

Coaching, Counseling, and Mentoring: A Strategic Need in Training and Development

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Literature within HRD is reviewed that aides in the understanding of Coaching, Counseling, and Mentoring (CCM) as a strategic need. Published case studies are presented where CCM strategies have been put into practice in the workplace to foster an environment of performance improvement. By developing and implementing these approaches, organizations can take advantage of innovative strategies that facilitate individuals, teams, and the entire organization, through cost-effective and ethically-justifiable HRD solutions that complement training and development.

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The best goals in the world are not attainable by someone who lacks the necessary knowledge, skill, and attitude to do the required work. The development of organizations' human resources are becoming more critical as these organizations attempt to survive in an increasingly dynamic and competitive global marketplace. According to Scott (2003), "with the increasing pressure on organizations to sustain constantly improving results, demands on performance are such that even small opportunities for individual improvement are worthy of the effort" (2003, p. 26). Managers are expected to foster an environment where each individual improves performance continuously. Scott (2003) further recommends a clear understanding of such guidance approaches as coaching, counseling, and mentoring (CCM) as strategies to facilitate improvement of individual and organizational performance. This paper reviews existing literature on Human Resource Development (HRD) in order to identify a foundation for the understanding of CCM as a strategic need within training and development. In addition, this paper presents published case studies where these specific strategies have been put into practice in the real-world workplace to foster an environment of performance improvement. Finally, implications are inferred.

Problem Statement

In HRD today, with tight training budgets, time constraints, and high organizational expectations, training managers are seeking alternatives to reaching these high expectations that will also continue to offer cost-effective HRD solutions. Managers have multiple approaches to choose from to facilitate improvement of individual and organizational performance. This has created a need by HRD practioners to continue to review strategies that foster an environment of performance improvement.

Advocates of training interventions need to also be aware of CCM guidance approaches. When these approaches are fully understood and applied with the same disciplined systematic approaches traditionally found in successful training interventions, practitioners may find these alternative strategies to be both cost-effective and ethically-justifiable HRD solutions that complement training and development. The purposes of this article are to reacquaint the training managers with the background and concepts of CCM strategies and to review published case studies where these practices have been applied. This focus helps reframe the view that coaching, counseling, and mentoring operate on different situational assumptions where each needs to be carefully considered by the HRD practitioner for appropriate application. Evidence from research and case studies will help explain some of the key principles which underpin the strategies of coaching, counseling, and mentoring.

Defining and Selecting CCM Strategies

Reviews of research on Training and Development concluded that advantageous HRD solutions are determined through applications of systematic needs analyses and assessments in order to determine the causes of organizational performance problems (Brinkerhoff, 2003; Dubois, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Philips, 1997). If careful analysis indicates that employees' skills, knowledge or attitude are at the root of the performance problem, the development intervention strategies of coaching, counseling, or mentoring may be required (Schneier, MacCoy, & Burchman, 1998).

According to Geroy, Bray, and Venneberg (2005) CCM interventions can be embraced in leadership behavior in an integrated strategy for managing performance. The activities of CCM are strategies for articulating the various leadership styles to effect positive change and optimal individual performance within an organization. In selecting between coaching, mentoring, or counseling as interventions (Minter & Edwards, 2000) the manager must select the proper intervention in the context of employee development. Coaching, counseling and mentoring operate on different situational assumptions where each needs to be carefully considered by a supervisor so that he or she can implement the appropriate application with employees.

Coaching

Minter and Edwards (2000) recommend that coaching model strategies should be utilized when the manager perceives that the employee's performance attitudes and behaviors align with the characteristics of a high performance employee. A high performance employee is generally motivated by a non-directive supervisory style which allows the employee to be self-actualizing and self directing on the job with minimal interference from managerial authority. The primary role of the coach in this model is to help sustain the appropriate conditions in the work environment for the high performance employee. Coaching here can be both group and one to one.

Geroy, Bray, and Venneberg (2005) adopt a view of coaching as a process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and learning opportunities they need to develop themselves and become successful. A leadership style defined by a leader who provides rewards in return for follower's effort and performance lends itself to coaching activities. The coaching intervention facilitates capacity development toward achieving results that the organization determines as desired. Schneier, MacCoy, and Burchman (1998) further refine coaching strategies as clarifying expectations, uncovering problems and providing feedback. This is in contrast to Garvey (2004) who argues that coaching is a skilled activity and its focus is on performance and skill enhancement. Garvey (2004, p. 8) further states that

...coaching also has an organizational focus and it is often a power relationship with the coach being the holder of the delegated organizational power. Power has the potential to distort the relationship and real and deep conversation may not occur in this context...

Farrington (2001) recognizes this by offering a structured coaching protocol where coaches are taught how to coach by learning about developing clear objectives, a schedule, and a mechanism for testing or confirming that the employee can accomplish the basic skills required. Farrington states, "the many benefits of developing a structured coaching protocol include helping new employees reach basic competency sooner, with the ability to do their jobs faster, more accurately, or more knowledgably" (2001, p. 1).

Counseling

According to Minter and Edwards (2000), the counseling model applies to the marginal performer who demonstrates performance issues that relate more to his or her attitudinal and behavior problems than to deficiencies in skills, knowledge, or abilities. Dysfunctional performance behaviors such as insubordination, lack of respect for authority, not accepting advice, being late for work or leaving early, substance abuse, chronic absenteeism, and abusive behavior are often symptoms of the marginal performer. Counseling model strategies should be used by the manager if any of the assumptions above apply to the employee. Schneier, MacCoy, and Burchman (1998) further this notion that counseling models are recognized as empathizing, helping to respond to setbacks, and encouraging and advising.

Garvey (2003) warns that the counseling model is a highly-skilled one-to-one helping activity which has an overt therapeutic purpose. Counseling should only be used in a professional setting, viewing the employee as a client, and the counselor as a trained, skilled, and highly professional person.

Geroy, Bray, and Venneberg (2005) adopt a view of counseling as a performance problem intervention process which focuses on confronting and correcting people whose performance is below standard. In the high performance workplace the below standard performance outcomes can be associated with person-to-person interactions, workgroup social interpersonal relationships, and/or cultural fit within the broad community of the organization. In the counseling intervention, the leader is challenged to counsel with the individual and group to address such issues as conflict in values, behaviors, and communications.

Mentoring

Minter and Edwards (2000, p. 4) recommend the mentoring model to be initiated if the manager perceives the employee as an average performer. Unlike the coaching model, employees who fit the category of average performer, require a mentoring relationship with their manager that provides close supervision to address skill, knowledge, or ability deficiencies. Performance improvement is achieved in the mentoring model when the employee and supervisor act as a team in the various stages of the development effort.

According to Garvey (2004), the term mentoring may be associated with induction, career and personal development, personal and career support and change. Mentoring is often relevant when employees are making

transitions at key points in their careers. The agenda belongs to the mentee, and mentoring may have both an organizational and individual focus. Schneider, MacCoy, and Burchman (1988) further view mentoring models as developing a relationship to transfer skill and knowledge, sponsoring a more junior person, and acting as a model of effective behavior.

Geroy, Bray, and Venneberg (2005) adopt a characterization of mentoring as the supporting of learning and development of highly motivated individuals seeking personal and professional growth. Mentoring efforts meet both individual and organizational needs. Mentoring activities transcend organizational knowledge management because they embody the individual's desire and intent to optimize control over type, process, and strategic application of knowledge development.

Stone (2005) expands on the mentoring model by recommending the mentoring of teams. Either a cross-functional team or a self-managing team may benefit from a mentoring program. To mentor a team successfully a mentor must: have both technical and process skills; be able to act decisively; set clear and specific objectives; maintain positive relationships with key stakeholders; ensure members get credit for their performance; maintain positive interpersonal relationships; and ensure that senior management supports the team process.

A study was done (Kleinman, Siegel, & Eckstein, 2001) indicating that mentoring functions considerably influence socialization and personal learning. Results of this study stressed the critical role of mentoring as a forum for individual learning. In this study of accounting professionals who experienced personal learning through mentoring relationships, these employees were found to be less likely to leave the CPA firm since the socialization educates them to the firm's goals, values and politics.

CCM Case Studies

Case 1

In 1999, New Hanover Regional Medical Center, Wilmington, N.C., reduced its turnover rate of graduate nurses from 34% to 8% in one year by creating a mentorship program and analyzing retention strategies. They defined mentorship as a self-limiting relationship between an expert and a novice nurse that involves role modeling, counseling, and coaching (Verdejo, 2002).

Case 2

A manager of administration with a large pharmaceutical company observed a highly valued supervisor's involvement in a growing number of conflicts with the sales division. Complaints from regional sales managers increased to the point where some action had to be taken. The manager initiated a counseling process with the supervisor to address the issue. Performance problems were identified and expectations were clarified. The manager also coached the supervisor on how to conduct himself in future interactions with sales personnel. The counseling process helped identify that the supervisor required additional computer training in order to keep up with demands on the job. Counseling and encouragement helped the manager to unlock this supervisor's potential. Within two months, complaints from the sales manager stopped, and positive reports were received (Schneider, MacCoy, & Burchman, 1988).

Case 3

Mentoring at Edward Jones illustrates a coveted company value of 'giving back'. To provide a mentor for every new 'Investment Representative' (IR), the firm needed an ever-growing number of veteran IRs - about 2,900 - to volunteer. Edward Jones also needed more than 200 mentor trainers across the country to ratchet up the quality of its mentors. To ensure top-quality mentoring, the company revamped its mentor training program by providing monthly day-and-a-half mentor/trainer refresher courses at its headquarters in St. Louis. This strategy became known as the Edward Jones' Goodknight Plan. This plan takes mentoring and flavors it with job shadowing. The plan pairs a new IR with a successful veteran for about a year, allowing the IR to assume responsibility for serving a percentage of the veteran's accounts before opening his or her own office. The firm discovered that new IRs who participate in the Goodknight Plan typically achieve production levels within their first year equal to the levels of a typical two-to-three-year IR. Edward Jones loses only about 3 percent of its new Goodknight IRs versus about 14 percent of other new IRs (Barbian, 2002).

Case 4

At one of Intel's largest chip-making facilities in New Mexico in 1997, the company's mentoring movement proved that an old-fashioned idea can be updated to work perfectly, even in an industry that changes with dramatic speed. Intel took the idea of mentoring and reinvented it to fit a competitive environment where what mattered most was an employee's ability to do the right things right away. Intel's version matches people not by job title or by years of service but by specific skills that are in demand. The Intel way of mentoring has almost nothing in common with traditional, corporate mentoring programs. Intel's way is more democratic, more systematic, and faster paced.

The first step in Intel's mentoring program was to create a matching system that eliminated guesswork. For this, the New Mexico team turned to the employee database in order to create an intranet-based questionnaire that could match partners with the right mentor. The system works by having potential mentors list their top skills at Circuit, Intel's internal employee site. Partners click on topics that they want to master, such as leadership, Intel culture, or networking. Then an algorithm computes all of the variables, and the database spits out a list of possible matches. By weeding out the politics, Intel is able to make use of an important asset that many companies never tap into: their employees, vast knowledge. While Intel has a few hard and fast rules about mentoring, the company tries to stay open to experimentation. During Intel's growth spurt, the New Mexico team shifted some of its focus to group mentoring, where one manager helps a small group of new recruits. The team matched small groups of new managers, usually four or five, with one experienced manager to work on a specific management problem. Employees reported that group mentoring offered a new way to solve problems and learn management skills - a way that is very different from management training in a classroom. These employees agreed that small group mentoring achieved the kind of deep feedback that may not happen in a roomful of people (Warner, 2002).

Conclusion and Implications of HRD

As organizations adopt or re-emphasize coaching, counseling, and mentoring (CCM) techniques as possible HRD solutions, they are realizing not only improved performance but are also reinforcing the strategic direction of the company. The four case studies presented revealed how their organizations have been successful in increasing value, reducing costs, and retaining valuable human resources through specific CCM techniques that establish a climate for growth and high performance. Because these case studies are based on evidence about the effectiveness of CCM interventions in relation to performance improvement, they are rooted in an outcome-focused approach to professional learning.

The research conducted for this article indicated that central to the understanding of CCM strategies is understanding that coaching, counseling and mentoring operate on different situational assumptions. Each strategy needs to be carefully considered by a supervisor so that he or she can implement the appropriate application with employees. The notion that HRD needs can be supported by correlated coaching, counseling, and modeling activities - coaching for skill, counseling for fit, and mentoring to support organizational and individual improvement - recognizes that organizations can improve performance through situationally appropriate leadership interventions (Geroy, Bray, & Venneberg, 2005).

By re-emphasizing, developing, and implementing interventions that include specific CCM processes, organizations can take advantage of innovative strategies that facilitate individuals, teams, and the entire organization, through cost-effective and ethically-justifiable HRD solutions that complement training and development. The test of the effectiveness of these solutions will lie in the extent to which HRD practitioners develop understandings of the principles and key concepts of CCM strategies. However challenging the concepts and principles of CCM appear, the key to their realization, as evidenced by these case studies, is the extent to which they can be made familiar and useful in practical contexts.

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