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Coaching 55 +: Tools For Managers And For Self Management

Background – a need for more flow in learning

In Finland and in Sweden an increasing part of the population are reaching a higher age and are also working longer - the amount of people who are over 55 and still working are rising. This could potentially become a problem if the needs of this group are not considered. Managers who might be younger than their staff may not have the time or the skills to coach this group.

Another potential problem within this group is if a person *mentally* quits and stops participating in a positive way at work and therefore become less efficient. A person who has lost interest in their work might be a disruption and could influence their colleagues and the working environment in a negative way, like Eeyore the donkey from Winnie the Pooh.

However, among the 55 + there are also a lot of "tacit knowledge" that is not utilised or shared with others who could benefit. Research on this subject has been done both in Sweden and Finland by amongst others Professor Bo Göranson (Dialogue, Skills and Tacit Knowledge, Wiley), Erik H. Erikson and Gail Sheey. The importance of the role of the manager to observe and coach this group has been found to be key.

Educational project on Tacit Knowledge

In Finland, Svenska Studiecetralen (Swedish Study Centre, SSC) has carried out an educational project on Tacit Knowledge in the Third Age, as the 55+ group sometimes is called. There have been seminars to test tools and training and there is also an ongoing survey throughout various organisations on competence matters for this category. Björn Wallén, head of the SSC and Christina Lång, responsible for management training are running these seminars.

I have developed and written a tool box with a managers guide for coaching people who are 55+ in close cooperation with the SSC. We have tested the material among people who are 55 and over but also among people who work as managers or as coaches for people over 55. The test seminar was a success and it was very encouraging to hear comments after the training like:

"I wish I had had access to these kind of tools when I was younger". This comment came from a recently retired person – another category who could benefit from a bit of coaching to help them refocus on a new phase in life.

To our surprise younger people also liked the material – it seemed to work just as well for them.

About the material

The tool box consists of two parts, the tool box itself and a guide for managers and coaches.

We have focused on the working situation and environment, the role of the employee, as well as on duties and competence. With the help of a coach this material helps the coachee to reflect and bring out his or her own 'know how' and needs. You can use it for yourself in between coaching as well as for joint workshops within your company. It is easy to work with and it inspires your own thoughts and ideas – what is important for you in your working environment? What would you like to change?

Learning and bringing ideas into focus

As a consultant I work to improve knowledge and learning in individuals and groups. Some of the tools are based on my earlier work in this field and also on work by some of my colleagues. For example, Gunlög Bergander, previously responsible for competence development programs in one of the big unions in Sweden. We have both focused on encouraging individual ideas and not only looking at the organisation but also looking at enhancing the individual initiative and responsibility.

The material is mapped out in such a way that the coachee can go from today's situation to a simple plan of changes in the work situation. The material also contains some tools that will help develop certain skills like communication and creativity.

The coaching has been built around a 5-step model:

- Step 1 Important mile-stones from my history
- Step 2 My needs and current situation at work
- Step 3 I want to do/my hopes for the future
- Step 4 Want to learn more about/develop some skills
- Step 5 Plan and carry out.

The guide for managers or coaches gives you tips and hints on how to work through the model and suggests specific tools.

In the coachee part of the tool box you will find 25 step-by-step tools that will help you analyse your needs and end up with a plan of action with suggestions on how to improve your work and how to continue to develop.

You will also find recommendations on further literature and reading material on the subject. The material will be published in Swedish.

The SSC plan to use this material in their member organisations for inspiration and competence development. The project is going to be evaluated further when more people have tested it.

For further information or questions you may have on the material, please contact the author direct.