INTRODUCTION

As a consequence of the widespread adoption of coaching interventions in professional contexts in many of the world’s leading economies (Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey, 2015), attention has turned to finding ways of sustaining the positive effects of coaching and broadening out its impact across organisations. The phrase ‘coaching culture’ is often used within organisational settings, despite the fact that there seems to be little shared understanding of what this means (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014). This chapter considers the key characteristics of a coaching culture and provides some practical ideas for organisations interested in leveraging the benefits of coaching. The chapter concludes with some thoughts about the future of coaching cultures within organisational settings.

There seems to be growing agreement that coaching has a positive role to play within organisational settings. For example, Penny Valk, Chief Executive of the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), noted that ‘coaching is a particularly powerful tool in the modern workplace – one that has proven to be a highly effective way of developing individual and organisational performance by unlocking capability. At its best, this key management tool can deliver considerable benefits, helping managers get the most from their teams, boosting employee engagement and developing high performing workplaces’ (Institute of Leadership and Management, 2011: 1).

According to a survey commissioned by the ILM, coaching is widely used in professional contexts within the UK (see Table 16.1).
Table 16.1 Responses to ILM survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What proportion of organisations use coaching as a development tool?</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What proportion of organisations make coaching available to all staff?</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What proportion of organisations provide ongoing support and development for internal coaches?</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many respondents saw the direct benefits of coaching to the organisation?</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What proportion of organisations use coaching for the personal development of staff?</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What proportion of organisations use coaching for improving organisational performance?</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What proportion of organisations measure the outcomes of coaching?</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Created from data gathered from an ILM report that was based on telephone interviews with learning and development managers at 250 large organisations (Institute of Leadership and Management, 2011).

WHAT IS A COACHING CULTURE?

This widespread use of coaching has raised questions and interest about how organisations can leverage the most value out of coaching interventions. Peter Hawkins, Professor of Leadership at Henley Business School (UK), sees the creation of coaching cultures as the ‘next phase in the development of coaching’ (2012: 2). Clutterbuck and Megginson, both leading figures in the area of coaching and mentoring, propose that a coaching culture is one in which ‘coaching is the predominant style of managing and working together … where a commitment to grow the organization is embedded in a parallel commitment to grow the people in the organization’ (2005: 19). The phrase ‘parallel commitment’ is very helpful in this context. In other words, if we are interested in pursuing a coaching culture, we should note that a dual focus is required: the organisation’s goals on the one hand and the growth of people within the organisation on the other. Coaching interventions can be planned and implemented in ways that fully support both aims.

Following a comprehensive review of the literature, Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh developed a revised definition of coaching cultures based on a ‘bringing together’ of existing ideas and concepts: ‘… coaching cultures exist when a group of people embrace coaching as a way of making holistic improvements to individuals and the organisation through formal and informal coaching interactions. This can mean a large proportion of individuals adopting coaching behaviours to relate to, support, and influence one another and their stakeholders’ (2014: 92).

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A COACHING CULTURE?

Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) identified some consistent features of prevailing theories about coaching cultures.
• Coaching can form an integral part of how organisations develop their people.
• Coaching can be embedded within regular performance management processes.
• Coaching can demonstrate a commitment to support the professional growth of individuals within an organisation.
• Creating a coaching culture requires investment and can take time.
• Creating a coaching culture can lead to changes in the organisation with rewards for staff, stakeholders and clients.

WHAT ARE THE PROPOSED BENEFITS OF COACHING CULTURES?

The proposed benefits of coaching cultures are manifold. Bringing together the results of a number of research projects, evaluations and case studies of internal coaching programmes, it is possible to reflect on some of the consistently noted positive outcomes.

According to an evaluation undertaken by Carter et al. (2009), an internal coaching programme for managers resulted in enhanced emotional intelligence, increased self-awareness, improved relationships between staff, enhanced interpersonal skills, increased workplace confidence, an improved ability to manage and better work-life balance. In a similar study, McKee et al. (2009) found that coachees reported increased loyalty to their organisation, development in their leadership abilities, improved communication with peers, an enhanced ability to resolve conflicts, and a renewed passion to support the development of others. In a study based in India, Mukherjee (2012) proposed that there were both direct and indirect benefits for managers trained to act as coaches within the organisation. Mukherjee concluded that ‘coaching is one of the most effective tools in building leadership capacity’ within organisations. These findings are presented in Table 16.2.

Table 16.2 The proposed benefits of coaching interventions within organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Benefit</th>
<th>Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced emotional intelligence</td>
<td>Carter et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-awareness</td>
<td>Carter et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better relationships/communication with colleagues</td>
<td>Carter et al., McKee et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Carter et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased confidence</td>
<td>Carter et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better ability to manage/lead</td>
<td>Carter et al., McKee et al., Mukherjee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better work-life balance</td>
<td>Carter et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased loyalty to organisation</td>
<td>McKee at al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced ability to resolve conflicts</td>
<td>McKee at al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewed passion to support development of others</td>
<td>McKee at al.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT A COACHING CULTURE EXISTS?

Many organisations now use coaching within a range of learning and development, and organisational development interventions. However, it is not always clear when a coaching culture can be said to exist within an organisation. According to a leading expert in this field, ‘a coaching culture exists in an organisation when a coaching approach is a key aspect of how the leaders, managers, and staff engage and develop all their people and engage their stakeholders’ (Hawkins, 2012: 21). In other words, the existence of a coaching culture can be determined if most people within an organisation use a coaching approach. While this is a good measure, it is a difficult variable to observe and record. Furthermore, questions could be raised about who makes the decisions about whether the managers and staff are employing a coaching approach in their interactions. Having said this, it seems appropriate to judge whether an organisation has a coaching culture based on the experiences of its people and its clients or stakeholders. The ‘Framework for Practitioners 3: Coaching Cultures’ presented at the end of this chapter provides an example of a helpful way of assessing the existence of coaching cultures.

HOW CAN WE WORK TOWARDS A COACHING CULTURE?

Even though there has been little clarity within the field about the exact definition of a coaching culture, there have been many attempts to identify ways of creating, developing and embedding coaching cultures. Early writers on the topic, Clutterbuck and Megginson (2005), proposed that there were four stages of development towards a coaching culture:

1. **Nascent**: almost no commitment to the concept of a coaching culture.
2. **Tactical**: some recognition that a coaching culture may be desirable but only a vague understanding of the concept.
3. **Strategic**: investment has been made towards developing a coaching culture and leaders start to model best practice.
4. **Embedded**: people across the organisation are involved in coaching and these initiatives align with organisational objectives.

While Clutterbuck and Megginson's four stages related to the phases that organisations might go through en route to a coaching culture, Passmore and Jastrzebska (2011) recommended a ‘journey’ comprising of five stages.
A journey towards a coaching culture

1. Informal external coaching.
2. Professional external coaching.
3. Coaching as a management style.
4. Coaching for all.
5. Coaching across the network.

Hawkins (2012) suggests a more comprehensive seven-step process.

The seven steps towards a coaching culture

1. Procuring external coaches.
2. Developing internal coaching capacity.
3. Leaders supporting coaching initiatives.
4. Developing team coaching/organisational learning.
5. Embedding coaching in performance management.
6. Coaching becoming the dominant style of managing.
7. Coaching used to do business with stakeholders.

Discussing the creation of coaching cultures in educational settings, van Nieuwerburgh and Passmore propose an integrated process for working towards a coaching culture. They recommend aligning the process to the Appreciative Inquiry stages of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (4-D cycle) (Srivastva et al., 1990) in order to gain buy-in for the move towards a coaching culture from all stakeholders. The 4-D cycle is then followed up by the leadership team who would take responsibility for ensuring that:

- Suggestions and proposals for moving towards a coaching culture were incorporated into the organisation’s strategic plans.
- Leaders across the organisation model the new behaviours.
- They were available to support the implementation of action plans.
- Challenges and difficulties were engaged with quickly and efficiently.
- Successes were regularly celebrated.

(van Nieuwerburgh and Passmore, 2012: 171)
Having considered a number of proposed routes towards coaching cultures, it seems that, generally speaking, the following broad stages seem to be supportive of the creation of coaching cultures. It seems that it is helpful to have an initial stage of assessment. How well is the organisation doing already? What is in place? What is the appetite for a coaching culture? Who will support it? How will leadership buy-in be secured? This initial stage may need to be followed by some championing. This may include enlisting the support of influential thought leaders who are enthusiastic about the proposed coaching culture. It also requires leaders to ‘champion’ the benefits of coaching, particularly by modelling best practice and getting involved in coaching initiatives. The authors in this book have consistently argued for the provision of high-quality training for those who will be involved in coaching others. This training should be offered to those who volunteer to take on coaching roles within the organisation. Following the training, an internal coaching resource should be set up. The existence of internal coaches seems to be one of the principal ways of leveraging the benefits of coaching within professional contexts (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014). A key to the long-term success of coaching within professional contexts is organisational alignment. The use of coaching interventions and approaches should be integrated into existing schemes, projects and objectives. Coaching should not be seen as a ‘bolt-on’ initiative. The final stage necessary for embedding coaching within organisations is normalisation. Formal coaching sessions, managers using a coaching approach and informal coaching conversations should become part of ‘the way we do things round here’.

**ACTION planning for a coaching culture**

- Assessment
- Championing
- Training
- Internal coaching resource
- Organisational alignment
- Normalisation

For those who like acronyms and checklists, the ACTION plan may provide a way of working towards a coaching culture. However, it should be acknowledged that the development of a coaching culture is a complex, albeit valuable, undertaking. We believe that the process of working towards a coaching culture is ongoing. The ethos of a coaching culture demands continual improvement and an openness to new ideas about creating a better environment in which to work.
For readers who are less comfortable with acronyms and checklists, we would propose an alternative approach. This comprises of three questions that should be addressed by those wishing to move towards a coaching culture.

**Three Questions**

- What is the case for a coaching culture?
- How can we transfer what is most powerful about coaching conversations into our workplace?
- What will be different in our organisation as we work towards a coaching culture?

The principle of *democratic voluntary involvement* is a necessary part of the process and should underpin initiatives to support the development of coaching cultures. ‘Democratic’ means that everyone has the opportunity to participate. ‘Voluntary’ means that each person is given a choice about whether or not to engage in coaching-related activities. ‘Involvement’ means that those who volunteer should be able to contribute positively in one way or another. By addressing the three questions listed above and adhering to the principle of democratic voluntary involvement, organisations can develop their own unique ways of pursuing coaching cultures.

**Practical ideas for consideration before embarking on a journey towards a coaching culture**

- Creating a coaching culture will require a significant investment of time and money.
- It is important to make sure that the people involved see some value in working towards a coaching culture.
- From the start, it is helpful to think about how the benefits of a coaching culture will flow beyond the organisation's staff to clients and stakeholders.
- Coaching initiatives and programmes should be co-created based on the principle of democratic voluntary involvement.

**REFERENCES**