

# Corporate Learning Priorities Survey 2014

Using learning and development  
to achieve strategic business aims





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# Welcome to the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Henley Corporate Learning Priorities Report

The Henley Corporate Learning Priorities Survey is conducted at the end of each calendar year – an ideal time to reflect and take the collective temperature of organisations and their senior executives concerning leadership, learning and development. Now in its fifth year, the 2014 survey is an even more comprehensive barometer than ever of the role that learning and development plays in the overall health of an organisation.

We canvassed the anonymous views of 359 executives from 38 countries and our respondents were made up of a 60/40 split between non-HR and HR roles. More than two-thirds of respondents were at the director or CEO level.

Alongside expert commentary and analysis from Henley Business School faculty, this report examines the relationship between organisational challenges and specific management development objectives, as well as trends in development and learning, and the expectations that organisations have of their business school partners. We have dedicated much of our 2014 survey to in-depth questions about coaching and we will continue to concentrate on other important and current themes for learning and development with each new annual survey.

At Henley Business School we use this research to inform our own development agenda and to ensure that we address the current and future needs of the individuals and organisations we work with. We hope that you will also find the results helpful in comparing your own thoughts on organisational leadership, learning and development with the broader set of experiences of almost 400 others.

Our thanks go to all who participated in the survey.



**Steve Ludlow**  
Head of Executive Education



# Executive Summary

## The confidence to invest

- Emphasis is placed upon investment in 2014 with 85% of all executives forecasting a learning and development budget that is the same or larger than 2013
- Compared to last year's survey, almost 50% more 2014 respondents expect budgets to be larger this year

## Developing organisational leadership capability

- Senior executives and HR professionals are focused upon the overall leadership capability in their organisations as the major challenge they face in the next three years, with double the number of respondents considering this to be a major challenge compared with external factors such as international competition
- Leadership capability development is also identified as the key development priority for both senior management and high potentials in 2014
- Senior managers, high potentials and middle managers are all seen as important groups for the investment of development plans and spending

## Learning and development objectives and tools

- Individual coaching is going to be the most used tool in 2014, by more than 80% of organisations, and coaching skills are seen as key areas of development for both managers and leaders
- Respondents are concerned at the lack of support and supervision currently in place for their coaching activities
- Once again, retention and employee engagement are crucial objectives for learning and development plans, for around 80% of respondents though supporting growth and talent attraction are of increasing importance

## The role of executive education programmes

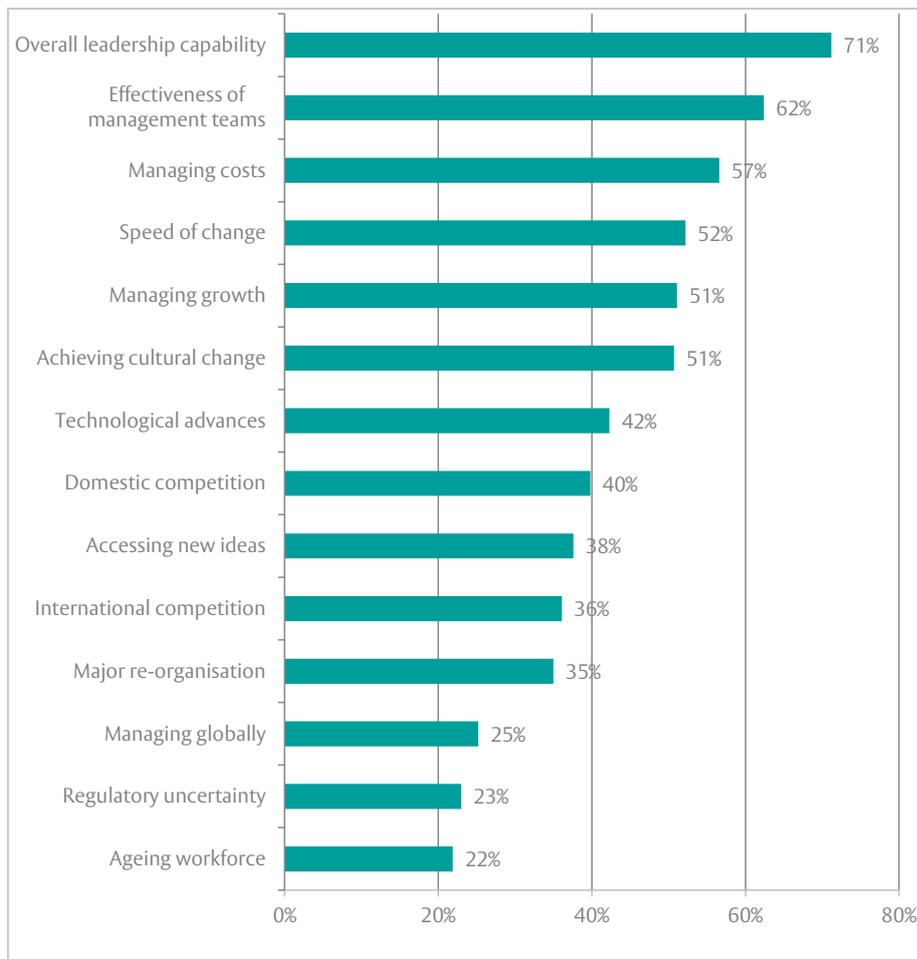
- Customised executive education is a planned activity for almost 50% of organisations in 2014 with the most important factor in choosing which business school to work with being the ability to demonstrate impact on business performance and business issues
- Open enrolment executive education is a planned activity for almost four in ten respondents in 2014 with the quality of faculty and contributors being the most important factor, followed by competitive programme fees
- The most important factor when choosing to work with a business school is the quality of the faculty which, when combined with the ability to have a practical impact on performance and business issues, is clearly what sets business schools apart from other learning and development providers

# Key Findings

## 1: Organisational challenges and development priorities

The Corporate Learning Priorities Survey 2014 not only identifies the learning and development priorities for organisations’ senior HR and non-HR executives, but also puts these priorities in context. As learning and development plans are not drawn up in a vacuum, but rather reflect overwhelming business needs and the contexts in which organisations operate, we gave our respondents a set of possible organisational challenges and asked which of these they considered to be the challenges for their organisation in the next three years.

**We would like to understand what you think your organisation’s major challenges are in the next 3 years. Please select as many as appropriate from the list below, or provide your own.**





Peter Hawkins

'This research tells us that overall leadership capability is the primary developmental challenge and focus for organisations: to deliver leadership development (which is always a relational, collective process) as distinct from leader development (which is the focus on the individual, the leader as 'hero'). Our work with organisations concentrates on designing development strategies that focus not just on individuals but on relationships, integrated teams, collective leadership and developing a leadership culture – all in the pursuit of a significant shift in organisational health and performance. Organisations need to move from developing more leaders to building high-functioning leadership teams and a culture of leadership for a healthier, higher performing organisation.'

**Peter Hawkins, Professor of Leadership, Henley Business School**



Bernd Vogel

'This year's survey clearly shows us that organisations have identified the development of overall leadership capability as key to organisational success. Organisations also indicate that high-performing management teams are the number two challenge for development. What does it tell us? While the current organisational agenda is concerned with external environmental drivers, or reacting to what the competition is doing, the paramount priority seems to be creating internal strength through improved leadership capability.'

Organisations clearly feel that this investment is essential, and are confident that this will reap rewards. Interestingly we found in our survey that this is true for both the smallest organisations and for the largest! Even when we looked at the organisation's very senior people the message is "investment, investment, investment" – in leadership development, in team development, and in forward-thinking focus and executing strategy. And with the concentration on management teams in particular, businesses have identified a new way of developing leadership capability – through collective effectiveness.'

**Bernd Vogel, Associate Professor of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour, Director, Henley Centre for Engaging Leadership**

Organisational leadership capability combined with effective management teams are considered the key challenges for our sample. Ahead of many possible external factors such as the domestic or international competitive landscape, almost three in four respondents selected overall leadership capability as a major challenge in the next three years, with effectiveness of management teams next, selected by 62% of respondents.

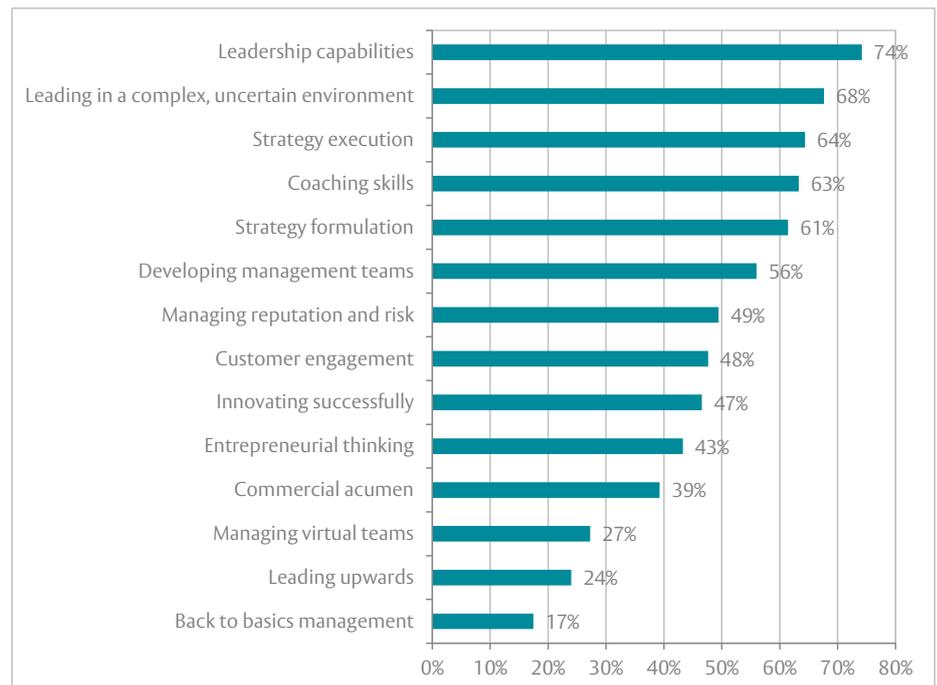
Looking at the broader landscape in which organisations operate, there were concerns about the speed of change among half the sample, with technological advances identified as a challenge by just over 40%. Domestic competition was selected by four out of ten respondents as an organisational challenge, a little ahead of international competition identified by around a third.

Thus we see that both senior HR and non-HR executives are focused on building the overall capabilities of their organisations characterised by two respondents as, 'Raising the bar, better consistency across the whole organisation' and '2014 – equip leaders to embed change'.

## 1.1 Identifying key staff development priorities

Whether as chief executive or HR director, a key challenge for our respondents is to translate organisational challenges into priorities for the ongoing development of the organisation's employees. We asked specifically about the development priorities for two key groups of employees in 2014: senior managers and high potentials.

### In 2014 which will be the development priorities for senior managers in your organisation?



In line with the organisational challenges reported by respondents, the most selected priority for senior management for 2014 is the development of leadership capabilities. This is followed by leading in a complex, uncertain environment, selected by 68% of respondents. This emphasis on leading in difficult external environments by the senior management team is surprising given the relative lack of importance given to external factors by respondents when asked about the organisational challenges elsewhere in the survey.

Strategy execution and strategy formulation were selected by around two-thirds of respondents as development priorities for senior management again showing us that building organisational capability is key.

Coaching skills were ranked fourth out of the list of 14 development areas. The emphasis upon the development of coaching skills throughout the organisation shows us how building a coaching culture has come to be seen as essential for organisations in the development of strategic and leadership capabilities.



Andrew P Kakabadse

'I am not surprised that organisational leadership capability has been identified by this sample of senior executives as both the most important organisational challenge, and as the greatest development objective, because leadership issues are the most critical to the success of the organisation. Gaining a competitive edge is actually all about leadership issues and alignment and engagement between the levels. In particular, getting value from the interfaces between the board, the management team and general managers is difficult and these are interfaces that are usually not well handled, particularly as the board is usually more engaged with numbers and protocols than with leadership or mentoring. Organisational normality is dysfunctional teams. It is the way that leadership operates and there is a massive problem of engagement for many organisations. **Andrew Kakabadse, Professor of Governance and Leadership, Henley Business School**

**In 2014 which will be the development priorities for high potentials in your organisation?**



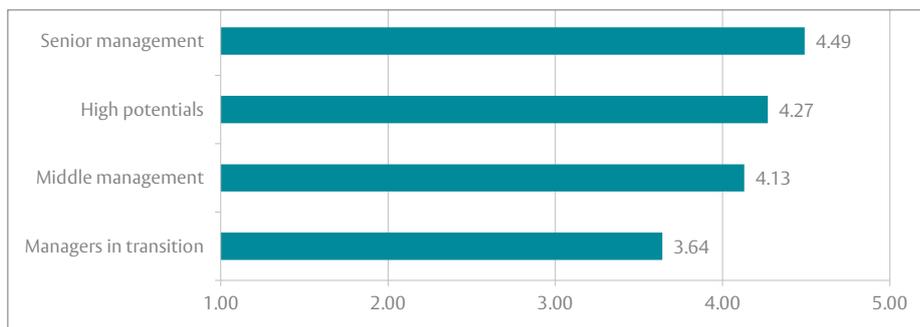
As with senior managers, the development of leadership capabilities is also considered crucial for high potentials. Coaching is again considered to be important for high potentials, ranked fourth. Elsewhere, the development needs of high potentials look very different – commercial acumen, customer engagement and innovating successfully are ranked significantly higher for high potentials than for senior managers. The ability of high potentials to deliver on these core areas could be perceived as key to organisations in implementing strategy and in their ongoing drive for growth and/or competitive advantage.

## 1.2 Priority staff groups for executive development in 2014

Respondents were asked about the likelihood of four different staff groups being included in executive development plans for 2014. The answer options ranged from very likely to very unlikely and the answers were aggregated and ranked with a mean score of 5 for very likely and 1 for very unlikely.

Echoing the emphasis placed on whole organisational capability elsewhere in our survey, there is a triple focus for executive development in 2014, amongst senior management, high potentials and middle management.

### Which of your staff groups will be included in your executive development plans for 2014?



Nick Holley

‘The almost equal emphasis placed by organisations on the development of leadership capabilities for senior managers, middle managers and high potentials alike reflects our experience at Henley Business School that it is just not enough to produce outstanding individual leaders. Rather, the emphasis must be placed on developing the leadership capabilities of the whole organisation. In order to do this, and to produce the best return in organisational performance for shareholder investment, the development of leadership capabilities in entire management teams and groups such as high potentials needs to be focused upon as a matter of priority in addition to those of senior management. This approach can be seen in current practice in the development strategy of a major global food manufacturer which has been specifically designed to build the capabilities of their whole R&D function in order for it to play its part in delivering outstanding organisational performance.’

**Nick Holley, Co-Director, Henley Centre for HR Excellence**

### 1.3 People and talent management objectives and trends

Each year the Corporate Learning Priorities Survey asks respondents to report on what their people and talent management objectives were in the preceding year, and to forecast what their objectives will be in the following year.

In 2013, retaining talent in the business and maintaining and building employee engagement were again the most frequently reported objectives, though both at very slightly lower levels than reported in 2012. The only area reporting an increase in importance year-on-year was attracting new talent into the business in both the reported levels for 2013, and the predicted levels for 2014. Although this increase is not large, it will be interesting to see if a more significant increase in talent attraction is reported after the next 12 months, as the effects of the widely predicted global economic recovery may start to be felt more strongly.

In 2014 respondents predict that retaining talent in the business and employee engagement will be followed more closely than in previous years by supporting the drive for growth and competitive advantage and attracting new talent.

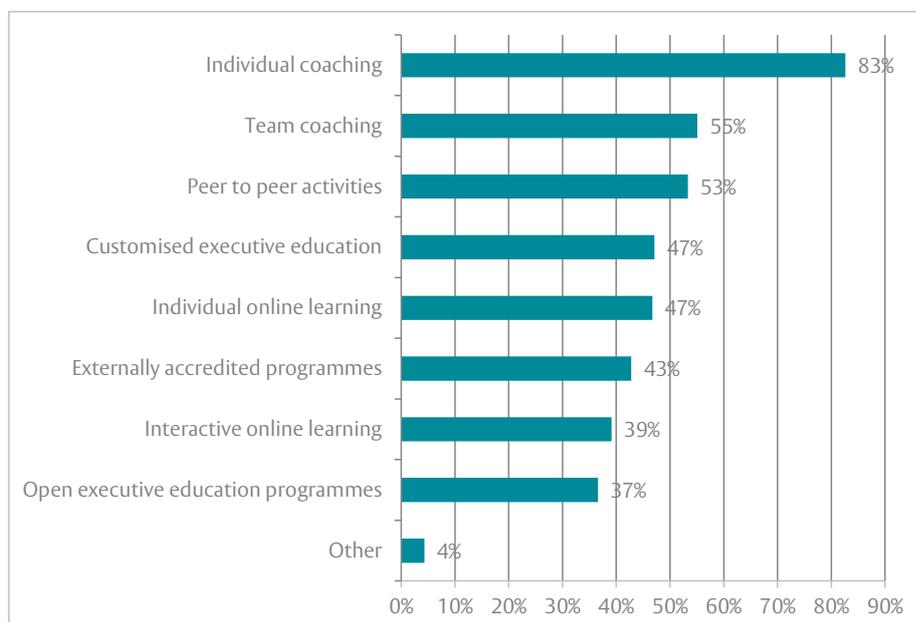
All objectives have higher predictions for 2014 than the actuals reported for 2013. This has also been the case in previous surveys and indicates that even the most senior executives can be over-optimistic about what they believe can be achieved in the future compared with the reality of what has been achieved in the past.

<b>People and Talent Management Objectives</b>	<b>2012 actual reported</b>	<b>2013 actual reported</b>	<b>2014 predicted</b>
Retain talent in the business	80%	75%	80%
Maintain and build employee engagement	78%	73%	83%
Support your organisation's drive for growth and competitive advantage	60%	61%	78%
Attract new talent into the business	57%	60%	74%
Equip leaders to deliver change	54%	52%	70%
Aid succession planning – particularly at a senior level	43%	41%	65%
Enable growth in international markets	29%	25%	43%

## 1.4 Learning and development plans for 2014

Individual coaching is going to be by far the most popular learning and development intervention in 2014, reinforcing the importance of the development of coaching skills reported elsewhere in the survey, selected by 83% of respondents. The second most selected method was team coaching, by just over half the sample. 53% of respondents are going to be using some form of peer-to-peer activities whilst just under half are planning to use customised executive education and individual online learning. Although further down the ranking, a significant number of respondents are planning to use open executive education programmes or interactive online learning (both just under 40%) and externally accredited programmes (43%).

### Learning and development methods planned for 2014



Peter Hawkins

‘The fact that coaching teams came second in the list of priorities for organisations in 2014 is a very new trend and reflects how organisations are beginning to recognise how essential it is to develop leadership teams that are more than the sum of their parts. Systemic team coaching helps leadership teams move from hub-and-spoke teams centred on the team leader to shared leadership teams. At Henley we have gone ever further and developed new thinking on how to coach the interface between leadership teams and the spaces between teams, such as that between the executive team and the board. This is just one of the key ways in which organisations can build a coaching culture that delivers improved leadership capability for the entire organisation, which this research, and our customers, tell us is so necessary.’

**Peter Hawkins, Professor of Leadership, Henley Business School**

## 1.5 Learning and development spending

We have measured HR and non-HR executive forecasts about spending on learning and development every year since 2009. Compared with 2013, almost 50% more survey respondents think that 2014 learning and development budgets will be larger than the previous year. A further 54% of our sample predicted no change. Only 15% of respondents forecast smaller learning and development budgets than they had in 2013. These forecasts show significant optimism for improving organisational health in the coming year and reflect the focus upon the development of organisational capability in 2014.

<b>Will your next learning and development budget be...</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>% difference</b>
Larger than the previous year	21%	31%	+48%
The same as the previous year	57%	54%	-5%
Smaller than the previous year	22%	15%	-32%

## 2: Coaching

83% of respondents reported plans to use coaching within their organisation in 2014, by far the most used development tool in the list of options provided. As coaching is such a well-used tool within organisations we developed a dedicated section on coaching within the online questionnaire this year, to give us the ability to analyse more deeply the use of, and attitudes to, coaching within organisations.



Andrew P Kakabadse

‘Our research tells us that only a third of top teams speak truth to power, and too often strategy is a top-down activity, done by the CEO, without evidence and testing. Yet the eyes, ears and heart of the organisation is the general manager or regional manager and they need to be listened to. Our research sample of senior executives knows this, which is why coaching is placed as such a high priority. So how can organisations get alignment and engagement? Careful mentoring can help organisations work through sensitive issues, and here the role of a business school can be best used as that of a trusted adviser or wise counsellor to help executives bring what they already know to be true to the table constructively.’

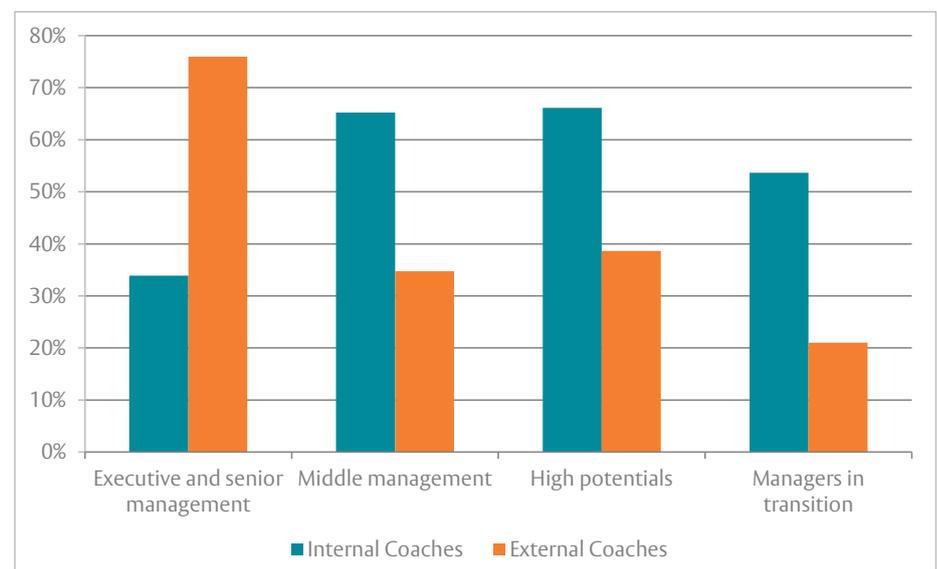
**Andrew Kakabadse, Professor of Governance and Leadership, Henley Business School**

### 2.1 Internal or external coaches?

The chart below shows the extent to which internal and/or external coaches will be used within organisations for distinct groups of employees in 2014. What stands out most clearly is that external coaches are much more likely to be used for senior managers than for any other group within organisations, with three out of four respondents who plan to use coaches in 2014 reporting that they would use external coaches for this group.

Internal coaches were most likely to be used for middle management and high potentials (by two out of three planning to use coaching). However for these groups around a third could also expect to have access to an external coach in 2014.

#### Internal or external coaches? 2014 coaching plans





Patricia Bossons

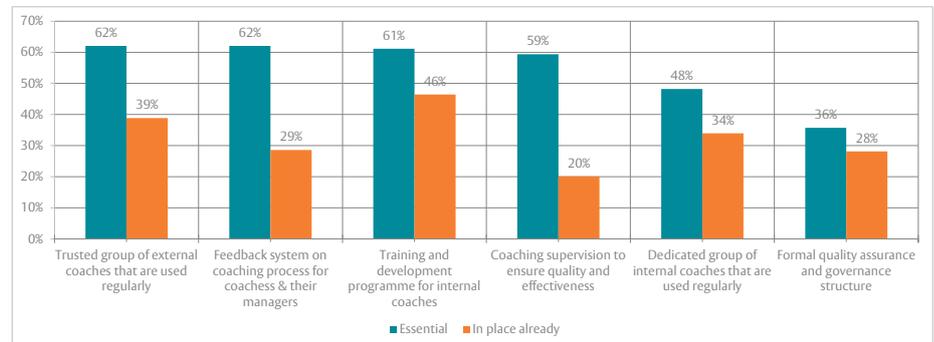
## 2.2 Coaching support and oversight

‘The idea of supervision in coaching was originally taken from the regulated ‘helping professions’ such as counselling, psychotherapy and social work but it is now considered essential in most areas of industry that coaches are in supervision, as this research clearly shows. A number of different models specifically aimed at coaching supervision have been developed to help organisations put this in place and even where a successful internal coaching culture has been developed, including a cadre of internal coaches, it is still very useful for the internal coaches to receive external coaching supervision. We have found that organisations developing their own coaching capability will often use a ‘blended model’ using professional external coaching supervisors to ensure independent quality control of their internal coaching.’

**Patricia Bossons, Director, Henley Centre for Coaching and Behavioural Change**

As there is such a prevalence of both individual and team coaching within organisations we wanted to understand more about how organisations feel coaching should be managed, and how they are currently set up. Respondents who had identified coaching as one of their planned activities for 2014 were asked what activities and processes they felt were essential to support coaching within their organisation, and which they already had in place.

### Which of the following do you think are essential to support coaching in your organisation? And which do you have in place already?



Two out of three respondents felt that it was essential to have a trusted group of external coaches that are used regularly, a system of feedback for coaches and managers, training and development programmes for internal coaches, and coaching supervision to ensure quality and effectiveness. However, despite these being considered essential, not one of these processes is currently in place at more than half of respondents’ organisations. Training and development plans for internal coaches are the most likely coaching support initiative to already be in place, reported by 46% of respondents who will be using coaching this year. It is notable that many respondents have not yet put in place those initiatives that they feel essential to support their coaching in 2014, and only one-third as many respondents as felt that coaching supervision was essential have actually put this into practice.



Peter Hawkins

'These results show us the rift between rhetoric and reality in relation to the development of coaching within organisations, which can harvest real organisational learning and performance benefits. Organisations tell us that they are conducting thousands of coaching conversations every year but we also know that they are not fully benefiting as organisations from these interventions. The areas that we and our survey respondents consider to be so essential such as coaching feedback systems and coaching supervision, but which the vast majority of organisations have not yet established, can be addressed and implemented. There is a wealth of support, expertise and knowledge available at business schools to help organisations achieve more organisational value from their coaching investments. Only once these systems are in place will organisations begin to reap the very substantial benefits that a rigorous coaching culture can provide.'

**Peter Hawkins, Professor of Leadership, Henley Business School**

### 2.3 Sourcing external coaches

Looking at how external coaches are found, the most likely routes are recommendations from colleagues or an introduction from a trusted external coach. Only one in five respondents would consider it likely that they would use a competitive tendering exercise to find external coaches, though one in three would be likely to use a database of coaches if it was from a trusted external organisation.

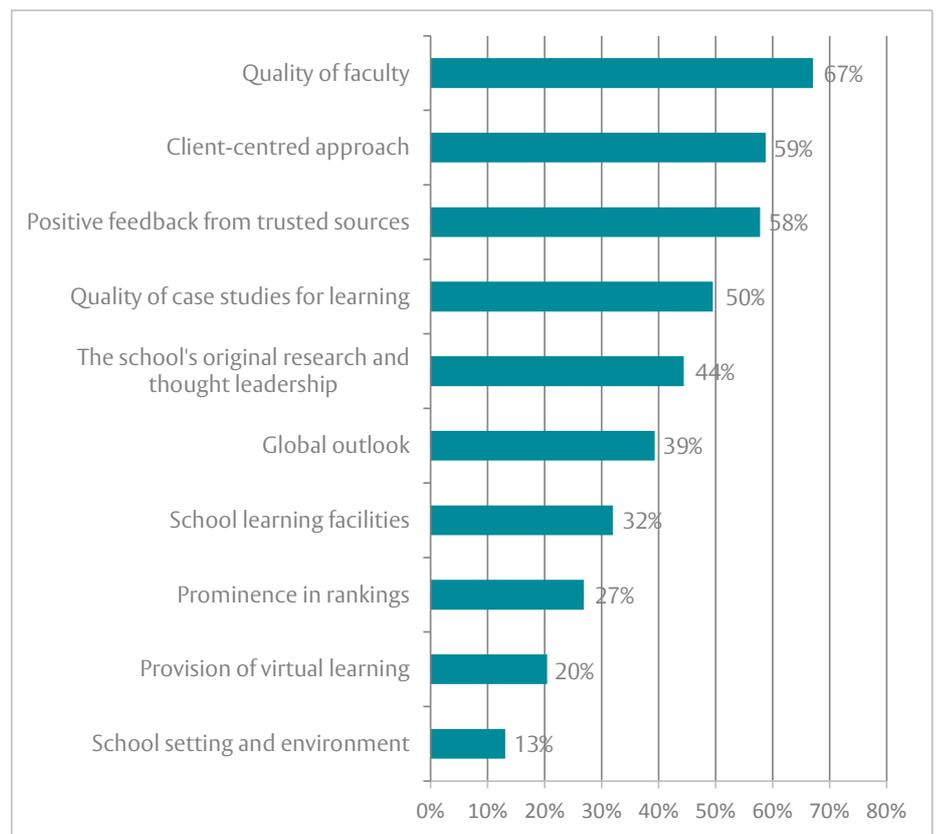
Methods for finding external coaches	Response
Sourcing using a commercial third party	16.7%
Recommendation from person to be coached	18.9%
Competitive tendering exercise	21.6%
Database of coaches from trusted external organisation	35.7%
Introduction from trusted external coach	59.5%
Recommendation from colleagues	73.1%

While coaching is an almost ubiquitous part of an organisation's toolkit for the development of managers and senior leaders, fewer than half of our sample felt that their support systems for the coaching process were at the standard they themselves felt to be essential. There also tends to be a personal, non-formal approach to securing new coaches. This does not mean that the results of coaching interventions are necessarily falling short but rather that the concerns of respondents mirror Henley's own experience of the growth in demand for both recognised, formally accredited coaching qualifications and greater knowledge in the area of coaching supervision.

### 3: Working with business schools

Business schools offer many of the services that respondents plan to utilise in 2014 – from leadership development to customised executive education, and from open enrolment executive programmes to the development and accreditation of coaching skills. So the survey measured what organisations consider to be important factors when choosing a business school partner or programme. The three charts below show the factors rated as ‘very important’ by respondents when choosing a business school to work with in the provision of executive development.

#### ‘Very important’ business school factors when choosing a school to provide executive development



The factor reported by most respondents as very important when considering who to work with is the quality of faculty at the school, selected by over two-thirds of respondents. This is followed by the demonstration of a client-centred approach and word-of-mouth recommendations.

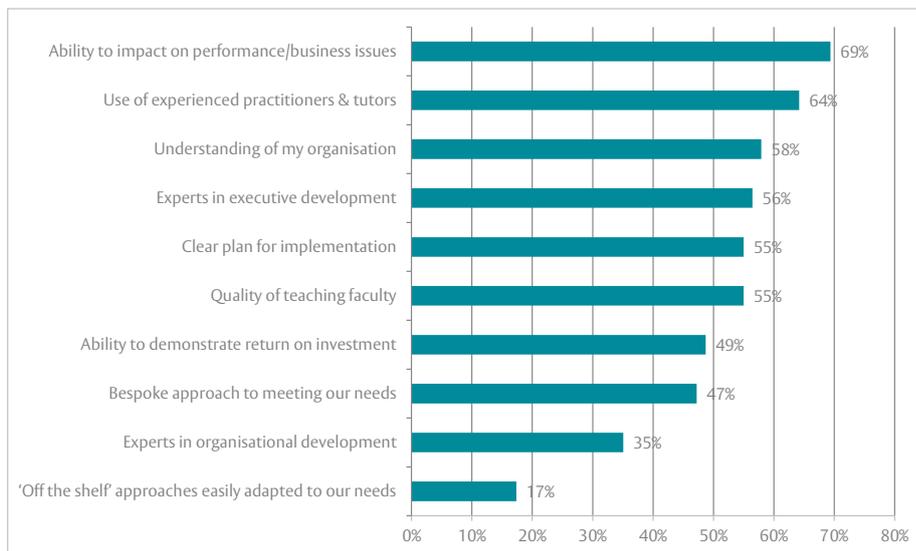
### 3.1 Customised executive education

47% of survey respondents stated that they were planning to use customised executive education in 2014. The ability of customised interventions to have an impact on performance and business issues was considered to be very important by the greatest number of respondents, by over two-thirds of the sample.

The use of experienced practitioners and tutors is second, a little ahead of quality of teaching faculty (64% vs 55%), which had been the most important factor when looking at business schools more generally. In third, is the depth of understanding of the organisation by the school, which is considered very important by almost six in ten respondents and demonstrates the value of the client-centred approach in customised executive education. This is particularly striking when compared with the ability of a business school to provide ‘off the shelf’ approaches, which is only considered very important by 17% of respondents.

While the impact on performance was the factor most likely to be considered very important by 69% respondents, the ability to demonstrate a return on investment is somewhat further down the list, with 49% selecting this factor as very important. This could be due to the perceived relative difficulties in being able to demonstrate a financial return on investment compared with demonstrating direct impacts on business issues of learning and development activities.

#### ‘Very important’ business school factors when choosing a school to provide customised executive development

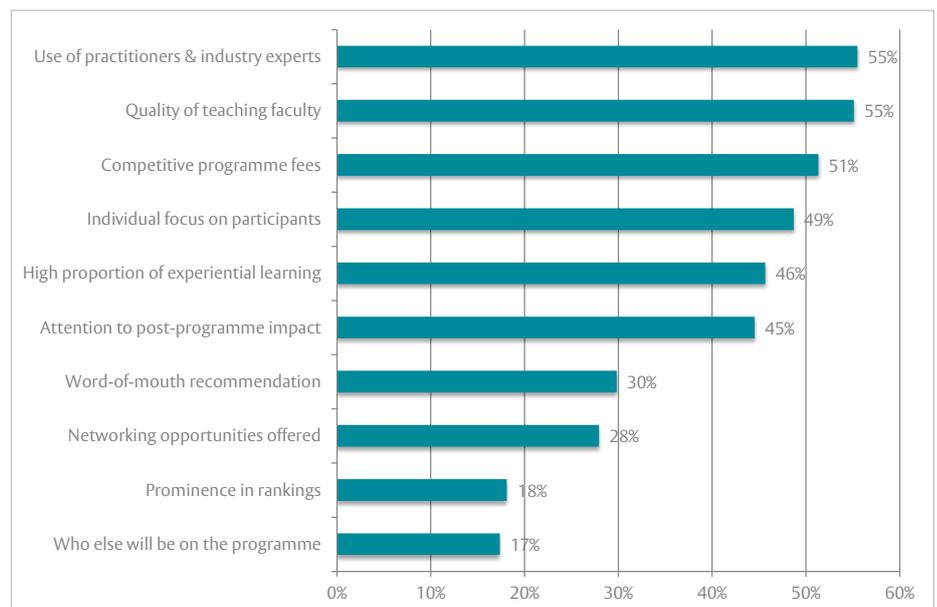


### 3.2 Open enrolment executive education

Open enrolment programmes were reported to be among the 2014 plans for 37% of respondents. For open enrolment programmes the use of practitioners and industry experts and the quality of teaching faculty are equally likely to be scored as very important by respondents (55%), ahead of all other criteria. There is price sensitivity around the selection of open programmes as the programme fee is the factor third most likely to be considered very important, by just over half of respondents. This is followed by an individual focus on participants, a high proportion of experiential learning and attention to post-programme impact, selected as very important factors by just under half of respondents.

The factors least likely to be considered very important by respondents are who else will be on the programme, prominence in rankings (which also scored comparatively low in customised executive education) and the networking opportunities offered. It may be that these particular factors may be of greater importance to the individuals who attend open programmes than to the senior executive or director responsible for sponsoring such attendance.

#### 'Very important' business school factors when choosing a school to provide open enrolment executive development



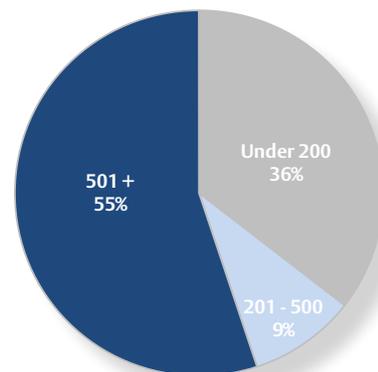
## 4: Methodology

The survey was completed online in December 2013 by corporate client and non-client contacts of Henley Business School. The questionnaire was sent to respondents via email link and the online questionnaire was completed anonymously. The anonymous online questionnaire was designed with the help of Henley Business School Programme Directors and faculty, with particular guidance from Dr Bernd Vogel, Director of the Henley Centre for Engaging Leadership.

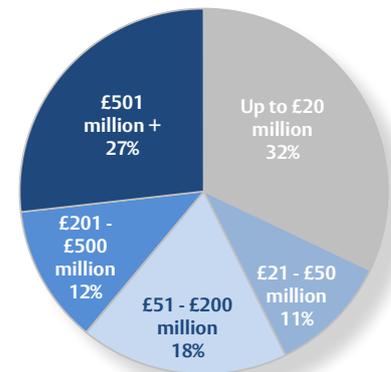
### The sample

Respondents were a mix of executive and senior HR and non-HR directors and managers from a broad range of organisations from SMEs to major corporations, across all sectors, both in the UK and overseas. We received 359 responses – the highest response since we began this survey in 2009 – and a questionnaire completion rate of 75.5%. Respondents came from 38 countries and 61% were from the UK, with 60% from HR roles and more than two-thirds at the director level or above.

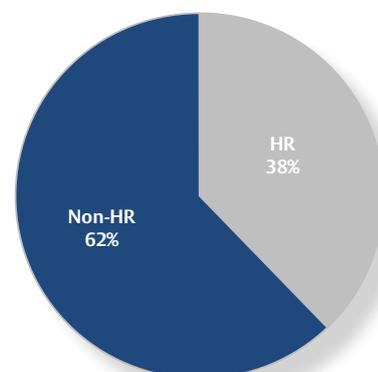
#### How many employees does your organisation have?



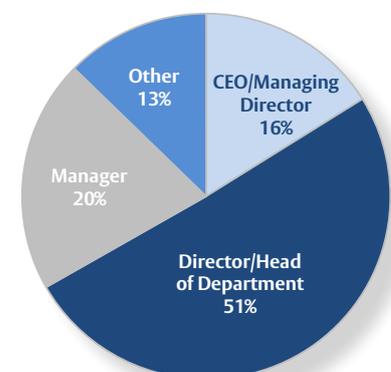
#### What is your organisation's annual turnover?



#### Respondent job function



#### Respondent job titles



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