

WHY COACHING IS CRUCIAL IN TODAY'S WORLD OF WORK

Article written by Graham Clark, MD OCM Enable

For the last few years, we've recognised that our world has become more complex and unpredictable (so called VUCA world) and that agility and adaptability are essential to personal and organisational success. The pandemic was an ultimate reminder that we can't predict the future, and for many organisations, it was a real test of their capacity to pivot. We have had to learn a great deal, very quickly, and the experience has speeded another trend that technology had already provoked – remote and hybrid working as part of our normal experience of organisations.

This change in the technology of work has profound implications for how we learn together, how we collaborate, how we lead and how we create high performing teams. And it's happening at a time when our capacity to learn, collaborate, lead and perform is already key to success in our VUCA landscape. This combination is creating some amazing opportunities to do things differently and create futures that are more sustainable for people, communities and organisations – but also some fearsome pressures on leaders who are struggling not just to 'build the aircraft while flying it', but to simultaneously adapt to increasingly unstable weather, and a need to completely redesign the engines! The difference between leaders who thrive and those who struggle to survive is their capacity to coach their teams in the virtual, dislocated world they live in.

VUCA WORLD

Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous

WHY COACHING, AND WHY NOW?

There were many interactions going on when we all worked in the same place that we almost didn't notice. We learnt by observing our peers, and in particular we learnt about the culture and behaviours that were acceptable in a new team or organisation. We got to know and trust each other by social interaction. We could ask for help by leaning across the desk, and we could see when an offer of help might be welcomed. We kept in the loop by overhearing a conversation as much as through the formal meetings. We shared space and an identity. Building high performance teams was supported by these unseen processes that built a social glue and opportunities for everyday connection.



In a hybrid or virtual environment, the leader needs to pay greater and more conscious attention to these processes of learning, collaboration and trust building. If online conversations are the majority of our connection and are focussed solely on 'business operations and performance' we are missing a key component of success. New starters need support to understand the culture, and we need to deliberately design opportunities to create understanding and trust. All of this happens through connection, collaboration and conversation between people, all hallmarks of great working relationships. Coaching is above all a "relational technology".

Leaders who use a coaching approach ask open questions that catalyse thinking in others. They help us to order our thoughts, reflect on our experience and learn either as individuals or as a collective. Their feedback helps us understand our world and navigate it, and their deep listening helps them, and us, to hear what we are not paying attention to as well as what is top of mind. By helping us to sort through frustrations and fears they lower our defences and promote cooperation. By helping us to understand and realise our ambitions they inspire performance and development.

Successful managers, team leaders and strategic leaders use coaching skills and approaches to make the interactions that they and their teams have with each other, either remotely or in person, more powerful, more effective and purposeful in creating learning, collaboration and trust.

This shift to a hybrid world brings opportunity as well as challenge. Like all things there was a shadow as well as a benefit to the office of the past. The old ways of working sometimes encouraged conformity, and could be difficult for diverse people to work in. Introverts might find today's more disciplined and structured virtual meeting easier to contribute to than the noisy meeting room where they were talked over by extrovert peers. A loosening of social conformity might allow us to deliver on our goals to support greater diversity. Reducing the need for physical 'presence' might open our team to people who are differently abled, have a need for more flexible work commitments or are remotely situated. And it has opened up opportunities for many of us to manage our lives more holistically. But we won't realise these benefits if we don't deliberately address them, if we don't coach our existing teams to help them adapt and change to gain from these opportunities, if we don't coach new starters to integrate without conforming and coach the team to learn together. We need to wholeheartedly embrace coaching as a 'relational technology' to make the workplace of today as productive as possible.



If upskilling your managers to develop essential coaching skills is something you'd like to explore, talk to Graham about the best way to create the impact you're looking for. Call him on **01869 338989** or email graham.clark@theoem.co.uk