

Ideas economy: What gives you competitive edge

Issue 10-09-08



In the West, we've seen yet another shift in "economic age" over the past decade. In just the last couple of hundred years, we've moved from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy and then to an information economy. Now we are in an ideas economy.

In an ideas economy, what gives an organisation competitive edge and, often, what it makes profit from, is the passion and commitment of its people. That requires a level of trust from leaders that has not been

required before. It also requires fostering a culture of personal freedom to voice individual ideas, to take good decisions and to act upon those at an individual level.

So it's our people now that make the difference

The leadership versus management debate has raged as a direct result of this change. Call that "purpose" versus "task" if you will. And coaching is the one-to-one tool of a leader in the way that appraisals and task checks are the one-to-one tool of a manager. .

Leadership in essence, is about enabling people to see the "vision" and understand the vital part that only they can play in bringing it about. .

In the process of coaching, the individual defines the goal, be that a specific target or a change in behaviours. The process then assists this by identifying and breaking down barriers, (real or imagined) to help them create and realise that vision for the organisation and for themselves.

The individual goal is defined, of course, within the context of the company's aims. The goal supports their team and the corporate vision at the same time as motivating them individually. Crucially, however, the process of coaching involves identifying and removing barriers – real and perceived. Real barriers, such as the need to get board buy-in to a plan are discussed and planned for. Perceived barriers, such as: "I could never manage a change program" are re-defined - from real to perceived (where realistic) - and then discussed and planned for.

The role of coaching in permitting individuals to examine "limiting beliefs" is vital. Without it they are likely to set up goals and plans that do not stretch and develop them or by, extension, the organisation. Or perhaps worse, be de-motivated by

setting goals that they do not believe they can achieve.

So in the ideas economy, where we need people to have courage and conviction to take decisions and actions on the spot, the best coaching allows people to develop this type of behaviour.

When thinking about external and internal coaching, external coaches have one distinct advantage over the internal.

Personal barriers

Internal coaches can play an extremely valuable role in helping people to address and overcome, personal barriers and they may also be able to bring value in terms of defining goals, but there is a risk that they will define the goals within the constructs of the corporate culture of the organisation as they see it.

This can mean that they think within the same patterns as the coachee, which means that when it comes to challenging certain perceptions, this can be tougher for an internal coach.

No matter how good their coaching methods and abilities, it is asking an almost super-human feat to expect someone from within a culture to remove themselves entirely from it when examining the coachee's interaction with the business. Because of this, there is a risk that internal coaches could see barriers as real when in actuality they are imagined and fail to push the coachee to their potential in terms of hard goal setting questions.

But internal and external coaches can indeed support each other. By working together in a similar methodology, the external coach can work with the individual to create goals and make initial discoveries and plans regarding barriers between the individual and the goal. It is then perfectly feasible to have a three-way meeting to hand the process from there over to the internal coach.

Providing agreed deadlines to work towards, continued support when the coachee hits internal barriers and a framework for the discovery of potential solutions when the going gets tough, can be very well handled by the internal coach alone.

Sense of purpose

Coaching is without a doubt the strongest tool for enabling individuals to develop a sense of purpose and empowering them to then act in accordance with that purpose in the workplace.

It is possible, even likely, that the plan will be less stretching if initially agreed with an internal coach alone, but that internal coach can be the very person best placed to supply the most effective long term support to a coachee who is determined take a personal risk in order to drive change for their organisation, their team and themselves.

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