



Coaching Culture as Strategic Infrastructure



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Executive context

For organisations navigating transformation and growth, capability is rarely the constraint. Alignment, decision quality, and behavioural consistency are.

A coaching culture operates at this level. It shapes how leaders think, relate, and act under pressure. It influences how quickly organisations adapt, how effectively they execute, and how sustainably they perform.

This is not a “development initiative.” It is operating infrastructure for modern organisations.



1. Why coaching culture is strategic in transformation and growth

Transformation is behavioural before it is structural

Most transformation efforts fail to sustain impact not because strategy is flawed, but because behaviour does not shift at scale.

Coaching intervenes at the level where transformation either holds or collapses:

- sense-making under ambiguity
- decision-making in complex systems
- interpersonal dynamics that enable or block execution

Research consistently links coaching with improvements in goal attainment, resilience, and adaptive leadership capability (Theeboom et al., 2014). These are not peripheral outcomes; they are central to transformation success.

Growth increases leadership load

As organisations scale, the cognitive and relational demands on leaders expand non-linearly:

- broader spans of control
- more ambiguous decision environments
- increased stakeholder complexity



Traditional development models struggle to keep pace because they are episodic and content-led. Coaching provides contextualised, in-the-moment development aligned to real work.

Meta-analytic evidence shows coaching has a positive effect on performance, skills, well-being, and coping (Jones et al., 2016). The implication is clear: coaching supports both capability and capacity.

Culture becomes execution risk

During periods of growth or transformation, culture is often described aspirationally but experienced inconsistently.

A coaching culture makes culture observable and actionable:

- leaders are held accountable for how they lead, not just what they deliver
- feedback becomes continuous rather than event-based
- reflection and learning are embedded into workflow

This shifts culture from narrative to system.



The link to business outcomes

The commercial case is increasingly well established. Organisations with strong coaching cultures report:

- higher employee engagement
- stronger leadership pipelines
- improved retention of high performers

ICF and HCI research indicates that organisations with strong coaching cultures are more likely to be classified as high-performing and report stronger revenue growth (International Coaching Federation, 2020).

The mechanism is not abstract. Coaching, when done systemically, improves:

- decision quality
- alignment speed
- leader effectiveness



These are direct drivers of organisational performance.



2. What is a coaching culture (and what it is not)

A coaching culture is not defined by the volume of coaching activity. It is defined by the consistency of coaching behaviours across the system.

Core characteristics

A mature coaching culture demonstrates:

- Distributed capability
- Coaching is not limited to accredited coaches. Leaders at multiple levels use coaching skills appropriately within their roles.
- Contextual application
- Coaching is applied where it adds value: complex decisions, leadership transitions, performance inflection points.
- Integration into work
- Coaching is embedded in existing rhythms—performance conversations, team interactions, strategic discussions.
- Psychological safety and challenge
- Conversations hold both support and accountability. This balance is essential for growth (Edmondson, 1999).
- Standards and ethics
- Coaching practice aligns with recognised frameworks (e.g., ICF, EMCC), ensuring quality and consistency.



The boundaries of a coaching culture

A coaching culture relies on relationships, not just infrastructure. It is equally important to be clear about what a coaching culture is not. It is not a catch-all solution for every organisational need, nor is it intended to replace other forms of leadership or management.



Organisations still require clear direction, timely decision-making, performance management, and, at times, authoritative leadership. Coaching does not eliminate these responsibilities—it sits alongside them. Not every moment calls for a coaching approach. In practice, a healthy coaching culture is defined by discernment: knowing when to coach, when to guide, when to instruct, and when to make decisions unilaterally. Overextending coaching into situations where clarity, speed, or expertise is required can create confusion rather than empowerment.

The boundaries of a coaching culture, therefore, matter. It is not about uniformity of behaviour, where every interaction is forced into a coaching frame. Instead, it is about expanding the repertoire of how people lead and relate to one another, with coaching as a deliberate and contextually appropriate choice. When those boundaries are understood, coaching becomes more powerful—not less—because it is applied with intention rather than obligation.

3. Diagnosing your current state

Before building a coaching culture, organisations need clarity on where they are starting. This requires moving beyond activity metrics.

Three diagnostic lenses for your coaching culture

1. Leadership behaviour

- How do leaders handle ambiguity and pressure?
- To what extent do they create space for reflection versus default to directive problem-solving?
- How consistently do they develop others in real time?

2. Organisational systems

- Where does coaching currently sit (if at all)?
- Is it integrated into performance, talent, and leadership processes?
- Are there clear standards for coaching quality?

3. Cultural signals

- How safe is it to challenge thinking?
- How is feedback given and received?
- What behaviours are rewarded or tolerated?

Data sources

Effective diagnosis draws on multiple inputs:

- leadership assessments and 360 feedback
- targeted interviews with senior leaders
- engagement and culture data
- performance and retention metrics



This aligns with evidence-based coaching practice, where data informs focus areas and intervention design (Grant & Cavanagh, 2006).

Common patterns in coaching culture diagnostics



Across organisations, several patterns recur:

- Fragmentation
- Coaching exists, but is disconnected from business priorities.
- Over-reliance on external coaching
- Limited internal capability to sustain behavioural change.
- Misalignment of intent and behaviour
- Stated values do not translate into leadership practice.

These are not failures. They are typical starting points.



4. Building a coaching culture

Building a coaching culture is a multi-year, system-level effort. It requires alignment across leadership, capability, and infrastructure.

Anchor to business priorities

Coaching culture initiatives often lose traction when positioned as “development.”

Instead:

- link coaching to specific transformation or growth priorities
- define the behaviours required to deliver those priorities
- position coaching as the mechanism to enable those behaviours

This ensures relevance and executive sponsorship.

Start with leadership, not scale

Senior leaders shape cultural norms. Without their visible engagement, coaching remains peripheral.

Focus on:

- targeted executive coaching aligned to strategic challenges
- building leaders’ ability to use coaching skills in context
- creating shared language around thinking, decision-making, and behaviour



Build internal capability deliberately

A sustainable coaching culture requires internal capacity.

This includes:

- training leaders in core coaching skills
- developing internal coaching pools where appropriate
- clarifying when to coach, when to direct, and when to escalate

The goal is not to turn all leaders into coaches. It is to increase behavioural range.

Integrate into systems and rhythms

Coaching must be embedded into how the organisation operates:

- performance and development conversations
- talent reviews and succession planning
- team meetings and strategic discussions

This is where culture shifts from initiative to norm.

Maintain quality and standards

Scale introduces risk. Without clear standards, coaching quality becomes inconsistent.

Organisations should:

- align with recognised coaching frameworks (ICF, EMCC)
- define expectations for internal and external coaches
- monitor outcomes, not just activity



Evidence-based practice requires both rigour and reflection (Stober & Grant, 2006).

Measure what matters

Measurement should connect coaching to business outcomes:

- leadership effectiveness
- employee engagement and retention
- performance against strategic objectives

At an individual level:

- goal attainment
- behavioural change
- decision-making effectiveness

Coaching impact is measurable when it is aligned to real work.



5. The role of a global partner

Building a coaching culture at scale introduces complexity:

- ensuring consistent quality across geographies
- matching coaches to context and need
- integrating coaching into organisational systems
- maintaining ethical and professional standards



This is where a specialised partner becomes critical.



6. Introducing BOLDLY

BOLDLY was established to open access to high-quality coaching globally and to set a benchmark for coaching standards. It combines a global marketplace of rigorously screened coaches with technology-enabled delivery to support large-scale, strategic coaching operations



What differentiates the approach

- **Global scale with quality control:** A network of over 4,800 vetted coaches across geographies and languages, with consistent screening and standards
- **Evidence-based methodology:** Coaching grounded in behavioural science, including cognitive-behavioural, systemic, and adult development approaches
- **Integration of services and technology:** Enabling organisations to manage coaching as a strategic capability, not a fragmented intervention
- **Alignment to organisational outcomes:** Coaching programmes designed around business priorities, supported by data and diagnostics

A partner for coaching culture

BOLDLY's model supports organisations to:

- diagnose current coaching maturity
- design coaching strategies aligned to transformation goals
- deploy coaching across leadership levels and geographies
- build internal capability while maintaining external expertise
- measure impact in commercial and organisational terms

Importantly, the focus remains on enabling human depth at scale. Technology supports orchestration and insight, not the coaching relationship itself.

7. Practical implications for GM Talent

For leaders responsible for talent and organisational capability, several priorities emerge:

1. **Reframe coaching as infrastructure:** Position it as part of how the organisation operates, not an optional development layer.
2. **Align with transformation priorities:** Ensure coaching directly supports strategic outcomes.
3. **Invest in leadership behaviour:** Culture shifts through leaders first.
4. **Build internal capability with clear boundaries:** Increase coaching fluency without diluting role clarity.
5. **Partner for scale and quality:** Global consistency requires specialised capability.



Conclusion

A coaching culture is not a signal of organisational maturity. It is a mechanism for achieving it.

In environments defined by transformation and growth, organisations need leaders who can think clearly under pressure, adapt quickly, and develop others in real time. Coaching enables this.

The question is no longer whether coaching adds value. It is whether it is embedded deeply enough to shape how the organisation actually works.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people's custodianship of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing seasonal, cultural connection with landscapes, waterways and the sky world. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging today.

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