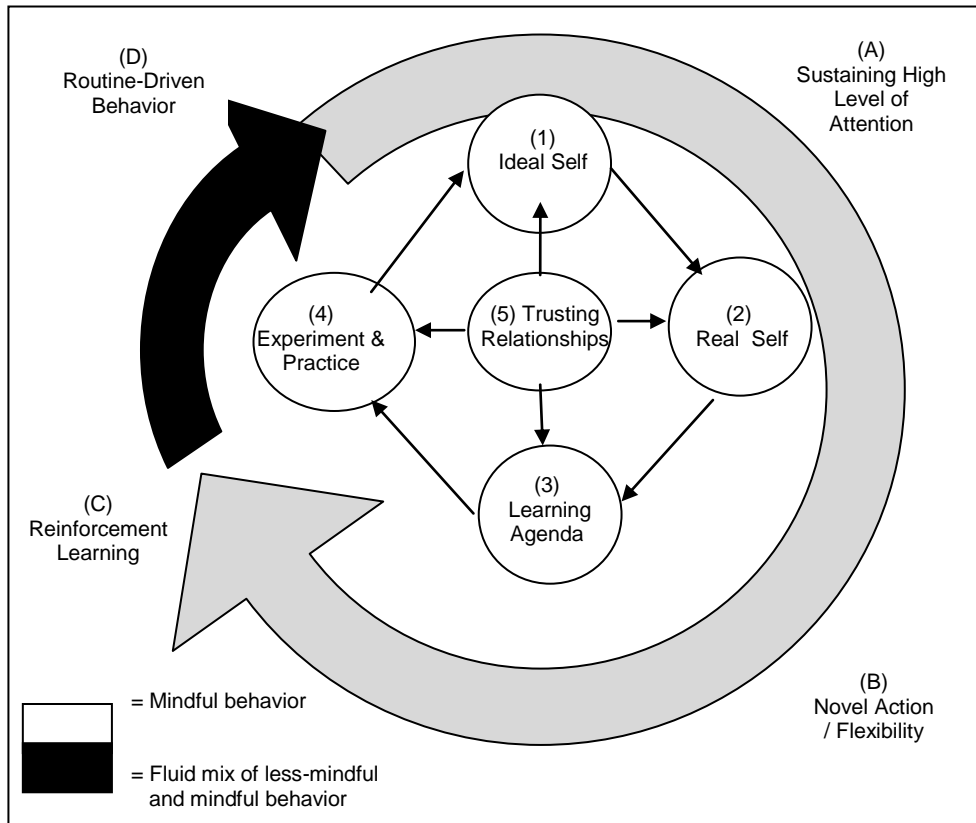


Figure 2. Awareness in intended change

The major impact of applying coaching in the process of intended change, often found in the managerial process, can be thus explained. Similarly, it is necessary to investigate and analyze the coaching relation in qualitative terms as well as the competencies that can be found at the level of the expectations of the parties that enter into relation.

One can easily notice that at individual level, to fulfill the dreams envisioned in one's own ideals, extremely deep emotional commitments and psychological resources previously unimagined can come into play, and attention has a determining role in this stage of starting the change process.

A diagram of the change process (Woodman & Pasmore & Shani, 2009, p.152), with the five stages enumerated above, is pictured in Figure 2, from the perspective of perception behaviors, by evoking the contribution of conscious awareness in front of change of the individual who takes part in this process, and respectively, the lack of awareness of the individual in front of change.

Conclusions

Coaching can be seen as a way to facilitate efficient individual management in order to achieve the desired change, thus maintaining the balance between the usage and the development of human capital. Applied at executive level, coaching adopts its specific form, namely executive coaching, and includes in its process a series of organizational domains that need change.

As shown in this work, to reach a high span organizational development, an entire range of change processes are necessary, both at individual and organizational level, with a view to supporting and perpetuating the desire for change on the hierarchy but also time scale, and in this way the organizational culture is reshaped.

The sustainability of organizational change, irrespective of the factor that initiated the change, cannot be achieved without the individual support of the majority of the staff that makes the human resources of the organization and this is achieved through their empowerment to support change, understanding the necessity of this change in relation to the universe of every individual and their empowerment in relation to each necessary stage. This entire mechanism can become functional through the implementation of a type of management combined with coaching and by applying executive coaching at top management and executive level.

In a fiercely competitive climate, to be able to maintain at a healthy level and develop the organization against the increasingly sensitive balance between the demand and offer which involves consumers, suppliers, human resources etc., the process of changing the organization gains the connotations of a cybernetic system in which its own results represent the resources of a cyclical change process.

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