Coaching Research Summary
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Contact
Brian Edwards, Managing Director
E: BEdwards@Entendeo.com
M: +44 (0)7974 194756
T: +44 (0)207 562 8910

Jeremy Kourdi, Director
E: JKourdi@Entendeo.com
M: +44 (0)7905 609590
T: +44 (0)207 562 8910

UK head office: Level 17, Dashwood House, 69 Old Broad Street, London, EC2M 1QS. United Kingdom
Hong Kong office: Level 19, Two International Finance Centre, 8 Finance Street, Central Hong Kong, China
Brazil: 132 Apogeo, Rua Dionisio da Costa, 47, Villa Mariana, Sao Paulo
Executive Summary

Overview

1. The challenges that executives raise are broad, consistent across groups, and changing
2. There is consensus among managers and coaches about some of the most significant issues
3. Achieving transformational change requires sustained commitment and practical support
4. Views about talent are shifting

The challenges that executives choose to discuss are broad, consistent across groups, and changing

So, what are the typical coaching challenges being raised by executives worldwide? The answers below reflect leader’s current priorities and areas for development.

Leading people through change – how to lead a team through challenging and often uncertain times, particularly when the individual’s future is also uncertain. Also of critical importance is the availability of tools and support.

Changing the culture of a team or business – how best to refocus a team so that their behaviour and mindset shifts; how to alter the elements of culture (the systems, symbols and beliefs).

Career development planning – how to prepare and position for the next role.

Starting a new role and onboarding – how to set and achieve goals in the short, medium and long term, and how to meet the challenges of starting a new role.

Managing performance – how to have tough conversations, encourage others to do the same, and build a culture where performance matters and is actively managed.

Managing time and workload – closely linked is the need to balance work and home life.

Managing upwards and developing influence – how to influence bosses, particularly significant for senior executives and those one or two levels below the senior management team, or those working in a matrix structure.

Presenting a new vision or goal – communicating can be challenging at any time but it is particularly challenging when the audience is cynical and has ‘seen it all before’.

Building motivation and engagement – how to ensure that people are positive and enthused.

Communicating – presentation and business writing skills are still important, especially for non-Anglo-Saxons working in Western organizations.

Coaching and developing others – how best to develop skills, encourage people to value personal development and use personal development plans as effectively as possible.

Managing across cultures – there is an awareness of cultural sensitivities but often not enough understanding about how to relate to people from other cultures.

Improving a weak or dysfunctional relationship – typically this is with a direct or indirect boss, sometimes with a direct report (appearing as a performance issue), and occasionally with a peer.

Lack of confidence – often among women or fast-tracked employees.

Building trusted relationships – this issue covers client relationships (approx 1/3), team members (1/3), and bosses/senior managers (1/3).
Leading people through change / executing strategy – getting people to think, act and behave differently are colossal and ubiquitous challenges. There is invariably a disconnect between people’s ‘head, heart and guts’ – the way they think, feel and act. Rational explanation only goes a very small part of the way to getting people to change but it is invariably the preferred approach, especially in intelligent, knowledge-based businesses. Incentives, examples, a practical explanation of what actions are needed and (if possible) the benefits to the individual, as well as patient guidance, support and the right tools are all more likely to succeed than explanation alone.

Increasing self-awareness – the need for executives to understand the effect that their behaviour and style has on others is seen as a paramount challenge for many leaders.

Developing executive presence – the desire for executives to have greater impact and influence is important, and this needs to work with all stakeholders, in all situations (good and bad), and across cultures.

The need to develop people and plan succession – in particular, the value of building a strong team as well as developing people’s talents and helping them realise their potential.

Managing people across multiple locations, generations and cultures – this interesting issue is becoming increasingly challenging for many organizations, particularly in Europe and North America.

Delegating work and empowering team members – some managers, even at senior levels, are still failing to delegate effectively or empower their team.

Sharing knowledge and improving collaboration – people understand that collaboration makes sense for the organization, but human instinct can be naturally competitive and opposed to collaboration. Sometimes genuine reasons not to share are provided, sometimes these are exaggerated excuses.

Preparing for a new role – a major challenge is often finding the best way to prepare for a new role, even when it is 12-18 months away.

Removing business-as-usual thinking and complacency – this issue affects innovation and the ability to learn, continuously improve and set challenging new goals.

Managing performance (and giving feedback) – this is seen as a perennial challenge for organizations and managers. Giving feedback is a particularly valuable skill but one that is not often explained. Managing performance also has two other specific elements (see below): 1) handling plateau performers, and 2) improving focus, productivity and engagement.

Handling ‘plateau’ performers – this involves managing, challenging and getting the most from people who have reached a plateau in their career.

Improving focus, productivity and engagement – there is an admission by some organizations that levels of focus can diminish over time, and that managers need to get better at sustaining the pace and level of their teams’ work.
Achieving transformational change requires sustained commitment as well as practical support

Many executives and HR professionals that we met felt that change initiatives often fail not because of leadership, need or understanding, but for the simple reason that people lack the right support at the right time. It is vital to provide the sustained practical guidance that will help them whenever they encounter a challenge or uncertainty. If this support is not provided then initiatives will fail in a way that leaves significant frustration and cynicism (see diagram).

Views about talent are changing

As part of our work we often ask senior executives, managers and HR professionals for their views about talent. The following points, explained in detail in the book ‘The Truth About Talent’ written by Jeremy Kourdi and Jacqueline Davies, summarise many of the key insights.

1. Talent is abundant and diverse. We run the risk of falling into the talent doom loop, believing that we simply need more intensive processes to find the right talent (not necessarily excellent leaders).

2. Potential is discretionary. People often don’t know what they can achieve – they don’t understand or realise their potential. Great managers and organizations help them find this.

3. Interdependence and relationships between people are critical. More than ever, talent operates systemically: talented people are attracted through relationships, developed through relationships and retained through relationships. And the opposite is also true (people leave a bad boss).

4. Talent is affected by the organization’s ‘ecology’. «Biologists often talk about the ‘ecology’ of an organism: the tallest oak in the forest is not the tallest just because it grew from the hardiest acorn: it is also the tallest because no others blocked its sunlight, the soil around it was deep and rich, no rabbit chewed through its bark as a sapling, and no lumberjack cut it down before it matured.» (Malcolm Gladwell, Outliers)

5. The nature and context of work matters – work must have meaning. Getting the best from talented people (in fact, from most people) is best achieved by giving them work which has meaning. Also, leadership and talent management are context-based.

6. Growing and engaging talent is at the core of leadership. These are not times for average leaders or those who cannot appreciate and use the skills of their people. If the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century are to be navigated successfully then it will take ‘whole’ leaders who can build business relationships that take their people and organization forward.
It seems counter-intuitive at best to claim that ‘people are our greatest asset’ and then largely neglect the talents and aspirations of the majority.

Our experience is that executive coaching provides support that is flexible, timely, personal and relevant.

About our research

- 1:1 interviews with 120 executives in over 50 companies
- ...and 510 questionnaires completed online
- 35% Continental Europe, 23% UK, 18% US, 11% Asia, 13% rest of the world
- Range of sectors and roles
- 68% male, 32% female
- 44% aged 35-44 years
- 28% aged 45-54
- 20% aged 25-43
- 8% over 55
- Above average qualifications (41% graduates, 51% postgrads)
We provide executive coaching, leadership development and consultancy expertise for individuals and market-leading organizations worldwide.

About Entendeo
We are an international executive development business with a growing team of 40 coaches, offices in Europe, the Americas and Asia-Pacific, and a client base including global, market leading businesses.

What we do
We coach people to improve the way they make choices and behave, delivering the culture shift and results that our clients are seeking.

How we do it
We provide a range of interventions – high impact executive coaching, consultancy and tailored development programmes – so that people:

» Provide support and challenge, both for themselves and for members of their team.

» Generate practical insights leading to behavioural change.

» Learn and are open to the need for continuous development, flexibility and change.

» Develop strong, effective business relationships both internally (within the organization, leading to greater collaboration and teamwork) and externally.

» Build their confidence, understanding, awareness and skills.

Our approach is based on our values including the need to help people understand, build, innovate and execute.

Why we do it
We believe that amazing business relationships deliver amazing business results. Relationships provide the foundation for success – for individuals, teams and organizations. We deliver this by providing coaches who care about people and about achieving results.

What this achieves
We develop leaders with the skills, confidence and mindset – and the relationships – needed to make progress and succeed. In this way they can help their organizations achieve their goals.

Our products are briefly described below.

Coach on Call delivers fast, cost-effective, world-class coaching for all your employees via telephone or skype. Any person. Any issue. Any time.

Coaching Connect is premium-value coaching for leaders and high-potential managers, developing relationship and skills and delivering results.

Leadership Connect is our name for tailored leadership and change management programmes designed to suit your needs and situation.

Strategy Connect is our advisory service provided by Entendeo’s consultants, people who are expert in leading change and advising on organizational and people development.

Our Clients
Based in London and with offices in Hong Kong and Sao Paulo, we work with international clients worldwide. Our clients include:

- BBC
- Blake Lapthorn
- Citigroup
- DEFRA
- Duke Corporate Education
- Economist Intelligence Unit
- European Commission
- Financial Times
- HSBC Group
- IBM
- IMD Business School
- John Lewis Partnership
- KPMG
- London Business School
- PricewaterhouseCoopers
- Royal Bank of Scotland
- Saudi British Bank
- Tetra Pak
- The Economist Group
- Zurich

Clients value our work because we develop executives and teams, enabling them to perform at the highest levels. Above all, our coaches ensure that people understand not simply what to do, but how and why. Our commercial approach emphasises execution, personal development and the need to deliver business objectives.