

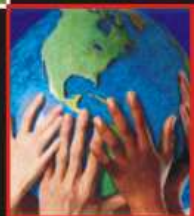
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EXECUTIVE COACHING IN CORPORATE INDIA- PRESENT STATE & CHALLENGES AHEAD

R.S. DABAS*

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Increasing role of 'Executive Coaching' in India?

Executive Coaching is not just a frill or fancy word today as it is widely accepted as a necessary learning, needed to improve businesses.. Executive Coaching as a specialized discipline has been flourishing in the US, UK, Australia and other developed economies. For years, CEOs of some of the most successful and largest companies in these countries have relied on executive coaches. Research studies in these countries have been consistently showing spectacular improvements in performance after executive coaching. It has made its presence felt in India too – top corporate honchos now acknowledge the invigorating role that a coach plays. In India we had followed the concept of coaching as the metaphor of “guru-shishya parampara” as a very unique practice. There are *many top business executives, company owners and successful working professionals in India who have their own coaches and mentors. Typically they are called as 'Gurus' and are addressed in several different forms.* The current concept of executive coaching is still in a very nascent stage in the corporate India. However, in recent years both corporates and individuals are starting to recognize its impact and relevance as a method of facilitating, learning, development and performance enhancement. The increasing role of executive coaching is evident from the 50% industry growth seen in recent years resulting in a new entrepreneurial opportunity – the industry of executive coaching. But, the fragmented and nascent stage of this industry makes it difficult to define its size and structure. A rough estimate suggests that the industry size in India is USD 60 million as against USD 5 billion in the US.

*Director – Centre for Individual & Organization Excellence New Delhi [discusses the present status of Executive Coaching in corporate India and the challenges ahead] (India)

CEOs also realize that ‘What got them here, won’t get them there’ (Ref. Marshall Goldsmith*). The top executives realize that they need to have a global mindset, entirely new skills and must overcome certain derailers. Many CEOs and top leaders feel lonely and isolated. They have their fears, doubts and at times feel their inadequacies. In spite of these, they have to display that they are in total control as their own personal stakes in terms of reputation are high. The business consultants usually give their expert recommendations, but the CEOs and senior executives have to take the final call. They are looking for a sounding board - an external confidential trusted friend, philosopher and guide. The increasing number of organizations opting for executive coaching for its leadership and potential leadership team is a positive indicator for the nascent industry in India. Five years ago it was only the Indian arms of large global organizations that were open to the concept of executive coaching but today Indian organizations along with many first generations entrepreneurial organizations are equally opting for it.

Who is an Executive Coach and what is his/her role?

The role of a coach is to facilitate and help a person to learn, develop and enhance performance. The role of a coach is to bring coherence between the efforts of the individual and the company. Increasing instability in the business scenario is raising complex challenges that CEOs and top executives today must be prepared to tackle. This necessitates organizational leaders to strategize, think and act in entirely new ways for growth and sustenance in the Indian as well as in the global market. Executives are under enormous pressure from shareholders, banks and stakeholders to get results and most organizations today agree that the biggest barrier to growth is the absence of the right talent who they can trust to deliver agreed results at the required speed, and at the required magnitude. Amidst such complexity and shortened business cycles, executives are looking for a sounding board – an external confidant, who is a trusted friend, philosopher and guide. This is resulting into an increasing advent of executive coaches entering the market.

How does it Coaching contribute to business performance and when is it required?

Perry Zeus and Dr. Skiffington (of the Behavioral Coaching Institute) define executive coaching as, “a time bound dialogue between coach and coachee within a productive and result oriented context. It is about change and transformation that the coachee aspires, which emanates from asking the right questions rather than providing the right answers. It is about creating new identities and new futures.” Coaching is viewed as a process where a professional coach helps the coachee to become aware of his/her strength, possible areas of development, values etc. to help him/her build expertise towards contributing to individual growth, and aligning that with the organization’s vision and priorities. Executive coaching has become more mainstream today. It is accepted as part of standard leadership development for elite executives and talented up-comers. It is a one-to-one collaboration between a certified coach and an executive, who wants to generate positive personal changes, inculcate greater adaptability, better his leadership skills, access new perspectives, and above all, reach maximum potential. Executives should seek coaching “when they feel that a change in behaviour – either for themselves or their team members – can make a significant difference in the long-term success of the organisation,” says Marshall Goldsmith, coach to top executives in many of the world’s leading companies.

Coaching is viewed as very positive and demonstrates an organization’s commitment to the employee’s success in both current and future roles and developing leadership. About 30 % of learning and

development comes through a developmental relationship. The 40 percent of learning happens through specifically designed challenges in work assignment; 20 percent through life experiences and 10 percent is through training courseware and conventional training. In recent times, there is increasing acceptance of the significance of this ‘developmental relationship’ as a powerful process to unlock the potential of individuals and the increasing role of coaching comes here.

How well is ‘Executive Coaching’ understood by companies?

The concept of Executive Coaching is relatively new in India. Traditionally coaching in India was perceived as a stigma and often clubbed with counseling which was primarily meant for corrective actions. Executives were reluctant to be coached as it was viewed by peers and subordinates as something negative against the coachee. Bosses and organizations sometimes considered it a last resort for correction of negative behaviors or performance before an exit, stagnation or sidelining of executive. Most of the executives in corporate India have difficulty admitting they need help. A mix of upbringing, schooling, and role modeling by others including parents has made this even worse. Seeking help is usually considered a sign of weakness.

This perception is now changing as executive coaching is being seen in positive light and is being sponsored by the CEOs and organizations to develop and motivate high potential employees for accelerated growth. In fact, executive coaching is today viewed as a special leadership developmental initiative for ‘high potential leaders’ who are on accelerated career path. Today, executive coaching is seen as for ‘successful leaders to become more successful’. Although a sizable number of companies invest in coaching for the middle level managers, there are very few companies which have structured and established coaching programs for top business executives. Over the last 3 to 5 years it has got increased. As more and more organizations drive to adopt best practices and learning from the fortune companies, the practice of executive development is becoming more visible. This trend will gain more momentum as more as MNCs and Indian organizations appoint more expats in their respective organizations. The expats are used to such concepts and that would play a key role in rolling out such practices. Many first generation entrepreneurial organizations also engage coaches to manage growth in a variety of aspects. These entrepreneurs are typically young individuals who started a venture with a great business idea, grew very fast, and then felt the need to work with a coach to manage this accelerated growth. Usually, 95 percent of executive coaching in India is reported to be company sponsored while 5 percent is self-sponsored mainly by CEO/owners of small and medium size companies (SMEs) which are growing rapidly, changing their business models, or facing succession issues with next generation family members

While many such organizations in India have started understanding the role of coaching and the value it brings to business, the real issue is in making it happen. Demonstrating coaching behaviors, which is distinct from ‘telling’ behaviors, is an art and needs a strong belief system to put it into action. We need more commitment at the top to make this a long term investment. Organizations, along with the individuals, ought to spend more time reviewing, understanding and deciding on what exactly is required to be learnt or improved first and we then need to look for an appropriate method to get that learning or improvement. Many organizations do not spend the quality time on this exercise and quickly get to the solution. This hampers the effectiveness. We need more coaches who really are good at coaching. Slowly the tide will turn when more Certified Coaches are entering in the market. Coaching needs to be owned by CEO and pushed down in the organization. Waiting to implement it at the mid or executive level will not build the foundation of leadership development.

How is coaching different than advising?

Coaching is a facilitative role where there is no advising. It is about listening and the art of asking the right questions. This is what helps in the unfolding process and slowly, but surely, unlocks the potential of the 'coachee'. The focus is towards helping an individual to mobilize and be able to see multiple options/new opportunities for both at the learning level as well as at the performance level. . "The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." - Albert Einstein. Coaching is relationship centered, and largely rests on the quality of the relatedness between the coachee and the coach

What are the challenges in ensuring success of a coaching exercise?

Usually a major challenge is in enabling the engagement between the coach and coachee, and ensuring that they share a trusting and respectful relationship. It is this relationship that forms the foundation of a successful coaching exercise. Another challenge is the ability of the coach to maintain a balance – that is, being interested and at the same time, detached enough, to help the coachee to self-discover the answers.

Any coaching initiative needs to take a top down approach to reap the true benefits and that will happen only when the efforts have a structured process-driven relationship between a trained professional coach and an individual or team. This should include: assessment, examining values and motivation, setting measurable goals, defining focused action plans and using validated behavioral change tools and techniques to assist one to develop competencies and remove blocks to achieve valuable and sustainable changes in both professional and personal life.

Who are these 'Executive Coaches' and what are the requisites to be a successful Executive Coach?

Coaching has the power to energize and build tremendous momentum in an organization. Since Executive Coaching, is becoming increasingly prominent in India as a practice, it is envisaged that organizations, will invest lot of time and resources in nurturing coaches internally as well as fostering a culture of learning through increased coaching relationships. There are large number of retired CEOs, senior HR professionals, psychologists, and other senior executives who are jumping into this lucrative and growing arena of executive coaching. Some of them consider their long and successful industry experience as enough qualification and designate themselves as an 'executive coach'. There are also several self made coaches and fly by night experts who consider themselves as executive coaches. Such persons at best can provide only an introduction to executive coaching. However in India a coach must have both skills and the contextual understanding of the business in question to be effective. Ganesh Chella, Co-founder & Vice Chairman, Coaching Federation of India explains, "A CEO with experience in an execution role is a critical requirement because he understands the business context of the coachee".

Coaches must get certified from renowned global coaching experts and coaching associations which conduct 4 to 10 days Executive Coaching Certifications courses in India (or through distance education), followed by 60 to 100 hours of supervised executive coaching practice before finally certifying them. Marshall Goldsmith, the world's most renowned CEO Coach, has visited India several times since 2007 and conducted certification courses at ISB Hyderabad. Some coaches also opt for certifications from International Coaching Federation (ICF), Coaching & leadership International (CLI), Coaching Federation of India (CFI), ICC, Franklin Covey, etc. This is slowly gaining acceptance on the demand side, that is, more and more Indian organizations prefer certified coaches from reputed global coaching associations to ensure a minimum quality standards. However, while certification is a necessity, it is not

a sufficient condition to be successful and effective coach, and organizations must be wary of this reality.

What are different Coaching Models & Methodologies?

Most 'Global Coaching Certifications' teach western coaching models and methodologies which are based on proven theories in psychotherapy, psychology and behavioral sciences. Many certifications also focus on coaching practices, ethics, codes, qualities of coaches and coaching models. Some of the popular coaching models are the GROW Model of Coaching, PCMK, NLP Coaching, Positive Psychology Coaching, Behavioral Coaching (Marshall Goldsmith Methodology & other Methodologies), and Ontological Coaching, Integral Coaching, among others.

The study shows as a matter of concern that many coaches are becoming slaves to and obsessed with coaching model steps, techniques and toolkits. This makes coaches more 'Coach Centered' than 'Coachee Centered'. An effective coach aims at focusing on how to effectively help the coachee in the transition, transformation and change. Executive coaching is still more an art, and needs extensive practice and periodic supervision from master coaches. Further, expert coaches develop their own unique personal style of executive coaching which is effective from coachees' point of view. While executive coaching as a concept is catching rage in India, there is a need for equal impetus in propelling research to identify what practices would be more effective from Indian coachees' point of view and document the same.

Coaches mostly use the following tools and techniques of coaching.

- ◆ Powerful questioning
- ◆ Feedback
- ◆ Active listening
- ◆ Reframing perspectives
- ◆ Visioning and goal setting
- ◆ Creating structure and action plan
- ◆ Acknowledging
- ◆ Enthusing
- ◆ Challenging
- ◆ Power tools
- ◆ Truth telling

Does the western style of coaching fit to Indian Needs?

One shoe does not fit all. What works best for the west need not work in the Indian context. The western coaching methodologies which resort to asking questions and expecting the coachee to find answers or solutions, is not fully appreciated by coachees in India. This is because the Indian cultural ethos is built on the 'Guru Shishya Parampara' with the greatest role model being Krishna the coach Arjuna the coachee in the Bhagavad Gita and the Mahabharata. The rishis in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and even the Vedas and Upanishads, mentored and coached the 'Shishyas' (coachees) to insightful learning, self awareness and self realization. Geert Hofstede's research on cross cultural dimensions too suggest that unlike the western culture Indians are comfortable holding duality and all shades of grey without looking for black or white (Either/Or) answers and alternatives analog rather than digital view (0 or 1) of the world is acceptable in India. The Indian Kings also needed Rajgurus and Rishis as advisors and sought their help in crisis and critical situations. In the Indian context, it is the 'Nurturant Task Leadership' which is more successful.

The recent Centre of Creative Leadership Research (2010) 'Developing Tomorrows Leaders Today' shows that 46 percent of the leaders in India agree they learnt the most from their bosses and superiors which is unlikely in the USA and Europe. The Indian coachees expects the coach to be a learned, experienced, nurturant and much elder who can mentor, coach and share relevant experiences and stories while at the same time ask insightful questions to help the coachee reflect on deeper personal insights to act on their own convictions and alternatives.

Trust, faith and respect for coaches with long-term relationships are unique aspects of the Indian culture and ethos. Coachees in India expect empathy in the relationship. Cold contractual relationships based on logical questioning being followed in the west does not create the trusting bond required in the Indian backdrop. While a coach must listen actively on the one hand, he/she should also be mindful and be a non-judgmental observer with 'Sakshibhav' of what is happening to the coachee and himself as a coach during the coaching session. The coach hence has to delicately balance and play the role of coach, mentor and guru at various points during executive coaching, especially with middle level emerging leaders and high potentials.

The present challenges for Executive Coaching in India

The fragmented nature of the executive coaching industry in India poses many challenges both on the supply as well as the demand side. On the supply side, there is absence of experienced coaches. Organizations often report shortage of CEO/CXO level coaches who have similar level of industry experience, who understand and appreciate business ambiguity and have finer business wisdom as compared to what theoretical coaching model based methodologies provide. CEOs are also looking for help in terms of new ideas, new leads, new friends and fresh networking for business growth.

There is also a need for executive coaches to clearly understand the sponsor's expectations. Poorly stated assignment briefs lead to ineffective coaching outcomes. Coaches need to focus on improvement, change, and outcomes rather than merely stating the issues. It is essential to ensure that the outcome expected by all three parties – coach, coachee and the organization, is the same.

On the demand side, there is a need to sensitize CEOs and CXOs on executive coaching and on what executive coaching can and cannot achieve. The HR function in many organizations tend to treat executive coaching as any other training intervention. There is a need to educate them on the critical role that executive coaching can play in strengthening the leadership pipeline. However, all situations cannot be handled by executive coaching. Sometimes the coachees may begin to lose motivation during the course of the coaching exercise and then the challenge of the coach becomes to keep the coachee focused. Hence it is critical to gauge the coachee's level of willingness to learn, change and grow, which will eventually define the success of a coaching exercise. Also for executive coaching to be successful, confidentiality of information is essential however there is often a challenge in the extent of information that will be shared with the sponsor (client organization). Executive coaches also need to quickly gauge if the coachee (in rare cases) is a patient having mental health issues needing therapy and medical attention rather than coaching and refer the coachee to such experts for help when there are deep psychological issues.

The way forward for Executive Coaching in India

Executive coaching will play an active role as CEOs and leaders prepare for growth, change and transformation. As executive coaching gains momentum in India, organizations need to identify specific

domains that can benefit the most by seeking help of external expertise through executive coaching. At the same time they should take necessary steps to create a culture of coaching by nurturing internal leaders and managers to become coaches. Coaching can effectively help in improving team performance and leadership competencies for high potentials. With increasing business complexities, organizations will also engage coaches to support ‘Action Learning Teams’ in solving critical organization problems. Further, on boarding of senior executives at the CEO/CXO levels will become critical along with transition coaching for supporting job rotations, promotions and movements to the next level in the leadership pipeline.

Going forward, executive coaching will also include function specific coaching such as sales coaching, supply chain coaching, etc. to enable effective and timely decision making. A pertinent trend will also be seen in executive coaching becoming a part of post training programs to ensure effective implementation of new learning for future business interests.

While the industry is still in its infancy, there is an increasing trend seen in executive coaching playing a critical role in organizations today. This necessitates thorough research in the area in the Indian context, as well as development of an Indian/Asian model of executive coaching that is relevant to the culture.

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