

# Using Coaching to Foster a Culture of Innovation

## How can Coaching be used to foster a Culture of Innovation



As we move from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age<sup>1</sup>, most businesses now require a culture of innovation in order to be successful. For years hyper-growth companies have credited innovation as the primary driver of their success. With the increased pace of globalisation and higher levels of uncertainty and business complexity, a larger proportion of businesses are looking to innovation as the key enabler for future success. The majority of business leaders now recognise that the levels of innovation they got by on in the past will not be sufficient to fuel future growth going forward. According to the 2012 Conference Board CEO Study<sup>2</sup>, surveying over 776 CEOs, **Innovation and Human capital** are the top two most critical challenges for the coming year.

### What is a culture of innovation?

Most people will quickly agree that culture of innovation is one where creativity is actively encouraged and new ideas are rewarded. However, there is another side to a culture of innovation that is often overlooked. Distinguishing which new ideas are the 'right' ideas and seeing them through to full scale

implementation is an equally important part of a that requires visionary foresight, culture of innovation and one that requires visionary fore-sight, execution discipline and perseverance.

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*Coaching is essentially about helping people generate their own new ideas*

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Encouraging creativity and generating lots of great new ideas is far more likely to happen when managers and leaders are proficient in and regularly use basic coaching skills, rather than always defaulting to traditional command and control management techniques. Especially generation Y, now making up more than 50% of the workforce globally, really don't want to be 'told what to do'. *They are far more engaged, proactive and creative when they work with managers who use coaching skills to get them to do the thinking.* Senior leaders often also need a conduit that will foster autonomy, fuel their passion, encourage them to be bold and celebrate new ideas; all of which are key ingredients of good executive coaching.

*For coaching to be accepted as a favorable management style and important enabler for development and success it must start at the top, with senior leaders demonstrating good coaching skills and receiving coaching themselves.*




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*Generating new ideas and insights requires time and space*

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Taking coaching seriously within an organization means that a routine practice of taking the time to not only generate, but also to work through new ideas, is established and becomes part of the culture. *In addition to*

*learning coaching skills, managers really need to take the time to practice by having powerful coaching conversations. In order to really use coaching to foster innovation, every manager and leader must spend at least 20% of their time developing others. One great example of this is A.G. Lafley, CEO of Procter and Gamble, who states "I spend a third to half my time developing leaders, nothing I do will have a more enduring impact on P&G's success than helping to develop other leaders".*

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*A well structured coaching programme is all about taking new ideas and insights into action*

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Unfortunately many of the great new ideas and insights people have get lost because they don't write them down or commit to some type of action linked to their new insight.



According to neuroscience, there is around a one hour window following a new insight, where the enthusiasm and energy is there to really commit to taking some type of action. *A well structured and consistently used coaching process can ensure that once new ideas and insights are generated they can be captured and that the right quality and quantity of attention is paid to the new ideas that are really worth implementing.*

At an individual level this involves agreed actions between the

manager and team member (or the coach and coachee). Follow-up at or between coaching sessions, along with some structured accountability and reward for completed actions and new ideas that have been implemented must also be part of the coaching process. *At an organisational level the necessary strategies, support systems and processes must be in place to gather and distill the 'right' ideas generated through coaching and put them in into full scale implementation.*

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> Pink, Daniel H. (2005). *A Whole New Mind: How to thrive in the new conceptual age*. New York: Riverhead Books.

<sup>2</sup> The Conference Board CEO Study 2012. [www.theconferenceboard.org](http://www.theconferenceboard.org)

*Future articles in the MDS Newsletter will continue to examine some of the other characteristics of successful global leaders – so please stay tuned!*

Any comments or questions on this topic are welcomed – please send to [elisa@mdsbeijing.com](mailto:elisa@mdsbeijing.com)

At MDS we help organisations develop their people by delivering outstanding leadership and sales programmes that boost business performance. *Elisa Mallis* is the Head of Executive Coaching for MDS in Mainland China. She has designed and delivered numerous coaching programmes for managers and senior leaders across the United States, Europe and the Asia Pacific Region. Previously she worked as a Management Consultant at Accenture for 10 years and has a Master of Education in Counseling Psychology and Master of Arts in Organisational Psychology, both from Columbia University.