

The Strategic Case for Coaching Senior Leaders

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## Coaching, the missing piece in your SLT's Development





In today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment, the demands on senior leaders are higher than ever. This report outlines the strategic case for introducing executive coaching within your organisation. Drawing on research from experts, sector experience, and proven coaching methodologies, this paper demonstrates how executive coaching can enhance individual leadership performance, improve team dynamics, and drive organisational success.

Coaching is not simply a development tool, but a strategic enabler. It empowers leaders to navigate complexity, enhance emotional intelligence, make better decisions, and create a culture of high performance. Coaching also supports succession planning and leadership transitions. Implementing a well-structured coaching strategy, supported by the right organisational conditions, delivers tangible ROI and fosters sustainable growth.

'The International Coach Federation (ICF) reported that working with a business coach could increase net revenue by up to 46%' (Forbes)

If you're not invested in this activity as a strategic enabler right now, read on and let's create a case for change together.





### Coaching vs Mentoring: Strategic Purposes

There is possibly no better place to start than to discuss the difference between these 2 methods of bringing support. Coaching and mentoring are both critical to supporting organisational strategy. While similar in fostering development, their distinctions matter significantly at the executive level.

Peter Bluckert in his book the Psychological dimensions of executive coaching (2006) defines coaching as "the facilitation of learning and development with the purpose of improving performance and enhancing effective action, goal achievement and personal satisfaction." Coaching is typically goal-oriented and founded on the belief that the client holds the solutions within themselves, accessed through well-formed questions.

Mentoring, as defined by CIPD, is a relationship in which a more experienced colleague shares knowledge to support the development of a less experienced individual. While also fostering development, mentoring differs in that knowledge resides primarily with the mentor.

#### At the strategic level:

#### **Coaching supports leaders by:**

- Improving decision-making, particularly around business strategy
- Managing high-pressure situations
- Problem-solving complex strategic issues
- Increasing self-awareness and emotional intelligence

#### Mentoring supports leaders by:

- Embedding organisational values and behaviours
- Strengthening succession pipelines
- Developing domain-specific expertise

Both disciplines require trust and rapport. However, coaching necessitates a relationship of equals, whereas mentoring assumes an asymmetry in knowledge. Implementing both as part of a strategic leadership development framework allows flexibility based on individual needs and goals.

Despite the benefits, senior leaders may resist coaching due to cultural perceptions of vulnerability. It's critical to shift this narrative and demonstrate coaching as a mark of leadership strength, not weakness.

MENTORING

LEADERSHIP

SEMINARS

COACHING

WORK

PRACTICE

DEVELOP

### Organisational Readiness: Context, Culture, and Strategy



Organisational context is a key consideration when introducing executive coaching. If the leadership team is accountable to a board and influenced by shareholder interests, coaching initiatives require their buy-in. A lack of support at this level can undermine efforts before they begin. In larger organisations, especially those that are publicly accountable, coaching may be challenged on cost and effectiveness unless its strategic value is clearly communicated.

Sector-specific factors also play a role. For instance, in the water sector—where I have spent significant time—external environmental factors such as drought or extreme weather events trigger emergency responses that dominate senior leaders' time. During these periods, coaching is often deprioritised, despite the fact that it could support better thinking, resilience, and decision-making under pressure. This sector is not alone.

Strategically, coaching acts as an enabling tool that underpins other strategic initiatives. While an IT strategy might deliver measurable efficiency gains, the impact of coaching is often more difficult to quantify. That said, its role in aligning diverse strategic initiatives and enhancing execution across departments can offer just as much—if not more—long-term value.



# COACHING of Senior Leaders can create CONNECTION beyond perceived



#### **BOUNDARIES**

From a cultural perspective, readiness for coaching depends heavily on existing leadership styles and perceptions. Coaching can be counter-cultural and highly challenging in some organisations. For example, leaders with authoritarian tendencies may feel uncomfortable with the element of choice and autonomy coaching fosters. If coaching has previously been used to address performance issues, it may be perceived negatively—as a remedial action rather than a strategic enabler.

Culturally, leadership must role model coaching behaviours to establish legitimacy. I've observed leadership teams promote coaching for others while distancing themselves from it, which undermines credibility and effectiveness.





## Coaching as a Strategic Enabler for Learning & Development

Executive coaching is one of several learning and development tools, but its strategic value lies in how it complements other methods by deepening their impact and aligning them with organisational goals.

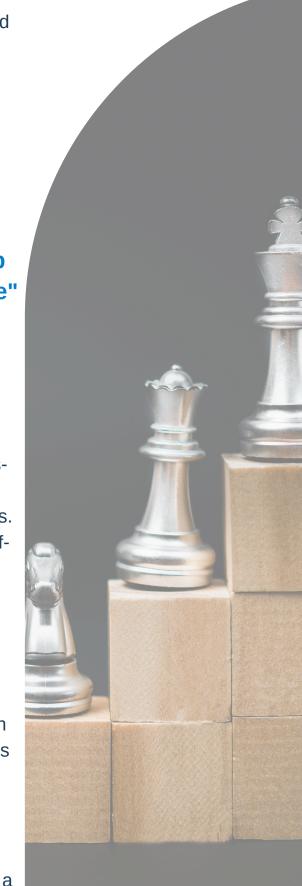
Training programmes are often looked to first and provide structured learning delivered by subject experts. While useful, they often lack the flexibility needed to address individual leadership challenges. Coaching allows for personal reflection and contextual problem-solving.

'75% of organisations rated their leadership development programs as "not very effective" in improving overall organisational performance' – Harvard BR

Stretch assignments tend to be another method used to expose executives to new challenges in real-time. These projects build capability, especially in leadership and crossfunctional collaboration. However, without structured reflection, leaders may simply reinforce existing behaviours. Coaching enables deeper insight, supporting growth in self-awareness and leadership style as new challenges are navigated.

Peer advisory groups are a third source of leadership development often utilised which offer valuable forums for shared learning among executives. They create space for advice and perspective-sharing. However, the advice given may not always be contextually relevant. Coaching ensures that executives evaluate options based on their unique environment, values, and goals.

In all these methods, coaching acts as a flexible wrapper that enhances impact and accelerates the development of a well-rounded executive.



## Key Factors for Successful Integration



To embed coaching effectively into an organisation, we believe that four key factors must be addressed:

#### 1. Internal Communication Strategy

A clear, strategic internal communication plan is essential to explain the 'why' behind coaching. Communication drives employee behaviours aligned to business outcomes. Leaders must articulate how coaching supports strategic goals, dispel myths, and ensure that initial concerns are surfaced and addressed before sessions begin.

#### 2. Coaching Leadership and Sponsorship

A coaching strategy should be led by a dedicated internal sponsor—ideally a senior leader (HR Director or CEO at this level) with influence and passion for coaching. This leader should be supported by an advisory group drawn from across the organisation. Their role is to champion coaching, troubleshoot implementation issues, and align efforts across departments.

#### 3. Processes and Governance

Clarity on how coaches are selected and matched with leaders is critical. Factors such as chemistry, role background, and personality profile may be considered. Standards for engagement, preparation, and confidentiality need to be agreed upon in advance. Governance frameworks, ethical codes, and shared expectations ensure consistency and integrity in delivery. At senior leadership level this is critical.

#### 4. Alignment with Organisational Goals

As Jenny Rogers points to in her book around Coaching Skills (2016), executive coaching must serve the business. Coaching goals should align directly with strategic priorities. Misalignment risks disengagement, confusion, or failure to demonstrate value. Strong goal-setting and evaluation practices ensure coaching drives performance and adds measurable value.



checking alignment
with true direction
has the potential to take
you off course



### Capabilities of the Executive Coach

Effective executive coaching demands a broad and nuanced set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and practices. At senior levels, where the complexity of the organisational system and stakes are high, these capabilities are particularly critical.

Knowledge must include a robust understanding of coaching strategies, organisational dynamics, leadership, strategy, and culture. As Peter Bluckert (2006) notes, coaches unfamiliar with corporate life risk failing to align with organisational agendas, undermining their effectiveness. Lived experience—especially at a senior level—brings credibility and relevance to the coaching engagement.

**Skills** like questioning and presence are essential. Ideas such as Socratic questioning are powerful because coaching time is limited and every question must count. At the executive level, this intensity increases, and the need for impactful, personalised inquiry becomes vital. Equally, the ability to be fully present—to notice what is happening within oneself and the client in the moment—is foundational to developing rapport and responding intuitively.

**Behaviours** such as trustworthiness and flexibility must be consistently demonstrated. Drawing on Stephen Covey's book Speed of Trust (2021), 13 Behaviours of High Trust, I have personally used these as a benchmark to receive feedback and adapt my coaching approach. Listening, in particular, is not just a skill but a critical behaviour that executives are quick to assess and value.

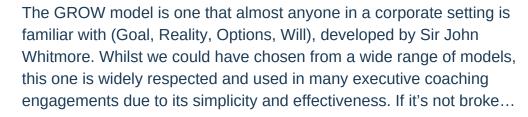
Practices such as thorough contracting and boundary-setting establish clarity and confidence from the outset.

Confidentiality, especially, becomes paramount at executive levels where sensitive strategic information is often discussed. Coaches must also structure sessions in a way that balances agenda with emergent insight—ensuring each session drives toward value while remaining responsive to what is live for the client.



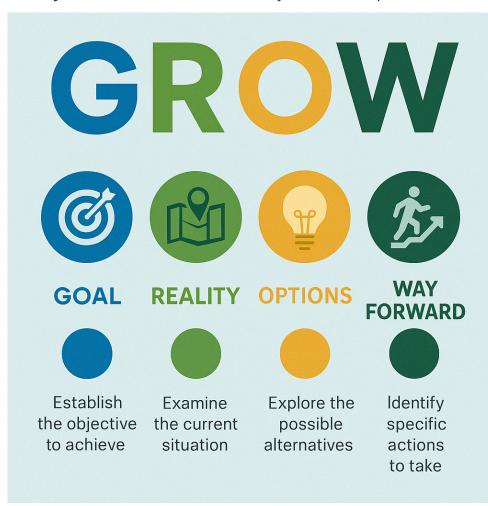
### Coaching Models: The GROW Framework





It offers a structured yet flexible framework:

- · Goal: Establishes clear outcomes
- Reality: Explores current context and challenges
- Options: Expands the client's sense of possible actions
- Way Forward: Drives accountability and next steps



Its value lies in its ability to provide a logical sequence while allowing the coach to adapt based on the flow of conversation. Whilst some may understand the model at a surface level, it is in fact the deepening questions, opportunity for feedback and potential interventions learned by the coach, that make the difference.

In practice, I have found that its accessibility allows both coach and client to maintain focus while encouraging psychological depth—particularly in exploring beliefs and perspectives during the Reality phase. Used skilfully, GROW fosters both insight and momentum.





## Evaluating the Impact of your Coaching Strategy

Evaluating coaching at the executive level is both essential and challenging. The nature of executive development often involves intangible shifts—greater confidence, enhanced decision-making, or stronger presence—that resist simple metrics. Nonetheless, evaluation ensures accountability and strengthens the case for ongoing investment.

Individual-level evaluation can include 360-degree feedback tools and models like Kirkpatrick's Four Levels (reaction, learning, behaviour, results). These tools provide both qualitative and quantitative insights. Feedback should be gathered at the start and end of any engagement to establish shifts over time.

A key risk, however, is starting coaching without clear goals or evaluation frameworks in place. Peter Bluckert (2006) warns against tolerating vagueness at the contracting stage, as it compromises evaluation later on. Coaches and organisations must co-create clear, aligned goals early to enable meaningful reflection and assessment.

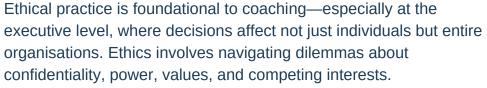
Organisational and Stakeholder Evaluation goes beyond individual outcomes, evaluating at the organisational level. This includes measuring Return on Investment (ROI) and Return on Expectations (ROE). Linking coaching to KPIs—like productivity, engagement, retention, and innovation—offers an accessible way for executives to assess value. This should not be avoided.

Organisations should agree on impact objectives from the outset and define a process for tracking results. A balanced approach considers multiple stakeholder perspectives. For example, the CEO or sponsor can provide 'perceptual evaluation' that speaks to strategic alignment and cultural shift. Without these broader perspectives, evaluation may be skewed or incomplete.



### Ethics and Supervision in Executive Coaching





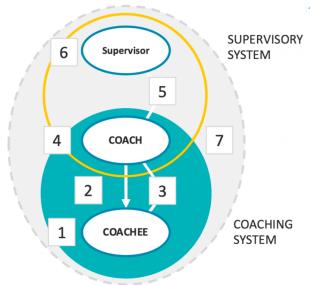
The EMCC's Global Code of Ethics and models like Passmore & Mortimer's ACTION framework offer helpful guidelines. However, as their work shows, ethics is not always black and white. Coaches must integrate ethical reflection into their practice and balance competing demands thoughtfully.

The idea of supervision, something that is not often observed, is critical here. It provides a reflective space for coaches to explore their own reactions, test assumptions, and unpack ethical tensions. A coach who is not essentially being coached themselves will inevitably have less understanding of what it is like to sit on the other side of the relationship after all. I am still amazed at the lack of 'supervision' for coaches in large organisations. Yes we have coaches but they do not have coaches.

Hawkins' Seven-Eyed Model is really useful to understand how this can work to great effect as it encourages exploration of multiple perspectives—coach, client, system, and relationship.

Supervision also supports resilience. Coaching executives can be emotionally taxing due to the intensity of the issues presented. I have personally found that sharing dilemmas with a supervisor or peer allows me to 'drop some of the weight' and return to engagements with renewed confidence and clarity.

#### Seven modes of supervision



- 7. The wider context
- 6. The supervisor
- 5. The supervisory relationship and parallel process
- 4. The coach
- 3. The coaching relationship
- 2. The coach's interventions
- 1. The coachee's situation





### Conclusion and Recommendations

Executive coaching is a 'no brainer' when it comes strategic investment in leadership effectiveness. When properly implemented, it develops leaders who are reflective, resilient, aligned, and capable of navigating complexity. Not a luxury, but a necessity in the current climate.

#### **5 Recommendations for getting going:**

Launch a pilot programme with clear goals and evaluation frameworks.

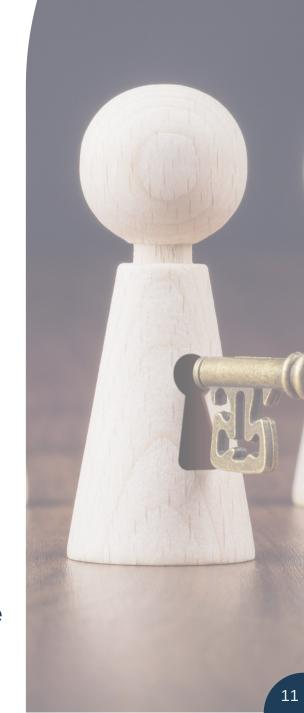
Ensure strong executive sponsorship and internal communication.

Align coaching with strategic priorities and KPIs.

Embed coaching alongside training, projects, and peer learning.

Invest in qualified coaches, contracting, supervision, and ethics.

By embedding executive coaching into the leadership fabric of your organisation, you build the conditions for lasting performance, cultural alignment, and adaptive leadership.



### About Get Knowledge & the Author



### **GET KNOWLEDGE**

Get Knowledge is a coaching, training and consultancy business based in the North of England.

Working across a variety of sectors we design and develop High-performing team interventions, because High Performing Teams don't happen by chance. They are intentionally built and protected by people who often require support, challenge and a framework to succeed.

At Get Knowledge we help create teams that not only deliver results but also thrive together. learn together and create Fun, Authentic, Caring & Trusted environments that deliver more with less.

The Coaching of Senior Leaders both in a 121 and group setting, is fundamental to how we support delivery of High Performance.

You can find out more about Get Knowledge by going to www.getknowledge.co.uk OR you can drop us a message at info@getknowledge.co.uk



The Author - Jason Elliott

"Jason is a fantastic coach, he's super adaptable and can work successfully with a really wide range of people. He's worked with our leadership teams to embed a Performance Excellence culture, to understand how to identify problems and solve them, how to lead through coaching and most importantly how to develop a sense of team purpose that everyone can buy into"

- Zoe Burns-Shore (CCO Yorkshire Water)

Jason is an Executive, Leadership, and Performance Improvement Coach based in the North of England and co-founder of Get Knowledge. With over 25 years of experience working with teams and individuals across sectors, Jason coaches senior leaders looking to enhance organisational performance, strengthen leadership capability, and achieve personal and professional growth.

Jason's coaching is built on deep expertise in workplace behaviours, leadership psychology, and coaching techniques drawing from, NLP (certified Master Practitioner), ILM Level 7 in Executive Coaching & Mentoring, mBIT, and the 9 types of Leadership (Enneagram), as examples. His work is values-driven, grounded in trust, care, and partnership, and he specialises in helping leaders bring meaning, clarity, and influence to complex organisational challenges.