



Building a successful coaching environment at LogicaCMG

Making coaching mainstream in a skeptical organization is a challenging task. John Blakey, LogicaCMG's coaching director, shares four ways to make coaching part of your business culture.

In the November/December 2004 issue of *Strategic HR Review*, Nigel Perks, group HR director at LogicaCMG, described the HR challenges that were successfully overcome in the merger of Logica and CMG to create a 21,000-person, global IT services company.¹ One aspect of these challenges involved appointing one of the company's most successful managing directors as director of coaching.

Over the course of two years, LogicaCMG developed an approach to coaching designed to deliver benefits to the bottom line. John Blakey, director of coaching at LogicaCMG, describes how the company has gone about meeting this challenge.

The challenge

One of the key leadership challenges post-merger was succession planning for the new executive committee members. A presentation to the group board in September 2003 noted that five executive committee members were due to retire in the next five years. More worryingly, there was no

visible internal pipeline of successors for these key leadership roles, nor were there structures in place which would develop such a pipeline.

This challenge was symptomatic of the wider organization. Previous HR processes built for an era of high growth, rising salaries and skills shortages in a much smaller organization were no longer appropriate for the motivation and development of 21,000 employees operating in a far more competitive environment. It was against this backdrop that LogicaCMG took a series of steps to introduce a coaching culture which would identify and nurture the business leaders of the future.

The approach

To build a successful coaching environment, we had to tackle the immediate business need of succession planning for the executive committee. In parallel, the foundations for wider coaching initiatives across the organization had to be put in place so coaching wasn't seen as a tool for the "elite few" alone.

The immediate succession planning need resulted in our Leadership Development Program. Coaching was a major component of this, alongside mentoring, 360-degree feedback and a new competency framework. This program was targeted at the top 50 high-potential managers in the

company and gave these influential individuals a first-hand experience of coaching. These leaders were later able to sow the seeds for follow-on initiatives in the wider organization.

A second aspect involved implementing a three-level coaching skills training framework. This raised awareness in the wider company of what coaching is and how it works, as well as allowing these skills to be learnt and applied in day-to-day management roles.

Finally, coaching was used as part of our strategic change programs. For example, during the reorganization of the global telecoms business, the transition plan included a coaching element to enable key leaders to adapt quickly to new roles and changed international structures. This involvement in strategic change helped position coaching not just as a personal improvement tool but as something that could also deliver bottom-line benefits.

The four keys to success

In 2003 the concept of coaching represented something of a leap into the dark for LogicaCMG. The heritage of both Logica and CMG was in analysis and coding of complex, mission-critical IT systems rather than in the softer skills associated with coaching. However, within two years, it has become a core principal behind our HR practices and features strongly as part of our annual

LOGICACMG

LogicaCMG is a major international organization in IT services and wireless telecoms. It employs over 20,000 staff in offices across 34 countries and has more than 40 years of experience in IT services.

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management conference. There were four keys to achieving this success.

1. Create and maintain CEO sponsorship

The importance of senior sponsorship for any change process will be a familiar concept, but while most texts focus on how to create this sponsorship, few dwell on the more challenging aspect of keeping it. It's one thing to have an initial conversation with the CEO when coaching is considered innovative and cutting edge. It's another thing to repeat those conversations when budgets are being reviewed, the initial novelty has gone, and the first challenges appear in the coaching program itself.

Sponsorship is like trust; it's hard won and easily lost. In creating a coaching environment, maintaining CEO sponsorship involves measuring results and reviewing them on a regular basis. It also involves constant innovation to ensure the initiative keeps track with the way the business is evolving. At LogicaCMG, we were fortunate to have and keep the sponsorship of our CEO, Dr. Martin Read, who visibly championed the program throughout the organization.

2. Focus on the "marzipan layer"

The idea of trying to create a coaching culture from scratch in a 21,000 person organization is a daunting prospect. Don't try to do it! These concepts spread by osmosis, not revolution. It was key to success at LogicaCMG to focus on those people who are in the best position to influence the wider group.

In theory, you'd guess that this would be the board of the organization. However, this group often don't have the time to effectively sponsor this type of initiative. As an alternative, consider the "marzipan layer" – the group of young and ambitious leaders who fill

the layer below the board. These leaders are often more enthusiastic about introducing new ideas to the organization and have a greater insight into the ambitions of people lower down in the organization. It's this group that was the focus of our Leadership Development Program.

3. Ensure project management discipline

LogicaCMG is steeped in over 30 years of project management discipline. This is a big advantage when building a coaching environment. The skills required to deliver complex software on time and to budget are essentially the same as those required to manage any major change activity in a large, global organization.

These skills include rigorous planning and estimating, active steering groups, regular reporting and communication and celebrating success. Within the coaching team there needs to be sufficient project management skills and aptitude to avoid the inevitable risks these types of programs involve.

4. Create accredited internal coaches

When LogicaCMG initially embarked upon its coaching initiatives we had no option but to involve external coaches. However, our objective was to build an accredited internal team of coaches who could be used alongside external coaches.

This wasn't just a cost issue – the benefit of the internal coaching component is that these people can act as change agents within the organization in a way which isn't possible for an external individual. Hence, the final course in our coaching skills training program takes nine months to complete and leads towards accreditation with the International Coach Federation.

The results

In assessing the impact of our first steps into the world of coaching, it's the flagship Leadership Development Program which has grabbed the headlines. The results have been impressive. Firstly, four of the original sixteen participants on this program were promoted to the Executive Committee by the end of 2005 and a further four were promoted to other career development roles.

What stands out even more is that there has been zero attrition in this original group over the past two years. Anyone familiar with the dynamics of turnover at this level in a hugely performance oriented company, will recognize this is a tremendous outcome.

The future vision

The vision for coaching in LogicaCMG is that it will quietly become "just the way we do things round here." While this evolutionary approach is not as glamorous as other more forceful approaches, it has the advantage that it's more likely to be sustainable and make a deep difference to the day-to-day performance of the company.

There remains much more work to do to lever our coaching environment to reach more of the 21,000 people in the company, but it is clear that firm foundations have been laid which will allow the company to achieve this in the coming years.

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