

HDA Coaching Culture Survey Results 2011

HDA is a Human capital consultancy that has worked in the area of coaching for 17 years, developing a reputation for a highly successful, outcomes-focused approach to achieving objectives. Coaching is a technique that has helped countless individuals to increase their levels of performance and engagement. As a result, many organisations now also want to embed coaching within the culture, resulting in better communication, higher levels of respect and improved management of employees. As part of our sustained commitment to promoting a best practice approach within coaching, we recently undertook a detailed survey to measure opinions and gain an understanding of the practicalities involved in developing a coaching culture – a culture which focuses on collaborative working and continued development and where coaching is essentially used as the main management technique. We incorporated views from across a broad sector base, including organisations just beginning to think about developing a coaching culture, to those that have successfully established one.

We wanted to understand exactly what organisations were doing to successfully implement a coaching culture; what barriers they faced and how they overcame them; and what likely outcomes organisations thinking about introducing a coaching culture can expect. This brief report outlines the findings of the **2011 HDA Coaching Culture Survey**, which goes some way towards answering these questions.

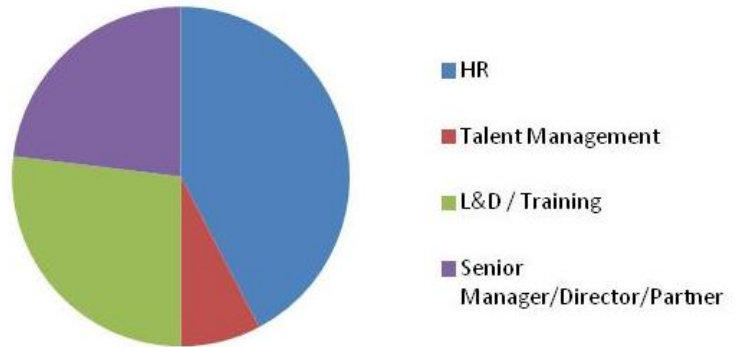
Headlines and major trends...

- **Over 85%** of organisations surveyed are either thinking about developing a coaching culture (45%) or are in the process of implementing one (42%)
- **12%** of organisations believe they have successfully established a coaching culture
- The **key barriers** to implementing a coaching culture are:
 - Senior management buy-in
 - Lacking the coaching skills required
 - Perception of time commitment
 - Resistance to change
 - Lack of understanding as to what coaching is and its benefits
- **Overcoming the barriers to change** can be achieved by:
 - Training for Senior Managers
 - Developing an effective communication strategy
 - Involving staff members in the process
 - Taking a long-term approach to coaching
- **50%** of organisations recommend training for managers as one of the first steps in implementing a coaching culture.

Key Demographics:

Industries:

Responding organisations came from various industries, including financial services, public Sector, professional services, higher education, NGO, retail, construction and engineering, healthcare, publishing, manufacturing, IT and media.



Job Area:

The largest proportion (**40%**) of responses came from those working within the area of general HR, for example HR Manager; HRD; or HR Officer. A further **27%** of responses came from individuals within Learning & Development / Training; and the remaining responses (**23%**) were from those operating at a senior manager/director level or within the area of Talent Management (**8%**).

Defining a Coaching Culture

It appears that how a coaching culture is defined is very much organisation specific – which makes perfect sense. In order to fully realise the benefits of coaching within your organisation, it is critical that everyone understands what coaching means; what the benefits are; how it can be achieved and ultimately managed. Essentially a shared vision must be created which in turn will foster longer term commitment. This requires effective communication in a 'language' and style that fits with the organisational norm so that, as one respondent mentioned, *“Coaching (can then be) something that people at all levels in all areas of the organisation participate in...believe in...and take a coaching approach to problem solving and continuous improvement without having to stop and think about it”*.

Although differing in their specific definitions, respondents were in agreement that a successful coaching culture tends to involve the following:

- An environment where employees continue to adapt, grow and develop through informal/formal individual and collective coaching – thereby releasing potential and increasing capability and effectiveness
- Supporting and empowering employees to take responsibility for their actions, enabling them to find their own solutions to problems and thereby being more engaged with the organisation
- Managers adopting a coaching approach to facilitate the development of their teams

The Benefits of Introducing a Coaching Culture

It is widely recognised that coaching can be a key factor in enabling individuals to improve their performance which in turn can lead to improved business performance (Consulting to Management, 2002; The Business Journal, 2003; Psychology Today, 2003; CIPD 2008; HDA, 2008, 2010). This was reinforced by responses to the survey, with over **50%** of respondents highlighting improved performance, productivity and motivation as key benefits arising from the implementation of a coaching culture. One respondent noted that within an organisation that has successfully introduced a coaching culture, *“Staff members are able to work through issues and debate ideas in an unbiased forum. Staff members in turn are able to give more back to the business because they are able to take the time out of the daily routine to focus on a topic or hone their skills and approach.”*

Establishing a coaching culture creates a facilitative, empowering environment where ‘people feel valued’ and communication is improved between individuals and departments ‘resulting in a more collaborative style of working’ – where issues are resolved quickly and efficiently and innovative ideas are captured on a regular basis. This promotes a proactive workforce whereby individuals take ownership of their own development and growth, focusing on generating solutions rather than apportioning blame. All of the above in turn enhances employee engagement and motivation, which over **20%** of respondents noted.

The Barriers to Implementing a Coaching Culture and how to Overcome these Barriers

Respondents are in agreement that implementing a coaching culture can be a complex, time consuming process *“It is a change of mind set to be able to apply a coaching approach...It can be easier to not try”* – however as we have seen above the benefits to both individual and organisation are significant so understanding how to achieve this successfully, with minimal disruption, is crucial.

Ensuring buy-in at a senior level can be one of the most difficult aspects of establishing a coaching culture but also one of the most important. In order for coaching to become part of *“an organisations DNA as opposed to this week’s initiative”*, senior leaders must take ownership and lead by example. This can often be a difficult process as senior managers and indeed line managers may not have the skills required to adopt a coaching approach. Hence, they continue to use their more traditional styles of management which in turn leads staff members to believe that they are not fully bought into the process and *‘if it appears that managers are not convinced of the power of coaching then why should the rest of the staff be’*. Ensuring managers and senior leaders have the skills required to coach is vital and this can be achieved by providing adequate training which is regularly refreshed. One respondent noted that within their organisation *‘managers are encouraged to explore what they don’t know and question their own (and others) way of doing things’* in order to identify any skills that may be required.

As with the introduction of any new initiative it would appear that resistance to change can be one of the key barriers to introducing a coaching culture. Typically

staff members can fear any changes that they do not fully understand, for example, those who are effectively coaching *'in their own way'* can resent the introduction of a formalised approach that they do not understand and which may be perceived as more time consuming in an already time constrained business environment. Changes must be introduced gradually to ensure success and avoid the coaching being seen as an *'enforced, formal approach...which becomes another 'system' to record, document and implement'*. Any changes must be pre-empted by a clearly thought out communication strategy to ensure that all staff members are aware of and understand coaching and its benefits (both individual and business); and that coaching can be both an informal/formal process. Respondents have found that involving staff members in the process by sharing organisational barriers, collating case studies and seeking feedback can be a useful tool in overcoming resistance to change and ensuring staff member embrace coaching at all levels.

Steps to Implementing a Coaching Culture

Adopting a structured, well thought-out approach to introducing any change initiative is vital in ensuring a successful change that is sustained in the longer term. Typically organisations will spend considerable time considering (and discussing) the pros, cons, the how and why of introducing a coaching culture in advance of beginning any action on implementation. Initial steps will involve defining agreement on the way forward and obtaining buy-in and commitment from senior leaders. Once these key stages have been achieved, organisations then vary in their approach to implementation.

However, over **50%** of respondents reported that training for managers/leaders was one of the first steps required in order to successfully implement a coaching culture. As managers and senior leaders play such an important role in ensuring the success of any change programme, investing at this level is a sensible move. A further **30%** have provided training to designated staff members to create a pool of internal coaches, for example one respondent noted that the *'L&D team have become qualified as coaches and have started coaching a selection of high performing high potential leaders.'*

Alongside training, in order to successfully embed coaching organisations have:

- Undertaken extensive research about best practice coaching initiatives;
- Implemented task/working groups;
- Assessed openness to change through staff survey;
- Created codes of conduct and ethical frameworks – outlining what is expected and role profiles for coaches; and identifying usable coaching models
- Appointed 'Coaching Champions' across the organisation to promote the coaching message, best practice and support others in their implementation of coaching.
- Created coaching networks - to ensure that coaching *'becomes a way of working...is visible and available for a number of purposes'*.

- Revised talent and reward systems to reflect and promote new ways of working
- Introduced coaching initially via a pilot group - enabling assessment of the success of the approach and undertaking revisions of the approach prior to roll-out at a company-wide level.

One Organisations Story

The introduction of a coaching culture was positioned as part of a wider change initiative requiring different leadership behaviours in response to rapidly changing external market place and poor internal employee opinion survey results. The steps taken were as follows:

1. Leadership behaviours were diagnosed via 360 appraisal, staff focus groups and employee opinion survey. Gaps were identified in leadership behaviour and the impact felt internally and in terms of business delivery.
2. Findings were discussed in detail over some time with commissioning sponsors
3. Personal coaching sessions were held with external coaches for all senior leaders so that they could experience coaching for themselves. Sessions were focused on psychometric and 360 degree feedback, with the goal of developing learning objectives going in to the leadership development programme.
4. Undertook programme of leadership development to create shared understanding of businesses' leadership identity - introduced the notion of situational leadership styles and linked this to personal feedback. Spent time talking about a coaching style, current experience of informal coaching in the business and potential benefits already gained by informal coaching
5. Designed selection process for internal coaches and recruited from a pool of those managers and leaders identified as having potential - linked the selection process to the talent management strategy
6. Held 2 day coaching skills workshop over 2.5 months, involving individual structured practice and evaluation between off-line training days
7. Established a coaching steering group of internal coaches, who have responsibility for the ongoing development of the coaching strategy to include service design, referral process, communication (marketing), evaluation and reporting in future
8. Ongoing - have been collecting stories and testimonies, talking about these and publishing where possible in in-house newsletters/intranet/blogs etc. so as to raise awareness and understanding of coaching, benefits of coaching etc.

Once Implemented, what were the outcomes – both Expected and Unexpected?

Those organisations considering introducing a coaching culture will already have a good sense of what they expect to achieve, including desired outcomes and expected return on investment. To provide some additional valuable insights, HDA asked respondents who have already been through the process what outcomes they actually experienced as a result of introducing a coaching culture. Responses included the following:

- Performance issues addressed more effectively and proactively – *'Managers became more comfortable with addressing performance issues...and were more willing to ask for support when needed'*

- Perceptions of coaching changed – *‘People have a positive impression of coaching as a method for developing people.’*
- Improved business performance – *‘Smoother and more efficient running of business operations even when short staffed’* and *‘reduced the time it takes for trainees to be productive from 18 to 6 months’*
- More motivated and engaged staff – *‘Staff opinion survey results are expected to have improved in 3 key areas’*
- More effective on-boarding – *‘Quicker learning and settling times for new employees’*

Unexpected outcomes included the following:

- More peer to peer coaching undertaken than anticipated
- Greater interest in coaching than expected
- A host of issues brought to light which can be addressed
- Pool of coaches adding value across the organisation more widely than expected - *‘ Our in-house trained coaches, enjoy coaching and are keen to do more coaching than we had originally anticipated, providing a great resource for us to offer coaching more widely across the organisation...and use their coaching skills with their own teams’.*

The future

The respondents were all at different stages of the implementation process, from just thinking about what it would mean to introduce a coaching culture right through to having successfully had a coaching culture in place for some time. For those organisations that have successfully implemented a coaching culture the emphasis for the future is on ensuring that coaching remains embedded, by:

- Continuing to communicate the benefits of coaching throughout the organisation, for e.g.
- *‘Getting the Coaching Champions involved in some big projects...to demonstrate more powerfully how effective a coaching approach is in the achievement of our objectives.’*
- Providing ongoing support, training and supervision to internal coaches, new recruits and managers
- Integrating coaching into all HR and L&D processes
- Introducing a means of measuring and reporting on coaching so the ROI can be evaluated
- Ensuring a long term strategy is in place, for e.g. *‘to develop and present a strategic plan outlining the benefits of, and the recommendations for, embedding coaching across our businesses going forward’*

Summary

As the results of this survey confirm, introducing a coaching culture can yield a host of tangible and intangible benefits and the use of coaching competencies is clearly a

powerful means of creating a workforce focused on continuous development and learning. However, as with any culture change initiative, there are many barriers to implementing a coaching culture. In order to ensure success it is critical to take a long term view by developing a strategy that focuses not only on the introduction of coaching but also how it can be maintained for e.g. through action learning sets, workshops, ongoing training, etc. It is also important to refine current process and systems to reflect the new ways of working and integrate coaching into all aspects of organisational operations. Coaching must become a central focus and not a parallel activity to be used in certain situations.

For more information on any of the above or to understand how HDA can add value to your organisation through coaching, please contact **Tiffany Bowles, Head of Consulting** – tiffany.bowles@hda.co.uk /