

# Coaching buyers want ‘chemistry’

Interim results from the 2011 Ridler Report reveal changing trends in what organisations expect from their executive coaches. **Liz Hall** reports

**T**he most important factor when choosing an executive coach is personal chemistry although buyers are also more concerned with coaches’ professionalism than ever before, according to interim results from the latest Ridler Report.

Executive coaching is still most used at the higher echelons and tends to come about through top talent development programmes and significant internal promotions. Most organisations with strong internal coaching functions use external coaches too, according to interim findings based on responses from more than 50 coaching buyers by the beginning of April.

Clive Mann, editor of the Ridler Report and managing director of Ridler & Co, said: “The Ridler Report research programme has, over its first

four years, surfaced evidence of an increased emphasis among users of executive coaching on coaching professionalism when assessing executive coaches’ effectiveness.”

The ongoing nature of the research has enabled Ridler & Co to identify and track trends in executive coaching.

### What are buyers looking for?

The personal chemistry between buyer and coach is vitally important when making buying decisions (81 per cent rated personal chemistry as “highly relevant” or “essential”; see *Table 1*). Executive coaching, like other high value services, is bought on the basis of the relationship with the buyer. The coach must demonstrate personal and organisational “fit”.

High weighting is also given to professionalism in the assessment of

an executive coach’s effectiveness.

“Depth and rigour of professional coach training” scored 58 per cent and “evidence of high professional coaching standards, eg, regular supervision”, 55 per cent.

These measures of professionalism are now rated significantly higher than “long-standing business career before becoming a coach” (39 per cent) when assessing a coach’s potential.

### Seniority levels

When asked at what levels of seniority executive coaching is used, the most frequently cited responses were senior executive (subsidiary board director or country head, for example) at 50 per cent and senior manager (head of function or manager of multiple teams, for example) at 47 per cent (see *Table 2*). Executive coaching was also very much

Which of the following characteristics do you look for in an external executive coach when assessing their potential effectiveness as a coach in your company?	Percentage (%) of respondents who answered “highly relevant” or “essential”
Your personal chemistry with the coach	81
Depth and rigour of professional coach training	58
Evidence of high professional coaching standards, eg, regular supervision	55
Professional reputation in the marketplace	53
Long-standing senior level business career before becoming a coach	39
Ability to demonstrate an attractive business return on their previous coaching assignments	27

**Table 1 External executive coach characteristics required by buyers\***

At which of the following levels in your company is executive coaching most used?	Percentage (%) of respondents who answered “often” or “very often”
Group CEO / main board director	39
Senior executive, eg, subsidiary board director, country head	50
Senior manager, eg, head of function, manager of multiple teams	47
Middle manager, eg, supervisor or team leader	23

**Table 2 The use of executive coaching by seniority of executive being coached\***

Which of the following situations is most likely to give rise to a senior level executive coaching intervention in your company?	Percentage (%) of respondents who answered "often" or "very often"
Leadership development programme for top talent	63
Transition arising from a significant internal promotion	59
New appointment from outside the company	24
Ongoing sounding board for CEO / board director	23

**Table 3 The most common executive coaching situations\***

What mix of internal and external coaches does your company use at the following levels?	Percentage (%) of respondents who answered "usually external coaching" or "always external coaching"
Group CEO / main board director	69
Senior executive, eg, subsidiary board director, country head	52
Senior manager, eg, head of function, manager of multiple teams	28
Middle manager, eg, supervisor or team leader	14

**Table 4 Use of external coaching by seniority of 'client'**\*

\* Table source data : 51 Ridler Report questionnaires, received before 2 April 2011

in evidence at group CEO / main board level, though at a lower 39 per cent.

When asked which kinds of situation were most likely to give rise to executive coaching, the most frequent sources were leadership development programmes for top talent (63 per cent) and significant internal promotions (59 per cent; see *Table 3*).

Mann said: "Evidence from the report supports the view that executive coaching is especially suited to senior executives who are transitioning upwards in their organisations."

### Internal and external

Many organisations participating in the Ridler Report have highly developed internal coaching functions. They cite a number of benefits of using internal coaches such as their greater understanding of the organisation's way of doing things, their greater effectiveness in promoting a coaching culture and lower cost.

Most with strong internal coaching functions use external coaches too – some of the reasons being internal coaching's finite capacity and the belief that some external coaches have expertise that does not exist internally.

### The Ridler Report factfile

The 2011 Ridler Report presents findings from research carried out between October 2010 and April 2011 by Ridler & Co. By the beginning of April, 51 organisations had completed the questionnaire and more are expected.

The report analyses trends in the use of executive coaching. Participants are mostly senior HR, L&D, talent and specialist coaching professionals engaged in commissioning executive coaching.

Coaches' views are not included in the data gathering. This ensures that the findings represent exclusively the approaches to executive coaching of leading organisations that use executive coaching. Questionnaire data is supplemented by in-depth interviews and detailed case studies.

If you would like to participate in the research for the next Ridler Report, email Laura Taylor, director of Ridler & Co, at [laura.taylor@ridlerandco.com](mailto:laura.taylor@ridlerandco.com)

The new questionnaire will go online in early 2012.

Some executives, especially very senior individuals, prefer an external executive coach. One reason given is the very sensitive commercial and personal nature of their sessions. *Table 4* shows that the more senior the executive, the more likely they are to work with an external executive coach.

### Further findings

The full Ridler Report includes important data and analysis on:

- How organisations rate the value for money of internal versus

external executive coaching

- The returns on investment organisations are achieving on executive coaching
- The relative importance buyers attach to psychological insight as a coach characteristic.

The report also contains case studies from Ernst & Young and BSKyB (looking at different themes to the case study on page 30).

- The report will be posted online at: [www.ridlerandco.com](http://www.ridlerandco.com) after it has been sent to participating organisations.