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## Research Article

### METHODOLOGY FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF A WORK GROUP INTO A HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM IN ORGANIZATIONS IN MEXICO

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#### ABSTRACT

The professional and academic quality of new generation Architects is in a state of low performance due to deficient academic level and low salaries. A systematic mechanism in which via strategic executive coaching, weaknesses were identified and attended, was proposed. The investigation took place in the city of Chihuahua, during the 2016-2017 period, among companies in the construction industry. An initial application of performance evaluations and organizational climate surveys allowed to make a human resources inventory that became the starting point for the methodology's approach. The data was captured under the Likert scale, where scores were obtained for each employee and the company in general, all of them with a reliability index of 0.756. During the capture of results, it was identified that the direct manager's assessment influenced team performance directly, as the lowest perception in the companies analyzed was said variable. Also, it was determined that all organizations have employees with high performance index, given that the average yield of performance averages exceeds 4.0, therefore the transformation path into a high-performance team was short. The most effective method of strategic executive coaching was the mixed technique, using only four models according to each case, and a battery of four sessions for the general case of the direct manager.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The main characteristics of a high-performance team are completely different from those of a normal team. In essence those characteristics are more nodal, though at the same time none have a direct relation with traditional team regulations, such as performance, punctuality, achievement, etc. The aspects that define a high-performance team are mutual support, trust, patience, compromise, good humor, compatibility, cooperation, adaptability, friendship, courage, enthusiasm and generosity (Whitmore, 2003).

According to Piqueras and Arola (2014), in order to work on team improvement, first you should know what the objectives that will enhance performance and achievement are. These objectives can be the result of internal perception (performance evaluation) or external perception (organizational climate survey). Once the objectives have been identified through these two means, it's necessary to take note of said indicators, attend directly to them, and reevaluate them once the coaching process has been completed in order to obtain two indicators of the same type: a previous and a posthumous one. That way, it

will be possible to obtain a real measure of the methodology's impact. Another thing that both authors agree on, is on the issue of coaching teams from an individual perspective, based on the five levels set by Escobar, always seeing them as a great system (Gonzalez, 2014). In order for the leader to effectively apply executive coaching, he should have a clear understanding of reasonable goals, that is, have clear knowledge of the administrative system that the team is embedded in, whether that includes company policies, organizational culture, regulations, even local, federal or on occasion international labor laws.

Just as important as having clear notions of the real limits imposed by the surroundings, one must be conscious of the personal limits of each team member. Thus, work assignments should be handed based on an analysis of each member's current state, always aiming for everyone to grow in their strengths and thus contribute to the production chain (Revans, 2011).

Maxwell (2010) points out that effective leadership should have three essential parts that can never be divided, separated,

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or applied on their own: 1) effective and tacit administration, where all norms, deadlines, and guidelines are clearly shown; 2) the options that the leader must present to followers in order for them to reach established goals with more ease; and 3) freedom that the leader must give (empowerment) to followers so that the goal reached possesses personal meaning for each team member.

It's also agreed upon that team coaching must be applied according to the context where it's needed, hence that the coaching profession is very scattered among a great number of persons with different professional backgrounds, including psychologists, doctors, teachers, engineers, architects, etc. In their corresponding areas, they should apply coaching as needed in different tasks, in each area of the productive branch, always aiming to help others. The goal of this research was to propose a methodology for the transformation of a work group into a high-performance team in organizations in Mexico.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Due to its nature, the research was first addressed with mixed criteria, since statistical data such as results from performance evaluations, competence examinations, organizational climate, as well as some qualitative data, such as social, emotional and cultural aspects, was considered from the beginning. The research was of applied, non-experimental nature, since it was carried out in a specific and explanatory time, owing to the fact that the proposal only included causes and effects of the present state.

The method was composed of the following parts: 1) the general concept was analytic-synthetic, since the current state of the work group was established through five coaching techniques; 2) the procedure was carried out through case study, where three simultaneous cases were explored in construction and architecture companies; 3) surveys were carried out in order to extract numerical and qualitative data. The research work was done at the city of Chihuahua in construction and architecture companies, during a ten-week period from February 2016 to March 2017, with a recess in coaching for a week, leaving a free period between each week in order to allow for specific actions determined during the session to be carried out.

The studied construction companies from the city of Chihuahua possessed the following characteristics: 1) located at the city of Chihuahua; 2) developing projects of private and public nature; 3) registered with the appropriate instances; 4) five years or more of seniority; and 5) workforce personnel of more than 15 specialized people.

Cost and time constraints deemed unlikely to carry out the investigation with the size of the sample calculated for infinite populations, which is why the sample selection was carried out via random selection and invitations; thus, the subjects analyzed are voluntary. Data collection was carried out through an interview which was applied to the executives of each area from the architecture office, same as to the direct bosses or coordinators of each department. With this activity, it was possible to collect quantitative information that helped in some degree the information obtained through observation. Five question sessions were prepared. In the first session, a 360 degree evaluation was carried out, as well as the organizational

climate survey. For each one, a 40 questions survey was designed, where each question had five answer options classified on the Likert scale which went from bad, regular, good, very good, to excellent, with assigned values of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Each team member was evaluated on a vertical and horizontal sense, that is, by direct bosses and subordinates, as well as by equals from the same or other departments. On this survey, the questions were divided among four variables, where different but relevant aspects of each team member were evaluated: 1) being, 2) knowing, 3) doing, and 4) feeling. In the first set of questions where "being" was evaluated, the questions asked for information related to how each team member is perceived by the rest of his or her teammates from a personal perspective, that is, the behavioral aspects that usually pass unnoticed in processes of new entry recruitment, selection and evaluation, but that day to day could influence directly on work environment and the direct boss' appreciation. The second set of questions sought to evaluate "knowing", also from the rest of the teammates' perspective, focusing on academic background and training related to the profession. The third set of questions had a tendency towards "doing", where the aim was to evaluate an individual's ability regarding work execution. Finally, questions about "feeling" were asked, which explored emotional intelligence as perceived by others. It's worth mentioning that this last paragraph caused surprise. This last set of questions gave useful data regarding executive coaching, since as mentioned before, nodal and behavioral issues are the ones that should be addressed in order for changes in the team to be radical and permanent.

The results obtained from the performance evaluation and the organizational climate survey were registered and analyzed through descriptive statistics. In addition, the reliability factor of the instruments was presented in a numerical way through Cronbach's alpha. The proposed methodology was approved by the Delphi method, which was carried out through personal interviews with directors and managers of construction companies with a high level of specialization.

## **RESULTS**

The companies presented higher values than four, which indicates they are stable organizations from a personnel selection and processes perspective. At the same time, they show stability in behavioral patterns and are very similar in final results; it is thus determined that the team coaching process will put a higher emphasis on teamwork. During data capture it was detected that one of the coworkers showed high rates in three of the variables, except on "feeling", therefore this case will be used as an example for the topic of personal executive coaching application.

As a result of the 360 degrees evaluation, it can be observed that in general terms he or she is appreciated by the office community as a very good coworker, the direct boss being the one who evaluates him or her with the highest values on "knowing" and "doing", thus obtaining a 4.34 as average of general averages. These data determine that the process of executive coaching was of a personal and self-appreciation; a self-esteem and self-trust nature. It was ruled out that the assistance to this individual should be of an academic or training nature, since he or she is appreciated as someone with the necessary academic tools to perform the tasks assigned.

The performance evaluation showed the strongest areas of each member and the work group in general, as well as the areas of opportunity for the implementation of executive coaching. The employee classification was achieved once the performance evaluation results came in, allowing for the sub-teams to be adjusted taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of each team member, according to the four factors evaluated. That way the weakest areas of each group were covered, as shown by the results on table 1.

have a direct impact on each member’s task performance and role functions (this issue should be checked against performance evaluation).

In general terms, the team members have similar assessments regarding organizational climate inside the office with barely three exceptions, one in peak and two in valley, which only represent 15% of the company’s total population.

**Table 1** Employee Classification According to Performance Evaluation Score

Noted Abilities	Performance Evaluation (PE) Score									
	3.0	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.5	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.5	5.0
Being										x
Knowing					x		x			x
Doing	X		x		x		x			x
Feeling	X		x		x		x			x
Position Suggested										
According to Performance	Jr. Executive		Sr. Executive		Jr. Designer		Sr. Designer		Leader	
Type of Salary	Recent Graduate		Base Salary		Average Market Salary		Competitive Salary		Superior Salary	
	\$ 6,500.00		\$ 8,000.00		\$ 12,000.00		\$ 20,000.00		\$ 25,000.00	

Source: own elaboration (2016)

**Table 2** Executive Coaching Method According to Position

Suggested Coaching Method	Jr. Executive	Sr. Executive	Jr. Designer	Sr. Designer	Leader
1.- Unstable Pattern	x	x			
2.- Functional Pattern			x	x	
3.- Assertiveness			x	x	x
4.- SWOT	x	x	x	x	x
5.- Dysfunctional Pattern	x	x			
6.- GROW	x	x	x	x	x
7.- Perceptual Positions	x	x			
8.- Nodal Resources			x		
9.- Mentors				x	x
10.- Worsening the Situation					x

Source: own elaboration (2016)

For the organizational climate survey, one company was used as sample for the universe, since that was the one that had the most number of employees. Also, the company management showed more openness on the issue unlike the rest of the other companies; it was also the place from where most additional data was collected, which helped during the final interpretation of the survey. Before interpreting the graphs’ results, it’s important to note the additional data requested, since it can be of use for final proposals of executive coaching implementation.

The organizational climate survey gave truly valuable data, since as mentioned in the antecedents, the role played by the leader inside a high performance team, more than that of a human talent manager, is that of an exemplary motivator sensible to the needs of his or her people, integrated with them all to the extent of not being seen as a boss but as a protector; however, the reality of the surveys is something else and the direct boss is the one assessed with the lowest score, even below salary concerns.

Most of the organizational climate surveys analyzed were expected to yield the lowest score on the topic of team members’ assessment of salary, however, the topic “office management” was the one that obtained the lowest assessment score with an average score of 2.67.

According to this report on present state of affairs, the general management of the company is the one that should take precise actions regarding the office management, since by not acting effectively, the whole team’s performance will continue to have low tendencies and organizational climate will be in constant decline.

The average of averages yielded a score of 2.94, above median and below the expected score of 3.0. One employee excelled with an average score of 3.73 which stands out with three maximum scores in the areas of “workplace, office management, and salary”; his gender is male.

Due to this, it was determined that the executive coaching sessions would be as shown on table 3.

According to the previous data, it is then possible to establish that the first issue to be addressed is the office boss, who showed certain disintegration with the rest of the team members. Another point to be noted is that salary came in second place as a priority issue, since the low perception could

Under this blueprint of programmed coaching sessions, they proceeded to be implemented in a weekly session period, receiving feedback at the end of each block.

Table 3 Executive Coaching Method According to Organizational Climate Survey

Suggested Coaching Method According To Organizational Climate Survey				
Suggested Coaching Method	Workplace	Management	Office Management	Salary
1.- Unstable Pattern				
2.- Functional Pattern				
3.- Assertiveness		x		x
4.- SWOT		x		
5.- Dysfunctional Pattern			x	
6.- GROW		x		
7.- Perceptual Positions			x	
8.- Nodal Resources				
9.- Mentors		x	x	
10.- Worsening the Situation	x (with focus on ergonomic audits)		x	

Source: own elaboration (2016)

**Coaching Methodology for High-Performance Teams**

The first step of the proposed methodology consisted on the elaboration of an inventory of available human resources. The data obtained from the performance evaluation in four variables was used for this purpose; said data was captured on a spreadsheet for posterior manipulation.

The next step on the methodology was to reclassify team members in order to form sub-teams, which then could be redesigned according to the ongoing project’s needs. The reclassification consisted of a previous identification of the assigned tasks’ nature, and based on that, which enabled to define which team members were the most adequate for each task, as shown in table 4.

Table 4 Personnel Classification According to the Nature of the Ongoing Project’s Needs

Project’s Nature	Main Team Members	Support Team Members
Preliminary process of the project (sale, relation with client, analysis, etc.)	Feeling	Knowing
Hired project must be defined and carried out	Knowing	Doing
Hired and defined project must be carried out	Doing	Knowing
Completed process	Being + Knowing	Doing + Being
Project follow up after sale	Being	Knowing

Source: own elaboration (2016)

The last step was the implementation of the proposed coaching methodology in each sub-team. This phase consists of many parts and is described as follows:

**Coaching methodology for the transformation of a work group into a high-performance team**

**The main protagonists on the team coaching process**

It was of outmost importance to define the main protagonists of the team coaching process before said process began, since every one of the members played a vital role on the methodology’s process of change. It was also made clear that if one member was absent, the process simply couldn’t be carried out. There were four main protagonists: the office as a team, the leader or direct boss, the company represented by an executive, and the coach.

The team was perceived not as a group of people but as unique being with personality of its own, as a result of the sum of all the members that conform it.

They were the main responsible entity during the process, since they proposed their own methods and it was also them who enjoyed and reaped the benefits of the process.

The leader, which in this case was the direct boss, played an important role, since even though the team was the one that proposed the adjustments, it was the boss itself who approved or rejected them, always providing solid and objective arguments beyond a simple personal perspective or view. The hardest part of integrating the direct boss, was appealing to his or her good judgement and professional humility in order to comment and give suggestions at the same level as the team, without undervaluing his or her image.

Another aspect that the leader and the coach had to treat with care and sensibility, was that the team should never perceive a closeness between these two parts beyond that of a work relationship, otherwise suspicion could’ve arisen among team members, thus causing bias in the whole process.

Only in one of the cases from this study did the direct boss receive a customized executive coaching process, since that was the person who received the lowest assessment score in the organizational climate survey, however, said process was carried out in private in a time and place outside of the company, with complete confidentiality regarding obtained data and results. The companies, which in these three cases were represented by company executives, were analyzed one at a time. In two of the studied cases the owners themselves were the ones who carried out management, and in the remaining case, the designated executive was the director’s representative in the form of the human resources office chief.

This last protagonist is essential, since management it’s the first instance that requests and authorizes this coaching process, and lastly, it will be the one to approve the whole process in executive terms.

Finally, the coach was the integrating protagonist, as well as a mediator among all the others. The coach always worked with a global vision of the team and process being carried out, never focusing on each team member; as mentioned by Piqueras: “He never saw the trees, he always saw the woods.” (2014).

**The executive process of team coaching**

Once all four vital members of the coaching process were defined, and the pertinent clarifications mentioned before were emitted, the following steps were carried out:

1. An executive meeting referred to as session 0 was established. It lasted no more than 45 minutes and took place among the four main protagonists to reflect and celebrate the real potential of the team, all of this using the Assertiveness technique from which it is important to single out:
2. A description of facts from when the team has worked effectively and from successful cases. Each participant mentioned a specific case.
3. A description of thoughts and opinions generated within the team when a successful goal was achieved. Each participant brought up a different point from those already mentioned by his or her teammates.
4. A description of the feelings produced within the team when a successful goal was achieved. Only the protagonists were obliged to answer, the rest of them volunteered.
5. A description of positive consequences generated within and outside the team. Each participant had to mention a specific case.
6. With a global perspective from all those present at the executive meeting, and based on each and every comment, a document was put together by everyone and established as the guiding road for coaching. This outline also served as an attachment which was used later on to analyze the real progress of the sessions.
7. Four coaching sessions with different topics were carried out, always aiming to cover the weaknesses found as a result of the performance evaluation and the organizational climate survey.

**Session 1.** It started with a 15 minutes dynamic group exercise that served as an ice-breaker. Team expression was encouraged and the team members weren't allowed to speak of the team in the first person.

The goal of said exercise was to create awareness among the team regarding their current state, as well to understand the concept of empathy in order to create sensibility about how others perceive things.

Later, each team member was asked to express through mime the team's current state. They were forbidden from speaking and couldn't look at each other. By limiting verbal abilities it's possible to prevent emotions from being rationalized, also, working in silence allowed a certain level of individuality on facial and corporeal expression, given that spontaneity guarantees a higher level of authenticity. This mime exercise was done in two minutes. The remaining ten minutes of the exercise were devoted to debating in two groups the expressions seen among the rest of their team mates. In addition, a couple of questions were posed to each team and had to be freely answered. These were:

- What do you think of what you've seen from your team mates?
- What expression captured your attention the most?
- Which was the most common expression?
- Did you feel affinity for other expressions?

In the same session, and after the previous exercise, the team promptly described the best team strengths, the best and closest opportunities, the worst weaknesses, and the looming threats.

**Session 2.** On this appointment, the team defined short-term training and learning goals, as well as their current state on technical affairs and their subsequent limitations. They determined what the fast options available to tackle said deficiencies were and what actions they should undertake to carry out these mini training sessions.

The session was carried out at the same time as the team meeting, an executive meeting with the same attendants as in session 0, where in no more than 15 minutes the established outline document used as a guiding road for coaching was reviewed, in order to assess progress from a qualitative perspective. At the time, there was no quantitative analytical tool to measure real progress and issue a numerical indicator to establish a percentage of progress in the two weeks that had transpired.

On this session, the points that would be addressed during the general process were revised in order to be assessed or make the necessary adjustments.

**Session 3.** Same as in session 1, it started with the implementation of a group dynamic exercise that, unlike the first time, on this occasion took up 90 minutes. The clear goal was to understand the story of a given situation, that is, the same specific issue was brought up for debate but from the perspective of various members. This way, the team became aware of the vastly different ways to see the same issue depending on the different paradigms and points of view of each team member.

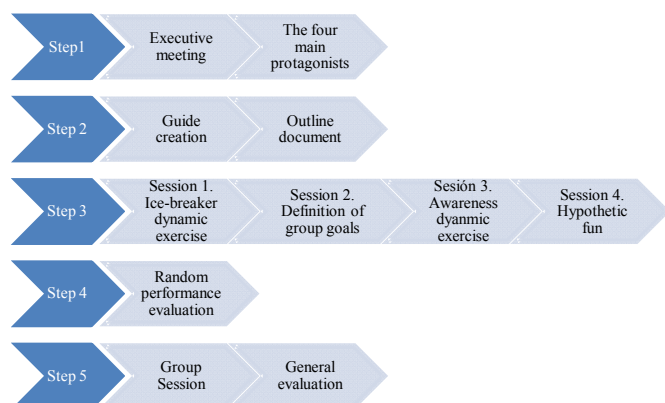
After the group exercise, and to soften the end of the session, a hypothetic personal consultation with the three most trusted mentors of the team members, was laid out. It was suggested that the mentor be someone everyone trusted and was acquainted with, since as an imaginary exercise, that imaginary mentor had to guess answers according to the issue addressed at the time by the team.

**Session 4.** On this last session, where learning was almost completely turned over to team members, and to prevent falling into a monotonous session rhythm, a fun hypothetical session was laid out, in which all team members, after having analyzed the clear goals and objectives for the team's improvement, had to consider an imaginary and hypothetic case in which they had been hired by a rival company to lay out actions that would undoubtedly worsen the company's situation and thus lead it to an end. Once the step by step guide to lead the company towards failure was established, it was analyzed in a mirror and the main points were reconsidered as a guide to improve the situation.

This technique helped visualize that the truly necessary changes for a transformation are very simple and generally are already present on the team's options. The performance assessment was quickly applied to the employee that had stood out the most on the initial evaluation, preferring him or her after being assessed again, comparing the initial scores with the new ones.

The last group session took place without the coach, since this was an internal meeting where the company management showed satisfaction with everyone's attitude change. It also expressed gratefulness for the mind openness that had been reflected on a productivity increase, and as a consequence, a

sideline bonus program was implemented, with awards that were handed out to every team member; it wasn't specified if said awards were in cash form, in kind, or time concessions.



**Figure 1** Coaching Methodology for the Transformation of a Work Group Into a High-performance Team

Source: own elaboration (2016)

## CONCLUSSION

The theory proposed by Piqueras and Arola (2014) related to the general executive coaching implementation is approved, since it was possible to identify the performance factor of each employee through performance evaluations and organizational climate surveys, thus allowing the identification of personal traits for each team member, which enabled a redesign of the general team where the most radical change was the creation of sub-teams with better defined tasks that complemented the whole.

Once the sub-teams were created, the proposed executive coaching methodology was implemented. The teams were assessed again in a short period of time, both in terms of performance and in terms or organizational climate, showing substantial improvements.

It was verified that with a structured and systematic methodology, it was possible to detect weaknesses in those team members who brought down the performance rate of the whole team. It was also possible to verify that the systemic evaluation produced measurable data regarding performance, it also helped to provide feedback for the human resources office regarding their new recruits' evaluation, in a way that allowed for certain aspects analyzed in the performance evaluation to be assessed at the job interview, and even from recruitment.

On the three analyzed cases, it was possible to have an open participation from the company directives and owners, thus ensuring a positive effect at the same time that the employees noted an interest in change coming from management itself, in addition to a high level of consistence between what the managers asked and did. It is then possible to conclude that, had there been no participation and compromise from the four main protagonists vital to the work group transformation into a high-performance team, an effective process wouldn't have been able to be carried out.

Lastly, the companies' open mind regarding the organizational climate survey gave a clear headlight of what the internal team

felt in relation to their immediate environment, since in some cases there was no way or mechanism to voice out ideas or improvement suggestions pertaining the analyzed points, such as salary or direct boss assessment.

## Recommendations

Carry out a performance evaluation in a periodic and systematic way. It is suggested that said evaluation be carried out at each closing of a project.

Link the performance evaluation with the initial job interview, this way in the recruitment and selection process, it will be possible to have an inventory of abilities as a starting point for an internal classification of personnel.

Give feedback to the human resource office regarding performance evaluations.

Carry out the organizational climate survey in stablished periods of time that do not match the start or end of a project, in order to reduce motivation and tiredness bias respectively.

Use executive coaching sessions every time a team member is promoted, or in the case of team or office bosses, let them be carried out in a periodic way according to what the general management stablishes.

Stablish bonuses for measurable productivity in project delivery time, whether they be in cash, in kind, or time concessions.

Document the company's methodologies as part of quality control processes.

Carry out the executive coaching technique periodically as part of the internal training and instruction program.

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