

Aligning individual with planetary benefits through coaching

Coaching has experienced rapid and continuing growth as a flexible and effective means of achieving personal and professional development outcomes within organisational contexts. The increasing relevance of sustainability challenges is a compelling driver for developing individuals who can lead organisations through the complexity of performing against three bottom lines. It is the link between individual transformation and leadership, and the capability of organisations to innovate and take steps towards sustainability that highlights the role that coaching can play in individual, organisational and sustainable development.

While development of individuals may not be the ultimate outcome of coaching for sustainability, individuals are the most fundamental unit comprising an organisation, and all change and transformation must engage them in the process. Additionally, researchers and practitioners emphasise that we have the knowledge and technological solutions we need, but what is lacking is people in positions of responsibility and influence to make decisions and implement these solutions. But, often leadership is lacking, with two-thirds of organisations reporting a shortage of effective leaders.¹

The mindset, worldviews, values and leadership capacities of individuals are critical to facilitating a shift towards more sustainable organisations: *“I can only change this company as quickly as I can change myself”* (Allied Signal CEO, Larry Bossidy). Then, coaching has a role to play, as it is one of the most effective ways to develop leaders e.g. 84% of respondents to a recent survey rating it as effective.²

If organisations are to realise the benefits and synergies of aligning individual and sustainability goals, coaching is one of the most flexible and appropriate ways to achieve this. Coaching can support individuals to broaden their knowledge, skills and competencies. Coaching is also used to increase awareness and support leaders through complex transformations. Through our research, we identified numerous means of achieving these multiple outcomes, for example:

- External coaches delivering one-on-one coaching to key individuals, which supports their transformation.
- Peer coaching between individuals in different parts of an organisation, which creates a culture of mutual support and develops new competencies in the individuals.
- Action learning sets and peer support groups across organisations, to sustain leaders through tough times and prototypes the types of team culture necessary for sustainability.
- Integration of adding social and ecological goals to the development plans for individuals, to turn the triple-bottom line into something that is meaningful at an individual level.

The benefits for individuals in engaging in coaching reported by participants in our research include accelerated development, enhanced self efficacy and awareness, increased performance in their role, greater awareness of the needs of others, additional confidence and guidance, greater capacity for innovation and problem solving, and improved relationships with clients and team. All these benefits are additionally relevant to their effectiveness in integrating sustainability if that context for their coaching work is made explicit.

Even more significant than our findings about motivation, means and impacts of integrating coaching and sustainability, is the realisation that sustainability provides the most compelling context for individuals to develop as leaders, not only for their own sake, but such that they can be more effective in achieving organisational and social goals. This is expanded upon and supported by cases in the full report.

¹ Jarvis, J. "The rise and rise of coaching", *Coaching at Work*, [Online]. Available: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/coachingatwork/presales/The+rise+and+rise+of+coaching.htm>.

² Jarvis, J. "The rise and rise of coaching", *Coaching at Work*, [Online]. Available: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/coachingatwork/presales/The+rise+and+rise+of+coaching.htm>.