

THE CHALLENGE

To meet a formidable set of new global challenges, the leaders of a major international organization realized that they had to move beyond a familiar role as a global policy think tank. The agency's researchers were still doing the same good work they had always done in their sector, but it was no longer enough. After several decades of impressive successes, the organization was on the verge of losing its predominance to younger, hungrier institutions.

In order to fulfill its global mission, the leaders realized that the agency now needed to play a more hands-on role and project more leadership in its sector. Achieving that goal would require the organization's leaders to forge more partnerships, drive a more ambitious and focused research agenda, streamline its model for project engagement, and develop a culture that promoted evidence-based policy options.

But first, the leaders realized, they needed to change themselves. As leaders, they needed to become more mobile, and develop a greater capacity for innovation and collaboration. To help them with this important task, the executives of one department reached out to MayCoach & Co.

LEADERSHIP AS AN UNWANTED BURDEN

Our own investigation confirmed the leaders' intuition that the agency had grown too inward and silo-bound for its own good. Many leaders lacked trust and belief in others – even people on their own team – and focused largely on personal agendas. Agency executives we interviewed told us that their opinions were often treated brusquely by their colleagues and superiors.

"The agency's culture was very task-oriented, expert-driven, and dedicated, but they needed to make a greater effort to build stronger, more positive relationships and more accessible leadership," recalls Susanne May, the CEO of MayCoach & Co. "It almost seemed as if the parts of their work that had become most real to them were not the on-the-ground challenges people associate with their brand but the production of papers describing those challenges."

Our interviews with relevant stakeholders suggested that this reserved culture was impeding agency-wide successes. Not only was communication within the department difficult, but lack of contact between departments further reduced the organization's collective

capacity for knowledge sharing, innovation, and efficiency. This lack of collaboration led to a generally weaker sense of personal accountability, and left the workload on the shoulders of a few staffers.

Communications generally flowed from the top down, and multiple layers of management made the execution of every decision very time-consuming, particularly as the executive team received only sketchy reports from further down the pyramid that might have kept the decisions more on target. As a result, the agency had a hard time identifying, much less coping with, dynamic crises as they emerged. This dysfunctional communication furthermore meant that most of the staff felt excluded from real decision-making and never developed the experience they needed to handle a complex challenge.

Faced with so many obstacles, many people focused instead on narrow but more achievable technical and scientific tasks. They operated without seeing how their work fit into the organization's global agenda or even the agenda's key points. Nor were they united by a shared sense of aims or values.

OUR APPROACH

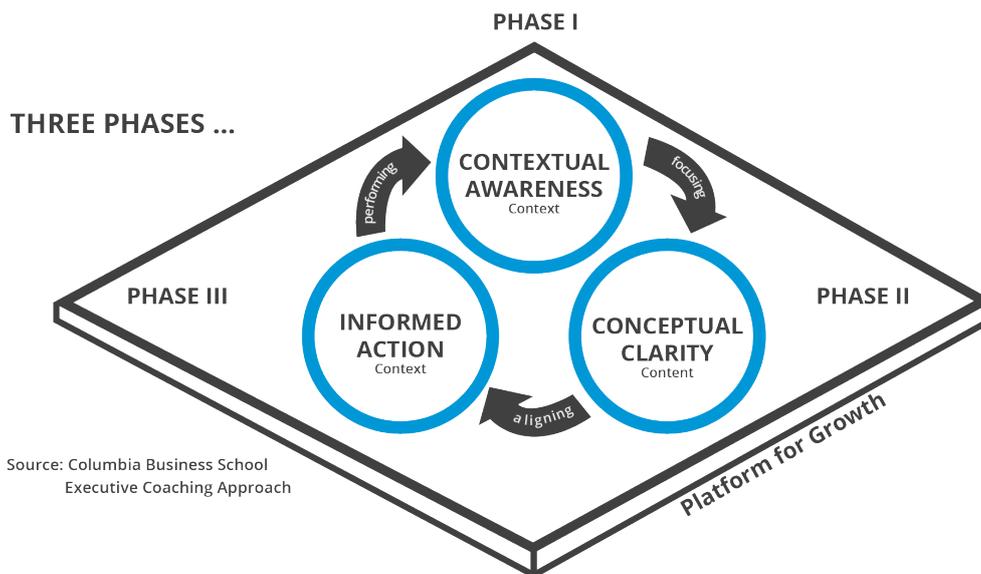
Based on our research and experience with various profit and non-profit organizations, we recommended a multifaceted coaching initiative. Overall, we aimed to help this department:

- Increase self-awareness of each individual executive's leadership style
- Establish a feedback culture that encouraged the creation of more positive professional relationships and better conflict resolution
- Foster collaboration across units and build effective peer networks

INDIVIDUAL COACHING

Each leader received a series of private coaching sessions led by a highly experienced and internationally accredited coach. The coaching process followed Columbia Business School's classic three-phase, "three-C" approach, which is illustrated on the following page.

Sixteen executive coaches from seven countries supported the program. The organization's leadership team had thus the chance to discuss aspects of their work that mattered most to them in one-on-one conversations. The coaches developed an environment for intense reflection and new thinking through challenging questions.



ON-AND-OFF SITE PROGRAMS

Besides individual coaching sessions, the coaches also facilitated on- and off-site group workshops. The program moreover featured several “learning on the job” elements including a leadership toolbox comprising concrete tools which could help to improve leadership on a daily basis. This toolbox included easy-to-implement exercises, short reminders for different state-of-minds as well as practical models that were anchored in exemplifying situations and based upon the core methodology which focused on three themes:

- Leading Self
- Leading Others
- Leading Networks

Participants in the group coaching sessions were drawn from different levels in the organization and different teams in the department. This mix of hierarchies and fields of expertise made participants more aware of the many opportunities they had to share best practices and begin productive collaborations. As one participant put it, “Although I knew that there were other people doing interesting things, I only came to know through the program that they were actually doing interesting things that also mattered to my team.”

In addition to the several individual and group coaching sessions, the senior leaders also met for several off-site retreats. In these workshops, the MayCoach & Co. faculty aimed to foster self-awareness and peer exchange and identify the theoretical underpinnings of the most effective approaches to building power and influence in an organization. They also taught the senior leaders how to enhance their personal influence among internal and external stakeholders, helping them understand the effect of culture on employee engagement.

Participants in the final off-site workshop discussed what they had learned in their individual coaching sessions, reflected on the way the agency’s culture needed to evolve, and developed a clear action plan to continue the transformation.

PERSONALITY & LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT TOOLS

To enhance the value of the coaching, the MayCoach & Co. team also administered several psychometric assessments. Such assessments are a good way for individuals to gain insight quickly into their particular strengths and weaknesses as leaders and colleagues, and give coaches detailed data that might otherwise take months of interviews to acquire.

In this case, the team used two standard tools, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Step II Assessment, one of the world’s most widely used and statistically reliable personality type tests, and the Hogan Leadership Suite, which teaches executives what “derailer” behaviors they are likely to exhibit under stress or high pressure. Both assessments were followed by debriefing sessions in which the coaches advised the participants of their strengths and weaknesses and reactions they should try to avoid in high-pressure situations.

PEER COACHING

At the same time, the leaders participated in peer coaching, which gave them fresh insights and best practices, and new tools to become more effective leaders. “The wonderful thing about peer coaching is that people get to learn how to incorporate these new insights and tools right away, under hands-on peer exchange relevant for the

agency context, making it much easier for them to get the hang of them before the engagement is over," said Deborah Croft, a Geneva-based coach who facilitated a number of the peer coaching sessions.

THE IMPACT

The final report and feedback from participants indicate that the program achieved its objectives. Most participants believed that they had gained greater self-awareness and a deeper understanding of the needs of their team, their peers, and their supervisors. In addition, the organization's top executives said they had observed a positive behavioral change in how that department collaborated and communicated with important stakeholders. All in all, most executives agreed they were well on the way toward becoming a more dynamic and empathic organization.

More specifically, MayCoach & Co. found that:

- Roughly 80% of the participants rated three of the four group leadership coaching sessions as valuable or very valuable.
- Six of seven participating directors ranked the offsite sessions as either valuable or very valuable to them. Five of seven strongly agreed that they had learned more about leadership.
- All of the senior leaders and over 85% of the other leaders reported that they had found their individual coaching valuable or very valuable. Nearly 70% of the executives said they either agreed or strongly agreed that the program had increased their repertoire of leadership tools and techniques.
- Over 80% of leaders found peer coaching either valuable or very valuable, and nearly 95% said they intend to continue peer coaching in the future.

Inspired by what they had learned, the leaders made a ranked list of values that they wished to make central to their agency, and developed an action plan for honoring those values and integrating them into the culture – work that continues today.

These days, this department is beginning to build a coaching culture that thrives on feedback and collaboration. Some participants say they have made strong gains in their ability to reflect on themselves and their behaviors. Others tell us that their feedback to their team members has become more productive, their leadership more effective, and their job satisfaction higher.

MayCoach & Company is a globally operating consulting firm in the field of leadership development, cultural renewal, global coaching solutions and assessments with over 150 professionals in 42 countries and offices in Berlin (Germany) and Singapore. For further information, please visit our website www.maycoach.com or contact us at info@maycoach.com.

© 2015 MayCoach & Company. All rights reserved.