

intervention be assessed, and how can knowledge gleaned from the coaching intervention be leveraged for organizational success?

## Peer Coaching

A recent focus group with a small group of health care providers in their hospital-based practice demonstrated the tremendously important resource of peer coaching. Typically in this particular profession, one learns technical knowledge in school and very little about how to apply that knowledge in the workplace. That kind of learning, the development of a foundation of the required tacit knowledge, takes place on the job. In the hospital department in question, each new hire is given a 4-month formal orientation. Everyone in the focus group agreed that by no means is that sufficient to fully orient new professionals to the hospital or their roles. What happens next? A very effective informal peer coaching capability takes over and supports the individual professional, literally for the rest of his or her career. The professionals in this group are all highly regarded, and there is no evidence to suggest that this capability is inadequate to the task (though it is easy to understand how it might look so to others, at least superficially). The peer coaching capability has been built up over the years as the culture of the department evolved.

Employees in this department are expected to seek help if they need to know something related to their jobs or organization; and employees who are asked for help are expected to provide it. Significant resources are devoted to supporting such a culture, including the provision of an up-to-date library (which people actually use) and a variety of additional online resources. People are encouraged to grow by taking on job-related challenges. The pay is relatively low, but worker satisfaction is quite high.

Researchers have known the value of peer mentoring for some time (Kram, 1988). The reality is that we turn to our peers for help for a variety of reasons. It is less threatening. Peer support is often available “just in time” to help deal with spontaneously emerging learning needs. Peer coaching can also be viewed as a form of social capital, networks of people who by virtue of their relationships with one another are more capable than they would be without those relationships. The peer network also provides support for the diffusion of knowledge from a coaching conversation to other parts of the organization.

While there are some formal peer coaching programs (Hunt, Strei, & Weintraub, 2002), as seen in the example above, an aggressive peer coaching capability is often more of a natural outgrowth of the culture within which it exists. Employees in the department cited never intentionally

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planned for the development of such a capability and (despite our advice) did not intend to manage that capability; and it is not clear that they are truly in a position to appreciate the significance of peer coaching as an aspect of the department's culture. This brings us to the question of the degree to which peer coaching can be stimulated intentionally. If so, can it be managed, or perhaps lead, toward organizationally desirable outcomes?

### **A Coaching Capability “Infrastructure”**

An organization, then, has a range of options from which to choose when considering how to establish a coaching capability. To summarize the position taken earlier, we believe that building a coaching organization requires both leadership and management. Leadership is required to establish the linkages between the organization's goals and the coaching capability, and it is also required to establish a coaching-friendly context appropriate to the organization's needs. Management is required to make and execute a series of decisions about the coaching capability, to make sure it is effective in the service of both the individual coachee and the organization.

When the decision is made to engage in coaching, perhaps by offering coaching training or by bringing in an executive coach, is the decision made haphazardly or strategically? Is thought given to what organizational-level outcomes can and should be pursued? If so, are appropriate plans and resources put into place to ensure that such outcomes are attained? In other words, there needs to be some kind of vision for what coaching can do, a leadership task, and then the allocation of resources and the follow-up to make sure that progress is made toward the vision.

Thus, there is work involved. Our main belief about that work is as old as the organizational hierarchy itself: What is seen as important gets done. A coaching capability can grow in a variety of forms, if there is a good reason for it to do so. We challenge the reader to think about the reasons for promoting coaching in his or her organization. Are those reasons aligned with the business or organization's vision, strategy, or plans? If so, you will find the existence of what we call a “coaching value chain.” The exercise at the close of this chapter presents an organized approach to thinking about the coaching value chain in your organization. You may find that the linkages are clear, not so clear, or poorly articulated, representing different challenges that we address throughout the book. In the next chapter, we will more clearly describe the factors that promote the evolution of a coaching organization.