

Our coaching offer

Navigating uncertainty and developing system leaders

Leaders in health and care face growing uncertainty and a development challenge

Senior staff are working in an increasingly ambiguous and rapidly changing environment. They must navigate uncertainty, make and implement decisions with limited information and adapt to the results of their efforts. In a complex system, results are unpredictable – so the potential for implementing standard solutions is low.

There is typically no 'right answer' to the questions being posed and often a lack of evidence base to support proposed interventions. Uncharted territory can drive insecurity in leaders – which can paralyse decision-making or lead to unfounded confidence in popular ideas. There remain barriers to innovation and disincentives for staff to flex their approach once change has begun.

Leadership roles are changing significantly. They are frequently more externally-focused in nature and require genuine collaboration across multiple organisations. There is greater emphasis on the human aspects of change. Shifting power dynamics mean influencing and negotiation skills are increasingly more valuable than a 'command and control' style of leadership.

But beyond this, the competencies required to perform these roles effectively are typically being defined 'in flight'. Availability of support is fragmented and responsibility for development of leaders is unclear – so there is a strong risk of individuals experiencing isolation. Development needs are highly diverse, so 'sheep-dip' style training alone is unlikely to be an adequate response.

Coaching is an ideal intervention to respond to these challenges

Coaching is facilitating the development, learning and enhanced performance of another.

...It is typically a targeted development intervention, working with an *individual* over a series of sessions towards a defined set of objectives.

...But it can also be thought of as a broader set of competencies and techniques, which can be applied to support individual, team and organisational development.

It is an ideal intervention to respond to the challenges facing senior leadership...

- **Coaching is well-placed to deal with ambiguity** – It involves working alongside individuals to help them gain a deep understanding of the issues they face. It is characterised by asking the 'difficult questions' to stimulate fresh ways of thinking. It involves challenging assumptions at every stage to ensure that actions are based on sound reasoning.
- **Coaching is founded on active experimentation in the real world** – It is an antidote to false certainty and abstract solutions! The coaching relationship supports individuals to explore the critical issues – to reflect, develop clarity and make progress. It retains a strong grounding in educational and management theory and can be rigorously evaluated.
- **Coaching is completely driven by individual context and needs.** It is person-centred and can be adapted to the needs and preferences of the individual. It provides a confidential and non-judgmental environment to support development. It offers a 'safe space' – a chance to step outside the usual constraints and tackle the uncomfortable and the unfamiliar in a supportive partnership.

What's the evidence?

- It is challenging to demonstrate a direct effect on individual and organisational performance with a development intervention.
- However, coaching has been associated with improvements in 360 degree feedback results, including self-awareness, confidence, communication skills and leadership effectiveness. Improved retention and productivity gains have also been described.
- We can also draw upon robust, well-validated research in psychology/therapy to support the value of coaching/mentoring skills (including listening, building rapport, asking 'powerful' questions, feedback and the value of relationships).

Why us?

In the Strategy Unit, our coaches...

- ✓ ...undertake accredited training to deliver coaching at a senior level (ILM 7 Executive Coaching & Mentoring), as well as key supporting skills, such as use of psychometrics (e.g. DiSC, MBTI) and group coaching.
- ✓ ...operate according to a recognised code of ethics (European Mentoring & Coaching Council)
- ✓ ...access regular coaching supervision and professional development.

But it is our wider situation that sets us apart...

We're familiar with the context: Our projects in The Strategy Unit typically place us at the forefront of change in health and care systems, where there are high levels of ambiguity and diversity of opinion as to the best way forward. We can draw upon our experience of a range of professional contexts (including clinical work, management and project-based consultancy) to better adapt our approach to individual requirements.

We can build on our existing trust and relationships: The Strategy Unit has a strong history of acting as a 'critical friend' to local systems and we are increasingly proactive in identifying and responding to their development needs. Tailored individual interventions, such as coaching, form a natural progression in our offering and can be built into broader development programmes and partnership arrangements.

We can draw on our wider capabilities: As well as offering coaching on a standalone basis, we can adapt and incorporate the 'coaching approach' into our other service lines, into our work with teams and as a means of adding reflection and challenge into significant projects.

What does The Strategy Unit offer involve?

Typically...

...a series of one-to-one coaching sessions with an individual, focused on defining and delivering an agreed set of objectives.

Who is it for?

- Our offer is aimed at senior managers.
- They are typically operating at sub-director or director level (though leaders may choose to invest in a more junior individual who shows significant potential).
- They are often relatively new to their role, or have had a recent change in remit (e.g. taking a leadership responsibility for a significant change programme)
- They are working amidst a high degree of uncertainty and ambiguity – making decisions and responding to results in a complex environment.
- They may have specific development needs identified, or be participating in a wider development programme.

What would happen?

- We tailor the format and frequency of sessions to the needs and preferences of the individual.
- We would typically use an initial session to define a set of strategic objectives and measurements to work on, and to describe the nature of our partnership.
- We would then work on these objectives together in a series of developmental conversations, at intervals determined by the actions agreed each time.
- Depending on your area of focus, we may draw upon psychometric tools as an input to our discussions e.g. DiSC, MBTI etc., or organise 360° feedback from peers.
- We regularly monitor progress against objectives and agreed metrics – rescoping together as and when your requirements change.

What might we work on?

- We work on the areas that are most important to you. These could include...
- **Leadership** (e.g. personal impact, recognisable behaviours, style)
- **Change** (leading, coping with, planning for)
- **Strategic thinking** (e.g. exploring logic, understanding challenges, innovating effectively)
- **Relationships** (dealing with conflict, improving effectiveness, working with groups)
- **Communication** (individual/group, written, verbal, interpersonal skills)
- **Self-management** (prioritisation, delegation, clarity of goals/focus)
- **Career** (planning development, identifying stretch goals, imposter syndrome)

Coaching from a trusted partner, operating within the NHS and with an understanding of your strategic context – at a significantly lower cost than externally-provided executive coaching.

What does The Strategy Unit offer involve?

We can also draw on the coaching approach to support a broader range of development interventions:

Group coaching – *to develop your team...*

Coaching methods can be a powerful means of supporting team development – particularly where there is a need to reflect on group effectiveness and to develop and deliver plans for improvement. We can act as a neutral facilitator throughout this process and are comfortable providing support for teams ranging from multidisciplinary teams at neighbourhood level, up to new boards or alliances that are forming in support of system working.

Coaching workshops – *to 'build in' quality for key workstreams...*

Significant projects and programmes typically benefit from the support of a 'third party', facilitating reflection and offering challenge to the delivery team. This is particularly valuable for work that spans organisational boundaries, or where there is a high level of external scrutiny expected. As well as supporting individual leads, we can work with your core delivery team or a wider group of stakeholders – on a one-off, or an ongoing basis – as a means of adding rigour and encouraging new perspectives.

Training and mentoring – *to support behaviour change...*

We can support senior managers to adopt a 'coaching approach' to management, modelling and developing the skills needed to manage uncertainty and to support their teams through change. Coaching also has proven effectiveness as an adjunct to training - a means of bridging the gap between 'standard' classroom learning and actual changes to behaviour in the workplace. Building in coaching support can help ensure that the development interventions you invest in lead to lasting improvements.

Clinical leadership development – *to build capability...*

We recognise the increasing expectations of clinical leaders in system working and that there are specific challenges associated with effective development in these staff groups. We can draw on coaches who are clinically trained and have a deep understanding of the context, to maximise the chances of success. We can offer coaching within the context of a wider development programme e.g. using our network to arrange mentoring relationships and supporting interventions to build general leadership and management skills.

We can also give you access to our wider team... to help build your understanding of the past, present and potential futures – acting as a key input to your reflective process and supporting you to make key decisions. Our capabilities include advisory and implementation support, knowledge and evidence review, analytics and evaluation.



So what next?

To find out more about working with us and to arrange an informal discussion, please get in contact.

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