3 KEY COACHING COMPETENCIES FOR SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
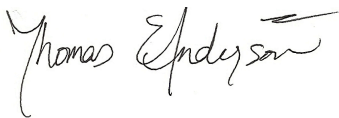
Dear Organizational Leader,

Welcome to Teaiiano Leadership Solutions! In 2015 as part of a master's level culminating project, I reached out to local business owners and managers to get a sense of their familiarity with coaching, and how much they used coaching in their organizations. The positive response prompted me to dig for more information, and pretty soon, I was in the midst of a deep dive into business literature related to organizational coaching. What I found was interesting: desired business outcomes overlap with coaching competencies. That experience changed my perspective on why business owners, leaders and managers are increasingly integrating coaching practices into daily business operations.

For the past 3 years, I have surveyed business and academic literature searching for connections between coaching and strategic business outcomes. My research questions have evolved in that time from: "Why should leaders and managers care about coaching?" to "What makes leaders and managers adopt coaching practices?" to "How do coaching practices help companies to meet their goals?" These questions led to an examination of coaching ROI (hint: it's not limited to a financial return) and how organizations use coaching to improve employee performance, well-being and engagement.

The vision at Teaiiano is to partner with visionary leaders and entrepreneurs to make a positive impact on the world. Coaching is changing the way the world communicates. If you are interested in using coaching skills to improve your communication culture, I would encourage you to read further to see how what we do at Teaiiano can be of value to you and to your organization.

Hoping to connect,

Thomas E. Anderson, II
CEO and Facilitator
Teaiiano Leadership Solutions

A SHIFT IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizations have evolved over the last 100 years. The overall design of companies has drifted away from the "cog-in-a-wheel" type bureaucracy, as executive leaders began to embrace a more organic, networked form of organization. Inflexible company cultures still exist but have proven counterproductive to facing challenges posed by the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex/chaotic, ambiguous) environment. Inflexible cultures have resulted in employee work-life issues such as[1]:

- Lack of purpose
- Feelings of misuse and abuse
- Substance addiction
- Low self-esteem
- Sabotage, personal/family issues
- A host of counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) such as withdrawal, sabotage, and shrinkage.[2]

Most relevant for managers and executive leaders, these employee issues hinder job focus and employee performance, which affects the overall performance of the company.

Managers have the unique task of balancing team performance and interpersonal dynamics. In other words, managers are balancing task orientation on one hand and relationship orientation on the other. Establishing open, two-way communication patterns within organizational life facilitates the balancing act, and the presence (or absence) of this pattern lends keen insights into the culture of an organization. When effective, two-way communication becomes a pattern in organizations, its presence can be detected by an open flow of communication between leaders and followers.

Richard Daft (2013) explains "an organization exists when people interact with one another to perform essential functions that help attain goals. An organization is a means to an end" (p.12, emphasis added)[3]. This definition of organizations inspires two questions:

- Is pursuing goals in direct competition with building relationships?
- If so, what can organizations do to change that pattern?

For decades, great focus has been placed on the benefits of executive coaching and leadership coaching for managers and leaders. While leadership coaching is crucial for organizational success, let's zoom out to examine how coaching benefits entire organizations by creating an atmosphere or culture of engagement.

In an effort to bridge the gap between coaching skills and organizational outcomes, this insights paper delivers the following outcomes:

- Discusses how organizations can use key coaching skills to improve employee communication satisfaction.
- Explains how these coaching competencies create an environment that accelerates organization goal achievement through increased employee engagement and improved employee performance.
- Focuses on the impact of giving and receiving feedback.

Before diving into the competencies, it is important to establish the definition and characteristics of coaching and explain how coaching benefits organizations.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching is a skillset that many companies are integrating into their company culture. The International Coaching Federation, or ICF, officially defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." Coaching functions in various ways within organizational life. One way to think about coaching is through the following seven functions:

1. Coaching is a **service** that supports achievement of business and personal goals.
2. Coaching is a **solution** that keeps clients moving forward toward their agenda and growth goals.
3. Coaching is a **set of techniques and skills** including open questions, the G.R.O.W. model, unpacking, reframing, and S.M.A.R.T.Y. goals.
4. Coaching is a **set of competencies** that focuses largely on co-creating relationships, communicating effectively, facilitating learning, planning, and goal achievement. [4]

5. Coaching is a **capability** that organizations integrate into business operations to improve performance and achievement.
6. Coaching is a **discipline** that co-exists alongside counseling, mentoring, consulting, and facilitation.
7. Coaching is a **movement** that is transforming communication culture, one conversation at a time.

> E m p l o y e e issues hinder job focus and e m p l o y e e performance, which affects the overall performance of the company.

Coaching is changing the culture of organizational communication and decentralizing throughout organizations at an unprecedented rate. Coaching allows companies to build the type of cultures they can be proud of. Organizational coaches also work to create cultures that reengage employees, and <u>without</u> putting undue strain on managers, employees or executive leadership.

Within an organizational context, coaching sessions are designed to improve job performance and productivity from a holistic approach. Fortune 500 companies, such as Walt Disney, Apple, Continental, Harley Davidson, have integrated coaching for executives into HR operations. Other companies have successfully integrated coaching at lower levels of the organization to guide employees in making positive change on their jobs, in their lives, and in their careers.

So "how do key coaching competencies impact and improve organizations?"

3 KEY COACHING COMPETENCIES

Leaders and managers can mobilize three coaching capabilities that positively affect employee-manager communication and engagement: practicing mindful reflection, giving and receiving quality feedback, and facilitating learning outcomes.

COMPETENCY 1: MINDFUL REFLECTION

(ICF Core Competency: B.4.1-2 on Co-Creating the Relationship by Establishing Coaching Presence; C.5 on Communicating Effectively through Active Listening)

Effective coaching requires the discipline of mindful reflection. A person practices mindfulness, or sense-making, by "reflectively paying attention through monitoring personal feelings, thoughts and actions [to] make sense of […] situations, events and actions…by removing a rigid or fixed mindset".[5] Mindfulness is the exact opposite of mindlessness where there exists "no need to think about what you're doing because it comes naturally and is accepted and expected" with no reason to question one's assumptions because of the expectation that things will continue uninterrupted on auto-pilot.[6] Mindlessness among employees and leaders counteracts strategic goals, but given the global realities of change, mindfulness is useful at multiple levels of the organization.

Due to globalization and shifting demographics, diversity has become a hot topic in organizations. Diverse organizational cultures cause organizations and people that work for them to change. In fact, managing personal change is one factor that accelerates organizational change.[7] Coaching guides employees and leaders in practicing the discipline of mindful reflection as a springboard to personal change.

The practice of cultural intelligence (CQ) underscores workplace diversity. Tuleja (2014) describes mindfulness in the context of cultural intelligence. In fact, the components of cultural intelligence and mindfulness overlap with coaching competencies, including:
- Listening
- Observing
- Behavior modification
- Alteration of communication preferences
- Reflective thinking to resolve cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance resolution allows everyone from line-workers to global leaders to discover their own answers, which facilitates a more lasting learning experience and maximizes the commitment to selected actions.[8] [9] Mindfulness requires

emotional intelligence and the ability to delay one's reaction in order to take in environmental cues, listen, observe, and reflect.[10] [11]

COMPETENCY 2: GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

(ICF Coaching Competency: C.7.1 on Providing Clear, Articulate, and Direct Feedback)

Studies on effective communication have found that employees desire quality, timely, and actionable feedback from their managers. In interviews with leaders across industries that asked them about their ideal communication situations, receiving quality feedback was the most popular response. Feedback is a component of two-way communication, which generates an overall sense of communication satisfaction for followers. In fact, feedback represents a unique convergence of three important benefits and/or outcomes: what employees desire from supervisor communication, benefits for the organizations and an important skill coaches specialize in. Instruments, such as pulse surveys and the 360-degree anonymous feedback exercise, are valuable tools that managers use to generate quick feedback and gain implementable insights. However, these assessments should not replace face-to-face feedback. Workers desire feedback that is positive, constructive, and timely – giving them the ability to make adjustments.

5 Tips to Giving Employee Feedback
Followers prefer open, semi-official two-way dialogue that takes place at least on a monthly basis. The preference also includes unstructured conversations as well as structured settings. Employees desire feedback that occurs in addition to official performance reviews. Leaders can use the following five tips to guide themselves in giving feedback to followers:
1. Frequency: employees want more instances of feedback than managers think they give
2. Quality: managers should explain strengths of the employee's performance and suggest improvements
3. Quantity: employees want timely and immediate feedback
4. Setting: managers should consider the degree of formality and create a balance between formal/informal and structured/unstructured environments
5. Actionability: employees desire easily implementable feedback

> Employees enjoy receiving and giving feedback, especially with the ability to **speak freely** with their leaders.

Receiving Employee Feedback
Just as employees like receiving feedback from their leaders, they also enjoy providing feedback, with the ability to speak freely with their leaders. Leaders can use this feedback to inform organizational strategy. Robert Bradford and J. Peter Duncan (1999) explain that employees are the best sources for information about the outside world if leaders take time to listen to their people (p.54). By involving people in the information gathering process, leaders gain an understanding of customers, competitors and the overall conditions of the marketplace. This increases employee buy-in, resulting in long-term gains for the company.

Feedback as a Trust-building Coaching Discipline
While serving as Director of Strategic Leadership of U.S. Cellular, Jim Gustafson coached his employees on a daily basis to explore possibilities, achieve their potential and maximize their contribution to the company. He intentionally changed leadership behavior to use appreciative inquiry, work with followers to create more authentic communication, and inspire a more collaborative and trusting environment (Daft, 2011, p.468). Leaders who solicit feedback build and preserve trust, especially in times of change.

When it comes to feedback, followers want it frequently, specifically, and descriptively. Most of all, they desire feedback delivered in a way that positions them to take action. For instance, most employees have a fear of making mistakes. More aptly, the anxiety associated with receiving negative consequences for mistakes causes many employees to play the blame game. Employers also shun mistakes, viewing them as a waste of money and time. However, leaders can make sense of mistakes and encourage employees to learn from them. This communicates to employees that the only bad mistake is the one they fail to learn from.

During organizational change, employees need encouragement to try new things. Employees will make mistakes, especially when trying out new tasks or learning a new job function. Followers, especially lower performers, require more encouragement than higher performers. Even a high performer engaging in a new task or taking on a new responsibility needs encouragement as they learn. Leaders should provide coaching that encourages them to critically assess what they have learned and provides feedback to prevent repeating mistakes. Leaders can build trust by inviting employees into the conversation and by allowing

them to share their feedback without fear of recourse. Mistakes can be costly; however, the larger cost is not learning from them. Coaching discourages blaming and encourages learning.

COMPETENCY 3: EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES FOR EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING

(ICF Core Competency D.8 on Facilitating Learning and Results through Creating Awareness;
D.9 on Facilitating Learning and Results through Designing Actions)

Although research shows that manager engagement accounts for the 70% variance in employee engagement, the responsibility to produce strategic outcomes cannot fall solely on management and executive leadership.[12] Stakeholders should adopt shared ownership of key results, such as employee engagement, well-being, and productivity.[13]

Coaching provides managers with an alternative to the decision-making bottleneck, evidenced by overflowing email inboxes and an inundation of paperwork. Through coaching, managers can empower employees to effectively participate in the decision-making process. A manager's use of coaching skills places adequate responsibility in the hands of employees and facilitative ability in the hands of the manager. Feedback should complement empowerment to give employees an idea of how they are performing, outside of official reviews.

When planned and implemented effectively, coaching reduces the amount of strain on the manager and leads to a more effective, participative decision-making process. This shifts the manager's role from one that single-handedly makes all decisions, to a leader who facilitates the implementation of organizational outcomes. To effectively motivate team members, it is crucial for managers to ask for feedback as well. Managers should communicate interest in receiving feedback verbally and non-verbally. They can use listening and effective questioning techniques to send non-verbal signals that they are interested in receiving feedback. A leader who invites feedback with an attitude of receptivity communicates that he cares about the follower's growth. Managers who establish an authentic sense of caring are well-positioned to build trust and rapport with both employees.

WHAT MAKES COACHING WORK?
Coaching is a dynamic process inclusive of multiple competencies. The most important coaching competency, however, is not a skill or technique. It is an attitude. For coaching to work as effectively as possible, one must develop the heart of a coach. The coaching manager should believe the best in their employees. This attitude of believing the best in employees makes coaching work. Without it, coaching skills and techniques ultimately result in a zero-sum game.

Organizations use coaching techniques to not only navigate the complexities of change, but to also engage employees on a strategic level. The fundamental concept of engagement requires employees to go above and beyond the call of duty to meet the organization's goals. Leaders and managers can utilize coaching competencies to produce strategic organizational outcomes such as effective communication cultures and participative decision-making.

Let's Connect
If you are interested in creating a culture of engagement or strengthening your current culture with the concepts presented in this paper, I would like to connect with you. To schedule a time to talk about how our solutions can specifically benefit your organization, contact Thomas E. Anderson, II at t_anderson@teaiiano.com or (240) 499-2828.

OUR SOLUTIONS

Real Talk Training (RTT)
While the Cultures of Engagement Series briefly introduces three of eleven coaching competencies, Real Talk Training (RTT) equips attendees to use professional coaching techniques to revolutionize their everyday interactions with co-workers and managers. Participants unlock sustainable personal change by learning to:
- Ask powerful questions that enhance learning
- Listen for what really matters
- Connect meaningfully at home and at work
- Empower others toward transformation
- Uncover forgotten dreams
- Make conflict less demanding and more productive

Geared toward training leaders in effective interpersonal communication skills, RTT is an interactive experience that includes demonstration, practice, and constructive feedback.

Effective Feedback Workshop
Giving and receiving feedback is deceptively simple. Factors such as timeliness, quality, trust, and organizational hierarchy make for a complex communication exchange without the proper principles to guide your approach. Feedback involves more than a set of techniques and strategies. Learn the 5 keys to effective feedback, and how to implement them in your team setting. Participants will also learn principles and application for:
- Integrating feedback into organizational life as a productive on-going process that supports strategy implementation.
- Developing and preserving trust to ensure that feedback is well-received
- Providing feedback that respects communication styles, job focus, and organizational interests
- Delivering effective, actionable feedback that is timely, high-quality, and authentic

When implemented effectively, feedback has the power to open the lines of communication. Our approach to feedback bridges the gap between trust and open communication.

FaciliTraining
At Teaiiano, we believe the answers are in the room. Our FaciliTrainings take the coach approach by drawing the answers out of employees and managers to come up with a solution that will work for your organization. This team building exercise is designed to guide teams, departments, task forces, and organizations through a process of strategic thinking. FaciliTrainings consist of two (2) parts:
1. A workshop to learn (or review) principles and best practices of a leadership topic
2. A strategic thinking session that applies what you've learned to co-create a deliverable or action plan that you have pre-selected

Facilitators collaborate with organizational sponsors to co-create the agenda for the session. Topics include (but are not limited to) the following:
1. Effective Decision Making
2. Creative Problem Solving
3. Teamwork and Collaboration
4. Vision, Strategy & Action Planning

The session format varies to accommodate conferences, half-day, and evening sessions.

Effective Decision Making FaciliTraining
Middle managers are experiencing ever-increasing work demands and longer, more intense work hours than ever before. One way to alleviate the strain associated with management is to clear the decision bottlenecks that appear in everyday life. These can take the form of paperwork inundation, overflowing email inboxes, and large stacks of miscellaneous work that accumulate on the desktop. Although research shows that manager engagement greatly impacts employee engagement, the responsibility to produce strategic outcomes cannot fall solely on management and executive leadership.

The Effective Decision Making FaciliTraining is designed to establish a shared sense of ownership for key results. In our Effective Decision Making FaciliTraining, participants will engage in strategic thinking sessions to:
- Co-create a process for effective decision-making that works for your team
- Apply principles of effective decision making to a real situation in a team setting
- Design processes for more effective decision-making and delegation

Facilitators will collaborate with organizational sponsors to co-create the agenda for the session.

FaciliTrainings are an effective way to increase engagement among multiple generations (i.e. Millennials, boomers, Gen Xers), as well as build consensus and buy-in through a process of collaboration. These sessions are also great for task-forces, team building, and action planning.

More Information
You can also visit our website at www.teaiiano.com to download more of our insights papers and read our blog posts.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Thomas E. Anderson, II (t_anderson@teaiiano.com) is CEO and Facilitator of Teaiiano Leadership Solutions. He is an alumnus of Columbia University, and holds an M.Div. and Masters of Organizational Leadership in Organizational Development Consulting from Regent University. Thomas is a recurring presenter at the Annual Research Roundtables at Regent University's School of Business and Leadership and is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in strategic leadership.   Thomas has published scholarly articles in the Journal of Practical Consulting (JPC) on coaching, organization change, well-being and employee engagement. Thomas holds leadership coach credentials from Lifeforming Leadership Coaching and works with students from grades K through 12 in one of the nation's top performing school districts. Above all, he enjoys being a devoted husband to wife, Jamie, and dedicated father to Arianna and Azalia.

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