
A Balanced Approach to Evaluation

Coaching Measurement, Evaluation & ROI



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Abstract	This article focuses upon the evaluation, measurement and return on investment for coaching in the workplace. It is the outcome of a seminar discussion on this topic with over 20 HR Directors together with concepts and practical experience from 121partners. The authors explore the core skills, key process steps and conceptual framework required for effective evaluation. The business balanced scorecard is recommended as a proven model that can be applied to coaching interventions in a similar manner to its established use as a tool to convert business strategy into measurable and diverse goals. A practical case study from LogicaCMG highlights the use of the approach in practice and the lessons learnt.
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1. Background

In May 2006, over 20 HR Directors from FTSE 250 organisations gathered at the Leander Club in Henley to discuss a topic that had vexed them deeply in recent months – how to measure the return on investment for executive coaching programmes ? 121partners facilitated this discussion using the theme of the ‘Coaching Olympics’, challenging the group to use the precise and measurable impact of sports coaching to shed light on how a similar benchmark could be achieved in business. The well known TGROW model was used to step the group through a process of clarifying goals, assessing reality and brainstorming options. From this process emerged a number of insights including :-

- ✓ The 110m hurdles – The Barriers to Successful Evaluation
- ✓ The Modern Pentathlon – The Five Most Popular Tips for Successful Evaluation
- ✓ The Closing Ceremony – Actions to implement the findings back in the workplace

The ‘110m Hurdles’ event confirmed that in practise the group perceived many barriers to the successful evaluation of coaching programmes. The most common issues raised were :-

- ✓ Ensuring clarity of goals against the intangibility of what is being measured
- ✓ The tension that inevitably arises between organic and mechanistic approaches
- ✓ Keeping momentum and maintaining sponsorship as a programme proceeds
- ✓ The possible conflict between personal and business goals
- ✓ The lack of skilled people available to carry out the evaluation
- ✓ The surrounding culture which may undermine efforts to establish disciplined evaluation
- ✓ Conflicting and changing priorities
- ✓ Lack of time and knowledge to compete the evaluation efficiently

This group won its metaphorical ‘Gold Medal’ by identifying that the effective evaluation of coaching requires the application of specific skills, a sound process and a respected conceptual framework. Using the analogy of Olympic athletes, the skills are the innate ability of the athlete, the process steps are the techniques in which he or she is trained and the conceptual framework is the rules of the sport they are competing in ! - that which holds it all together and provides a consistent ‘backbone’ to the experience.

This paper is a summary of the outcomes from the ‘Coaching Olympics’ event combined with 121partner’s own experience of the successful evaluation of the coaching programmes we have been responsible for.

2. Summary

Our discussions and experience lead us to believe that the rigorous measurement of coaching in business requires the following core skills

- ✓ project management disciplines
- ✓ attention to detail
- ✓ 'completer-finishers'
- ✓ creativity

..... and the following key process steps :-

- ✓ establish SMART goals for the programme that align personal and business agendas
- ✓ obtain 'buy in' from all stakeholders in the programme at the start of the programme and maintain this through frequent, proactive communication
- ✓ use mid-programme reviews to keep momentum, communicate progress and, if necessary, refine the initial goals
- ✓ integrate the coaching programme measures into broader performance improvement and HR initiatives
- ✓ once you have the results then ensure these are presented back in an appropriate way to all stakeholders

This leaves the conceptual framework, the glue that holds it all together and provides a degree of academic rigour to the exercise. There are many conceptual frameworks that could be applied to the measurement of coaching. These include 360 feedback tools, team assessment questionnaires, individual profiling, etc but at 121 we recommend the business balanced scorecard as the most powerful tool for this purpose. We recommend this model because :-

- ✓ it is well established and respected by business leaders
- ✓ it is relatively simple
- ✓ it helps convert nebulous words like strategy and coaching into broad but measurable goal sets
- ✓ it is rooted in business reality rather than psychological analysis

Armed with our skills, our process and our conceptual framework, 121 has applied this in practise as well as validated this approach with over 20 HR Directors. The results and lessons learnt are captured in our practical case study from LogicaCMG.

We hope this repeatable model provides HR professionals with a proven road map for the successful evaluation of coaching, further 'de-mystifying' this powerful tool as it establishes itself in the mainstream of business life.

3. Core Skills

Our first thought when the topic of evaluation of coaching is discussed is often the process required to achieve this. As we discuss later, a process is important but, however brilliant a process may be, without certain skills the process will fail. In a similar way, there is a very clear and structured process involved in putting together 'flat pack' kitchen units but for those of us who have tried, it is clear that certain skills are required for this activity to be completed successfully !

In our experience, the three core skills are as follows :-

✓ Project management discipline

Project managers can be irritating people. They are forever asking you for progress reports, convening steering group meetings and occasionally conducting 'ad-hoc' activities such as risk analyses, project 'kick offs' and quality reviews. What all these activities have in common is that they attempt to establish and maintain a structured framework around an activity to maximise the probability that desired business goals will be achieved. In the 'free spirit' world of coaching then project management input can often be regarded as a rude intrusion on the otherwise 'magical' process of raising self awareness. However, we would suggest that having such disciplined skills somewhere in your coaching programme team is essential if you are to deliver a successful and well-evaluated programme.

✓ Attention to Detail

Not all great project managers have 'attention to detail' hence this is a distinct skill that deserves its own focus. No-one can escape the inevitable fact that there is part of the evaluation of coaching programmes that requires wading through masses of data, sifting this and pulling out the 'nuggets' of insight and learning that is hidden deep in the detail. If you are the sort of person that 'loses the will to live' after reading the twentieth same evaluation questionnaire and adding the findings to a multi-dimensional spreadsheet then this is not a task for you.

✓ 'Completer-Finishers'

It was Belbin that first coined the phrase 'completer-finisher' but it has slowly crept into everyday language. What Belbin's work would suggest is that the people who first initiate the coaching programme are unlikely to have the aptitude to ensure its successful completion and evaluation. Equally, those who play the role of gathering all the resources required to make the programme successful or those who come up with the fantastic ideas as to how to design the programme are also unlikely candidates for the lonely role of 'turning the lights off and locking up' at the end of the programme. Belbin's lesson to us all is to check that you have a balanced team and that somewhere in it there lies a 'completer-finisher' just waiting to prove their worth.

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✓ Creativity

No two coaching interventions are the same. Each programme sits within a unique organizational context. The 'text book' approach to evaluation will need to be adapted to meet specific needs each time it is used. The sponsors and programme leaders will need to innovate around the template model to create something that fits with the culture, the timing and the business function in which the programme is taking place. Successful evaluation often rest on a small refinement that allows the process to 'click' into place. For example, the simple use of telephone evaluation discussions rather than e-mail questionnaires can be the difference in some business cultures between a 'blank sheet' and a rich pool of relevant feedback.

4. Process

Armed with our core skills, we are ready to embark upon a process that, throughout the coaching cycle, will guide us towards a successful evaluation and measurement of results. For our process we are indebted to the enthusiastic group of over twenty HR Directors that we gathered together at the Leander Club in March 2006 to brainstorm this topic. From their deliberations, the following process steps have been developed :-

- ✓ Establish SMART goals for the programme that align personal and business agendas

This step is most likely to be achieved via a facilitated 'goal setting' team workshop with representatives from all the stakeholder groups e.g. HR, coach, coachee, line manager, programme sponsor. Sometimes it is not possible to gather this group together in one place at one time. If this is the case then a smaller group can brainstorm the goals but then ensure that these are validated 'off line' with the missing stakeholders through 1-2-1 conversations or conference calls.

- ✓ Obtain 'buy in' from all stakeholders in the programme at the start of the programme and maintain this through frequent, proactive communication

The best form of 'buy in' is through being involved in the goal-setting process step itself at the start of the programme. It is often essential to review the programme goals with the business board / management team as an agenda item on their regular business review meeting. This integrates it with 'business as usual' and achieves a collective agreement in a formal setting. Having achieved this then it is no time to relax since the coaching programme needs to be pushed back onto the business agenda at two to three month intervals to ensure that momentum and 'buy in' is maintained.

- ✓ Use mid-programme reviews to keep momentum, communicate progress and, if necessary, refine the initial goals

In the real world, the 'goalposts' move on a regular basis. Hence, any evaluation process needs to be flexible and adaptable as business priorities change and personal agendas and shift. The coaching programme will require two to three month team review workshops to provide opportunity to react to change and renew direction. Sometimes, the programme goals themselves may change significantly in mid-programme. This does not have to be a disaster if the reviews take place and the refinements are implemented and communicated.

- ✓ Integrate the coaching programme measures into broader performance improvement and HR initiatives

There is a risk that coaching is seen as 'flavour of the month' and that too much focus is put upon a single intervention as the only means of improving business performance and developing leaders. This 'flash in the pan' mind-set leads to a burst of 'razamatazz' and sky-high

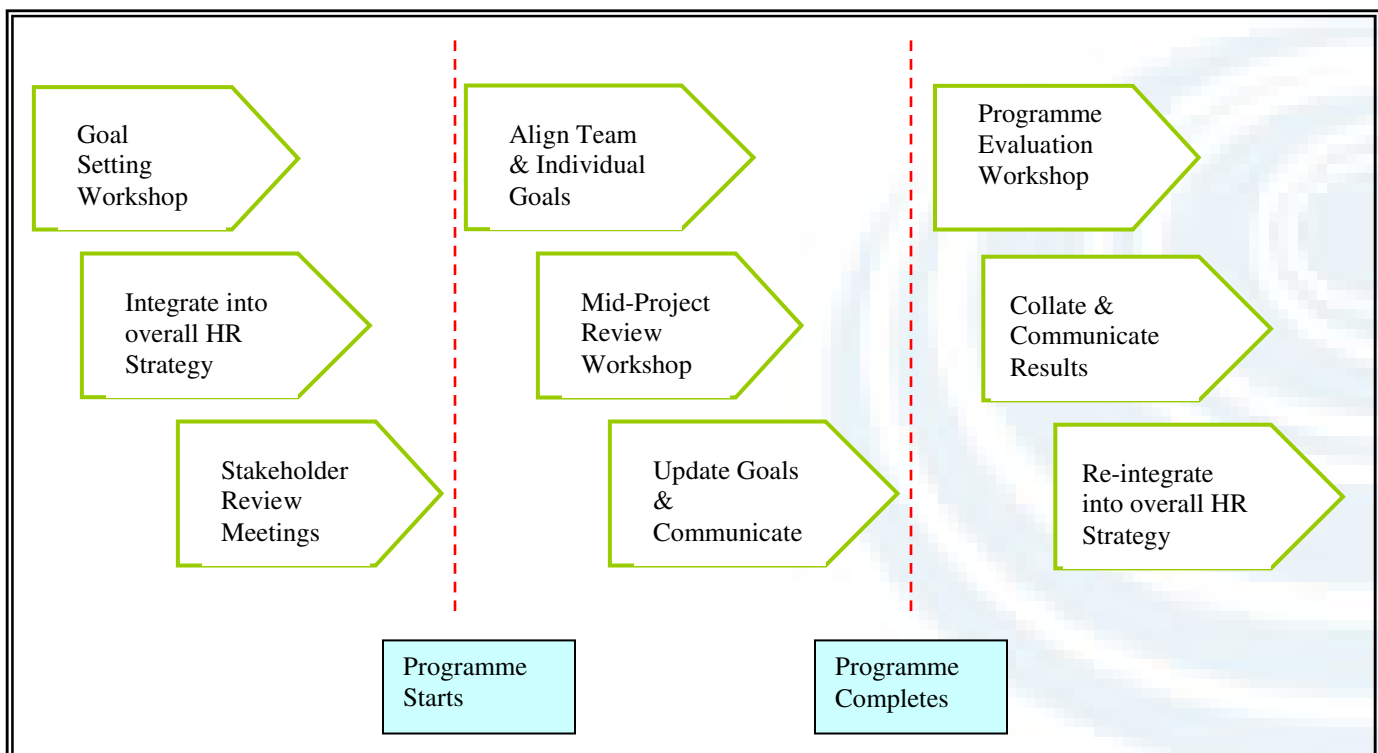
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expectations following which there is lengthy period of deflation and ‘sobering up’. It is a phenomenon that we refer to as ‘premature elaboration’. Avoiding this involves embedding coaching into a wider set of initiatives that are being applied continuously to boost an organisation’s health over a period of time. Frequent, incremental results and ‘wins’ that are credited to a series of interventions that include coaching is the sustainable means to building a coaching culture.

- ✓ Once you have the results then ensure these are presented back in an appropriate way to all stakeholders

After all the data collection, analysis and late hours to compile detailed evaluation reports, it is a crime that many of these reports lie unread, gathering dust in corporate filing cabinets. It is sometimes very difficult when having invested great effort in collecting data to remember that ‘less is most definitely more’ when presenting the findings to the original stakeholder groups. As a rule of thumb, it has been shown that most people can only remember five to seven pieces of information about any given topic. Therefore, apply a ruthless filter to your evaluation findings and focus upon the five to seven headlines which you wish all parties to know about and understand. Often this will lead you quickly to a single powerpoint slide rather than a lengthy word document or pivot-table ridden spreadsheet.

In summary, a typical evaluation cycle on a 6 month coaching programme might look as follows :-



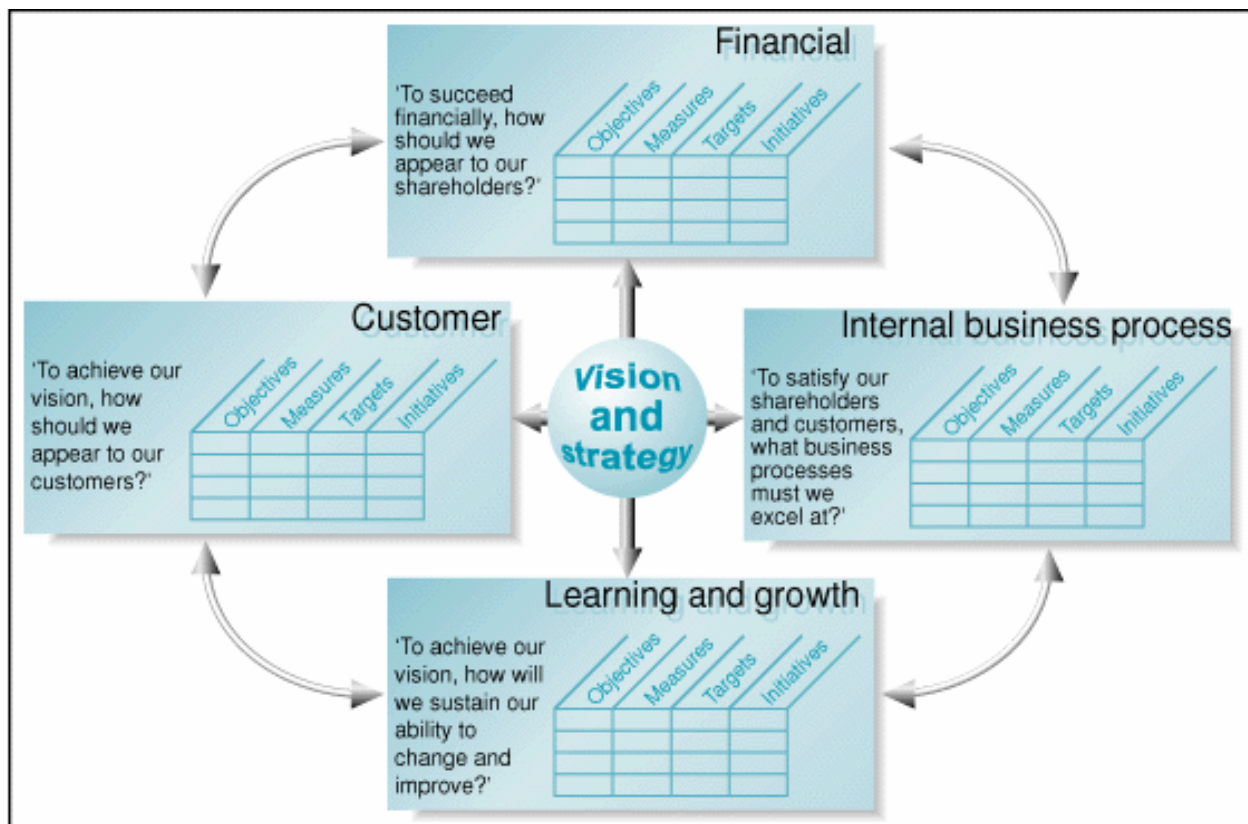
5. Conceptual Framework

We can now imagine arriving at our 'kick off' launch workshop for a coaching programme with our skills and briefing all the stakeholders on the process for evaluation that will run alongside the coaching activity. However, we are still missing one important ingredient in our 'evaluation package'. Where is the respected and rigorous evaluation concept that can underpin our process? Enter the business balance scorecard model

5.1 The Business Balanced Scorecard Model

The business balance scorecard was developed in the early 1990's as reaction to measures of performance that purely focused upon the financial impacts of strategy decisions. It was embraced by consultants who used it to help business boards translate a vision and a strategy into a series of key performance measures. To ensure the breadth of the key performance measures then these were developed from four different perspectives – financial, business process, customer and learning / growth. This simple model gained popularity rapidly to the extent that 36% of organizations within global companies were using the approach as part of business planning by the end of 2001.

The model is summarised in the diagram below :-



5.2 Applying this Tool for Use with Coaching Programmes

The popularity of the business balanced scorecard means that it has a track record in business that helps greatly with its introduction as a concept to evaluate coaching and coaching programmes. We would recommend that this model is used as part of the initial goal setting workshop / stakeholder discussions to facilitate the development of broad yet SMART performance measures for coaching. After a brief introduction of the balanced scorecard, small teams brainstorm measures in each of the four aspects of the model. They are then challenged to convert the measures into SMART goals for the programme which are presented back to peers for validation and agreement. Should there be a proliferation of different measures then the group is asked to use a simple voting system to prioritise the measures and focus upon the 'top three' under each heading. Normally, we would allow two to three hours for this exercise to be completed with a team of up to fifteen people.

In our experience, it is sometimes necessary to adapt the tool by choosing different headings for each of the four measurement areas. Headings can be chosen to reflect other perspectives of success and to help the team look at 'success' from different stakeholder perspectives. For example, instead of the traditional customer / learning / financial / process perspectives, we have used other headings such as CEO / shareholder / staff / suppliers. These headings can be chosen following initial discussions with the programme sponsor to reflect the areas where the programme is most likely to have an impact.

The model facilitates the cascading of organizational goal into team goals via the team workshop and then cascading team goals into individual goals via the personal coaching sessions. In this way, the programme is held together by a series of consistent and integrated measurement criteria and results will be delivered at individual, team and organizational levels.

With these simple refinements, the business balanced scorecard can be adapted for use as conceptual framework for the evaluation of coaching.

6. Conclusion

We have seen that the effective evaluation of coaching and coaching programmes involves an integration of skills, process and a sound conceptual framework. None of these, in isolation, are complex components to define in theory. However, achieving a balanced combination of all three in practice remains a rare feature in most coaching programmes.

In light of this challenge, the HR Director must make conscious, 'up front' choices to push these topics onto the agenda with coaches, coachees and other stakeholders. Simple tools like the Belbin team analysis can assess quickly whether the required 'completer-finisher' and 'attention to detail' skills are present in the team. A check of cv's will reveal whether the project management experience features to the required level. The launch of any programme can include the process for evaluation and the conceptual model that supports this.

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Armed with these early diagnostics and repeatable models, the evaluation of coaching can be taken to the next level resulting in case studies that continue to prove that coaching is not only great for individual development but also 'bottom line' business performance. Failure to apply these disciplines risks a gradual erosion of sponsorship and credibility such that the coaching profession will not deliver upon its undoubted potential to transform the business landscape.

Our 'Coaching Olympics' seminar succeeded in creating great ideas from a formidable team of coaching 'athletes'. Out thanks go to the following organisations for their input :-

Serco / Yell / LogicaCMG / Jones Lang Lasalle / Shell / Warner Brothers / Cap Gemini / Boehringer-Ingelheim / Severn Trent / William Hill / L'Oreal / BT / Kingston Communications / Allied Irish Bank / BBC / National Grid

If you and your organisation have the will to apply these concepts in practise and require a free consultation on how to apply this approach to your unique evaluation challenge, please contact either John Blakey or Bill Barry at johnblakey@121partners.co.uk or billbarry@121partners.co.uk.

Appendix 1 - Case Study

Delivering Business and Personal Results for the e-Identity Project Team within LogicaCMG

Business Challenge:

The e-Identity centre of excellence was set up by LogicaCMG in 2005 to exploit the international market opportunity for electronic passport, id cards, biometrics, corporate id and electronic border solutions. Driven by the concern over global terrorism, international crime and illegal immigration this is considered a key growth opportunity for LogicaCMG.

Historically, the company has struggled to exploit these opportunities on an international scale due to the need to create virtual teams across traditional country and organisational boundaries. The e-Identity virtual team is the first example of its kind to be set up with a new funding structure designed to promote collaboration and shared investment.

The team is led by Tim Brew and comprises two members from the UK and two from Holland. Team members bring a diverse range of skills ranging across selling, marketing, technical and delivery expertise. The team is 'virtual' in as much that they are rarely sat in the same office and they have a 'dotted line' relationship back to their 'home' management and business divisions.

As part of the initial coaching programme workshop, the team used the business balanced scorecard model to develop the following ambitious goals. The business balanced scorecard was adapted to brainstorm four stakeholder perspectives – customer, internal sponsors, team and partners. The resulting nine SMART goals are listed below :-

Customer

- ✓ Be Invited to speak at 2 conferences and write 3 articles within the next six months
- ✓ Win £15m of new business from at least 2 new deals by the end of May 2006
- ✓ Be in the 'Top 3' by market share of e-Identity suppliers in Europe by the end of 2007

Internal Sponsors

- ✓ Create a sustainable self-funding business model that will support a team of 10 by the end of 2007
- ✓ Within 6 months have signed up 2 additional business units to the e-Identity delivery model

Team Development

- ✓ Within 1 month assign an owner from the team for each of the target countries / regions
- ✓ Within 6 months share personal goals and drivers across the team

Partner Perspective

- ✓ Within 6 months issue a partner strategy that identifies a preferred partner or partners for each component of the e-identity solution
- ✓ Within 2 years have successfully achieved multiple reference site installations with each of the strategic partners

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The Coaching Programme:

A coaching programme was designed for the e-Identity team comprising both team coaching and individual coaching components. The objective of the programme was to accelerate the team's achievement of the critical business goals necessary for success. The programme comprised the following steps :-

- ✓ Developing shared and SMART objectives that the team were committed to achieving
- ✓ Profile the team members to raise awareness around collective strengths and weaknesses using the BELBIN tool
- ✓ Developing and implementing a bespoke 360 DEGREE FEEDBACK TOOL based on the team's perception of the critical competencies required for them to achieve their goals
- ✓ Providing 1-2-1 COACHING support to each team member via four coaching sessions each over a period of six months
- ✓ Facilitating 3 x team workshops at the beginning, mid-point and conclusion of the programme

At the mid-point team review the programme goals were re-visited and refined to reflect changing circumstances in the team and its environment. For example, one of the team members had left the organization and new goals were required to replace these skills under the 'team development' heading.

In the final team workshop, results and outcomes were evaluated against the original goals. Objective measures were complemented with subjective feedback from the participants. Throughout the process, steps were taken to communicate goals, progress and results to other stakeholders which included the Board sponsor and the coaching team.

A bespoke personal development plan (PDP) was used to capture the individual outcomes of the coaching in terms of personal goals, self analysis and action planning. The PDP also helped participants review outcomes with the team leader. In the first coaching sessions, the team goals were translated into personal goals with the help of the coach. In this way, a close alignment of team and personal goals was achieved.

Finally, the programme was positioned as a 'pilot' within a wider Group led coaching strategy. This involved initial discussions with Group Management Development to integrate into the 'bigger picture' together with the promotion of the results as a case study both internally and externally on programme completion. As a result, the company made a significant, measured step forward but did not raise expectations that this programme in isolation was 'cure all' for a complex organisational challenge.

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Results:

The programme was formally evaluated with the team as part of the final workshop. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative outcomes was captured. These are summarised below :-

Business performance headlines for the first six months 2006 :-

- ✓ The team won over £12m of international sales order in the first six month's of 2006 and have a qualified sales pipeline of £48m for the remainder of the year.
- ✓ Over 50 press articles published and 6 keynote speaker presentations
- ✓ On target for the team to be fully self funding by the end of 2006
- ✓ Successfully 'signed up' business units in Portugal, Czech Republic, France and Middle East Region to the e-identity delivery model
- ✓ Active partnerships with Actividentity, ACI, Schipol Group and WCC BV

Participant feedback on the impact of the coaching programme :-

"The programme helped us identify the best people and put them in the right roles in the team"

"We now have the confidence to grab the headlines through our PR activity"

"The team has become adept at thinking on its feet and rapidly adapting to changing internal and market conditions."

"The individual coaching helped me communicate more bravely when there were difficult team issues to discuss."

"The team coaching workshop accelerated the process of understanding who we were as a team."

"The individual coaching gave me a new framework for problem solving and increased my confidence in decision making."

"The most valuable aspect of the programme for me was understanding my own personal drivers and recognising that these were different from other team members."

"I have improved my organisational skills and clarified how success in this role fits in with my 2-3 year career vision."

"Now I feel we are a REAL team and not a VIRTUAL team."

"The programme is a fantastic concept without which we could not have achieved our business goals."

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For future programmes, the team identified that an additional team coaching or team training workshop mid-way through the programme would have further boosted the impact. In addition, for those who were not previously familiar with coaching then spending greater time briefing participants on how this tool works would have accelerated the start of the programme.

Having proven the 'coaching for business performance' concept with the e-Identity team, the vision is to seek sponsorship for many new projects of this type across LogicaCMG. In particular, these types of programme appear to have most impact when used in international and matrix managed organisational challenges where complex lines of authority and diverse cultures require a more sophisticated formula for success than has traditionally been necessary.

The evaluation approach used for this programme was subsequently documented by the independent research company, IDS and featured as an example of 'best practise' in their recent publication – 'Coaching in the Workplace'. A copy of this is available on request if more details is required on the evaluation approach and process..