THECR NETWORK

Peer to Peer Coaching Programs: How Social Learning Builds Thriving Workplace Communities

SNAPSHOT

SPEAKER
Phil LeNir (
Coaching Ourselves)

COMPETENCIES
Community Management

MATURITY PHASES
CMM1, CMM2, CMM3, CMM4

TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

This approach of peer to peer coaching encourages social learning to affect organizational change which, in turn, helps move organizations towards a more collaborative and community-oriented state.

1. Phil summarized his talk by stating that the Peer to Peer Coaching Program offered at CoachingOurselves basically involves training a series of management champions on how to facilitate peer coaching. These champions will then run peer coaching groups with their peers inside of the organization, usually over a six month period. They use a catalogue of modules that highlight different managerial subjects to facilitate the journey. When hundreds of managers follow this program, change occurs with not just the individual or various groups, but the broader organization, as well.

2. Within these sessions it is very important that participants speak to each other in a reflective manner. Nothing will shut down a group faster than if they feel that someone is telling them what to do and/or if the participants are made to feel as though they are doing something wrong.

3. Phil stated that Fujitsu was one of their first case studies conducted across 2500 employees in Japan. In this case study, profitability was mapped per department and correlated with the percentage of attendants who participated in these peer coaching sessions. Those departments that had the highest attendance rates had higher profitability, proving that peer coaching works.

OVERVIEW

Background

Phil founded CoachingOurselves with Professor Henry Mintzberg in 2007.

- Phil stated that this presentation is a standard presentation that he uses when speaking to Learning and Development (L&D) practitioners, which are his company's prime customers.

- Phil is an Electrical Engineer who has specialized in speech recognition software. After the dot-com era went bust, the threat of layoffs and engineers being considered a cost to the organization made going to work wearisome. Therefore, Phil investigated ways to help himself and his management team to change their mindset so that they could get back to enjoying their work. This is when Phil turned to Professor Mintzberg to ask for help. Professor Mintzberg is a well-known award winner in management and management education.

- In the mid-90's Professor Mintzberg and a great many other professors started to question the proper pedagogical approach for management education. Many professors questioned this approach because they felt that management was not a science, but rather a practice. Therefore, the way to educate managers must also be different. This eventually led to the work of Professor Mintzberg and subsequent changes in management education. What CoachingOurselves does as a business is help organizations set-up peer coaching programs.
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- CoachingOurselves has set-up approximately 18,000 managers with this approach. The result has been the ability to help managers become better managers. Phil's interest in talking with TheCR is to see if there are parallels between the community approach and the peer coaching approach.

Financial Results:

Phil shared that globally the approach is known by different names to reflect the culture of the country. In the US it is called peer coaching. In Europe they sell it as an approach to building community. In Japan – which was the first market for CoachingOurselves – it is not called peer coaching at all. It is called: "Reflection Roundtable." Fujitsu was one of their first case studies. It was introduced within the company in 2011/12 with 2500 employees working for Fujitsu Japan.
> Profitability was mapped per department and correlated with the percentage of attendants who participated in the reflection roundtable sessions. Those departments that had the highest attendance rates had higher profitability.

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- Fujitsu was one of their first case studies. It was introduced within the company in 2011/12 with 2500 employees working for Fujitsu Japan.
    - Profitability was mapped per department and correlated with the percentage of attendants who participated in the reflection roundtable sessions. Those departments that had the highest attendance rates had higher profitability.
    - In Japan, most managers have been de-humanized from copious amounts of hard work and pure analytical thinking in order to squeeze the efficiency out of every process. With the reflection roundtable, managers can become whole managers and discover all aspects of themselves as human beings inside of these organizations. This positioning in Japan works very well when tied in with the impact of deflationary pressures over the last 20 years.

OVERVIEW

<u>Professor Henry Mintzberg</u>

Professor Mintzberg has conducted extensive research on the nature of managerial work. The key message here is that management is not a science. It is, in fact, a combination of art, craft and science. The way to help managers become better at their role as managers and leaders requires a different approach to sitting them in the classroom and/or traditional lectures.

As quoted by Professor Mintzberg: "Thoughtful reflection on natural experience, in the light of conceptual ideas, is the most powerful tool we have for management learning." Essentially, this means storytelling. Have a group of managers sit down and talk about what they did last week or even yesterday as a manager. They will tell stories that reflect on their natural experience. Then there is the idea of doing it in light of conceptual ideas.

 For instance, take a conceptual idea on managerial decision-making. Managers can broadly discuss the different processes or ways in which managers make decisions. What Professor Mintzberg and others are saying is that if managers are given the opportunity to reflect on natural experiences or tell a story on how they made a decision and do that with this conceptual idea, they can do it through a process that helps them to make sense of it all.

 That leads to managerial learning, which is very much adult education to a large degree.

Many schools like Harvard have adopted this thinking. Professor Mintzberg is very well-known in the upper echelon of management education and has – with these theories – caused disturbances in the field. Harvard has changed their MBA program to include one year of experiential and reflective learning.

OVERVIEW

<u>A Cartesian View of Learning vs. a Social View of Learning:</u>

Traditional learning (or Cartesian Learning) is focused on the individual as the learner. Knowledge is thought of as a substance that is transferred directly to the student. Social Learning assumes that an individual's understanding of a subject is constructed by talking about that content, as well as through interactions around real-life experiences. How a person socially interacts while learning impacts how he/she transforms this into practical action.

Learning about vs. learning to be is the idea that social learning is a process of joining a community of practice. This is completely void of any technology platform or tool. This is a very human idea centered on a couple of people getting together to talk about what they are doing. In doing so, they help each other figure it out by seeing it through a different lens.

The conceptual idea used by CoachingOurselves is to give it a theme, a direction and a focus. People end up helping one another learn through the tacit – as well as the explicit – in order to learn how to become better in their practice of management.

Peer coaching groups do not need to be led by a senior manager overseeing junior managers. Learning does not happen through the process of one person telling his/her experiences and then someone else learning from those experiences. The learning comes from an individual reflecting on his/her own experiences and learning from that reflection. The others in the roundtable are there to help each other figure it out. Looking at it from a pure coaching relationship, the coach is not there to tell someone what to do. The coach is there to help that person figure it out for himself/herself. That happens through self-

OVERVIEW

CoachingOurselves – Topic Sample

 Phil's second set of slides demonstrates an example of one of these modules/sessions in action. The topic is "Strategic Blind Spots". This demonstrates a module that people use as a management team to help them become better at management.

Strategic Blind Spots: The facilitator of this module walked a group of managers through a self-discovery exercise based on the topic of their own strategic blind spots. These blind spots were personal, group or organizational (for senior managers).

Each session takes 90 minutes and is conducted in person, on Skype or as a conference call. The group usually consists of five or six individuals. Each will have a printout of this document and will take turns reading a page out loud and following the instructions.

- Management Happenings: This takes 10 minutes. The instructions are noted on the page. In this case, participants were asked to share and reflect on a story of something that happened to them as a manager in the last couple of weeks.

- Topic Agenda: The topic agenda is outlined for the allotted time together. Each section is given a specified amount of time. The facilitator also acts as a timekeeper.

- Topic Overview and the Introduction to the Theme: Someone will weed out the content. In the case of this example, it has to do with decision making and the decision makers being out-of-touch or out-of-date.

- Introductory Reflection: The participants were asked to list examples of when they have been surprised by various events in their industry or organization (which were listed in the module ahead of time for ease of facilitation). Phil stated that this part of the exercise is fascinating because people talk to each other about their surprises. It gets reflections out in the open. The author, in this example, was given some conceptual ideas around strategic blind spots. The participants were able to reflect on whether they were suffering from any of these strategic blind spots so that they could come to their own conclusions.

BEST PRACTICES

The following is a summary of best practices as shared by participants within the discussion:

<u>Understand the Impact of Focusing Solely on the Bottom Line</u>

Phil shared three reports on this subject:

McKinsey Quarterly: Executives and managers often think that their job is to focus purely on financial results vs. managing people. This results in the neglect of people management. When that happens, Human Resources gets involved. This seems to meet organizational needs, but actually causes systemic problems. Therefore, according to McKinsey Quarterly, "HR should let managers decide on standards, choose how they hire, and develop leaders."

Deloitte – The Self-Developing Organization: Rather than think about the learning and HR strategy as one of "delivering training", think about it as "creating a self-developing organization."
- What this means is that people should be making the time to teach and coach others through either classes or workshops. This includes leaders at all levels.
- People should be hired for their learning agility.
- Learning should be a valued part of the culture.

Bersin Report: This was one of the largest ever longitudinal studies. It studied 3300 plus business and HR leaders over 106 countries.
- Over the past couple of years The Bersin Report has shown the increasing importance of culture and engagement and the need for leadership development to drive culture and engagement. Interestingly, community drives culture and engagement in organizations.
- What Phil has seen in his work is that the pedagogical approach used in leadership development interventions is more important than the content. That is a big step for many in the L&D field who have been so content-focused. The results are clear when applied. Frankly, peer coaching is one of the many group-based learning activities that can be used for leadership development.

Phil added that in the past, L&D has measured skills gap analysis in its staff with the idea that training would bridge the gap. Again, it is very focused on management and leadership finding skill gaps and then trying to fill those gaps with traditional leadership development activities. In Phil's professional opinion, this has no impact on the performance of the organization because the real problem is not addressed.

BEST PRACTICES

Culture is Key

Many people within organizations know this is a fact; 95% of candidates believe that culture is more important than compensation in their jobs and, of course, organizations are looking for the best candidate. In order to achieve this, the leadership development activities need to have a profound impact on culture. The pedagogical approach makes a big difference vs. what is taught.

Engagement surveys are challenging at best because they do not actually measure engagement. As a matter of fact, Phil does not believe that engagement can truly be measured. You can get a sense of engagement and use that to help impact your judgment on the engagement, but it is just one data point. Furthermore, assuming that the data is statistically significant, it will outweigh most engagement survey results.

Extract Learning from Work through Peer Coaching

Peer coaching removes the classroom and instead focuses on setting participants in a roundtable scenario. This facilitates the ability to talk to one another about their personal experiences. The conceptual ideas are written on paper. This is peer-coaching (note the sample topic above for an outline of how the program is structured).

For these clients, there are hundreds of these types of groups working simultaneously. They are all independently run and self-facilitated.

When this happens, the organization begins to experience the broader impact in terms of a sense of community in the organization, again within the management and leadership area. Phil stressed that they work with managers and leaders, but they are talking about managing as a practice. It is not about what is being managed or who is being managed, but rather management itself. It results in communities of practice inside of the management ranks where

people help each other become better.

Community helps people to extract learning from their work experiences. Roundtable calls at TheCR are a perfect example of how that happens.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following is a summary of lessons learned as shared by participants within the discussion:

- Rachel asked Phil what – in his experience – people have the most difficulty with in terms of peer coaching. Phil replied that people have an ingrained vision of what is supposed to happen in learning and development and that can be a hurdle. However, how they have managed to overcome it is to structure and price the program in such a way that people can try it. That means taking 90 minutes to try a peer coaching session with one of the modules. A pilot is six managers doing it for 90 minutes with support from HR or an administrator from CoachingOurselves. Once people actually try it, they realize benefits that they did not expect. That leads to wanting to do more sessions. Over time they truly begin to realize the benefits because they see the results.
  - On a side note, Phil added that what they have noticed is that although these processes are emergent, they try to make them classically analytical. People like to be able to map out the beginning and the end and the needs, etc.

- In the 70's a research study showed that secondary school teachers did not apply new curriculum and methodologies because there was a problem transferring the learning. The authors of the study proved that peer coaching in small groups helped with this transfer of learning. They also showed that there was no value in having groups led by senior educators or external experts. This is social learning, not content-based learning. Therefore, peer groups were all that were required.

  - However, the impact did diminish dramatically if the participants attempted to tell someone else what to do. This is due to the fragility of human egos. For this group of professionals, the teachers would get their backs up if they felt that someone was trying to tell them what to do. It was interpreted as pointing out mistakes or flaws, which made people defensive. As a result, the openness would break down very quickly, as well as the feelings of trust and honesty with the peer coaching group. Therefore, Phil cautioned that in doing this exercise, it is important for the individual to communicate in the form of a reflection vs. telling people. Rachel shared that using phrases like: "In my experience" or "In my opinion" helps with this type of discussion because it leaves an opening for someone to have a different experience.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Phil was asked if, during one of these sessions, managers do not feel confident enough to reveal their weaknesses and be fully honest with the others. Phil replied that it is not uncommon. People will come into these modules with their organizational filters on – saying only what they think should be said. The only way to get past that is time. Eventually, it will break down. Phil shared that this usually happens after about 45 minutes, at which time there is a shift in the group dynamics. Someone will say something that is honest and that will provoke more trust in the group. That trust leads to more openness. After the group meets three or four times, in most cases the participants become quite open with each other. Out of 10 groups, perhaps one group might be a dismal failure. They talk a lot, but do not say anything real. Then there may be two or three groups that are so/so and the rest of the groups are productive.

- Source: "Evolution of Peer-Coaching" by Showers and Joyce, written in the 1980s

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Hillary asked participants to share – on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being a very traditional learning approach and 10 being an approach where the organization acknowledges social learning and encourages it – how their organizations rate:

- All participants stated that this rating would range across their organizations.
- One participant gave her organization a 1 overall, but a 6-7 for her community team.
- Even with a range of demographics across the organization, one participant shared that the focus is youthful across multiple channels of business globally. Therefore, she would rate it high; about an 8.
- Another participant shared that her organization would rate a 3-4 overall, but globally they are doing some great things around social. They have hired an internal social strategist that this participant partners with closely. Social learning is a key priority for their chief learning officer and they are putting things in place to execute on this strategy and make sure that it is part of the overall learning roadmap going forward. However, the rating is only a 3-4 because they this program is still in its infancy.
- Lastly, again though it may range across the organization, one participant would rate it as a high-level of social learning with a high-level of enthusiasm among people. This participant would give his organization an 8.

Hillary asked participants to share their most important take away from the call. One participant stated that for him, he sometimes thinks about social learning as being relatively unstructured. This call helped him to realize that it is, in fact, a very structured approach.

RESOURCES

- As mentioned in the discussion: http://www.mintzberg.org/
- As mentioned in the discussion: http://www.glassdoor.com/
- As mentioned in the discussion: http://www.joshbersion.com/
- As mentioned in the chat:
  http://www.fernridge.k12.or.us/venetaele/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/everydaycounts.jpg
- As mentioned in the chat:
  http://www.communityroundtable.com/podcasts/ivonne-smith/