

# STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COACHING AND MENTORING IN ORGANISATIONS

When coaching and mentoring are well delivered, they are transformative. If used strategically, with clear links to key organisational objectives, they can catalyse changes in capability and behaviour that enable the organisation's purpose. However, creating and implementing a coaching strategy can be hampered when you don't have the structure that allows it. And you don't always have the freedom to change the structure in the short or medium term.

Here, Diane Newell shares 3 common issues and some ideas about how to overcome them.

## INSIGHT 1: EVERYONE'S BUSINESS, NO ONE'S RESPONSIBILITY.

Coaching and mentoring are well-established in some organisations. You may have many senior leaders working with coaches on development programmes, top teams working with internal and external coaching to support their performance, and you may have invested in the coaching skills of leaders across the business. Everyone agrees that it's valuable and important – but it's a tool used by different people in different ways to support different ends. No one group has an overall strategic responsibility for it. If it's well managed, it will deliver many benefits to many people and teams, but there is a good chance that opportunities are being missed. The most obvious one is that there is unlikely to be a coaching strategy and policy linked to delivering the key strategic transformations that will enable the organisation. So how can you be sure that your investment is best shaped and going to the right places to maximise benefit? A lack of consistency causes a more subtle issue – what do we mean by 'coaching' or 'mentoring' in this organisation? At times, the very vocabulary is muddled – what one part of your organisation calls mentoring is called coaching elsewhere. This makes gathering data, understanding the impact and sharing best practices difficult and can make it seem impossible to grasp the nettle of making coaching and mentoring genuinely effective strategically. The solution (even if it were possible) is not to centralise everything and make it impossible for people to use coaching and mentoring without 'permission'. That would just create either resistance or a lack of agility and responsiveness. But what you can do is to build links and networks between the people who use and commission coaching and begin to gather the data that will help strategic leaders to see:

- How are we using coaching and mentoring now? What are the costs and benefits?
- What coaching resources do we have that might be shared or used more effectively?
- Where is the best practice in our organisation (delivering great benefit and cost-effectiveness), and how can we share that?
- What can we learn from the experience of others? What is best practice in our competitors and customers?

## INSIGHT 2: LOCAL VS GLOBAL.

This is a common structural challenge across many issues in organisations, and it affects coaching and mentoring too. For large organisations spread across geographies and business sectors, there is always a struggle to achieve a balance between what is held and managed centrally and consistently and what the local teams have the freedom to manage to meet their particular needs and preferences. Some organisations have commissioned coaching provision globally against strategic objectives, only to find that it is considered sub-optimal for local needs and so not fully used or avoided in preference of local partners (there can be a cultural element here too). Others have found it impossible to develop local buy-in to a strategy designed to deliver against global talent objectives.

As in Issue 1 above, the biggest concern is that this then 'hides' coaching and mentoring investment and makes it impossible to know what is being spent by who to what benefit, undermining the capacity of the organisation to manage the investment strategically. The quickest solution here is to ensure that the coaching and mentoring strategy follows the business strategy. If your strategic decision makers are heads of geographies, you need a geographically based coaching and mentoring strategy. If strategy is made business by business, each Business Unit needs its own coaching and mentoring strategy and to be responsible for its delivery.

That doesn't mean to say you can't share information globally and share best practices, just as discussed above – but it allows you to demonstrate clearly how the investment meets strategic aims and to get the support of key strategic leaders for your strategy.

## INSIGHT 3: LACK OF INTEGRATION BETWEEN STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION.

This issue arises in organisations where structure separates strategic responsibility from implementation. For example, where there is a central Global Talent function responsible for creating coaching and mentoring strategy and resources, and local HR Business partners, with no direct or indirect reporting link to Talent, who support and commission coaching services, internal mentors and training for managers in coaching skills. In some organisations, local HRBPs are unclear about the global resources and how to commission them effectively, and the feedback loops that would allow information about the effectiveness of that investment are not built into the structure and processes. HRBP's goals and KPIs don't include their effective use of coaching and mentoring, and Global Talent gets no information to allow them to adjust strategy based on learning in practice. As a result, there is a coaching and mentoring strategy in theory rather than in practice. If your organisation has a strategy that isn't being implemented, that seems to 'sit on the shelf', could this be the barrier that is blocking you? If so, who has responsibility for managing implementation (probably more than one person!)? What are their agendas and needs? How could implementing coaching and mentoring strategically help them? How can you start a conversation with them to develop the strategic linkages that will make strategic management of coaching and mentoring a shared responsibility?

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