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Five years ago, the BBC's former head of executive development, Tony Ryan, opted to create an in-house pool of accredited internal coaches, in response to the high cost of bringing in external coaches.

The journey has not always been smooth but the BBC's Coaching Service is now 75 strong and over a 12-month period has delivered around 5,000 hours of coaching across the corporation. But just how effective is an internal coaching model? I set out to test how relevant the Kilburg model of coaching effectiveness (2001) was to the BBC's internal model.

Our research has endorsed the role of the internal coach as a credible provider of executive coaching. There are costs in terms of development time, training and supervision, as well as the need to have a dedicated administrative function. But the model is an effective way of helping managers to develop themselves as leaders.

The model

The BBC is a large, multi-disciplinary organisation that has now embraced an entrepreneurial economy, works across the globe, and has a diverse workforce. Its leaders need a wide array of skills. They must also respond to its cultural change programme "Making it Happen", launched three years ago with the aim of making the BBC "the most creative organisation in the world". As part of the programme, staff have been asked what they look for in a leader. Words such as "trust", "respect", "feedback" and "visionary", came up time and again, and are now seen as essential qualities for BBC leaders. Our coaching programme aims to foster these attributes among leaders across the organisation.

Moreover, as the BBC strives to maintain the highest levels of performance throughout the current change programme, coaching is seen as key in helping leaders deliver. "Even in the current environment, where the organisation is slimming down, coaching remains a significant part of the strategy for building effective leaders," says Nigel Paine, head of training and development at the BBC. Frisch defines internal coaching as "a one-to-one developmental intervention supported by the organisation and provided by a colleague of those coached, who is trusted to shape and deliver a programme yielding individual professional growth". This is consistent with the BBC's approach.

Coaches carry out their work on a voluntary basis, in addition to their day jobs. They are drawn from a range of managerial and professional backgrounds and are accredited

By Eunice Aquilina

How effective is the BBC's new Coaching Service as an internal model? A corporation-led study looks at how leadership is being fostered across the organisation

CHANGE OF PROGRAMME

through the BBC Coach Foundation Course. This course is a four-month modular programme with taught elements, observed practice sessions, assessed field work and an emphasis on skill development. Each trainee is mentored throughout by a coach mentor, ensuring standards and quality are maintained from the outset to enhance credibility.

The desire to have a convincing internal coaching operation also informed the supervision framework, which requires that all internal coaches also have regular one-to-one and shared learning sessions with other internal coaches. Further development is provided through quarterly workshops or short refresher courses.

Despite the voluntary nature of the work, these internal coaches are committed to it and have a real thirst for continuous development. Liz Macann, lead coach, says “It never ceases to amaze me that even though these senior managers take on their coaching role in addition to their normal work, they are hungry for further development and committed to attending regular supervision.”

The BBC is constantly developing its evaluation model, which began with a look at the impact coaching has on an individual. Through questionnaires, clients are asked for feedback on how coaching has helped them develop in their leadership and management roles. We are currently carrying out research with those who have received coaching in the past 12 months. We will combine data from a questionnaire with interview material to help inform our understanding of what the client expects from coaching and how it helps them develop themselves as leaders.

Client and coach relationship

Kilburg (1996) describes the coaching relationship as a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation, and a consultant who uses a wide range of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve an agreed set of goals. In this model of coaching, the coach is also valued for being able to bring an understanding of BBC culture and business to the coaching relationship.

Kilburg’s eight-component model seems to translate into the internal environment but some components appear to be more important in an internal model, and so need to be in place first. The study suggests that they present a challenge to the shape of Kilburg’s 2001 model, and therefore its interpretation. Taking these in turn:

Coach/client setting Our study participants identified this as a key component for the internal environment with internal models inevitably taking their purpose from the organisational development agenda. Frisch comments on the danger of setting up an internal coaching model as an internal advisory role, team building, training or mentoring. We found no evidence of internal coaching

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being used for such purposes. Instead, the BBC is using internal coaching to help leaders improve both organisational and personal effectiveness.

Quality of coaching intervention One stakeholder commented that an internal coach needs to understand how the organisation works, as well as the psychology of human behaviour. The BBC sees this understanding as being of huge benefit, allowing the coach to get into the client’s world very quickly. However, the risk of working with internal coaches is that they share the same world view as their clients too. This point was made by DeHann et al, who comment that an internal coach’s knowledge of an organisation may result in a corporate “blind spot”, preventing them from seeing certain power patterns, or raising them for discussion.

But our findings showed that internal coaches’ skills were rated very highly, with coaches asking challenging questions and helping clients to widen their thinking.

Conflict-of-interest issues can also create problems for internal coaches – a fact picked up by a number of authorities in the field. But we found that internal coaches recognised the danger of collusion in an internal model.

Adapting the current Kilburg model Our research suggests that it is important to establish some components before setting up an internal model of coaching, although Kilburg’s circular model suggests that all the components are equally important. If internal coaching is to be effective, organisations need to have an overview of how coaching will fit into the organisation’s learning and development agenda. They need to develop a learning culture in which managers are open about themselves as leaders, and move to a level of questioning the status quo that helps them gain greater self-awareness.

Individuals also need to be committed to continuous learning. A BBC accredited coach has to work with a minimum of three clients at any time, attend monthly supervision and take part in development workshops. Those taking on a coaching role must understand the level

References

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Learning points

- Individuals need to be committed to continuous learning
- There needs to be clarity about how coaching fits into a learning culture
- Coaching works best when managers are open about themselves
- Volunteer coaches must be prepared to put in time and energy
- A protocol must be established, so that coaches remain detached
- Evaluation models need to be set up, to assess the benefit employers are getting.

of commitment of time and energy they will need to make – over and above the day job.

With greater potential for collusion and coercion, developing a clear framework and set of rules is essential. Internal coaches need a protocol to ensure they remain detached.

So far, indications at the BBC are that confidence has increased, enabling leaders to tackle difficult issues which they might have ignored previously. Self-awareness appears to have improved, and the concept of coaching is better understood and valued.

I will leave the closing words to Nigel Paine: "The changes in behaviour needed to take the organization forward need to be embedded in the culture so they become the way we do things around here. The internal coaching model is a key component in helping us to achieve this." ■

Eunice Aquilina is an organisation coaching consultant at the BBC

Internal coaching at the BBC

Research design and methodology

Our research looked solely at coaching provided by internal coaches, not external executive coaching provision or managers who adopt a coaching style of leadership. Participants were drawn from those involved or with an interest in internal coaching at the BBC:

- **clients** – individuals who have received coaching from an internal coach
- **nominators** – line managers or HR professionals who may have nominated people for coaching
- **key stakeholders** – key people in the organisation who are able to comment on how internal coaching is positioned.

Semi-structured interviews were held with 15 clients, 15 nominators and five stakeholders. The internal coach group was invited to attend a focus group and the data collected was analysed in the same way as the interview data. Finally, we gathered documentary information from published policy documents, guidelines and training material.

Results

Kilburg's eight component models of coaching effectiveness (in bold; 2001 model) matched against the BBC's findings:

- 1 Client's commitment to progressive development:**
Clients expressed commitment to development.
- 2 Coach's commitment to progressive development:**
Coaches were dedicated to their own development and that of their clients.
- 3 Characteristics of the client's problems and issues:**
Internal coaching literature shows a requirement for the nominator and client to agree objectives.
- 4 Structure of the coaching containment:**
Broad agreement on common themes, including confidentiality and clear goals and expectations.
- 5 Client/coach relationship:**
Client benefits included having fresh insights and increased confidence; coaches were aware of the need to be open-minded, bringing an understanding of individual behaviour and the dynamics of change.
- 6 Quality of the coaching intervention:**
Clients spoke of coaching challenging perceptions and of being practical; nominators talked of the need for structure and discipline; key stakeholders said coaches need organisational knowledge and psychological insight.
- 7 Adherence protocol:**
Potential conflict of interest was acknowledged.
- 8 Client/coach setting:**
Seen as an important factor in the internal coaching model. There was support for this being part of the pan-BBC leadership strategy.

Findings

Our findings show high motivation among clients and coaches, and so we can conclude that Kilburg's model of coaching is relevant to an internal model of coaching. The coaches were pleased to take on the role, and said they needed to feel part of a group where there was a shared philosophy of continuous development, and where the work felt worthwhile.