

## Summary Report for the ICF

### Gaining maximum value from executive and business coaching when Multi-stakeholder contracting takes places

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#### Abstract:

*This research, explores how to gain maximum value from multi-stakeholder contracting with the aim of sharing best practice. It is based on over 650 questionnaire responses from coaches, organisations and clients on the impact, benefit and challenges of stakeholder contracting. For the first time it has also provided guidance from participants on how best to conduct the meetings, in what circumstances and any pitfalls to avoid.*

#### The research so far

In 2011 Passmore and Fillery-Travis identified one of the coaching research themes for the coming decade as examining ‘Critical features of the coaching relationship’ including examining the impact of goals being set by others such as the organisation (p81). While coaching is a widely accepted developmental intervention there are still many gaps in research and this update on an ICF-sponsored study explores how to gain maximum value from multi-stakeholder contracting with the aim of sharing best practice, combining the researcher-practitioner partnership advocated (ibid. p70).

#### Why this study?

To our knowledge this is the first wide scale study into ‘Gaining maximum value from executive and business coaching when multi-stakeholder contracting takes place’ that draws on the experiences of all parties who are involved in the coaching relationship – executive and business coaches, individual clients, and sponsors (such as HR, the line manager, L&D). It considers the impact, potential benefits and challenges of coaching from these different perspectives. In addition, it provides research-based guidance on how to carry out multi-stakeholder contracting, in what circumstances it is most effective, and common pitfalls to avoid.

The aim of this study is to explore what makes multi-stakeholder contracting most successful if coaching takes place on this basis. There is some evidence that management support can have a positive impact on coaching outcomes (e.g. Goldsmith 2004; Knights and Poppleton 2007; Stewart et al, 2008; Ogilvy and Ellam-Dyson, 2012). Carter and Miller (2009) found only 17% of coaching objectives in one programme evaluation were aligned to organisational outcomes and argued managers can either be a point of real weakness or make a real difference to coachees if involved as active and engaged sponsors (pp7-9). The Ridler Report 2013 pointed to evidence that “good contracting practices build the foundations for evaluation processes ...and successful coaching outcomes” (2013, p12) with three-way meetings seen as a key mechanism

## Research design

In part the study, and some of the questions it asks, arose from client case studies brought to the researchers by their supervisees when multi-stakeholder contracting had created challenges for them as coaches. The research is based on the analysis of more than 650 questionnaire responses to questions on when and in what circumstances multi-stakeholder contracting is appropriate, and the impact of, benefits, challenges, frequency, time taken and good practice approaches to carrying out multi-stakeholder contracting. The web-based survey was carried out between February and September 2014 and involved coaches, coachees, and organisations who employ coaches. Recruitment took place through invitations sent out through the major coaching bodies - the AC, EMCC and ICF - *Coaching at Work* magazine as well as organisations in the public and private sectors.

## The findings

The first striking finding of our study is that nearly 88% of coaches have been involved in multi-stakeholder contracting, and 62% had discussed it in supervision. This highlights the relevance of the concerns that inform the research as well as directions for further study.

The research shows that a large majority of coaches (82%, n=414) and organisations employing coaching (78%, n=25) see stakeholder contracting as good practice. The biggest difference was with individual clients with the largest group, just over half (52%, 13) not having strong views. Its key benefits are considered to be in setting a clear frame for coaching, clarifying the roles and expectations of all parties, establishing clear boundaries and protocols, ensuring honesty and transparency in communication, and jointly setting a focus for the coaching that will deliver both individual and organisational benefits.

Furthermore, the research reveals how multi-stakeholder contracting also presents challenges. Organisational structures and processes need to be in place to support this happening. Coaches may be used in place of a line manager, and issues of boundary management and confidentiality are complex and require the coach to use some key specific skills for the contracting to be carried out effectively. This has implications for the training of both coaches and coach supervisors, which we will explore more fully in later papers.

There is consistency about the circumstances when all participants believe stakeholder contracting is appropriate which can be summarised as for the client's development, promotion or demotion; if the goals lend themselves to evaluation and review and when the organisation is paying and the client agrees.

When considering how often they had been involved over the last twelve months, more organisations than coaches (52% v 44%) had taken part in multi-stakeholder contracting more than half the time. However, in some organisations (41%) and for some business/executive coaches (40%) this form of contracting is still relatively unusual (1 in 4 coaching programmes or less).

## Best Practice Advice

Another contribution is the sharing of best practice by all parties. In optional written responses coaches, clients and organisational representatives were asked "What would be your top tip for successful stakeholder contracting?" This will be expanded in a future paper

but a brief thematic summary underlines clarity as the key consideration, for example around boundaries and confidentiality, coupled with honesty and integrity:

Coaches (n=253)	Clients (n=6)	Organizations (n=8)
Be clear on expectations (of stakeholder, client and yourself), boundaries, confidentiality and what coaching is and isn't. (34.78%, 88)	Openness and honesty (from all parties) (50%, 3)	Honesty, openness and clarity e.g. regarding confidentiality. (50%, 4)
Ensure honesty and transparency in communication. Do not fear to challenge the line manager and/or ask the important questions. Coach the line manager so he/she is able to provide meaningful feedback. (14.62%, 37)	Clarity of objectives. (33.33%, 2)	Clarity of expectations/objectives. (25%, 2)
Take the lead in contracting. Plan ahead, provide a clear, concise contract. (8.69%, 22)	Real desire to develop performance, dedication to make full use of the coaching. (33.33%, 2)	Education of the whole client group in the value of coaching and how to get best value. (12.5%, 1)

The research has also updated supervision findings that showed 44% of coaches had supervision (Hawkins and Schwenk, 2006, p4). The figure globally is now 83% with the highest rate in the UK at 92% and the lowest in the USA/Canada at 48%. A separate paper is available on this aspect.

### Conclusion

The research shows that a large majority of coaches and organisations employing coaching see stakeholder contracting as an important ingredient of successful coaching at work. Its key benefits are in setting a clear frame for the coaching, clarifying the roles and expectations of all parties, establishing clear boundaries and protocols and jointly setting a focus for the coaching that will deliver both individual and organisational benefit. Multi-stakeholder contracting also presents a number of key challenges, notably around boundary management and confidentiality.

This project also contributes to an agenda for future research. Important areas for further study include determining whether a distinction between learning and performance goals (e.g. Locke and Latham, 1990, Scriffignano 2011) might play a role in determining whether multi-stakeholder coaching is appropriate and effective, and analysing the impact of multi-stakeholder contracting on the evaluation of outcomes.

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## **About the authors**



Eve Turner is an accredited Master Executive Coach and Coach supervisor whose passion for enquiry has led to a number of research projects. She is the current co-winner of the Best Research article for "Chain Reaction" at the 2015 Coaching at Work Awards [Click here to read the article](#) and regularly presents at conferences. Eve is an

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