

Performance and Independence

Flexible and Intelligent Managing

By Dr Angus McLeod

We want our executives to develop and improve in performance. As they do, they may become more independent of management time and more in control of their own learning and development needs. The manager can then transfer time intelligently to other staff. The 'Situational Leadership' model¹ offered four distinct managing styles for the developing worker on the basis of just two dimensions; needs for directive and needs for supportive behaviours. Here is a model² that also attempts to link with evolving training and needs as an executive develops. For this purpose, the word independence (or self-reliance) means psychologically self-maintaining.

The Managing Mentor: for Level One Independence

At Level One, an executive begins to develop the skills of the role and becomes more consciously aware of their incompetence³. Their manager can encourage more independence by providing information and examples, ideally by mentoring and by organising peer-support. The offering of information, ideas, solutions and advice does not usually encourage fast development of independent thinking. However, the Mentor-Manager may begin to use facilitative questioning (coaching) when the executive has obvious ability but lacks confidence to 'know-they-know'. The process of facilitative coaching encourages rapid independence. Mentoring tends to prolong dependence compared to coaching but mentoring is mostly appropriate at this level.

This is the time for plugging any skill-gap with training interventions. In the early stages, it may be too soon for distance learning unless adequate support structures are provided.

The Managing Coach: for Level Two Independence

At Level Two, an executive is more technically skilled but may not often think 'outside the box' or see the wider implications of team and corporate objectives. They are more independent on a day-to-day basis in terms of their tasking-performance but their emotional and creative competencies may still be limited. Typically, their ability to communicate (with) and motivate others is less than their potential. Coaching, now considered to be a facilitated process, is a powerful way for the coach-manager to stimulate and encourage independent creative thought and increasing self-confidence. The result in performance may be immediately exceptional.

Training interventions may include stimulation of psychological development: communication, feedback skills, conflict resolution, NLP and other leadership-skills training. Where staff-retention is high and potential identified, our experience shows that the provision of an external coach may provide step-level change in executive performance – even with only six interventions over three or four months – in many

¹ Ken Blanchard Companies

² Thanks are due to Wiebke Koch of the International Business School, Berlin

³ Reynolds B (1965) *Learning and Teaching in the Practice of Social Work* (2nd edn.) New York: Russell and Russell

instances with rapid promotion⁴. The executive may have issues about confidentiality and trust with their Coach-Manager that can be transcended using external coaches.

The Managing Visionary: for Level Three Independence

The Level Three executive may already have been promoted to higher status and may struggle initially with strategic issues and politics. If in a senior position, the same characteristics that drove desire for career progression may now limit their ability to collaborate and compromise with peers and other influencers. The executive may not correctly identify all the influencers or forge close working relationships with them. Coaching continues to be powerful at this level as it creates new perceptions about colleagues where prejudice existed and it encourages strategic thinking. The Visionary-Manager will most likely provide coaching via external resources. The role of the Visionary-Manager is to help them focus on the larger picture, trusting that the tasking ability of the executive will continue in their current role.

Training intervention is likely to include further facilitation skills programmes. Where senior executives have reached Level Three, team/board away-days and strategic management programmes may be helpful.

Level Zero

Level Zero is a stage of dependence where the effects of emotional turmoil, feelings of resentment, inadequacy, depression, frustration (for example) mean that the productive work of the executive is compromised. Even well-developed teams have examples of this type. At this level the need for support is typically outside the competence and resource of the manager - professional help is needed. Recovery can be slow and the level of manager-input needs to be intelligent, measured and appropriate. At different moments, this may mean being flexible enough to move from 'supporter' to mentor to coach as needs arise. A colleague at BT tells me that he has been in this position on several occasions during the last fifteen years – each time, the event being triggered by stress due to promotion into his division. It is a measure of his skills that each has moved progressively to higher independence and productive performance.

Training intervention might include personal development programmes (possibly in the public sector) but always checking with the individual what is appropriate at that time.

The Developing Performance Manager

Learning to be flexible is always a bonus for a manager's performance. Any model that creates intelligent thought and action should be useful. In this case, so they apply their time flexibly at the different levels, in the most appropriate way, at the best time. As needs change, so the manager demonstrates that flexibility. Regrettably, there are still many very senior executives that remain significantly below the flexibility required at Level Three - sometimes exacerbated by having a CEO at a similarly low level.

Within the corporate culture, unless we can vary our managing styles intelligently, little will change lower down the organisation. We can improve our position by hiring

⁴ To be presented at the CIPD Coaching Conference later this year

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managers who are personally developed and also have the psychological ability to adapt their managing to the dependency level of their staff.

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