



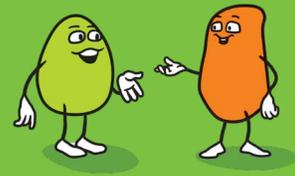
# The Resounding Cost of a Silent Culture

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*Ignite a Culture of Trust with “in the Moment” Coaching*



# Conversations are the conduits of culture.



How people interact with each other—or don't—is what gives a culture its look and feel. You can think of conversations as an electrical current coursing through your organization: when people connect, the current flows. People light up and insights turn into actions, igniting enthusiasm and trust. When the connection isn't complete, there's a short circuit. Sparks may fly and create havoc—resulting in damaged relationships and missed opportunities. All too often though, the risk of attempting to connect at all seems too high and people choose to remain silent, allowing issues to quietly fester, draining essential energy out of the culture. Sometimes, those silent standoffs explode into attention-grabbing crises that can inflict extensive damage and pain, leaving lasting scars both inside and outside of the organization.

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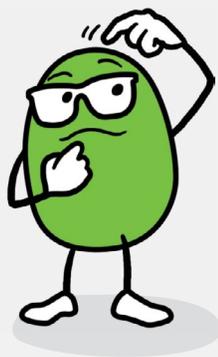
*That's why, at **Cylient**, we were curious to discover why people don't talk to each other, what happens when people don't have meaningful conversations and whether learning “in the moment” coaching and feedback skills fostered more open, trusting communications—and cultures.*

## METHODOLOGY

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At **Cylient**, our vision is to make coaching a way of life for the world. To do this, we partner with organizations to instill Change-Able® coaching cultures using our **Coaching in the Moment**® and **Feedback in the Moment**® workshops and full complement of reinforcement resources. To answer our questions, we reached out to our clients who have implemented **The Cylient System** for instilling coaching cultures in their organizations.

We conducted one-hour phone interviews with a total of 25 participants in five different organizations to gather examples of effective coaching conversations and understand if and how those conversations had impacted the organization. All (100%) of the interviewees participated in our Coaching in the Moment workshop, and 44% of participants participated in Feedback in the Moment as well.

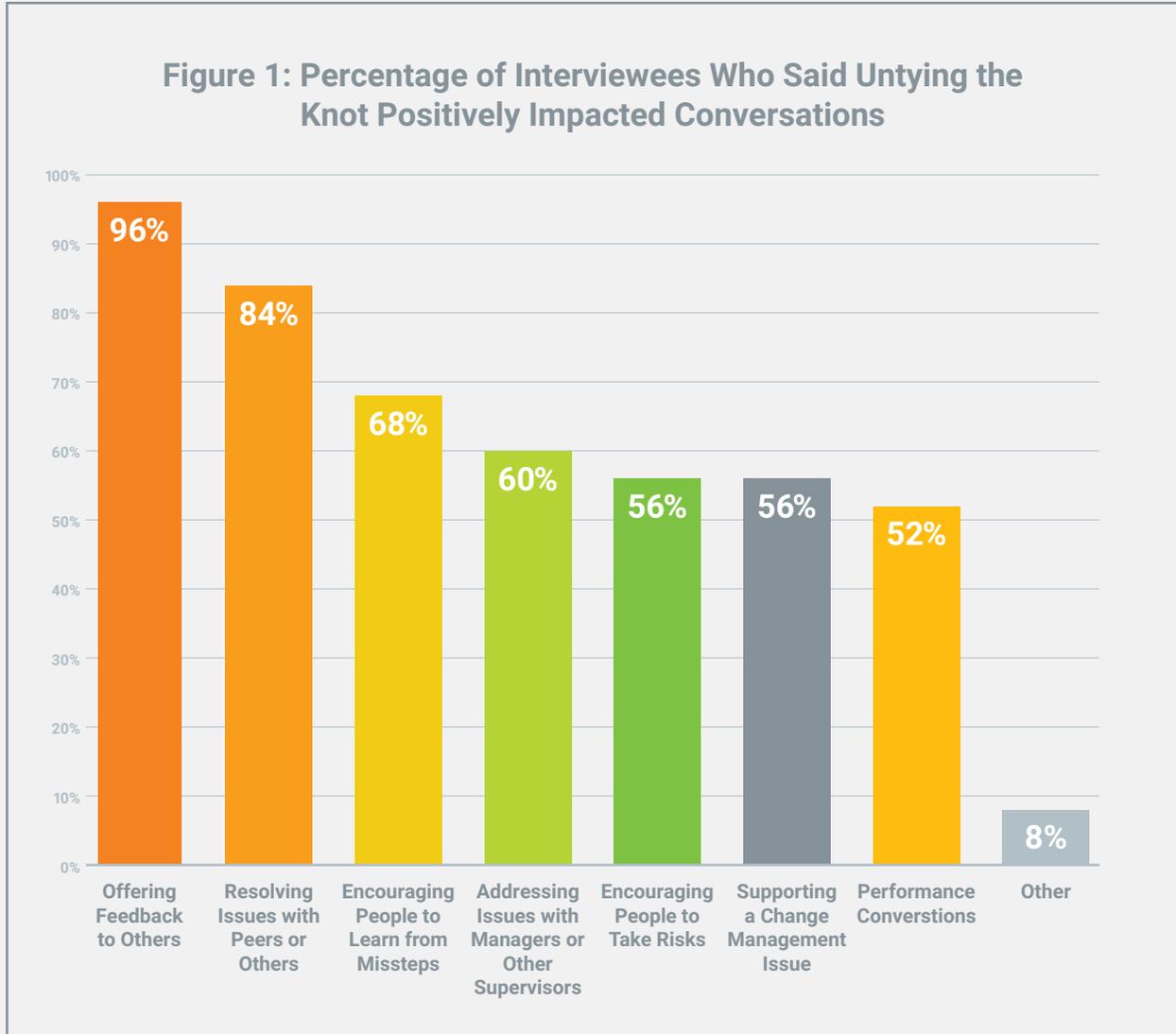


For the interviews, we used open-ended questions to discover specific examples of coaching conversations the participants have had in the workplace.

Then, we inquired about the impact of that specific conversation. We used a structured interview guide that asked questions such as:

- 1 What was the situation?
- 2 What did you do differently as a result of using the Untying the Knot® approach to address this situation?
- 3 How would you have handled this situation previously?
- 4 What kind of difference did that make for you? The other person?
- 5 Were there any other impacts you noticed from your different approach to the conversation?

**Figure 1: Percentage of Interviewees Who Said Untying the Knot Positively Impacted Conversations**



In our interviews, participants noted that Cylient’s Untying the Knot approach for “in the moment” coaching and feedback most improved their skills to engage in more effective conversations involving “offering feedback to others” and “resolving issues with peers or others,” with 96% and 84%, respectively, answering “yes” (Figure 1).

## THE COST OF SILENCE

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To get a feeling for the pervasive, yet sometimes subtle, impact that choosing to remain silent can have, let's look at what happened with Natalie\*, a specialist at a company that is focusing on improving customer experience. Natalie works with the call center supporting employee development and addressing issues that arise. The call center suffered from low customer satisfaction numbers and a high turnover rate.

To measure the successes (or failures) of call center employees, this company had a standardized "scorecard" that mapped out a Performance Improvement Plan that was used whenever a mistake was made. Natalie noticed there were many outstanding Performance Improvement Plans that weren't being acted upon, and as a result, issues that were not being addressed.

***After she took the Coaching in the Moment workshop to learn how to integrate coaching approaches into day-to-day conversations, she had the confidence to talk with the call center manager regarding her concerns about the scorecard and how it was being used.***

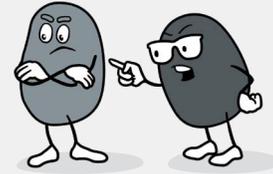
She approached the conversation with genuine curiosity, seeking to understand her manager's perspective using coaching questions. Her non-judgmental approach to the conversation facilitated an authentic exchange.

Natalie and the manager worked together to revise the scorecard and develop a coaching approach to implement it, a solution that worked for everyone—Natalie, the call center manager and the call center employees. This coaching approach ensured the intention was to make the employee as successful as possible, rather than focusing on discipline. Without Coaching in the Moment, Natalie said she might have "relied on a peer for advice on how to address the issues or not brought the idea up at all." The new process resulted in significant change in the call center: retention improved, overall morale increased, and there was a stronger focus on the customer. Rather than rushing through a conversation or simply getting the customer a quick answer, the call center employees are now having meaningful conversations with customers, making the customer feel like they're truly taken care of.

This is just one example of a conversation that initially wasn't going to happen, and the impact that having the conversation had on individuals, the department and the company as a whole.

*\* The names of participants have been changed and some elements of the general situation have been omitted to protect the privacy of the participants.*

Throughout the interviews and **in other research**, we've noticed that there are many other kinds of conversations that people in the workplace tend to avoid, such as:



<hr style="width: 80px; margin-bottom: 10px;"/> <p>Giving feedback to save others from embarrassment, arguments or defensive reactions</p>	<hr style="width: 80px; margin-bottom: 10px;"/> <p>Sharing their opinions to avoid stating the “wrong” answer, or worse, to avoid punishment from leaders</p>	<hr style="width: 80px; margin-bottom: 10px;"/> <p>Requesting job promotions or opportunities to grow based on fear of rejection</p>	<hr style="width: 80px; margin-bottom: 10px;"/> <p>Genuine peer conversations, instead letting others vent about a problem with no next step or solution</p>	<hr style="width: 80px; margin-bottom: 10px;"/> <p>Speaking out against group-think, causing more complex problems further down the line</p>
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**The cost of all that silence can quickly—and sometimes dramatically—hit the bottom line.**

When a culture of silence takes hold, predictable, perennial problems spring up. Through research and our interviews, we found that the most common issues in organizations are:

- ▶ Performance conversations not happening, or not happening effectively, even though organizations have mandated them

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- ▶ Younger workers not receiving the feedback or the frequency of feedback they expect, **therefore leaving companies**

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- ▶ **Disengagement and low morale** among employees because they don't feel valued—which in some cases translated to the customer experience

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- ▶ Any type of change effort not getting the kind of traction it needs

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- ▶ Low customer satisfaction numbers and/or poor client relations

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- ▶ **Mistrust in the company**—resulting in absenteeism and poor relationships with management

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- ▶ Worsening interpersonal relationships, creating a disconnect between employees and the company

# Silence Grows Out of Fear

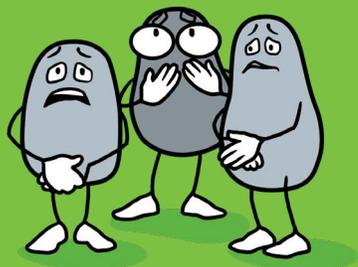
When people avoid talking about the things that really matter, more often than not, the avoidance is rooted in fear. In a fear-based culture, employees focus more on whether or not they'll have a job next week, rather than their actual job. The top priorities become following the rules and avoiding blame to stay safe.

In a company culture, there are two types of fear: **skill-based fear** and **culturally-based fear**. Skill-based fear comes from the fear of not having the skills to have the conversation. For example, someone might think: *If this conversation goes poorly, I may lose the good relationship I have. Or: If I don't present my idea well, it could ruin my reputation in the company.*

## TYPES OF COMPANY CULTURE-BASED FEAR

SKILL-BASED

CULTURALLY-BASED



Culturally-based fear, however, stems from the unwritten rules of what you are and aren't allowed to talk about at work (and in society).

These can often be attributed to those uncomfortable topics many people just don't want to address, like the performance of a member on your team, clashes between business units, or issues about pay. In some cases, there is a cultural bias within organizations against speaking out or speaking up if there is risk of embarrassing anyone, particularly people in more senior positions. Whatever the cause, the overarching threat of sanctioning can keep people quiet, no matter how important the issue is to them.

Our observation is that these two types of fear can be interrelated—just read what happened with Max\*. After taking Coaching in the Moment, Max began using a new approach with younger, newer employees in his department. Rather than taking a “direct and correct” approach when people make a mistake, for example, telling them what they did wrong and then instructing them on the right way to do it, Max now invests in what he calls “teachable moments.” He takes a coaching approach to the situation, talking

with the person to understand how the mistake happened, and offering additional background information, so the person understands why it matters to do things differently. Together they consider the question, “What do we need to do to prevent this in the future?”

These younger employees, some of whom recently joined the firm from a competitor, have expressed their appreciation for this approach. Some of them thanked Max for taking the time to explain each step, while noting that the managers they left didn’t provide this kind of coaching support. Max thought that it helped them understand that it’s okay not to know everything and opened up opportunities to ask for help when they need it. He also noted that this coaching approach decreased the likelihood of the same mistakes happening in the future.

Max said that this collaborative environment aligns with the values of the company, demonstrating the desired culture of the company. He also thought that it might help these employees become quality mentors in the future. The shift to the new approach illustrates how taking a “direct and correct” approach can silence people in an organization, and how “in the moment” coaching skills open up conversations to create a more engaged and engaging environment.

#### COACHING IN THE MOMENT

### USING A COACHING APPROACH GIVES CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION TO OUR TEAM.

*Jeremy\*, a manager, had a supervisor who also participated in the Coaching in the Moment workshop. After Jeremy went through the workshop himself, he recognized the importance of coaching and grew frustrated when his supervisor didn’t coach him. During one of his performance reviews, the main topic was how Jeremy’s supervisor could help him more, and Jeremy brought up his desire to receive more coaching. Instead of taking over tasks and telling Jeremy what to do, Jeremy requested that his supervisor help him understand what the next step is for the project or what success looks like for his supervisor.*

*After that conversation, Jeremy and his supervisor could work through issues more quickly and easily. They both knew the importance of coaching, so together, they made coaching a habit. Jeremy said he “wouldn’t have had [the conversation]” before he participated in Coaching in the Moment, and he would have grown frustrated thinking that his supervisor didn’t have confidence in his job capabilities.*

*He also saw impacts in the team environment, noting that other team members appreciated how their supervisor coached them through problems rather than giving them directions. Jeremy reported that he felt it gave the whole team more confidence and motivation.*

# BUILDING CONFIDENCE WITH “IN THE MOMENT” COACHING AND FEEDBACK

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Let's look at the kinds of skills that help people feel more confident about stepping into conversations they previously avoided. Here are a few skills taught in our Coaching in the Moment workshop that participants in this study referenced using that gave them the confidence to express ideas and concerns they previously kept to themselves. Those skills included:

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## **Getting curious about how others are viewing situations**

The ability to suspend judgment is pivotal when it comes to engaging in conversations that can have an emotional edge. Remaining in a curious place is essential for creating a safe space for the conversation to happen.

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## **Exploring the worldviews of others**

Whatever people do, it makes perfect sense to them. Coaching conversations begin by exploring how the other person seems to be perceiving the situation. This enables people to find what we call “the knots”—those are the places where the person's perception or skills are limiting them from seeing or doing something that is contributing to the issue at hand.

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## **Going beyond asking questions**

If the only tool you have to work with are questions, coaching conversations can turn into circular inquisitions that only generate frustration and annoyance, rather than trust-building insight. That's because people are frequently not aware of the limitation that they are experiencing. Often, they attribute the problem to something or someone else. So, asking more and more questions isn't helpful. In fact, it's more likely to be perceived as condescending and manipulative. That's not going to promote the kind of collaborative and conciliatory behaviors needed to resolve sticky issues together. It's essential for people to learn coaching skills that enable them to confidently go beyond asking questions—such as offering insightful observations or using analogies—so they can use so they can use their own insight to ignite the insight of others. That's the kind of exchange that builds trust and motivates shared actions, like the kind Natalie and the call center manager engaged in.

As a result of learning these skills, and more, participants in our study reported that: it felt easier to have difficult conversations, it didn't take as much work as anticipated, they asked more questions to stay curious, they refrained from inserting their own opinion into the conversation, and the learning that resulted from coaching decreased the number of times the same person came back to ask about the same issue.

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## OTHER BENEFITS OF “IN THE MOMENT” COACHING AND FEEDBACK

When we asked participants about the broader impacts of their “in the moment” coaching conversations, they recounted both tangible and intangible results that often extended beyond the original conversations to impact the larger organization.

### TANGIBLE

*Some of the tangible results attributed to these “in the moment” coaching conversations were:*

- ▶ Lower turnover rate and/or higher employee retention in departments
- ▶ Increased customer satisfaction numbers
- ▶ More hours dedicated to their own job, rather than doing others' tasks
- ▶ Reduction in employees' absent days
- ▶ Change management projects successfully implemented
- ▶ Increased productivity or projects getting completed faster
- ▶ Unnecessary change projects were stopped before implementation

## INTANGIBLE

### *Some of the intangible results were:*

- ▶ Better interpersonal relationships or strengthened relationships among supervisors, team members and/or peers
- ▶ An increase in trust in management
- ▶ More relaxed team environment, and/or teams and departments working more effectively together
- ▶ Increased self-confidence in both the person coaching and the person receiving coaching
- ▶ An increase in employee morale and motivation, or engagement in employees
- ▶ A person's greater self-awareness in similar situations—they now recognize when they're limiting themselves in other scenarios
- ▶ Greater abilities to solve issues before they occur
- ▶ People more willing to speak up about ideas, issues or feedback
- ▶ Increased communication between management and employees
- ▶ Better relationships between the company and its clients, creating a more valued partnership
- ▶ Leaders approaching situations differently, perhaps not resorting to discipline as often
- ▶ Performance metrics improving
- ▶ Better employee evaluations from supervisors and peers
- ▶ Employee promotions

These results show the differences “in the moment” coaching approaches can make. In addition, it's also important to notice the kinds of behaviors that taking a coaching approach to “in the moment” coaching conversations replaced.

Participants reported that when they previously used traditional “direct and correct” styles of leadership to address issues, they either

completely avoided addressing issues and told people what to do, or they had ineffective conversations that resulted in rifts, worsened relationships and/or unmotivated employees. Some interviewees cited that previously, they would have addressed the situation by giving someone the answer or by fixing the problem on their own, which would not have resolved the issue. Most likely, that issue would come up again in the future.

Other people recognized that before taking Coaching in the Moment, they may not have realized the situation was a coaching moment, completely ignoring the employee and not investing the time to develop them. These missed opportunities can actually diminish the relationship between the manager and employee because the employee does not feel seen or does not have the confidence to take necessary actions.

People also suggested that they would have waited a longer time to address an issue, which would have led to increased tensions, making the problem worse in the future. When mistakes were made by an employee, participants said that previously they would have focused on the mistake, rather than the process the employee used to reach that mistake. That kind of punitive focus can discourage employees from speaking up when they need help, can cause them to feel less confident in their abilities and doesn't support them in learning how to address that mistake on their own in the future.

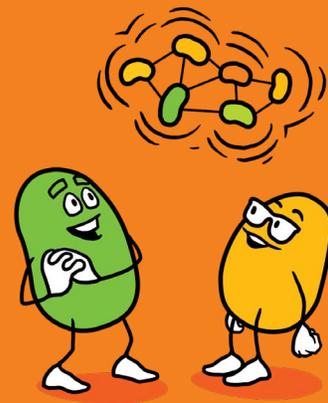
Instilling coaching skills gives everyone in the organization the ability to drain the fears and frustrations out of what were previously perceived to be difficult conversations and enables them to get to the heart of issues more quickly. When people recognize coaching moments and have the confidence to step into those conversations, they ignite the insights needed to inspire people to look at situations from fresh perspectives and risk trying new approaches. When people have a positive experience with change, they're more willing to engage in the process of making significant change happen at every level of the organization. This chain reaction of translating insights into positive actions is the foundation of a coaching culture that is built on trust.

#### COACHING IN THE MOMENT

### CHANGE PROJECTS ARE IMPLEMENTED MORE SUCCESSFULLY WITH "IN THE MOMENT" COACHING.

*Sarah\* was part of a team leading a change project that was about to implement a new system for a group of employees. Her team's job was to introduce the initiative and explain the benefits of the system to a large group in order to gain their buy-in for the change. As Sarah introduced the project in the first meeting, it was evident from the comments being made that they were not supportive of the initiative.*

*Rather than arguing her point, as she would have done before taking Coaching in the Moment, Sarah remembered what she had learned in class, that whatever people do, it makes perfect sense to them. So instead of judging or blaming the group, she decided to use a coaching approach of telling a story to help them address what she sensed were their concerns. Sarah was a new employee herself (just a few months into the job) and, as such, she had to learn all new systems along with the one she was introducing. She shared her experience with the group and explained how she thought this new system was easy to understand. She could see their faces relax and their reactions soften. She said she felt relief in the room. Sarah reported that this helped the rest of the team who were presenting to this group because the group appeared more open to what Sarah's team had to share. At the time of our conversation, the new system was being implemented successfully.*



# Build Your Own Culture of Trust

Trust is so important, it is viewed as a currency in the business. It's a currency that is becoming increasingly valuable as the escalating complexity of business challenges requires more and more people with differing perspectives and skillsets to collaboratively work together, often under intense time pressures, to find thoughtful solutions to challenges they may never have seen before.

When trustworthiness is present, it spreads throughout the team, department and organization. As trust builds between management and employees, and across departments, there is increased productivity among staff members, improved morale and a reduction in time to discuss and decide on key issues.

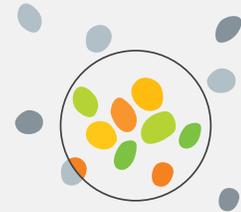
**A study with the Harvard Business review** stated that employees in trusting work communities are 106% more energetic at work, 76% more engaged with their jobs, feel 74% less stress and 29% more satisfied with their personal life.

The challenge with trust is it cannot be bought or forced. Employees and leaders must earn trust in one another. As we've seen, taking a coaching approach to day-to-day interactions enables people to learn new information about the scenario and the people involved, and it creates shared connections among people. Both of these factors contribute to a higher level of trust in the person, and therefore, the organization.

If you are looking for ways to break the silence in your organization and foster greater levels of trust, consider the following approaches:

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## 1 | Bring Coaching into Your Organization Thoughtfully



Notice that in the stories we've shared the coaching approaches were subtly woven into day-to-day conversations. They were not "formal" coaching conversations; in fact, in two of the cases, team members used coaching approaches to raise significant issues with their managers—not the other way around. When **"in the moment" coaching skills** are instilled at all levels of the organization, those kinds of forthright conversations that can change the trajectory of critical situations are far more likely to happen.

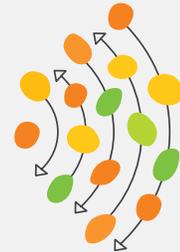
It's important to note that the term "coaching" is widely used to mean many different things. When you are considering how to bring "in the moment" coaching into your organization, be sure that the approach that you choose is not what we call **"faux" coaching—that is, coaching that is really just using questions to get people to do what you want them to do.** Faux coaching tends to feel manipulative to the people on the receiving end of the conversation

and will not deliver the kinds of results that we are pointing toward with this paper.

Likewise, teaching some managers to be certified coaches capable of guiding structured coaching engagements that unfold over time is a very different skillset than "in the moment" coaching. When only a few people are given coaching skills, it sends the message to the organization that some people are responsible for offering coaching while others simply receive it. Coaching up or over boundaries is far less likely to happen when top-down coaching is the cultural norm. In addition, this approach can be very difficult to scale because of the cost and time required to learn the full complement of skills needed to become a certified coach.

Culture is what people do. If you aspire to create a coaching culture, then everyone in the organization needs to have the coaching skills needed to engage in "in the moment" coaching conversations.

## 2 | Amplify the Impact with Reflection and Sharing Stories



We experienced our own “a-ha” moment when we asked interviewees, “How would you have handled this situation previously?” We noticed that when we invited the participants to reflect upon their own experiences, perhaps for the first time, they appeared to gain deeper insight into how taking a coaching approach to the situation they were recounting had created a more positive and productive outcome. As participants talked about their situations, they seemed to gain a deeper appreciation for the power of taking a coaching approach.

**As the American philosopher John Dewey**

**stated:** “We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.”

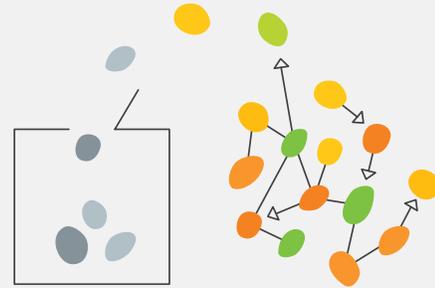
Reflecting upon what went well and what can be improved for the next time will increase a person’s coaching capabilities over time. Reflection also contributes to increasing self-confidence because it requires a conscious effort to synthesize, abstract and articulate the key

lessons taught by experience. This translates into higher rates of learning.

However you instill coaching-based leadership into your organization, we highly recommend that you find ways to invite people to reflect upon the types of questions that we asked our survey participants as a way to reinforce their appreciation for the impact of using their coaching skills.

Sharing stories that highlight the kinds of behavior that build trust, like respectfully questioning a decision or a process—will encourage others to take the risks needed to dismantle a culture of silence and replace it with a culture of trust. Providing platforms to appropriately share the stories that emerge—in team meetings, on intranet sites and through social media—can provide visceral motivation to learn how to integrate coaching more deeply into the fabric of your organization’s culture.

### 3 | Change the Culture with Change Itself



One of the fastest ways to instill coaching as a way of life is to pair learning coaching skills with implementing any kind of major change project, such as installing a new system, transitioning to a different business model, or going through a merger or acquisition. One of the biggest impacts we noticed consistently throughout the interviews was the momentum that arose during the implementation of significant changes after coaching approaches were used. We know that **70% of change programs fail to achieve their goals. According to a Deloitte study,** 92% of respondents completely agreed or partly agreed that “resistance to change is an expected reaction of people to anything new.”

Pairing learning “in the moment” coaching skills with the implementation of major changes is a win, win, win. Coaching approaches are woven into all aspects of the project, both within the project team and with client populations, to address the fears and concerns that naturally

arise when significant change is undertaken. This enables projects to stay on schedule and deliver the needed results because course corrections and critical conversations can happen in the moment.

People build confidence in their coaching skills the more they use them, so setting the expectation that everyone involved with a change project—including people who are impacted by the change—will use coaching approaches to work through the change process provides a ready-made practice field for everyone to learn on. Perhaps the greatest win happens when the project is done and a trust-infused coaching culture remains, making it easier for the organization to move through the inevitable changes that will follow the first wave.

## CONCLUSION

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Trust is a valuable currency and a vital current that enlivens the cultures of our organizations. Trust builds when it flows through heartfelt conversations that address core issues. It is diminished when what most needs to be addressed is observed in fear-based silence, and nothing is done. It does not help to direct people to talk about challenging issues if they lack the skills to do so in a productive and safe manner.

Wiring up an enterprise-wide network of “in the moment” coaching capabilities will energize your culture, emboldening people to engage in real conversations, in real time, about the things that really matter. As the level of trust in your organization increases, you will create a coaching culture where people feel safe to say what needs to be said, do what needs to be done, and work together to make the kind of difference your organization aspires to make in the world.

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*At Cylient, our sole focus is creating Change-Able® coaching cultures. The Cylient System for instilling coaching-based leadership, featuring our Coaching in the Moment® and Feedback in the Moment® learning experiences, is comprehensive, practical, universally accessible and globally scalable. Cylient is a true partner in making coaching a way of life, for you and your organization.*



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