

# The power of coaching circles - a new trend in staff development and talent retention

 By [Louise Worsley](#)

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We need to develop a strong base of skills in middle management. More and more companies are being hard-pressed to find and retain top talent; coupled with this is the need to put together the right team for the project.

As reflected in an article I wrote - [The right project manager for the job - trickier than it sounds](#) - you cannot simply put any project manager in a position to manage any project; you need to identify their experience, their skill sets and pair that with the right project.

The need to attract and retain the right people for the job is a global challenge that particularly impacts South Africa as we strive to develop the skills necessary to take business forward. A challenge that we at PiCubed have noticed, is the need to develop middle-level project managers. This we believe is a real focus area for business and an area that cannot be neglected.

## Learning needs to get much closer to the workplace

One company that has taken active strides in developing and in turn retaining and attracting the right talent is ABSA Bank. Nadia Barsch, an MBA student, recently carried out research that assessed the success of ABSA Bank's coaching circles programme, a continent-wide, in-house coaching programme launched by ABSA in 2010. Coaching circles (a concept developed by Charles Brassard) provide a space for managers that work together to coach and dialogue with each other. Slightly different from action learning which involves solving real problems in real time; coaching circles go to the next level and focus not only on solving problems, but also empowering team members and developing the coaching capability of the members.

According to the [research report](#) released by the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of business: "90% of participants felt that the coaching circles offered the ideal space to make mistakes and be corrected in a safe environment; while 100% thought that it enabled them to develop a sense of camaraderie and teamwork; and 100% felt they developed more self-awareness along with better listening skills and skills to ask the right questions of others.

"How this translates into organisational benefits is simple: Expanded networks and greater tolerance across the organisation leads to better teamwork, communication and problem solving...Participants described how they were able to develop empathy for the people they coached during the process, how they learned to be more tolerant of others and self-aware, and how they had been given the opportunity to form stronger friendships with people from outside their departments," said Barsch.

"Empathy helps form greater cohesion in the workplace, and strengthens teams, as does tolerance. In order for someone to be truly empathetic they need to be confident in who they are, and aware of the different assumptions they make about other people.

"The sense of safety, support, and understanding of confidentiality allowed coachees to openly share, build mutual trust, and build respect within the group," said Barsch.

## **Growing internal expertise that stays with the business is essential**

[Ideate](#) interviewed ABSA's talent development expert, Maria Cussell Humphries, who noted that other value derived from the programme was as follows: "By using their professionally trained, certified pool of internal coaches, all of whom have studied for at least seven months through the GSB's Centre for Coaching, the bank has been able to afford to offer coaching to many more staff than previously ever thought possible and at approximately 9%, a fraction of the cost of doing the same amount of coaching using external coaches.

"In addition, developing in-house coaching expertise has saved ABSA quite a bit of money. If the group had gone with external coaching at about R60,000 per coaching contract, the total cost to Absa would have been around R25m. The cost of providing the training to internal coaches was around R35,000 per delegate or a total of R350,000 - a saving of R24,6m," said Humphries.

## **Reflection and learning must be part of the way we do business**

Through coaching and the process of gathering stories for the PMSA SIG, [Success Stories Shared](#), we at PiCubed have noticed the power of encouraging project managers to sit down and reflect on projects and the lessons that can be learned and passed onto the team.

Allowing the time and space for this kind of development is imperative in the development of senior managers who can take on a variety of complex projects - these interventions are an integral part of ensuring individuals have the capability necessary to meet the needs of business.

Is your company running coaching circles? Do you have a success story you would like to share? Are you in a space where you and/or your team would benefit from coaching sessions/workshops?

Let us know your thoughts - we'd love to know what's happening in South African business.

For more information, go to [www.pi3.co.za](http://www.pi3.co.za) or email [lworsley@pi3.co.za](mailto:lworsley@pi3.co.za).

## **ABOUT LOUISE WORSLEY**

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