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The Value to Organisations and Individuals of a Blended Approach to Coaching

Article prepared by Paul Turner February 2006

The use of coaching for improving managerial, leadership and executive performance and for career development identification and planning continues to increase in organisations. Gaining an appreciation of the effectiveness of coaching is becoming an important consideration for organisations. Comfortingly, more and more studies are showing that, when the coaching aims and processes have been carefully analysed and considered by competent coaches, then individuals and organisations are reporting that real, measurable benefits have occurred from the subsequent coaching.

While face-to-face coaching is normally regarded as being the most effective method, particularly from the individual client's perspective, if the coach is based a considerable distance from the client, then the logistics and time taken to enable each session to take place, given that they are often no longer than 2 to 3 hours long can be a concern from efficiency and/or cost-effectiveness standpoints. This is just one of many situations where a blended coaching solution may well be more advantageous to all parties.

So what might be involved in blended coaching? Coaching processes mostly involve verbal communication and the auditory sense, sometimes visual [which includes writing and reading] and kinaesthetic [using movement] and much less frequently, touch and olfactory [smell] and taste - coaching those whose hearing or sight is seriously impaired are specialist skills. Given the dominance of verbal and written communication, the usual possibilities for coaching are face-to-face, by telephone, by e-mail, by pre-recorded audio or DVD or live in a real-time combined text, sound and visual link.

Theoretically, a 'blended' solution for effective coaching can involve all of these and where all these possibilities also exist in practice, the opportunity for an individually designed, maximised blended coaching programme is available. In my view, each effective coaching intervention needs at a very minimum an appropriately detailed analysis and understanding of an individual's or team's situation, their environment[s] and their aims and feelings. This is best achieved face-to-face, as is the beginning of the development of trust and rapport between the client and coach, both vital for a successful coaching outcome. Thereafter, the degree and formulation of 'blending' is determined by the particular needs of the client and the communication resources available to both client and coach.

The seemingly ever increasing pace of new electronic means of communications beyond email and conventional telephony is opening up some real and exciting possibilities for coaching e.g. web-casts, tailored e-learning material, web-based combined voice, visual communications and SMS alerts

For many coaching assignments today a combination of face-to-face, email, telephone and free real-time visual voice and text messaging systems e.g. MSN Messenger can provide great opportunities for effective and efficient coaching results.

The non face-to-face elements of coaching allow:

- a reduced cost of a coaching contract for an individual or an organisation
- for an organisation, the possibility of coaching for more individuals and teams for the same spend on a smaller number where all coaching takes place face-to-face
- more frequent coaching than for a similar spend on face-to-face coaching
- the possibility, often very valuable, of an immediate situation coaching session for a issue which is pertinent to the coaching plan and has just arisen, or is about to arise with short notice

So for many situations, a blended approach will be the smart method of coaching for effectiveness and efficiency. It is certainly worth exploring and we at the Link Management Group would be happy to have a no obligation conversation about the merits of this, or any other coaching possibility for you or for your organisation.