CREATING AND NURTURING A
COACHING CULTURE

Introduction

In any organization, When leaders coach, they create a culture that is empowering and energizing**[14] When coached, people develop, their motivation elevates, and they engage at a more deeper level with the organization. It is worthwhile to note that organizations with excellent cultural support for coaching, experience 13% better business results and 39% stronger engagement. Organizations where senior leaders coach very frequently, enjoy 21% higher business results [1].**

Organizations in which a coaching cultures thrives are more responsive and adaptive. In today's BANI world (The acronym BANI stands for **Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear and Incomprehensible)** organizations need leaders who can make change happen as quickly as possible, with maximum uptake and minimum adverse fallout. Coaching facilitates the change process [2]. When added to organizational learning programs, coaching increases focus and learning by up to six times [3]. It helps by guiding individual behavior change, supporting people during change, and making every conversation attuned to the change.

Coaching shifts the power dynamics between a leader and the team. Through coaching, power is granted. It is given generously, and it empowers. To create a coaching culture, progressive leaders willingly share their power. Those Leaders see power as more like a see-saw, balanced between themselves and others, than some jungle-gym, where the aim is to hold the highest ground.

In any organization, for a coaching culture to thrive, the typical competition between senior leaders must reduce [11]. Via adoption of a coaching style, laterally as well as hierarchically, senior leaders reduce uncollaborative silo behavior. Those leaders acknowledge the necessity for collaboration if they are to achieve their goals. Senior leaders need to be less focused on the high ground, pursuing success through individual effort, and aim for success through shared ground, the aligned shared efforts of all members. This is because cognitive biases have paradoxical effects.

Leaders who are Generative focus on collective benefit, and hence collaborate

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readily. They focus on the below mentioned behaviors and ask the following questions to themselves:

- Behavior: Rather than command, they coach.
- Question: How can I help my direct report team to be its best?
- Behavior: Rather than compete, they coach.
- Question: How do I help my peer team best meet our challenges?
- Behavior: Rather than control, they develop.
- Question: How do I balance an investment in future capability with a focus on results right now?

Generative leaders cultivate trust by supporting and developing others [11]. They do what they can to equip others to do their best work. Not only does more and better quality work get done, this has the enormous benefit of relieving the 'power stress' [3] they feel.

A culture characterized by coaching has within it the seeds to create a sustainable, self generating leadership legacy. By being deliberately developmental [4], a coaching culture grows future leaders as it empowers and develops current leaders.

Despite the clear benefit of coaching to the measures that matter, many organizations still continue to reward practices that fracture collective will. They:

- Reinforce power differentials by rewarding command and control styles, where only top leaders make decisions;
- Over-recognize individual and under-recognize collective effort;
- Develop senior leaders while neglecting the development of those on the frontline.

Objective

The objective of this white paper is to focus on how to use coaching, and Coaching Circles, to support the growth and sustainability of a coaching culture in an organization.

Why Should Leaders Build a Coaching Culture?

It's simple. And the simple reason for creating and sustaining a coaching culture is that:

The coaching process generates. It generates new ideas, new possibilities, and new energy. When done well, it respects what exists, grows new opportunities, and becomes self generating. It increases well-being at work - satisfaction, positivity about events and feeling sufficiently resourced to meet challenges [5]. Coaching creates a well-being ripple effect, with impact going beyond the individual who is coached. In a nutshell, Coaching elevates the performance of everyone.

Why Culture?

Culture is the sum of collective interactions. "Culture expresses goals through values and beliefs and guides activity through shared assumptions and group norms." [6] Culture is shared, pervasive, enduring and implicit.

If leaders want their organization to achieve its goals, they need to build a purposeful culture. If leaders want their organization to change, to grow, adapt and respond, *culture* is a powerful lever. If leaders want to leave a positive *legacy*, they need to leave a positive *culture* behind.

Merely making strategy isn't enough. It is important and it's more tangible. That makes it easier. Paying attention to culture is harder. When the two are aligned, organizational performance and effectiveness is higher.

Many leaders don't understand the power of culture, and/or don't use it powerfully. To change the culture of the organization, leaders, inparticular, need to act in concert.

Why Coaching?

Coaching is an excellent way to change culture. And the coaching style reinforces a flexible culture that is guided by purpose and learning. People welcome change rather than stability. They care about the future, and are open and agile. Coaching embodies these features. This creates an affinity between the means and the end, helping to speed up the process of change.

One of the impediments to managers using coaching more frequently is that they 'don't have the time'. This thinking needs to be challenged. It contains within it a fundamental misconception of what it means to be a manager. What is the role of the manager? Is it to do? Or is it to support others to do? In coaching, it's the latter. A key value in a coaching culture is that it clarifies how to balance between results now and investing in the future.

How is Coaching
Different from Commanding

These are the key differences between a commanding, directive culture, and an empowering, coaching culture[12]:

Aspect	Commanding Culture	Coaching Culture
Focus on:	The past	The future
Ask:	What went wrong?	What do we need/want?
Apply:	Coercion	Attraction
Say:	I'll tell you how	I'll let you work out how
Ask:	What's the problem?	What's working?
Apply:	Negativity, deficit	Strengths, opportunities
Orientation:	What holds me back?	What propels me forward?
Ask:	Will it work?	How can we make this work?
Positioning:	Manager as expert	Person as expert on themselves
Approach:	Problems to fix	Goals to achieve

What is your
Coaching Culture?

As a leader, your organization's culture should reflect your organization's uniqueness, as well as its aspiration. There are many versions of coaching cultures being developed in organizations, and they reflect the will and the individuality of their champions. Whatever good reasons there may be for having a coaching culture, your's should reflect how you want it to be and how you want it to work.[6]

To cultivate a coaching culture, senior leaders need to [13]:

- Have a strong belief in coaching, and to coach others;
- Model their openness to being coached;
- Look for opportunities to help others learn, including identifying challenging work assignments;
- Ask open questions rather than provide the solution;
- Willingly give and receive feedback;
- Have honest conversations.

Kets de Vries views coaching cultures as genuinely authentic, clear in purpose and meaning. They create a sense of vitality for people, which leads to feeling invigorated and complete at work [7].

Designing a
Coaching Culture

Designing your coaching culture means being clear about your purpose, understanding the levers to work with, and having a clear plan of implementable action.

Setting the Levers
for a Cultural Change

Leaders could use the below mentioned four levers to evolve their culture [6]:

- Articulate their aspiration, identifying the high level principles of why they need to change, what they want to be, and how they will change;

- Ensure the alignment of all leaders to this change initiative.

- Encourage conversation about the change, and use conversational tactics for mobilizing change.

- Ensure organizational structure and systems support their aspiration.

Focus on
High Impact Actions

Three high value actions will help leaders accelerate the change are:

1. **Revisiting the leadership storybook**

   A leader's 'leadership storybook' connects aspiration and action. Change is difficult if some senior leaders don't connect with and come to embody the cultural aspiration. Hence it is imperative to identify where leaders sit on the support continuum and engage them accordingly.

   Changing the organization's culture means changing its collective leadership identity. The organization's leadership identity is strongly influenced by the CEO and his or her style of engagement. Shifting to a coaching culture means revising and using stories about leadership that are consistent with a coaching approach. Generating a cohesive storybook will connect lofty aspirations with day-to-day experience. The stories connect those at the top of the pyramid, with those at the bottom of the pyramid. This gives an accessible meaning and life to the change for individuals. It makes change more tangible and learnable.

   It is important to ask, what is in the storybook of the leader. For a leader the story book has the answers to the following questions. What it means for

leaders to coach, why they coach, what the value of coaching is, translated into stories of how it was done. How do the senior-most leaders talk about leadership? Both collective and their own?

How do they 'show up' as leaders? What do they actually do? Are their words and actions consistent? Do they speak the same language, give a consistent message?

How do others describe what leadership is like here? Is there alignment between the leaders' views and those of observers?

As a generative leader , one crucial action is to shape the playbook. Share it in as many ways as possible. Ensuring the themes are simple and clear, then encourage improvisation.

2. Triggering experiences that increase change motivation

An effort for change has the potential to breed anxiety in people.

When leaders speak about what's changing in the culture, they need to ensure that they speak about what's currently valuable and what will endure. This reduces the threat and anxiety of change.

Further, It is important for leaders to watch out for, and draw attention to, small wins, breakthroughs and forward   movement, as well as goal achievement. When this is done regularly it increase's people's motivation. Step by step, day by day, people will notice the   progress   they are making and will be motivated to continue to make change. They will be more willing participants in the change. They will see the value of change. They will see the value of their efforts.

People need nourishment, support and encouragement to change. When leaders encourage effort towards change and prevent change burnout by generously nourishing their teams, the culture needle moves   in   the   right   direction.   This nourishment comes from:

- Showing respect and trust;
- Giving encouragement;
- Providing emotional support;
- Building affiliation.

3. Starting out with the end in mind

Leaders can't embed a coaching culture by control or coercion. The implementation of a coaching culture change process should be congruent with its goal. That's because leaders will be both coaching on it, and coaching in it. Once the aspiration and the end goal is clear, and all senior leaders are aligned, what needs to be assessed is how well equipped are all the leaders for the change. Do they have shared aspirations and understanding? Once the leaders find that congruence it's more likely they will translate coaching into their daily life. The aim should be to achieve congruence at two levels. Align the culture change process with its goal. And help leaders to align themselves with what coaching means for them.

At this juncture, the processes need to be attuned responsively to match where the leaders are at. One needs to make sure that one factors in the time to work with mindsets and create awareness of the value of coaching. What do the leaders believe about coaching? Do they have the appetite to coach? What is their previous experience of coaching? What coaching microskills do they have? And which do they lack? What's the gap? For whom?

If leaders are to be set up to be great coaches, the content of the coaching training will do more than just align with organizational factors. It will also support leaders to be great coaches in a way that is congruent for them. It's more likely they will translate coaching into their daily life. It can't just be a formula, it needs to be something simple and flexible that they can take on as their own storybook. If they can describe what they're doing in their own words, they prime themselves for congruent action. Value the learning process, and encourage learning and experimentation, to ensure congruence. If the means match the end, the organization is more likely to achieve it's goals.

If coaching isn't a priority for leaders, then we know we don't have a coaching culture. If coaching doesn't become a priority for leaders, then the culture change program needs a definitive reset.

Generative Leaders Model Coaching in an 'Everyone Coaches' Culture

Coaching relationships do not have to be restricted to line manager - staff member. Different organizations experiment with the following approaches:

- **Peer to peer;**
- **Senior person with junior person where there is no direct line relationship;**
- **Coaching or HR specialist to employee;**
- **Anyone, anytime.**

Some organizations set up formal coaching relationships between leaders and others, mirroring those with external coaches. These relationships are in addition to the hierarchical relationship between the leader and his or her team members. 'Contracting' establishes the time frame, commitments and goals for coaching. This approach is good but not sufficient to develop a coaching culture. As line managers are the biggest part of the problem with engagement, they need to be the biggest part of the solution.

They are also confident that they have skills and capabilities and experiences that can be shared with their . The best coaching cultures are those where leaders use a coaching style with their teams. When leaders are coaching, and their teams are learning that this is how we do things here, a coaching style becomes pervasive.[15] Team members can take the opportunity to have coaching conversations with their bosses, peers can use the coaching style as they engage with each other, and so on. Coaching behaviors in these contexts take a conversational form. The coach is responsible only for maintaining and articulating his or her own developmental, action-oriented frame of reference, not for what the coachee does in response to these coaching behaviors. Coaching outside of the direct line relationship helps to embed the proposition that coaching is not just performance management in another guise.

Nurturing a Coaching Culture

There is a strong business case for building and nurturing a coaching culture in organizations. A 2017 study [9]performed by the International Coach Federation and Human Capital Institute found that those organizations with strong *coaching cultures* grew their revenue much more than industry peer group members (51% versus 38%). Their employees were significantly more engaged (62% versus 50%). A lot of coach training does not produce results because of neglecting to build a coaching culture that supports coaching as a way of life. Older, traditional command and control cultures, unless changed, will come in the course of coaching, becoming the way of managing a business. No amount of training will help. However, culture is based on shared values or principles. They can make a big difference.

In our effort to understand why leaders need to create a coaching culture, it's time to take a look at an organization that was built on a coaching culture. It has achieved remarkable growth in multiple businesses while starting from scratch and challenging entrenched incumbents. Studying Richard Branson's Virgin Group gives us the 3 Pillars of a Coaching

Culture that every organization that wants to build a coaching culture should consider adopting.

The Virgin Group Case Study

Richard Branson created the Virgin Group in 1970. As he and his partners had literally no experience in initiating and running businesses. Yet they made multiple successful businesses beginning with Music and going on to unrelated Airlines, and many others. The Virgin Group has now been in existence for 50 years, currently operating 40 companies across five business sectors and five continents. The business sectors are as diverse as Travel & Leisure, Health & Wellness, Music & Entertainment, Telecoms & Media, Financial Services, and even Space. Some quotes from Richard Branson that exemplify his coaching oriented leadership style are given below:

- *"The simple fact is that nobody ever learned anything by listening to themselves speak."* A coach usually does not tell but asks questions and listens.

- *"Frustration can be an enormous driver of change if you are good at spotting the opportunity sitting right at the center of a problem."* Looking for problems to solve is a.

way to find an opportunity than to live with frustration. Coaching is about helping people solve their problems by themselves.

- *"Surround yourself with people that are smarter than you, give them everything they need to grow, and your business will thrive."* When you hire talented people without feeling insecure and give them the freedom, resources, and support they need, they will ensure the business will do well.

- *"In order to grow, you must be able to let go."* It is important to give people freedom.

- *"There's only one thing that is an absolute certainty in business – we all make mistakes."* If you want team members to be creative, experiment, do new things, take risks, they will inevitably make mistakes. The most innovative organizations not only tolerate mistakes, some even celebrate them.

- *"My mantra in business has always been 'screw it, let's do it!' and that has meant that Virgin has pursued a number of ideas that haven't worked out. I don't see them as failures; I see them as experiences to be learned from."* Willingness to learn from failures helps build future success.

The 3 Pillars of a Coaching Culture[10]

Richard Branson hired Carol Wilson to run the music business. He had asked her what she was inspired to do (a coach asks questions), and she wanted to do anything but the job of a secretary, which was what women mostly did back then. She didn't know the music business, but no one else did either. It took her two years to realize how and in the third year, they launched the business, and in five years, they were able to compete with Warner Brother and CBS (now Sony). She writes that in the first two years, while learning, she achieved less than experienced managers, but after that, achieved much more than other managers in the industry as she was able to discover new ways of doing things. (https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/sir-richard-bransons-coaching-culture-virgin-carol-wilson/) With her extensive experience in the music business, she writes about the three principles that are the pillars of a coaching culture:

Responsibility

If people are micro-managed, they stop thinking for themselves. Provide a strategic plan, skills training, information access, freedom to decide, and to act how it suits them best.

Encourage diversity of skills, thoughts, opinions, and approaches in teams. Given responsibility, people will rise to the challenge if given a safe and supportive environment.

Coaching ensures that the peers/team members have a safe-space ensuring emotional and psychological safety from judgement and bias.

Self-belief

To build self-assurance in people to suggest new ideas, they need encouragement. To build faith and courage in their abilities to carry them out, they need to be allowed to learn through trial and error. The same way that a parent instinctively allows a child to fall several times while learning to walk.

At the workplace, the supervisor tends to behave differently. To encourage and motivate new thinking and new ideas is critical.

Blame free

If an organization is ever to become a coaching culture. Nurturing an environment where mistakes are treated as a learning process rather than a case for punishment is warranted. To build a sustainable coaching culture, it is critical to maintain an environment where mistakes are treated as a learning process rather than being punished. People who are punished for failure will do what they have succeeded in doing before. They will avoid doing anything new, which would make it impossible to keep pace with a fast-changing environment.

Let's look at ways in which a coaching culture can be nurtured

1. Set leaders up for success

One of the best ways to shift to a coaching culture is by cascading its introduction. Cascades, when done well, accelerate adoption and implementation. Likewise, peer-based training has particular value. Peer-based coaching development separates coaching from performance management, and helps to make the mindset shifts necessary for good coaching.

Organizations with a strong coaching culture provide more training. In an ICF study, the top 20% of organizations with the strongest cultures provided between 30 and 60 hours to leaders in a year [8].

Responsibility has to affixed on the leaders to coach for a fixed number of hours. To learn coaching, leaders/ managers need:

- A coaching mindset and skills development,
- The experience of being coached, and
- Development of personal insight - reflective, emotional, intuitive, inspirational - this is what enables

transformational change rather than a continuing focus on transactional change.

2. Create self-belief by promoting a coaching mindset

Coaching focuses on the employee; their needs, their interests, their suggestions and their development. That focus comes from a place of humility and inquiry that is both sanguine and genuine. It helps the employee to feel valued and appreciated for their performance and their potential. This is more than a set of skills and a couple of models. It is a way of engaging. Coaching takes a new mindset and new habits, as well as new tools. Coaching is based on a generative mindset. The focus is on the long term, enabling self-correction and self-generation. There needs to be realistic expectations about the time it takes to attune to the mindset of coaching, the confidence to use it and build the belief that one can be an effective coach.

3. Develop the crucial coaching micro-skills

Critical components of a development process are these coaching skill areas:

- Creation of a psychological safe environment in the line management-team relationship.
- Deeping the listening skills to hear the message and constructs cleanly.
- Asking open questions that explore assumptions and mindsets, and resultantly create a rich picture of the coachee's world.
- Constructively questioning unhelpful behaviors and attitudes.
- Affirming strengths.
- Increasing cognitive flexibility, to be open to new perspectives and able to introduce them in the coaching conversation.
- Not blame storming.

4. Encourage coaching conversations

Coaching is most powerful, yet very easy to do, in day-to-day conversations. A coaching style changes the nature of conversations. By focusing at the level of conversation, culture change in an organization can be accelerated. In conversations we take back control of time, and events and decisions can be sped up or slowed. Rather than view coaching as something to do from time to time, it can be seen less prescriptively. Coaching is always present as an option except in moments of true crisis. Leaders should ask themselves in every moment, not whether or not to coach, but what to coach for.

An anecdotal evidence:

In the movie *The African Queen*, Katharine Hepburn plays the prim and proper missionary to Humphrey Bogart's character of a hard-drinking river trader. There's a delightful coaching conversation in the 'twisted like a corkscrew' scene. In the scene, the character of African Queen survives the rapids and a waterfall. But the boat is damaged. Tugged up on the shore, Bogart surveys the damage. A blade has broken off the propeller and the shaft is twisted - like a corkscrew. For Bogart, that's it. Hepburn asks him what needs to be done. Bogart explains how, with the right kit, in the right port, it could all be fixed. Out here in the jungle, he sees that there's no hope. Hepburn listens and watches. And then she gives a masterclass in coaching - through

conversation. She focuses Bogart's mind away from what's not possible, towards what is possible. A resolution is discovered, the boat is repaired and they continue their onward journey.

On the first level, this demonstrates the power of coaching to deal with the problems we face right now. At a deeper level, it shows how to deal with problems in general. There will always be rapids and waterfalls that we can't adequately prepare for, or don't pay attention to. Hepburn shows that it is possible to confront challenges if we keep exploring options, stay positive, and believe that there is a solution to every problem. The power lies in asking questions, and hence, it is the questions we ask, that make the difference.

Coaching Circles
and it's Advantages

Coaching can play a critical role in coach development by challenging their usual way of seeing and doing things and helping them to expand our field of vision. It helps them to develop their ability to apprehend what life presents in creative and authentic ways through greater awareness, discernment and practice. Imagine if you had five trusted coaches at your service to help you tackle your most critical leadership challenges?

This is what coaching circles can offer. They powerfully marry the principles and practices of action learning (pioneered by Reg Revans) and those of integral development coaching (pioneered by James Flaherty) to create a learning environment rich in compassion and self-discovery. More to the point, coaching circles achieve a dual purpose: they help people take concrete actions to support their goals in the organization and they hone the coaching skills leaders need to express their leadership voice more fully.[16]

How coaching circles work

Coaching circles are typically composed of a small group of 4 to 6 people who meet at regular intervals. During these sessions, each person uses their own "airtime" (i.e. a period of 40-60 minutes) to present their issue or challenge and to receive coaching from the rest of the group. In its simplest form, there are typically four elements to each airtime[16]:

1. The presentation by the client of their challenge and coaching request.
2. A period of collaborative inquiry designed to help the client explore this challenge in new ways.
3. A period of solo reflection to explore what was meaningful and impactful to each.
4. A period of voicing where people share their insights and what they intend to do differently.

Enjoying the Coaching Culture

Many of the benefits of coaching have been explored thus far in this whitepaper. Both, those doing the coaching, and those being coached, experience the benefits.

How leaders benefit from coaching

The action of coaching itself becomes rewarding. One of the reasons that coaching is powerful for improving performance is that to coach others rather than tell them what to do requires more focused attention. By developing others, leaders are also developing themselves. It is also powerful, and potentially energizing, for leaders to coach. The coaching

mindset reduces the 'power stress' that many leaders report. And it contributes to well-being.

How teams and individuals benefit from being coached

When coached well, the quality of relationship between the individual and their line manager improves. As noted earlier, well-being also improves. When leaders have the right coaching skills, and coach frequently, they generate engaged and empowered work teams. The graph below shows the impact of coaching capability and coaching frequency on team members.
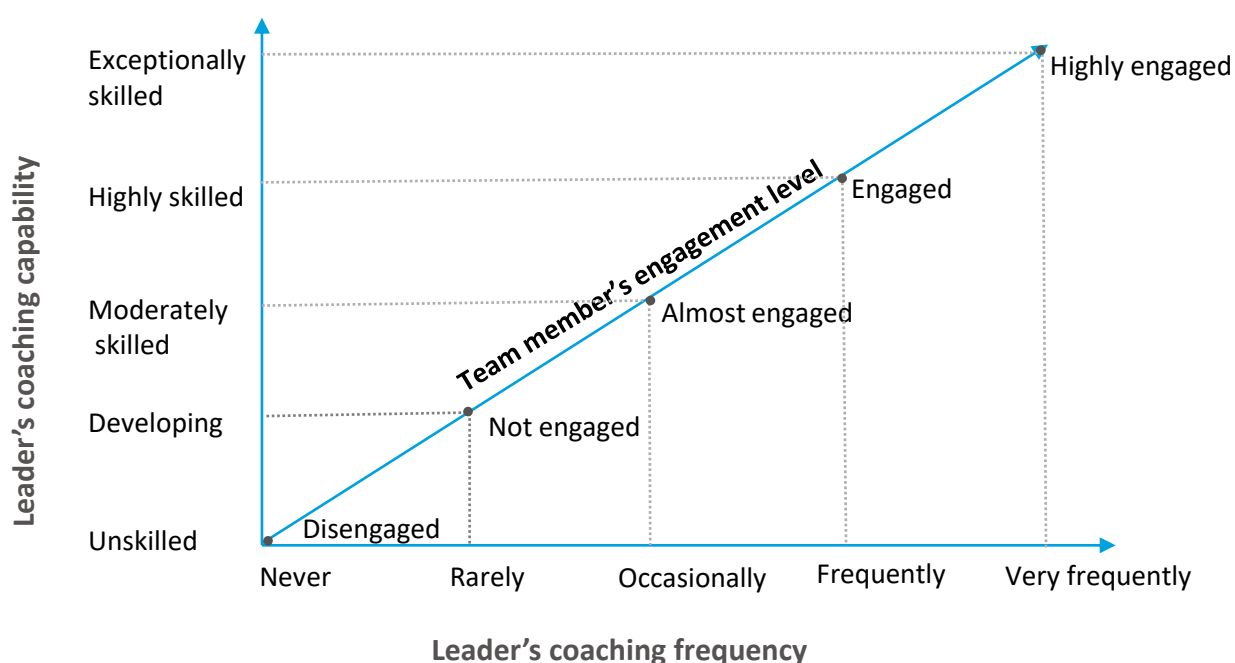
Sustaining the Coaching Culture

Any time someone is coached well, they become more coach-like themselves. This is part of the ripple effect of coaching. When people in organizations start coaching, they start to find their own answers and become more resourceful. People work more effectively together because they engage in dialogue, they listen and ask questions rather than tell, and they see resistance as an opportunity rather than a threat. The nature of conversations between people changes. Interactions become more positive.

The coaching style ripples out as more people enjoy its experience.

Organizations that have got a coaching culture, have got a sustainable legacy. A culture characterized by coaching has within it the seeds to create a sustainable, self-generating leadership legacy. By being deliberately developmental, a coaching culture grows future leaders as it empowers and develops current leaders.[17]

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