

Research Corner

The ICF Research and Development Committee reviewed the following research study and recommended that it be published in Coaching World so that all ICF members could benefit from it. This study was initiated by ICF France. It was then shared at the 2005 ICF Annual Conference and has since been used in several countries.

Beyond ROI:
An International Study by ICF France
on the ROI of Executive Coaching
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The purpose of this study is to build a new approach, beyond ROI, in order to highlight the effects of executive coaching on the global achievement and performance of a company.

Existing international studies seek to measure the return on investment (ROI) in a "traditional" way. For example, they estimate and quantify the increase in profit produced by coaching. The use of figures alone may be limited and biased. Therefore, we designed a study based on real cases of executive coaching in order to build a new approach "beyond the ROI."

From the beginning, it was the intention of ICF France for the study to be internationally validated. Therefore, an international study was designed based on partnership and ethics, consistent with coaching posture. The project, led by the ICF France Chapter, began in 2003. It was launched as a European research project by ICF France in May 2005, and confirmed as a worldwide study at the ICF Annual Conference in November 2005.

The study began with the review of 20 actual executive coaching cases.

The effects, including business performance changes, were easy to characterize using a model for the 20 cases studied. The evaluation process described important changes made by executives who had to face stakes of major development or survival. The top executives had to lead completely new evolutions and their coach had to help them renew the practices, behaviors and skills that had been conducive to their past success.

A parallel reading of the case reports enabled the identification of strong patterns in the transformations, which were sought and observed.

These patterns include elements of development and evolution (create, develop) as well as elements of stability (sustain, reduce) since the presence of both is necessary to describe a successful major transformation. According to the Theory of Dynamic Living Systems, systems seek constant balance - the deeper and more intense the change is, the more regulatory the mechanisms of control and limitation appear. These limitations are natural answers allowing the survival of living systems.

Above all, this parallel reading uncovered a classification of six major axes of change. To achieve his/her goals the executive has to make decisions on what he/she will:

Create/Initiate/Launch: Something new and very different for the first time - may be a new capacity, a new culture, a new team, a new strategy, a new business. This axis relates to the major evolutions - complete breaks, stops, halts, innovations.

Keep: Something the executive won't change, because it is one of his/her values or of his/her core business, or it is one of his/her key success factors. This part relates to the creation paradox: in order to re-invent and renew the organization, executives need to evaluate their bases - what should not move, what should remain; stability is part of the change process.

Develop/Enhance/Expand: Something that already exists which will grow (i.e., capacity) for the executive, for the team, for the organization.

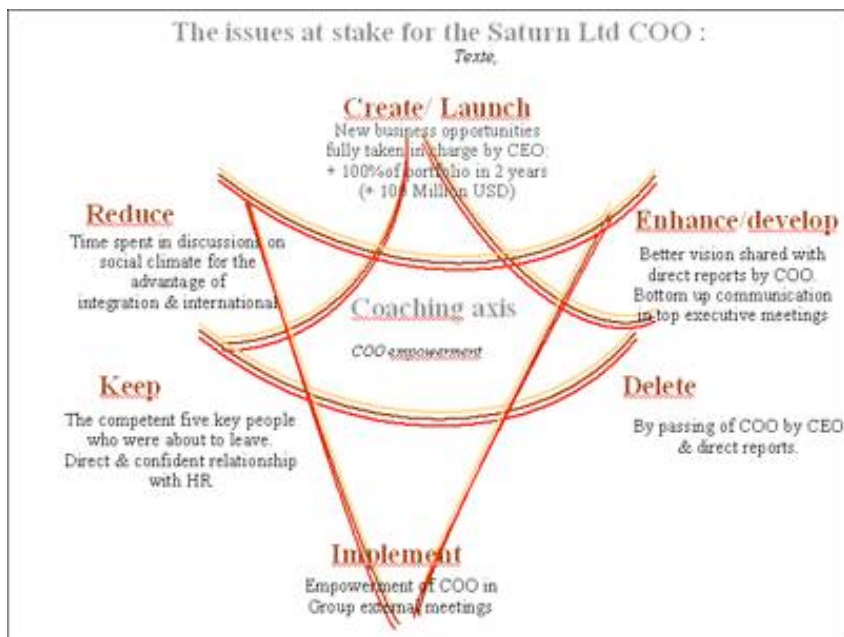
Reduce/Decrease: Something that already exists which will decrease (i.e., working time) for the executive, for the team, for the organization.

Stop: Something that already exists that will totally disappear for the executive, for the team, or for the organization.

Implement: the decisions to create, keep, develop, reduce, stop, in order to strengthen sustainability and added value (i.e., a new organization, a new management system, etc.).

When looking at how to illustrate these important results, it became obvious to us that a six-branch star was a relevant way to illustrate the interconnections between the six axes. The STAR is a universal symbol, and thus it was perfectly consistent with our goal to find a methodological approach easy to use in diverse countries and cultures. As a symbol, the STAR is a tool for dialogue and has the power to kindle the imagination and touch the heart. In doing so, it can help members of a diversified community to become more aware of the patterns and life experiences that unite them rather than those that divide them.

When using the STAR representation with our clients, we found that they used it easily and very intuitively. They also appreciated the STAR as an easy tool for very clear communication of the results to their shareholders. They said that they identified the foundations on which he/she will build a highly performing and ethical company. He/she discovered "the seeds of the future," for him/her and for the company. When used by an Executive team, it strengthens ownership and projection for the future.



There are three key phase opportunities for working with the STAR:

1. At the very beginning of the coaching process, the STAR structures the goals and indicators of results of the coaching process. Using the STAR, the executive can anticipate the transformation that he/she wishes to create and connect all the dimensions before defining the transformation he/she wishes to carry out. He/she answers the questions:

- What am I willing to reinvent, and what has to be preserved in my company? How do I manage the transformation by taking into account the need for stability in the true creation process?
What will I create, and what will I decide in order to increase achievement and performance?

2. At the mid-evaluation meeting the STAR is a booster to be more focused on what is now needed in order to create sustained growth.

3. During the evaluation meeting at the end of the coaching process, using the STAR allows clients to consolidate and focus on key achievement and performance points.

When we asked our clients, "how do you evaluate the impact of the change you decided upon during the coaching process (delete, create, etc.) on your company's performance," we received very clear answers. For example:

- Yes, we saved time on a strategic project.
- Yes, we got faster development of our business.
- Yes, the good cohesion of our international management team made it possible to maintain an excellent profitability while integrating a new foreign subsidiary company.

Update of the Study

This study was presented at the 2005 ICF European Conference in Norway, at the 2005 ICF France Summer University, and at the 2005 ICF Annual Conference in the United States. During these meetings, we shared our results with approximately 200 coaches and invited executive coaches to use the STAR with their clients and to participate in the study.

Currently 40 executive coaches in different countries have signed a partnership agreement to use this study. We also offer it to companies who are willing to strengthen the evaluation of their coaching by signing a partnership agreement.

The study is still in progress, and we invite all Executive Coaches to participate in it by contacting us to get the partnership agreement.

Some of our partners will present the study in their ICF chapters (i.e., New Jersey and Vancouver).

We presented it at the ICF European Conference in 2006 and participated in a panel discussion on the subject at the Research Symposium.

We plan to complete this part of the international evaluation of the STAR within two years (2008).

The results will be updated at the 2006 ICF Annual Conference in November.

We are very confident in the power of the STAR for two main reasons:

As a symbol, the STAR introduces a higher level of creative thinking and a renewed commitment to action in times of difficulty and transition. The high level of collective learning reached, for both clients and coaches, will help develop their own skills to explore new research territories.

When used from beginning to end in the coaching process, the STAR allows recognition of achievement and performance to occur. Since the question is raised from the very beginning (what is the question), the STAR allows the client to bring together coaching objectives and achievement, to visualize the effects, and to strengthen them. Asking the question creates the aspiration to answer it.

The STAR attracts and channels the client's energy to achievement and performance; he becomes curious, feels like exploring new paths and relates his coaching to his business stakes. He does not have a dissociated vision - "my company's objectives versus my development objectives." He has a more associated vision - "my development objectives are consistent with my business objectives and I can explain where the links are."

For more information on the STAR research contact Catherine Chambon, Danièle Darmouni MCC, Frédéric Deroche PCC, or Chantal Victor PCC at info@mozaik.fr