

Coaching V Consulting

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Coaching or consulting? How internal and external influencers can work for different organisations. There are a number of organisations that mix things up and tend to look outward when the answers lie within, and vice-versa. How does this work in a multi-cultural environment?

Quite often organisations ask themselves: can we do it ourselves or do we need to seek help? Do we have the skills, capacity and time within our department? If not are we close enough that with a little coaching, we can achieve our goals? Can ‘keep it in the family’ so to speak or do we need to engage an external consultant to do it for us?

Let’s assume that your organisation does not have the skills internally and so engages a **consulting** firm. You learn that consulting is primarily about problem solving and that it can be applied to developing strategy, to operational models that execute the strategy, and to the implementation of operational plans. And you decide that you are pretty good at implementing but lack in strategic thinking and operational planning.

In engaging consultants it is clear that they provide advice and make recommendations after extensive analysis and consultation with internal and external stakeholders. This is supported by Rasiel and Friga (2001), authors of ‘The McKinsey Mind’ who deliver a consulting model that is about identifying a problem and offering solutions through understanding a business’ needs, its management and leadership philosophies and capabilities, an in-depth analysis in order to frame, design, interpret and then present solutions for implementation. During this process, a consultant’s skill and intuition or hypothesis will be either proved or disproved by the data collected. Therefore in the ‘McKinsey Mind,’ problem solving is fact based, rigidly structured, and hypothesis driven.

For most consultants, it is a temporary engagement that ends with recommendations. If they present you with a few options, then quite often you may feel that the engagement has been of value. However since your organization is good at implementation, the consultants are not required to stick around to implement and see the outcomes of their recommendations. A word of caution – choose the option that is best for your business. This may not necessarily be the one that you yourself can implement.

Consultants may also be internal independent advisors who are full time employees, however they are usually from another department in order to maintain an objective view. The benefit here is that they have a greater understanding of the business than an external consultant. This can save time in the consulting phase and therefore potentially reduce billable hours.



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So how does consulting differ from coaching? Consulting usually operates at an organizational, departmental, or team level focusing on strategy, operations and sometimes implementation and involves consulting with many people. Coaching however is mostly a one to one process that develops the individual, enabling them to become more self-aware through a process of reflection and to take meaningful goal-focused action. It is about helping individuals reach their full potential in what they do, how they do it, and why they want to do it. In this respect coaching helps shape behavior.

For Example: Your business is having trouble with high staff turnover, so the HR department temporarily engages a consulting firm specialising in organizational development to help find a solution to the problem. The consulting firm, using a 360 degree process consults with staff, managers, clients and other key stakeholders. After consulting, analyzing, then applying their own specialist skills and hypothesis to the problem, it is determined that staff are no longer motivated, even though the business is doing extremely well. And it is further determined that this is because their development needs are not being met.

To solve this problem, the consulting firm provides several recommendations that could be implemented: an online training kiosk and a suite of external training courses; a mentoring program; one on one coaching; and some special projects requiring volunteers to help drive them. Now that you have some options, it is up to the Learning & Development Team to decide which one suits the individuals in the business. The L & D manager is finding it tough to decide which program to implement and so makes an appointment with a mentor. The mentor clearly states, 'I have been in this situation before and implemented the online Kiosk and it worked wonders at the last company I was with.'

Realising that there is a significant expense involved, the L & D manager decided to consult an Executive coach for a different opinion. The coach asked: "What are you trying to achieve?"; "What is the situation right now?"; "What options do you have?"; "What criteria have you set to help you make this decision?"; "What would others do?" and finally, "What will you do?"

The point of this example is to illustrate that the consulting process is different to the coaching process in that coaching is part of the solution. It helps the individual consult their own mind and the minds of others generate their own decision.

Coaching in work places is a collaborative relationship between a coach and coachee (person being coached) that uses experiential learning frameworks to help the coachee identify and remove interference that limits the expression of their full potential.

Strictly speaking, in the personal professional development space, coaching is not training, mentoring, performance management or facilitation.



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Training refers to a formal learning and educational process, usually in a class or group environment with an instructor or teacher.

Mentoring refers to guiding an individual or group/team using an experienced member of the team who is known to be an expert in the discipline/function of the group/team.

Performance Management refers to a process of measuring an individuals or group/teams performance against agreed goals or Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). It is usually a formal process and is conducted at least annually.

Facilitation helps groups or teams resolve issues/challenges in a group setting.

Coaching is mostly one to one and can take the shape of 6 x 1 hour sessions at intervals like fortnightly or monthly or more regularly if dealing with acute issues.

All too often, businesses think that sending people off to training courses will solve developmental, motivational, and aspirational engagement issues. How often can you recall going to a training course and thinking, that was very interesting but I can't see how I will apply the learning to my current role? Where people and individuals are concerned, it is important to understand which development technique to apply, especially in today's empowerment and engagement focused organisations. Using a Skill-Will Matrix we can see that if an individual has low skills and low will, they will need greater direction, however if they have low skills but high will, they will require greater guidance. Someone with high skills but low will requires inspiration, whereas another with high will and high skill will need to be stretched. (Source: Max Landsberg, The Tao of Coaching 2nd ed (Profile Business, 2003), p55.

Coaching helps hold individuals accountable for their own development by taking action to improve and reach potential. Coaching helps people implement behaviours immediately and expedite change at an individual level.

Coaching can be used to develop and improve many domains of peoples' work such as; handling difficult conversations, presenting with influence, dealing with conflict, effective communication, effective delegation, individual problem solving, creative thinking, developing others, being accountable & taking responsibility, decision making, giving & receiving feedback, goal setting and cultivating emotional intelligence.

This is achieved through a questioning and reflecting process using models such as the GROW coaching model published by Sir John Whitmore and Max Landsberg among others (Goals, Reality, Options, Wrap Up). This process enables an individual or team to sets SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound) goals. It is also a process that seeks to ensure sustainable behaviour change by providing a time for thinking outside the box, challenging the status quo and reflection. Coaching



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moves people from awareness to responsibility to commitment to action and finally to results. Coaches are champions of change.

In an increasing global market place where more and more global businesses are forming, managing change and diversity is a very real current challenge. We must consider how we communicate and interface effectively in diverse organisational geographies, cultures, demographics and so on. Consultants will consider an organisational problem from a strategic or operational perspective, analyse it, develop hypotheses and offer solutions. Coaching helps individuals in these environments actively listen, ensure understanding, collaborate effectively and build strong relationships and credibility through quality interactions.

Rosinski and Abbott among others have introduced us to “Intercultural Coaching”. It focuses on using culture as the enabler of change in reaching an individual’s potential. Griffin and Crook go on to state in their article “Intercultural Coaching: The next big thing,” that “people instinctively approach situations in business with their own ‘worldview’ (i.e. personal and cultural perspective). In the intercultural coaching process it is important to be aware of the various worldviews that are in play. Further more they provide “The Multicultural Adaptation Model which suggests four perspectives that exist when there are more than one cultural perspective at play in a particular situation or problem. These are ‘your way’, ‘their way’, ‘a combined way involving some of your way and some of theirs’, and then there is ‘a completely new way.’

It may not always be possible for consultants to consult with every one in a business, especially a global business. Too often Head Quarters are driven to make decisions that cannot possibly make everyone happy, engaged or feel like they have been considered. **It is a coach’s role to help an individual achieve personal goals in their current operating context while still meeting organisational and team goals and vice versa.**



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