Likewise, the factors that are present may call attention to linkages that can be reinforced by a coaching initiative and other cultural assumptions, business issues, or human resource management activities. For example, organizations with cultures that strongly hold to the value of promotion from within will be able to reap considerable return on their coaching invest-ments, by offering coaching to recently promoted managers, for instance, to strengthen the likelihood that they will be successful in their new roles. Organizations undergoing a strategic transformation will gain by making sure that they direct their coaching initiatives at least in part at those respon-sible for leading the transformation.

The Coaching Organization Assessment is presented in Box 3.1. A "check" by a particular item indicates both that the individual item lends support to a coaching effort and that the particular factor may also suggest an opportunity to shape a coaching program in a particular way. We first present the assessment exercise in its entirety for readers who wants to get right down to the business of assessing their own organizations. Following our presentation of the assessment tool, we offer in-depth explanations for the various items. In the close to this chapter, we discuss the implications of this assessment with regard to the options for executing an organizational coaching initiative and offer an illustration of its use.

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT 3.1 The Coaching Organization Assessment

Review the statements in Box 3.1. Check those that apply in your organiza-tion. Each statement is worded so that a "check" indicates that the charac-teristic described would work to support a coaching initiative in your organization. Because of the difficulties of describing an organization's cul-ture, we offer several examples, where appropriate, of the behaviors or other cultural artifacts that indicate the potential presence of the underlying value or assumption described as the heading for each characteristic (Schein, 1985). We do caution, however, that *these are only examples,* chosen to illustrate the cultural issue in question.

Box 3.1 The Coaching Organization Assessment Exercise

The Cultural Context

❑ In general, the level of trust within the organization is relatively high, as exemplified by the following:
   o Decision making regarding employees driven by organization-ally held values, business strategy, and goals rather than by arbitrary, individual judgments

---

o Leaders following through on commitments
o Sharing of appropriate business information
o Respect for confidential employee information
o Tolerance for reasonable levels of dissent

❑ In general, employees are viewed as ends in themselves rather than just means to a business end, as exemplified by the following:
  o Actions that demonstrate an interest in helping employees at all levels try to match their work to their interests and career plans
  o Concern about stressful or unsafe working conditions and the taking of actions necessary to deal with such conditions when possible
  o Follow-through on manager/direct report scheduled meetings
  o A tendency to view employees at all levels as assets rather than as costs

❑ In general, relationships between peers, employees, and managers are valued in and of themselves, as exemplified by the following:
  o A trend toward teamwork
  o Efforts being made to bring employees together for both business and nonbusiness reasons
  o Recognition of the importance of acknowledging relationship transitions, such as when the life of a team draws to a close or during an organizational reorganization
  o Recognition of the importance of work-life balance concerns, community involvement, and the need for special responses to special employee needs, such as crises.

❑ In general, learning is valued, as exemplified by the following:
  o The provision of appropriate formal learning interventions through activities such as providing on-site courses and seminars, tuition reimbursement, and executive education
  o Assigning work that will require learning on the part of the employee
  o The telling of stories about valuable lessons learned, including lessons learned through mistakes
  o The use of formal or informal action reviews or postproject reviews to assess "lessons learned"

❑ In general, it is accepted that employees who are dealing with challenging tasks are likely to benefit from the opportunity to seek guidance from others, as exemplified by the following:
  o Employees asking for opportunities to discuss their concerns about jobs or challenges with their managers and/or peers
  o The alternative, which would result in no check here, is the organization valuing individuals who survive and succeed with very little or no help (i.e., "sink or swim")

❑ In general, organization-specific knowledge and experience are valued, as exemplified by the following:
  o A bias toward promotion from within
  o Respect for specific knowledge, often communicated in the form of stories, regardless of position in the hierarchy
  o Discussions of "Our Company Way" (e.g., the "HP Way" [Hewlett Packard]) that imply that "Our Way" is a positive differentiator.

❑ In general, the role of "manager" and the skills required to manage (whether dedicated manager or "working manager") are valued within the organization, as exemplified by the following:
  o Promising talent being encouraged to take on managerial responsibility
  o The provision of educational and other developmental experiences specifically directed at the challenge of learning the skills associated with management

❑ In general, there is a value placed on job performance and telling people the truth about their performance, as exemplified by the following:
  o Completion of performance appraisals on time.
  o Substantial time and effort being made by most managers to make the appraisal process useful.
  o Differentiation of rewards based on performance.

❑ In general, diversity is valued within the organization, as exemplified by the following:
  o Meaningful efforts to actively recruit, select, develop, and promote women and members of various minority groups
  o The provision of opportunities to discuss the challenges associated with career management for those in minority positions
  o The provision of career development support systems for women and members of minority groups

❑ In general, innovation is valued, as exemplified by the following:
  o Open encouragement by managers to employees at all levels to give voice to their "good" and/or "new" and/or "creative" ideas

❑ In general, there is a value placed on continuous improvement, as exemplified by the following:
  o Total quality management practices
  o A culture that encourages employees at all levels to openly discuss reasonable mistakes or problems, without threat or blame

The Business Context

The Business Strategy

❑ The organization's strategy is relatively clear and well-known by organizational members.
❑ The organization's strategy requires a future-oriented view of the organization; in other words, the strategy is a long-term one.
❑ The strategy requires at least some degree of organic growth.
❑ The strategy requires new leadership skills on the part of the current and future organizational managers to enact the business strategy.
❑ The strategy requires large numbers of employees to develop new skills and competencies to enact the business strategy.
❑ The skills and competencies required of managers and employees to execute the strategy have been at least somewhat clearly articulated.

The Human Resource Management Context

Human Capital Strategy and Challenges

❑ The labor market that supplies the organization is constrained; that is, there are fewer candidates available to fill job openings.
❑ The age distribution within the organization is such that large numbers of retirements may occur in the next decade.
❑ The organization has a relatively large number of individuals moving into managerial roles from individual contributor roles.
❑ Senior leaders perceive that there is a need to build leadership and/or managerial "bench strength."
❑ The organization appeals to individuals who will likely be interested in growing within their jobs and/or careers.

❑ The organization advertises itself in the labor market place as one that encourages employee development.

❑ The organization selects talent for a broad array of competencies rather than narrowly for technical skills.

❑ The organization selects for "cultural" fit in addition to selecting for individual-level competencies.

Human Resource Management Practices

❑ The organization has competency models or descriptions of highly effective performance that inform managers regarding appropriate selection and development targets and that can help employees plan development activities.

❑ At least some senior line managers are actively involved in the development and use of competency models or descriptions of highly effective performance.

❑ The organization provides feedback to employees with regard to their levels of effectiveness in demonstrating important work-related competencies through the appropriate use of 360-degree-feedback mechanisms or other related processes.

❑ The organization has an adequate performance management system leading to effective performance appraisals.

❑ The organization strives to learn from employees through the use of tools such as employee surveys, upward feedback, skip-level meetings, after-action reviews, and other means for attaining and disseminating employee learning for the purposes of organizational development.

❑ Managers are expected to actively intervene when direct reports have performance problems and receive support from the human resource function in doing so.

❑ The compensation system of the organization encourages managers to spend time on employee development or at least does not punish them for doing so.

❑ Compensation and promotion systems encourage employees at all levels to be helpful to one another. They encourage managers to take the time necessary to develop their direct reports, and they do not encourage a spirit of unhealthy competition.

Other Strategic Human Resource Development Practices

❑ There are ongoing, budgeted executive, and/or management development programs in place.

❑ Development activities tend to focus on strategy formulation, execution, and opportunities for improvement. Development is not limited to unrelated "events" or remedial "fixes" for performance problems.

❑ Senior managers are involved in the planning and delivery of executive and management development programs.

❑ Executive education activities are used to disseminate strategy and values, build leadership skills, and/or provide opportunities for groups of managers to build relationships.

❑ The organization has regular "talent review" meetings for the purpose of assessing and promoting the development of managers and senior-level individual contributors.

❑ The organization engages in a succession-planning process.

❑ Managers are expected to consider the development of their direct reports as an appropriate and necessary activity.

❑ The organization uses 360-degree assessments for development purposes in particular.

❑ The organization has encouraged the development of formal or informal mentor relationships.

❑ The organization plans to or already does assess the business impact of training and development interventions.

Organizational Experience With Coaching-Related Activities

❑ High-profile senior managers have had satisfactory experiences with external, executive expert coaches, and they are willing to talk about those experiences.

❑ A number of senior managers have recommended external, expert executive coaching to others.

❑ External, expert, executive coaching is generally seen as a positive for one's career; it is not stigmatized.

❑ The organization has not made extensive use of external, expert executive coaches for the purposes of assisting those with serious performance problems or for the purposes of terminating employees with serious performance problems.

❑ In general, the organization has been satisfied by coaching provided by internal human resource management and/or organizational effectiveness staff.

❑ The coaching provided by human resource and organizational effectiveness professionals is generally seen as being conducted with an appropriate sensitivity to confidentiality.

❑ The coaching provided by human resource and organizational effectiveness professionals is generally seen as being objective, that is, balancing the needs of both the organization and individual employees or managers.

❑ Some senior managers are seen as being good coaches, interested in the development of their own direct reports.

❑ Managers are encouraged to tend to the developmental needs of both good and great performers as well as those with performance problems.

❑ High-profile senior managers have been known to act as mentors to others in the organization.

❑ Managers who have demonstrated particular talent in developing others have received some recognition and/or reward for their work.

❑ Organizational peers are encouraged to be helpful to one another whenever possible.

The Cultural Context

An organization's culture is manifested in employees' beliefs, values, and assumptions regarding what it takes for the organization to be successful in relationship to its external environment and in its integration of organizational members into a working structure (Schein, 1985). Culture is learned through participation in the organization and, over time, serves as a powerful behavioral guide. It isn't always easy to articulate such underlying values and assumptions, as they are often not discussed and sometimes not discussable. (These underlying assumptions and beliefs, however, are often reflected in and by the business and human resource practices we will discuss in the next section.) We suggest that those who are interested in exploring an organization's culture and its impact on a coaching effort spend some time talking in groups about these manifestations of culture. Consider the degree to which your organization shows the following characteristics.

There Is an Adequate Level of Trust

Trust is a cornerstone of any learning effort, and coaching is no exception. Indeed, because coaching, whether by managers or by experts, is so personal and so intimate, a coaching effort may be more dependent on trust than are other learning methodologies. In the classroom, the putative learner