



# A Company's Guide: 5 Keys to Successfully Implementing a Coaching Platform

Everything you need to know about finding the right coaching platform for your company and scaling your coaching program, developed based on the insights from the International Coaching Federation's Julia Atkinson.





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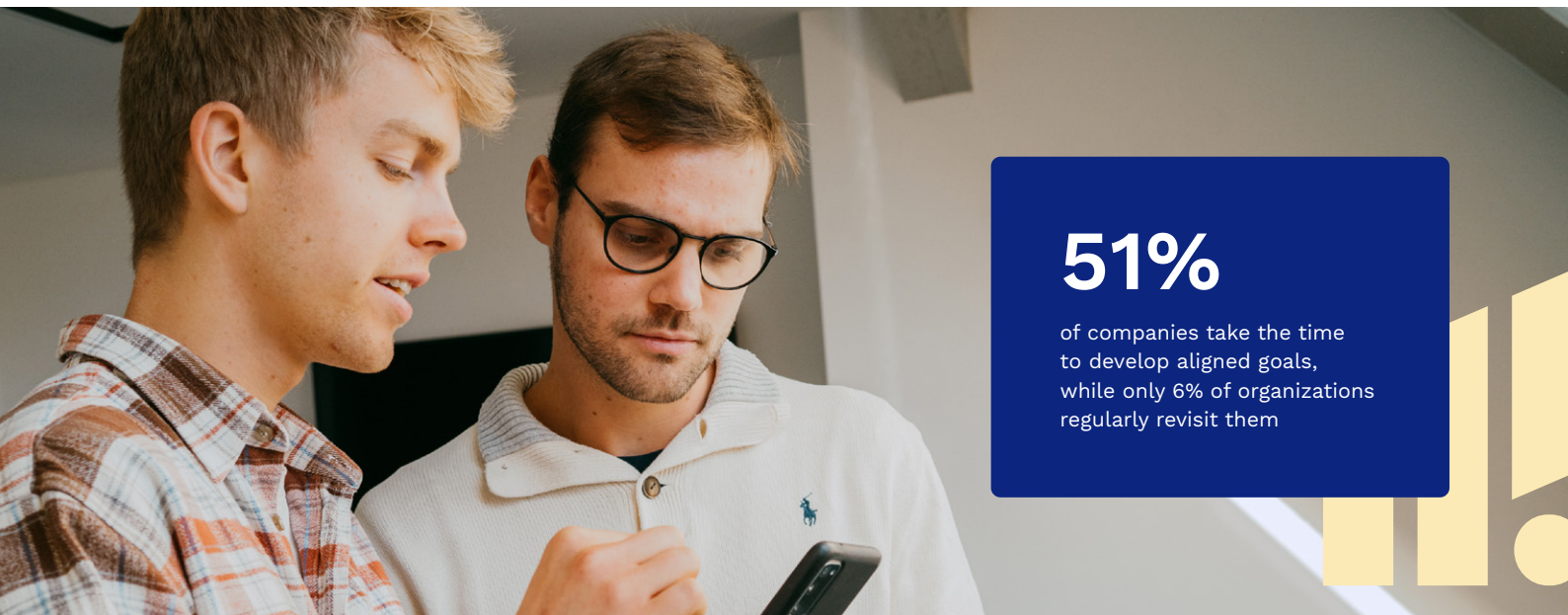


# The rise of digital learning solutions in a VUCA world

Today's fast-paced business environment is often described as one of VUCA, characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The instability of the global supply chain during the pandemic, combined with an unprecedented shift toward remote work policies, left businesses financially vulnerable. At the same time, many employees struggled with access to remote support as they adapted to home offices. During these turbulent times, the digital coaching industry, already in its growth through the digitalization of the broader coaching industry, expanded significantly. Within this context, any number of new platforms and providers have emerged. Increasingly, businesses recognized that it was vital to not only support but continuously upskill their employees to remain competitive, adaptable, and innovative.

One of the key strengths of digital coaching is that it offers employees remote support, allowing them to better understand their strengths and areas for improvement, develop their soft skills, and align their personal goals with career development. Inevitably, the growing recognition of digital coaching's benefits has also had a significant impact on the HR industry since the pandemic, allowing HR departments to support their employees from home via scalable, access-from-anywhere coaching solutions.

At Sharpist, we recognize that identifying, selecting, and implementing a coaching platform can be fraught with difficulties, from the challenge of gaining executive buy-in to integrating a coaching platform into existing systems and learning and development (L&D) initiatives. In order to maximize the benefits of coaching platforms, it is crucial that companies have researched the market, established clearly-defined goals and desired outcomes, as well as identifying employees who could benefit most from coaching. With this white paper, we therefore decided to evaluate the five critical factors for successfully implementing a coaching platform, as well as offer our perspective on essential questions to consider.



## 1 The importance of clearly defined goals

When implementing a successful coaching program, it is essential to define goals clearly at the start of the process. Not only do clearly defined goals help companies retain a strategic focus on their targets, but they also allow the organization to prioritize allocating resources where they are most needed and measure the coaching program's effectiveness through learner progress.

Although efforts to clarify goals are crucial to any strategic transformation, surprisingly few organizations make the effort to fully align goals at the planning stage. Indeed, according to research, only 51% of companies take the time to develop aligned goals, while only 6% of organizations regularly revisit them (Zender, 2020). At the beginning of the coaching process, learners and company leaders must identify what changes they would like to see within themselves and their organization, establish a plan for how to attain those goals, and track their progress throughout the program.

## Questions to ask before implementing a coaching platform

### Who?



- ✓ Who are the stakeholders involved in the coaching program (e.g., are senior management on board with the coaching program)?
- ✓ Who will be responsible for defining and tracking the coaching goals?
- ✓ Who will be selected first for coaching sessions?

### What?



- ✓ What are the desired outcomes from the coaching program?
- ✓ What specific skills or areas of focus for development should be targeted through coaching?
- ✓ What metrics will be used to track progress toward goals?

### When?



- ✓ When will the coaching program start and end?
- ✓ When will progress be reviewed and goals evaluated (e.g., after six months or a year)?

### Where?



- ✓ Where will the coaching program take place (i.e., in-person, remote, or hybrid)?
- ✓ Where will the data measuring the coaching program's success be stored? Is it GDPR-compliant?

### How?



- ✓ How will the coaching program be structured and delivered?
- ✓ How does the coaching platform intend to ensure continuous improvement?
- ✓ How will coaches align the company's strategic targets with learners' personal goals?
- ✓ How will progress be tracked and reported?

### Why?



- ✓ Why is a coaching intervention necessary (i.e., why is change needed in the organization)?
- ✓ Why were the specific goals of the program chosen?
- ✓ Why has the organization chosen the specific coaching platform (e.g., scalability, quality of coaches, easy-to-use interface)?

Clear goals that have been critically discussed and evaluated help to ensure the coaching process is aligned with the company's broader business objectives. However, the benefits extend beyond the effectiveness of coaching sessions. Company-wide clarity on targets and goals helps to develop employees' ability to work as a team in an impactful way. This point is reflected in a recent study conducted by Betterworks, which found that an overwhelming 92% majority of employees stated they would work harder if their co-workers could see their goals (Betterworks, 2016). Put simply, employees work more purposefully when they can see how their efforts fit into a bigger picture and contribute toward the company's overall success. Studies reveal, moreover, that it is essential that leadership teams communicate these goals in a clear, easy-to-understand way, with 64% of employees believing that the leadership fails to communicate top goals transparently (Betterworks, 2016).

Goals defined clearly and communicated effectively provide a framework for measuring the coaching process's success and ensuring that all employees and learners understand the program's aims, which is crucial to establishing company-wide buy-in from all stakeholders. These considerations are important for the success of any organization. However, they are of fundamental importance when undertaking a transformational process in particular, whereby roles, hierarchies, and strategic targets may have drastically changed.

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## 2 Gaining executive buy-in

For L&D professionals, gaining executive buy-in is seldom straightforward. There are many reasons for this; one is that executives frequently set goals in ways distinct from other employees, as explored in our [recently published white paper](#) in collaboration with Asana. From L&D professionals' perspectives, gaining executive buy-in is often challenging given the difficulty in quantifying a precise return on investment (ROI) of L&D initiatives - so much so that as little as 8% of L&D professionals attempt to calculate their learning programs' ROI (Emerald Works, 2020). As LinkedIn's 2021 Workplace Learning Report argued, "quantifying the value of learning is not straightforward. Learning leaders have to rely on a wide spectrum of measures to gauge success and identify areas to improve". This is despite the growing importance of L&D in the modern workplace, with the LinkedIn 2019 Workplace Learning Report revealing that 94% of employees would stay at a company longer if they felt there was investment in learning and development. However, executive and c-suite leaders are often unwilling to invest in initiatives that lack an immediate profit incentive. Combined with tighter budget constraints for L&D professionals, gaining executive buy-in for coaching platforms can be a challenge from the offset.

However, as with any significant organizational change or transformation, securing executive buy-in matters when successfully implementing a coaching platform. Aside from the clear benefit of financial investment in coaching from senior leaders, executive buy-in helps align company-wide goals by setting the tone for the rest of the organization. At Sharpist, we often highlight the [importance of a coaching culture](#) in enabling organizations to thrive, driving employee engagement and retention, and helping to build stronger interpersonal relationships between teams. For a coaching program to be impactful, leading to meaningful, long-lasting changes, it is vital that the coaching is embraced by stakeholders at all levels, with the senior team leading by example.



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**Embracing coaching as part of a corporate culture changes the way the members of the organization think and act themselves and toward others. It goes beyond self-improvement and provides a gradual yet dramatic change from a culture based on “but” to one fostering “yes, and...”.**

**Florian Brody**

Executive Coach, PCC/ICF, SP/EMCC, CIC/NVW

In addition, executive buy-in helps to build trust and credibility in the organization as a brand. Across the modern job market, job seekers are increasingly looking to an organization's brand in order to decide which jobs to apply for. Indeed, recent research suggests that as many as 82% of job seekers consider an employer's brand before even applying for a job, an increase of 7% from five years ago (CareerArc, 2021). Given the visibility of senior leadership both within and outside the organization, executives who empower their employees and foster an open culture of communication and mutual respect through coaching are more likely to make the top hires within the current market.



### 3 How to select the right coaching platform

The process of choosing the right platform cannot be undertaken without carefully considering the organization's strategic targets, goals, size, and makeup. In addition, different platforms will inevitably offer different levels of customization and digitization and provide competing metrics for measuring the coaching program's success. During a webinar hosted by Sharpist on this topic in early 2023, Julia Atkinson, President-Elect at the International Coaching Federation in Germany, highlighted the importance of six factors when considering which digital coaching platform to select:

- ✓ **High-quality coaching pool**  
Do the coaches have internationally recognized certifications (e.g., ICF, EMCC, DBVC)?
- ✓ **User-friendly interface**  
Is it easy for learners to find a coach in the system? Are the topics integrated with organizational goals?
- ✓ **Customization options**  
Is it possible to customize the learning content? Is it possible to integrate the platform with existing internal L&D content?
- ✓ **Scalability**  
Does the coaching platform offer only executive coaching, or is the platform scalable across all company levels?
- ✓ **Data security**  
Is the platform ISO certified? Is it GDPR compliant? How does the platform store learners' information, and who can access it? Is the discussion during the learner's session confidential?
- ✓ **Ongoing support and training**  
Does the coaching platform offer ongoing support? Are coaches trained in how to escalate problems if necessary (for example, if a learner appears acutely unwell)?

If a coaching platform can deliver on each of these six key factors, then it will most likely deliver an effective coaching program that will create a long-lasting impact; for more information on how Sharpist works to ensure it excels in each of these areas, see the end of this white paper.

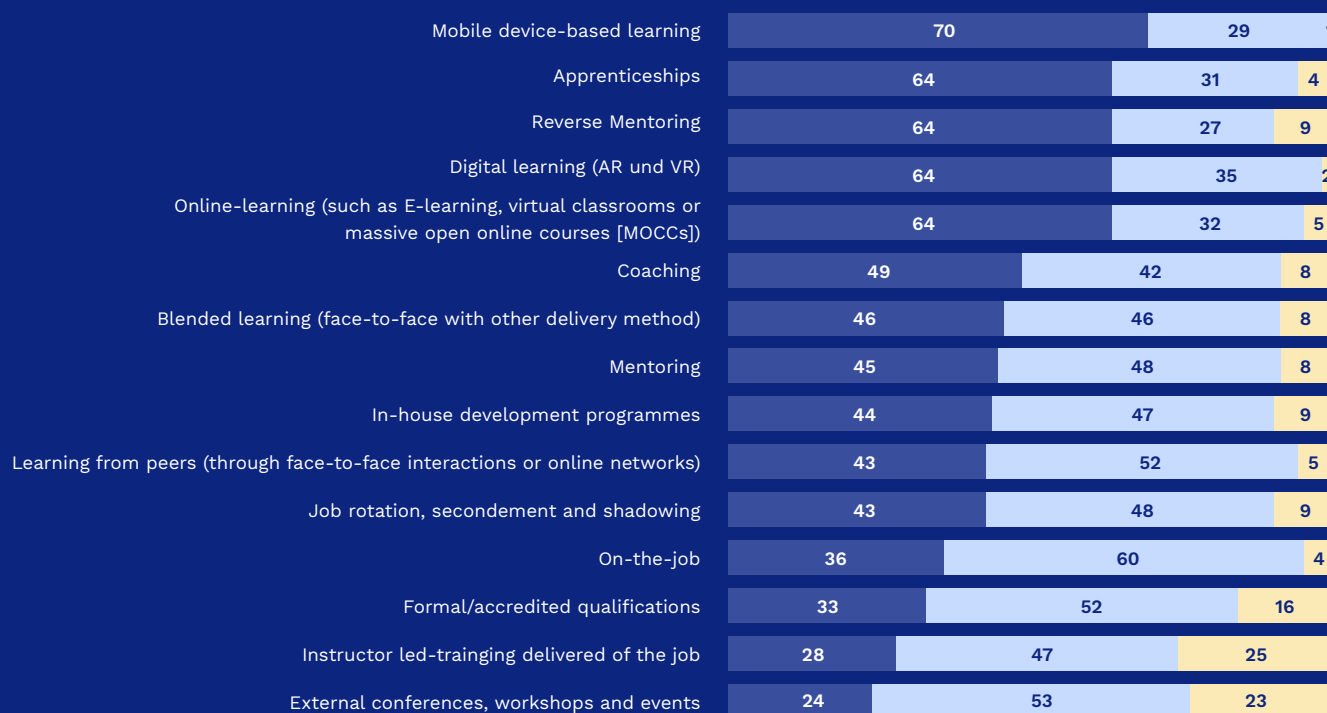
## 4 Integrating the coaching platform with existing L&D systems

Another important consideration when implementing a coaching platform is its accessibility and integration within the overall learning ecosystem of an organization. This is particularly crucial for large enterprises with diverse learning solutions and a larger workforce. The ability of the coaching platform to integrate with existing learning management systems, procurement systems, and other key components of the learning ecosystem, such as performance management, management development programs, engagement surveys, 360 feedback, and more, will play a significant role in its adoption and success.

Integration into the existing learning environment of the company facilitates access and promotes acceptance of the new tool. At the same time, HR departments can centrally store and evaluate data on all development programmes and derive recommendations for action. Data and analytics from previous learning and development initiatives help coaches understand what has worked well and where improvements can be made to the existing systems. Thus, integrating the coaching platform with other systems in the learning ecosystem is critical to its success.

Finally, integration is an important feature of digital coaching platforms given an increasing emphasis on self-directed learning in modern L&D practices. As employees have moved towards remote and hybrid work environments, and with smartphones ubiquitous in day-to-day life, learners must have the opportunity to access coaching sessions from anywhere they wish to optimize engagement. The marked increase in mobile device-based learning over recent years is another key factor when deciding upon a digital coaching platform; it is important to ask not only whether the platform can be integrated with existing L&D material, but also whether the platform can be accessed via a mobile device.

### Thinking back over the last two to three years, has your use of these types of learning and development tools increased, decreased, or stayed the same? (%)



Source: 'Learning and Skills at Work 2020'; CIDP, June 2020

● Increased ● Remained the same ● Decreased



## 5 Continuous improvement through coaching

Modern businesses face a dynamic, challenging environment; within a VUCA world, adaptability is one of the fundamental features of a company running well. However, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and anticipate future problems is not something that most businesses take proactive steps to develop in their workforce. One recent survey revealed that fewer than half of workers recognized adaptability as a skill they saw in themselves (Kirk, 2019). Much like businesses themselves, moreover, digital coaching platforms must continuously innovate and improve in order to provide best-in-class service for clients; in practical terms, this means platforms must be open to embracing new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and implement them to improve their user interface, overall user experience, and learner retention.

It is wise, then, to consider a partnership with a coaching platform as encouraging a process of continuous improvement, not a linear process of achieving certain fixed targets. When conceived of in this way, coaches can cultivate employees' soft skills more effectively and holistically, with soft skills increasingly recognized as essential to a modern, ever-changing business landscape.

Encouraging employees to continuously improve and innovate not only benefits employee engagement and retention, but also has a significant and immediate financial impact. For example, a recent study, *The ROI of Continuous Improvement*, suggests that the average impact of a cost-saving idea is \$31,043 (KaiNexus, 2020), while the same study revealed that 1 in 3 improvements have an immediate financial impact. A coaching platform, then, should aim toward incremental, company-wide changes to culture instead of quick-fix solutions. If implemented with the right platform and strategy, the results can change an organization's trajectory for generations.



## Conclusions

To conclude, the success of implementing a coaching platform in any organization depends on several key factors. Firstly, it is important to have clearly defined goals that are mapped onto the business's broader objectives and strategy, which helps to ensure the coaching process is impactful and provides a means of tracking and measuring its success. Secondly, gaining executive buy-in, though challenging, is crucial. Senior leaders must understand that the benefits of coaching programs extend beyond their ability to return an investment immediately and can lead to innovative, company-wide culture changes.

Thirdly, it is fundamental to choose the right platform that fits the organization's needs, taking into account scalability, quality of the coaching pool, and ease of use. Fourthly, the process of integrating the platform into existing systems and L&D initiatives should be well thought out, with a clear plan for implementation and scale. Finally, it is important to continuously evaluate and improve the coaching platform to maximize its benefits. Combined, these five factors can ensure that a coaching platform is implemented successfully.







## How Sharpist coaching can drive your organization's growth

### ✓ Clearly defined goals

Each Sharpist program begins with a process of defining clear, actionable goals. Then, our highly-qualified coaches are briefed on the goals to ensure your organization's goals are prioritized throughout the process.

### ✓ Executive buy-in

Our account executives and customer specialists are on hand to share strategies for securing the support of senior leadership and integrating the platform into your company culture

### ✓ The right platform for your organization

Sharpist has the highest quality coaching pool, with all coaches certified by renowned and respected institutions worldwide, coaching across 45 languages. The user-friendly interface allows you to navigate through the platform with ease. At Sharpist, we offer customization options to align coaching topics with your company goals, values, and needs. The platform is also scalable from c-level leadership to new hires - because everyone deserves the benefit of coaching. Lastly, Sharpist is not only fully GDPR compliant; we are ISO /IEC 27001: 2013-certified, Europe's leading standard for data protection.

### ✓ Integrating Sharpist with existing systems

Sharpist is a valuable addition to your company's learning ecosystem and coexists seamlessly alongside it. With our excellent onboarding sessions leading to an industry-leading utilization rate of over 80%, you can be sure your employees will adapt quickly to the platform and get the most out of Sharpist.

### ✓ Continuous improvement

Constant qualitative and quantitative feedback allows the Sharpist platform to improve continuously, tailoring our specifications to your company's needs. Our exceptional customer experience leads to an average learner rate of 4.9/5, with an impressive 98% of learners amazed by the incredible support from our User Operations team.





## Sharpist

### Digital Coaching Platform for Leadership Development

Sharpist is your turnkey solution for 1:1 digital coaching, leadership training and transformation projects.

Sharpist is the leading digital coaching and leadership development platform, driving the growth of organizations and their leaders through 1:1 digital coaching and personalized learning journeys. With Sharpist's tailored programs, companies can rapidly build and scale their leadership capabilities, behaviors, and culture across global organizations.

Powered by its data-driven L&D analytics dashboard, Sharpist helps enterprise companies achieve measurable business improvements and ROI, benefiting employee retention, engagement, and productivity. As a leading product innovator in the market and with a unique focus on user-centric experience, Sharpist's coaching achieves a market-leading engagement rate of over 90%, driving business growth. Personalized learning journeys are supported by Sharpist's content library, which comprises thousands of targeted resources from world-renowned institutions such as MIT's Sloan School of Management and Harvard Business Review, and its network of 1,000+ certified international leadership coaches.



#### Highest utilization and engagement rate in the market

Leaders show up to Sharpist more than any other learning program (>80% utilization)



#### Measurable leadership skills

Sharpist's platform offers strategic analytics for L&D decision makers



#### Integrated coaching & training

Deploy training, group coaching, peer coaching, and 1:1 coaching flexibly

### Trusted by leading organizations

