



A New Map for a New Age

“The true test of a leader is that his successor is a better leader.”— Stephen Covey, Author of “The 8th Habit”

by **Charlie Lang**

The top three challenges of organizations today, according to Hewitt Associates’ Best Employer Research, are:

- Talent sourcing;
- High employee engagement;
- Talent retention.

In the course of this article, I will invite you to look at these challenges from a different, evolutionary angle, so you may better understand some of your current struggles. I will propose a possible solution to achieve profound positive change.

If you look at the development of human civilization, you will note the

following development:

Stage I: Approximately 6 million years B.C. until approximately 10,000 B.C.

Hunter/Gatherer Age

Stage II: 10,000 B.C. until 19th Century

Agrarian Age

Stage III: 19th Century until late 20th Century

Industrial Age

Stage IV: Late 20th Century until today

Information/Knowledge Age

Each development stage brought about a massive increase in productivity, but also led to considerable confusion and discomfort because of the changes that

were necessary to move from one stage to the next.

You can also see that the time it took to move from one stage to the next progressively decreased. While people had centuries to change from Stage I to Stage II, and about half a century to change from Stage II to III, there are only one to two decades available to move from Stage III to IV.

In this article I shall focus only on the last two development stages and the implications for organizations today.

Let’s look at this overview of Success Factors for Stages III and IV (see Table 1 on page 8).

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It is easy to see from the table that the leadership behavior that made organizations successful during the Industrial Age is vastly different from the behavior set needed for the Information/Knowledge Age. The leadership behavior that worked in the earlier Industrial Age a success has become an obstacle in the Information Age.

Even companies in so-called 'Old Industries' like manufacturing, construction, etc., where the focus is still on creating tangible products are undergoing the shift from the third to the fourth stage and will face the same limitations as companies in the tertiary sector that seem to be more 'pure' examples of Information/Knowledge Age companies.

So how can companies make a shift from Stage III to Stage IV?

We found that one of the keys to successfully make this shift is to start developing a coaching culture.

In the Industrial Age, tasks are routine and can be defined more easily in procedures. This made the directive, dictatorial, autocratic, or task-oriented styles appropriate during that time. However, in the Information or Knowledge Age, workers are required to have a deeper knowledge or understanding of the nature, purpose, and other intricacies of the tasks at hand. This makes the coaching approach more appropriate.

Table 1: Success factors for stages III and IV

	Industrial Age	Information/ Knowledge Age
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uniformity - Stability - Product Orientation - Standardization - Status - Financial Capital - Scarcity (limited resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity - Creativity - Customer Orientation - Customization - Collaboration - Human Capital - Abundance
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hierarchy - Chain of Command - Task Orientation - Competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Networks - Initiative - People Orientation - Alliances
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authority - Directive - Control - Carrot & Stick Motivation - Focus on Efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People Development - Employee Ownership - Servant Leader - Engagement (inspire "discretionary effort") - Focus on Effectiveness
Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resources Management (Economies of Scale) - Bureaucracy - Building Solid Structures - Internal Control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective People Leadership Including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-Development - Coaching - Team-Leadership - Developing a Value-Based Organizational Culture

Key coaching concepts

1. Ownership

One of the key concepts of coaching is the framework of 'ownership.' When leading people using the coaching approach, you don't tell them what to do in which case you would have the ownership. Instead, you leverage on the knowledge and experience of the coachee and ask meaningful questions that draw out ideas and suggestions from him. The benefits of doing this are the following:

a) The coachee may come up with better

ideas than his or her leader.

b) The coachee 'owns' the ideas and is more engaged in putting them into action.

c) The coachee develops the habit of thinking by himself/herself and as a result grows as a person.

2. Being non-judgmental

This is perhaps one of the most difficult frameworks to master because our upbringing conditions us to be judgmental all the time. Our school system is

judgmental (we all remember getting marks), our parents' rearing style is judgmental ("this is bad, this is good") and our performance systems at work are judgmental (KPI's, appraisals, etc).

What then does it mean to be non-judgmental and why is it important?

One of the key objectives of coaching is to get to the truth. However, feeling defensive and, as a result, it's difficult if not impossible to discover the complete truth. This happens in recruitment interviews and it happens in typical appraisal conversations.

Being non-judgmental does not mean one cannot exercise any judgment, which is close to impossible. Being non-judgmental means being aware of our judgment and then putting it aside, or suspending it. A good way to achieve this is to replace our judgment with curiosity.

This is a crucial element for a coach to be truly effective. It builds trust between both parties and facilitates truth exploration.

Other coaching concepts include being forward-oriented, which means that any reflection on the past is limited to the extent that it is useful for the present or the future. It also means to focus on opportunities rather than on problems. This creates a higher energy level and tends to make the coachee more motivated to look for solutions on how to positively create his/her future.

Another key coaching concept is to avoid giving advice (it would reduce the ownership of the coachee) and instead share one's own or others' experiences with the coachee. This is most effective if the manager (coach) is ready to accept that the coachee may choose not to adopt what was shared. Otherwise, again, the coachee's ownership is compromised.

Major coaching skills

There are a number of coaching skills a good coach must possess, including

- Ability to build trust with the coachee;
- Being 100 per cent present during the coaching conversation;
- Listening, including active listening, contextual listening, intuitive listening, etc. (Note: you may want to explain these kinds of listening);
- Skillful questioning;
- Creating higher levels of awareness for the coachee;
- Goal setting;
- Action planning;
- Championing (supporting the coachee in his/her growth).

It is not easy for companies to transition to the coaching mindset. In order to successfully develop a coaching culture, the commitment to employ the coaching style ideally starts from the top of the organization. It is quite frustrating for middle managers to be coaching their subordinates while not being coached by their senior managers. As a result, they may give up making the effort and fall back into old leadership practices.

Successful implementation of coaching cultures usually happens on three levels:

- Top management: learns coaching mindset and skills and is ready to be coached by external executive coaches;
- Middle management: learns how to coach their subordinates and may be coached by internal corporate coaches (usually members of the HR department);
- Staff: Is being prepared for the cultural change through encouragement of taking more ownership and through leadership behavior that allows

making mistakes within certain boundaries.

Typical obstacles to the introduction of a coaching culture are:

- Resistance from certain managers who are afraid of giving up part of their power and sharing more responsibilities with their direct reports. Also, some managers fear that talented subordinates who develop themselves through coaching may become a threat to their own position;
- Resistance from staff who are afraid to take up responsibilities as they can be held more accountable for the results they produce. This is particularly a problem in a culture that doesn't tolerate any mistakes.

We know from experience that these obstacles can be overcome and that with a strong endorsement from top management, acting as role models, the necessary change in mindset can happen.

Conclusion

To build a successful coaching culture, all managers in the organization have to buy into the coaching approach and learn the necessary competencies. Ideally, senior management is coached by professional external coaches during this process. If implemented successfully, the company is on a good path to develop successful strategies, structures and practices to succeed in the Information/Knowledge Age. **HR**

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