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the magazine of professional coaching

Team & Group Coaching

The landscape of coaching many



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What are the differences between team and group coaching? When and how do you introduce team or group coaching? How do you effectively measure the impact of team or group coaching? This issue uncovers the secrets of successful group and team coaching experiences for both coach and clients, including how to design and launch programs to create engagement, inspiration, motivation and accountability for participants.



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COACHING & CONTENT

Group coaching as a leadership development program

By Philip LeNir

Group coaching is a process in which a coach works with a small group of people with similar goals. Similar to one-on-one coaching, “Group Coaching brings the coaching conversation into a group context. It is an intimate conversation space, focused on goal setting, deepening awareness around key issues, taking action, and accountability.” (from *What is Group Coaching* by Jennifer Britton.) In organizations, group coaching also delivers the benefits of breaking down silos,

It's common to ask about the ROI of coaching but that's too narrow a view. We needed to prove that we were driving profitability, not merely covering the costs.

increasing collaboration, engagement and trust, creating a shared sense of identity and catalyzing informal coaching between participants.

But can group coaching be used to replace a typical in-house leadership development program, or will it always be complimentary to leadership development programs?

About 15 years ago we were challenged to bring a slimmed-down version of McGill University's IMPM program directly into an organization. The IMPM program is a Masters of Management program developed by world-renowned management thinker Henry Mintzberg. Rather than attempt to mimic the program, we experimented with the idea of running bi-weekly 90 minute "learning meetings" using the program's content.

Unlike a typical MBA program, the IMPM program is based on having participants learn from their own experiences. Most MBA programs use case studies which stimulate learning through other people's experiences. The IMPM content includes questions and structure which make it look a lot more like coaching discussion rather than training. Not surprisingly, our learning meetings using the IMPM content felt a lot like group coaching sessions with content.

Many coaching groups already leverage content. A coach will recommend books, articles, TED Talks or similar to support the group coaching process. The content will be selected to support the coaching

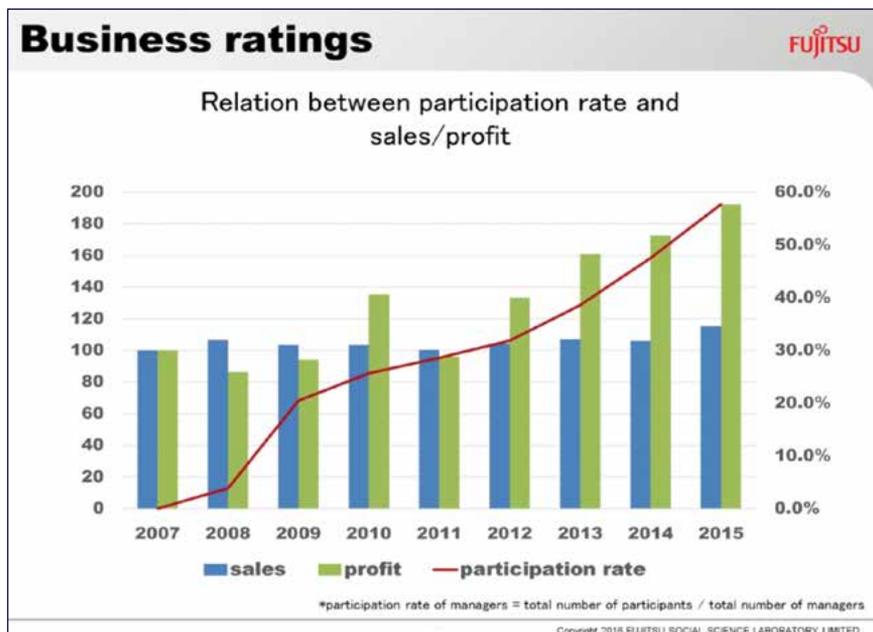
goals. For example, an article on emotional intelligence provides a lens to discuss one's own emotional self-awareness and how it helps, or hinders, with the coaching goals. The content colors and broadens the coaching conversation.

The IMPM content had a similar function in our sessions, but we selected and sequenced the content around the organization's competency model or leadership framework. Each session began with content which led to coaching goals rather than the other way around. This had the crucial benefit of enabling us to create programs which covered an organization's desired leadership competencies AND generated the direct impact on performance through the coaching aspects.

Finally, we had the issues of cost and scalability. A typical leadership development program costs far less per participant than a coaching program. This forced us to try something which is considered sacrilegious for some coaches. We experimented with self-directed group coaching. We gambled that the advantages of reaching a large number of participants in self-directed sessions would outweigh the impact of not having a coach running each session. Our gamble paid off, but it took many experiments to figure out how to make it practical!

Though it was highly beneficial to have a professional coach running each session, it was not necessary. Our content had the questions and structure to guide the group coaching. However, someone still needed to be the session facilitator and coordinator. We believed most managers could learn how to do this with some training and support.

One of the most innovative approaches to preparing managers to facilitate sessions came from one of our clients. They assigned a professional facilitator/coach to support a first cohort of participants. The graduates were then assigned as



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facilitators for the next cohort and so on. Fairly quickly they had hundreds of highly competent in-house manager-facilitators available.

The final piece of this puzzle was to figure out how to accurately measure the impact of our group coaching + content program. It's common to ask about the ROI of coaching but that's too narrow a view. We needed to prove that we were driving profitability, not merely covering the costs.

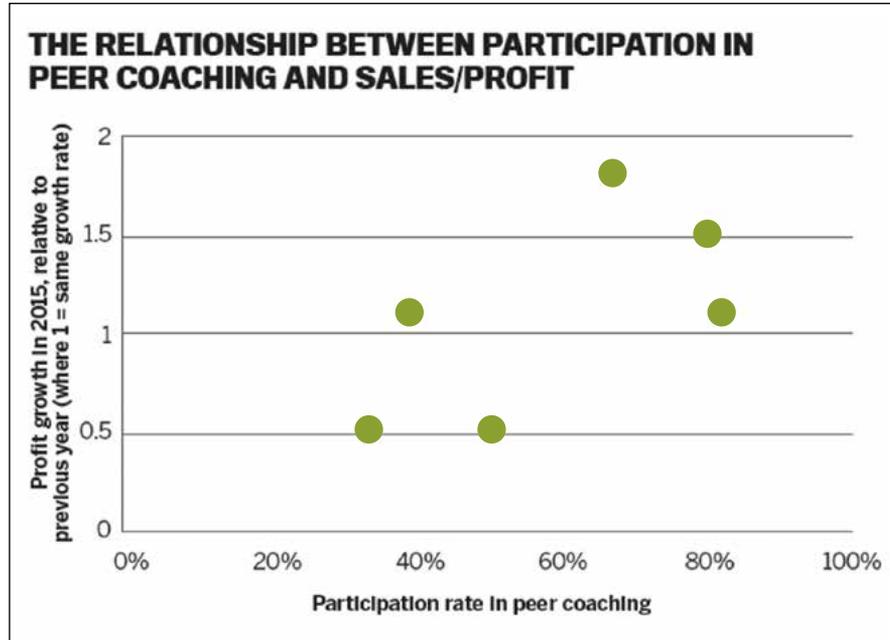
Our work with the Fujitsu group in Japan began in 2008. Fujitsu is a large global conglomerate with 159,000 employees. Two highly innovative senior vice presidents of their SSL division, Kentaro Iijima and Ken Senda, worked closely with our Japanese partner, J-Feel, for the past 10 years to develop the techniques and collect the data to prove the impact on profitability from group coaching + content.

They observed that participation in the group coaching program had many positive outcomes, but they were unable to determine the impact on profitability at first. Nonetheless, the other positive outcomes were sufficient to keep increasing the number of participants in the program year

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after year. In the fourth year, after overall participation rate increased past 30 percent, they observed profitability begin to increase in lockstep with increasing participation rate.

However, correlation does not imply causation. So they mapped the participation rate for multiple departments against the relative profit growth of each department. They dis-



covered that departments with higher participation rate had higher relative profit growth and vice-versa. This relationship was consistent year over year. This led them to conclude the group coaching + content program was the key factor to higher profit growth at the department level.

We call this program Coaching Ourselves. The program has now been spread to many other divisions across the Fujitsu group, as well as

For example, currently our programs leverage the technology already available in most organizations; a conference bridge or online group video platform for the sessions, a learning management system to distribute the content and manage the feedback, and a project management tool to organize and coordinate. This makes it easy for an organization to get started, but has limitations. We are developing custom software systems to better support the larger programs and continue to expand the field of coaching.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED:

- Group coaching plus leadership content will increase the impact of group coaching in an organization.
- Self-directed group coaching is an exciting new opportunity and provides many opportunities for coaches to have a greater impact across an organization.
- Innovations in coaching come from experimentation. Always be bold and look for new ways to deliver the benefits of coaching to your clients.

Coaching is still such a young and exciting field with many possibilities and new techniques still waiting to be discovered! •

many other organizations in eight languages around the world. It is used by individual coaches to support small group coaching programs and by organizations to run large scale programs which develop leadership capacity and support organizational change.

In the future we plan to continue pushing the envelop for coaching.