Return on investment i
effective organisation

In part one of a two-part series, Philip Atkinson focuses upon the positive benefits that coaching can deliver to create long term effective change for any business or organisation. As we move into 2012 and beyond, we recognise that most business models have changed. Ambiguity is the new norm. Don't expect that things will get back to normal – this is the new normal. Effective coaching will deliver performance faster, stronger and deeper than traditional organisational training interventions.

Benefits arising from coaching	
Organisational	Personal
Maximise potential of staff	Intrinsic motivation and feeling valued by the organisation
Motivate and install freedom to succeed	Career development and growth
Staff engagement	Responsibility for own learning
Become a learning organisation	Personal growth
Commit to serious career and performance management	Maximise potential
Focused staff committed to improvement	Personal engagement
Positive return on investment in L&D HR activities	Become accomplished in personal change

Coaching delivers huge ROI benefits to the client and the organisation

Coaching can develop large scale organisational change very quickly if you focus on the right people participating in the coaching process with those people pivotal to the success and well-being of the organisation. Coaching focuses upon moving well beyond the transfer from 'simple' to 'complex' learning which can lie at the very heart of 'attitudinal change'.

With coaching, attitude change can be very rapid – but usually requires a process of trial and error, learner-centred thinking in order for it to take place – whereas many of the alternative change strategies in training and development take too long, are imprecise in operational terms and are questionable in terms of the results achieved. Coaching is working 1:1 with a dedicated and experienced coach who is 100% focused on the client. This relationship enables the client to practise new ways of behaving and managing in a safe environment.

Personal change is more than transferring information

The typical training event focuses solely on transferring information to others. Information transfer is a poor criterion to view as positive and tangible ROI for organisational effectiveness. For training to be effective, it has to be active and enable those receiving the training to have real opportunities to practise integrating new behaviours and attitudes into their repertoire of skills and abilities.

Coaching is highly participative and geared solely to the client's needs – you cannot get much more engagement than that. However, we know that effective T&D should focus on active participation and the exchange of ideas and concepts through dialogue.

Does it achieve these noble aims? Often training as a change tool does not fulfil these criteria or their intention.

Coaching and attention

The average person has an attention span of ten to 15 minutes. Will training lead to better retention or will coaching promote and stimulate much more interest, attention and subsequent action? The average person forgets 98% of what they have learned within 48 hours unless some form of formal review is undertaken. The implications for recall, understanding and application of training alone as an organisational change tool can be exceptionally poor, unless other mechanisms compensate to retain the understanding.

Coaching has maximal impact by designing the process around the individual instead of applying the general rule of 'lowest common denominator' or 'sheep dip' associated with too many T&D events.

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al change

Not everyone in a training session will occupy the same position on the learning curve as everyone else. Some will be low on the curve because their attention has not been captured, they may be distracted by their own thinking or other things going on in the room.

Coaching is tailored for the client vs training – often akin to mass baptism

At best, training as a tool of change provides the ability to deliver lots of information quickly. There again, training cannot guarantee any learning at all. Often, trainees only receive and process a tiny percentage of the information transmitted in a session. Furthermore, at what level of individual or collective learning is the training focused on guaranteeing installed learning? By evaluating actual learning outcomes we can assess at what level training is actually delivered. We believe – and you may agree – that most of the time, training addresses the lower levels in the hierarchy of what and how people learn.

You may know from personal experience that shortly after attending a training event, recall can be extremely low – unless, that is, the training was well designed and well delivered. And, you know that this is often not the case especially when you attend 'sheep dip' events which are delivered to large groups of people.

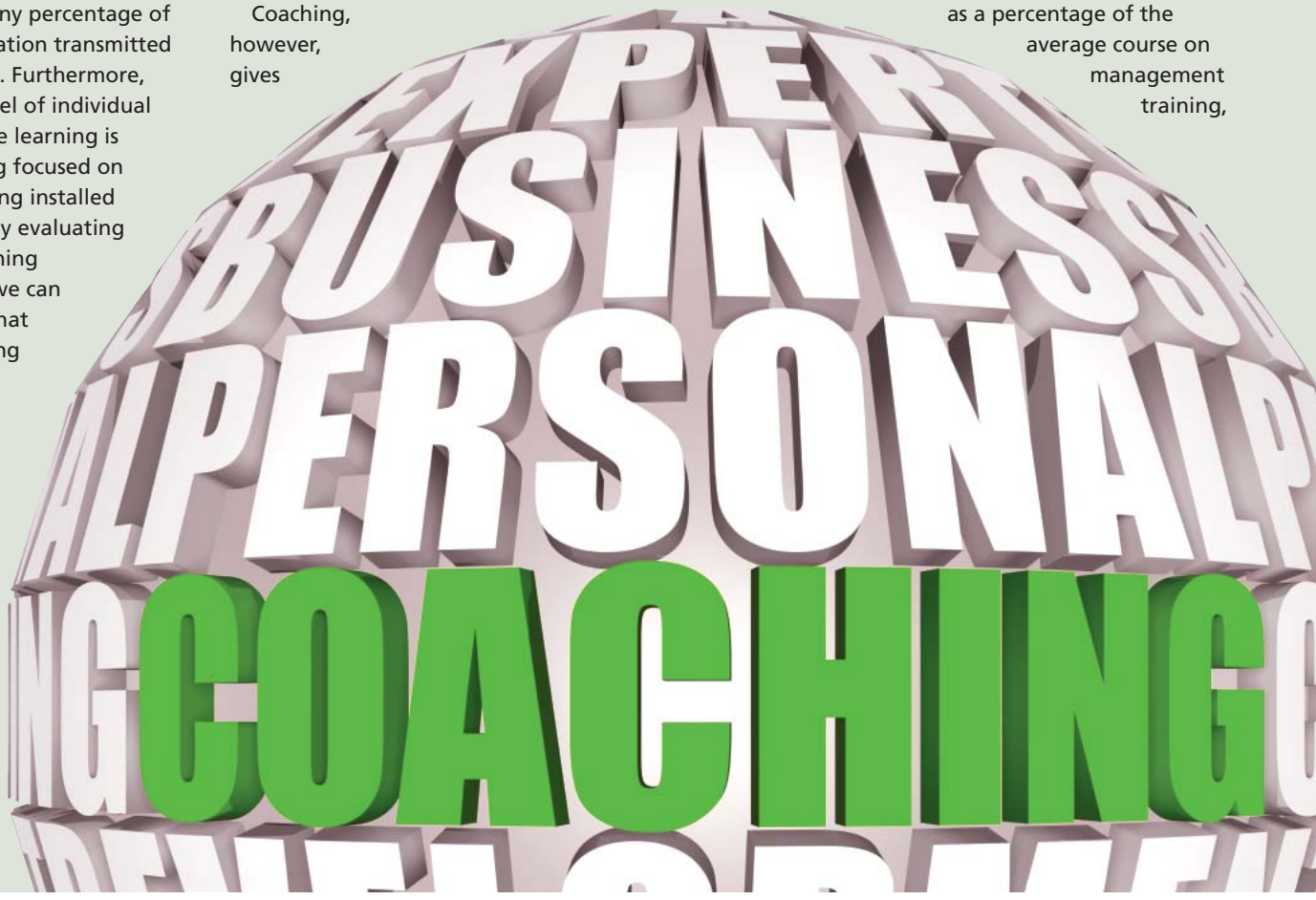
Reflect on training you have attended and ask yourself: "How often do you get the opportunity to practise the skills, ideas and concepts after you have been exposed to a organisational training event?"

Coaching, however, gives you the opportunity to apply and demonstrate real learning because it is tailored precisely for the client and 'where they are' currently. It enables the client the opportunity to find, apply and commit to solutions to their issues. The higher levels of learning for personal improvement remain in coaching, rather than organisational change delivered through training.

Coaching and the 'ASK pattern'

Training as a change tool tends to address knowledge rather than the skills and attitude inherent in the ASK pattern. Very few people will change their attitude as the result of attending a training event – however lengthy. However, coaching can address behaviour and attitude change very quickly. Working 1:1 with a dedicated and experienced coach who is 100% focused on the client is what leads to effective change. This relationship enables the client to practise new ways of behaving and managing in a safe environment.

Only the most advanced training programmes, with very precisely defined processes, can stimulate a person to change their attitude. Of course, these programmes do exist, but as a percentage of the average course on management training,



team building, leadership, communication etc, there will be very rarely that focus, energy and stimulation to bring about the desired change quickly enough to make a real difference.

Case study: Non-directive coaching with top team leaders

Being a MD can be a lonely calling. Frequently a coach can help. I was privileged to work with the CEO of a financial services business who had the task of agreeing a business merger. Because of confidentiality agreements with the potential business partner, this CEO could not share the issues and concerns with his team.

At the initial stage, he was forbidden to do so because any information filtering to the marketplace could put the merger at risk. He had decisions to make, ideas to discuss and strategies to formulate, but no forum to test for coherence and understanding.

Over time, he shared his thoughts and aspirations with me – not specific business issues, but rather possible strategies for bringing about integration. Trust was established and a special relationship developed.

Two years later, this CEO moved to be MD of another business, which he successfully developed through organic growth and a series of acquisitions.

During the time I worked with this very capable man, he benefited from having someone to 'bounce ideas off' who was not directly involved in the day-to-day work of his business. My detachment and non-directive or 'non-disclosure, content free' approach helped him work through the processes without his feeling that he had to disclose specific issues.

Behaviour change and performance improvement through focused facilitation and coaching

Compared to training, coaching and facilitation do have a much higher 'hit rate' in terms of learning and delivering results quicker and deeper in any business.

Coaches or facilitators will focus more energy and take more cognisance of a learner's individual style when working closely with their client. Trainers, on the other hand, may focus more on the old traditional method of 'telling and selling' information.

Training and teaching may have a role in L&D when conveying information to a large group of people. It is a case of one size fits all. However, the problem is that the individuals in the group may be on different parts of the learning curve and they may not have a shared interest to learn to unite them.

They will display very different learning styles. You have to ask: "Can the average trainer accommodate all those styles of the audience in training delivery?" Further, trainers may not be aware of 'learning styles' of others and, either by default or preference, deliver in the style with which they are most comfortable – that is, their own!

Learner-centred coaching focuses on the core behaviours and actions that an individual is comfortable to practise. With practice comes perfection.

Influence and presentation facilitation

I often coach one-on-one and in small groups for improving managers' capabilities for effective public speaking. It really is the number one fear for many people. Coaching people who have the negative experience of public speaking at the 'phobic level' of fear, it is clearly possible to turn their ability to deliver and move their capabilities from the terrifying 80-95% on the fear scale to something approaching 3-5%. Rapid progress can be achieved through 1:1 coaching. It is unlikely that the same success rate will be achieved from attending a presentation skills course.

Best practice in coaching and facilitation

Coaching is tailored and focused upon changing behaviour: "Until behaviour changes, nothing changes." My focus, therefore, is upon identifying precisely those activities that people need to display more effectively in their work and develop that ability until they have mastered the process.

You cannot achieve the same level of success quickly in a training room with 12-15 people in attendance. You certainly cannot achieve it in a large auditorium of 100-plus where there are competing motivations, interests and distractions for the audience.

Next time

Coaching is about helping others learn how to enable exceptional performance in difficult times.

The next part of the article will specifically discuss the healthy ROI that coaching and facilitation can generate.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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