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PART I

The Emerging Discipline of Professional Development Coaching

This book is about what we will be defining as ‘professional development coaching’, offered as a consultancy service to senior executives. Part I aims to put this form of coaching into its historical context. First, however, we distinguish broadly between the three main forms which executive coaching takes.

Skills Coaching

OBJECTIVES: ‘Skills coaching’ refers to where the client’s development needs relate to developing specific skills and abilities, which define the coaching objectives clearly from the outset. This kind of coaching is sometimes also referred to as ‘content coaching’ or ‘targeted coaching’, involving best practice advice and training for specific skills, such as presenting, selling or dealing with the media.

THE COACH’S RESPONSE: Because the required skills are so specifically defined, it is possible, and efficient, for the coach to impart his or her expertise on the subject quite directly. In this mode, the coach is effectively training the client. What distinguishes skills coaching from traditional training is the fact that it is delivered one to one and can therefore be highly individualised. In this sense, it is similar to ‘tutoring’.

In most traditional training programmes delivered in a group setting, *what* is being taught, as well as *how* it is being taught, are prescribed by the trainer. While there are varying degrees of participation and interaction during training programmes, there is not time for each individual to participate as fully as if he or she were the only trainee. The one-to-one setting of skills coaching allows for a two-way dialogue between coach and client in which the client can manage his or her own learning (for example expressing a preference for role playing or listening to the coach describe best practice).

While the timeframe for this individualised approach will depend upon the client’s existing skills and the level he or she needs to attain, this type of focused coaching typically requires only a few meetings.

Skills coaching is often built into group-based training programmes to provide individualised support to personalise and embed the individual’s learning.

This kind of individualised training is becoming more valuable as executives are promoted more quickly and into more diverse functions and situations than in the past. Executives do not have time to wait for a scheduled training programme or even to spend days away from the office. Although more expensive than training, skills coaching is more convenient and thus entails a lower opportunity cost for a busy executive since most skills coaches will be flexible enough to meet where and when the client wishes.

Performance Coaching

OBJECTIVES: As we move right on our continuum in Figure 1.1, the purpose of ‘performance coaching’ becomes wider in scope: to enhance a client’s performance more generally in his or her current role, usually by enabling him or her to develop particular behaviours, or to remove blockages to his or her performance. It is sometimes also referred to as ‘feedback coaching’ since the required performance improvement is often identified in the context of a development planning process, or, more commonly, as the result of a ‘360-degree’ feedback process.

The term ‘360-degree’ refers to the process of surveying relevant people whose roles surround that of the particular coaching client in the organisational hierarchy. These would typically include the executive’s subordinates, possibly a selection of *their* subordinates, a selection of the executive’s peers, the executive’s boss(es) and possibly his or her boss’s boss.

People at work are generally capable of a great deal more than their current performance. Performance coaching provides an opportunity to unlock personal potential and/or address underperformance. If an individual is not giving 100% of him or herself at work, it is often because the ‘psychological contract’ between the individual and boss or other colleagues is out of alignment. One of the most common agenda items we encounter is lack of clarity of expectations between individuals and their stakeholders (especially their boss). Performance coaching can provide the space for an individual to unravel his or her own set of assumptions and then plan to compare and negotiate expectations with his or her stakeholders more transparently.

THE COACH’S RESPONSE: Since the client’s development requirements and the implied coaching objectives are less precisely defined than in the case of skills coaching, the performance coach’s response needs to be more flexible than with skills coaching.

Typically, the performance coach will engage the organisational sponsor (usually the individual’s line manager and/or an HR professional) more actively in the early stages of the referral. The performance coach will request a briefing, either with or without the client present. Sometimes the reason for the referral is largely contextual (most commonly, the individual is moving into a new role). When the reason for the referral is more specific to the individual’s current performance or behaviour, the organisation is usually fairly clear about how it wishes the client to develop. However, where there is considered to be underperformance, the degree to which this has been communicated to the client varies greatly. It often transpires that the individual’s boss is uncomfortable giving direct feedback to the indi-

vidual, and that there is a tacit hope that coaching will deliver the bad news instead. In these cases, the coach's first role is to facilitate transparent communication between the boss and client so that expectations are clear.

It is worth noting that even with direct feedback, prospective clients have varying degrees of motivation to participate in coaching, and to be open to the change involved. They may feel pressured to accept the offer of coaching lest they do not appear open to such change, but privately they may feel wary or suspicious of the prospect. The first performance coaching sessions therefore focus upon enlisting the client's active participation, without which his or her coaching will not succeed.

Performance coaching typically runs over a period of three to six months. During early scoping of the coaching work, the coach often has to manage the organisation's expectations about how much, and what type of, development or change is realistic within the available timeframe.

Since the agenda will have been focused around clearly defined performance objectives in the first few sessions, the coach plays a fairly directive role in 'keeping the client on track'. Sessions are likely to follow the agenda quite closely, without much deviation on to other topics (although there is more flexibility than with skills coaching). When it comes to the particular issues within the agenda, however, the coach will play a less directive role, facilitating the client's own exploration of each issue and conclusions regarding what action he or she believes should be taken.

A model that can be used to launch the performance coaching process is provided in Box 1.1.

While all corporately sponsored coaching needs to address both the individual and organisational agendas, performance coaching places a slightly greater priority upon the organisational agenda than we will see in 'development coaching'. The *raison d'être* for performance coaching is that an organisation wants an individual to extend his or her 'behavioural repertoire' in order to enhance his or her individual performance and thus the organisation's performance. This is reflected in the fact that most performance coaching referrals are initiated by the organisation. While the client will benefit personally from this process, this is not the primary purpose of the investment.

Performance coaching has experienced a shift over the last few years, away from an initially remedial connotation. Executives were initially referred clandestinely to coaches, implying that both the organisation and the individual regarded the process as a sign of underperformance or weakness. More recently, there are an increasing number of executives who are proud to declare they are seeing a coach because it signifies that their organisation is prepared to make a substantial investment in them.

1. Define current role

- Objectives/responsibilities
- Assessment of value (and non value) added activities
- Opportunities for greater delegation of non value added activities, to free up time for ...

2. Define 'excellence in role'

In individual role:

- Task related (for example scope for more added value 'task' contributions)
- Relationship related (for example developing people, succession planning)

In team membership role, for example:

- Vision/innovation/ideas generation
- Structure/process improvement
- Communication/facilitation (within and between meetings)

In any other role/capacity (for example project manager of new initiative)

3. Feedback/relationship-building process

- Define 5–10 stakeholders (from whom to seek 360-degree feedback)
- Solicit feedback from stakeholders (for example a simple 'three strengths and three weaknesses' format to limit time required of respondent and to provide focus for the individual)
- Coach collates responses (thus ensuring anonymity)
- Address feedback themes and identify approach for addressing development needs
- Return to stakeholders to explore themes and build relationships around sharing of development

Because of its focus on results in a shorter timeframe, organisations are especially attracted to performance coaching. It can also be easier to gain acceptance from busy executives themselves, who feel more comfortable devoting time to their own development when they feel confident of quick results.

Development Coaching

OBJECTIVES: On the right of the continuum in Figure 1.1 is 'development coaching', which is the focus of this book. The development coaching task

is to create the conditions for reflective learning. A coach does this by first creating a psychological space, which allows the executive to stand back from the workplace, and then providing a supportive, yet challenging, relationship and dialogue in which the executive can gain perspective on his or her experiences and self, and on his or her leadership task within the organisation.

The nature of this dialogue has its roots in David A. Kolb's learning theory, illustrated in Figure 1.2.

Kolb identified that individuals maximise their learning by working through a cycle of:

- experiencing
- reflecting on the experience
- drawing conclusions or theories about what that experience means
- planning to test out that learning the next time they encounter the same experience

Research by learning experts, Mumford and Honey, has demonstrated that individuals tend to have preferences for one of these four elements of

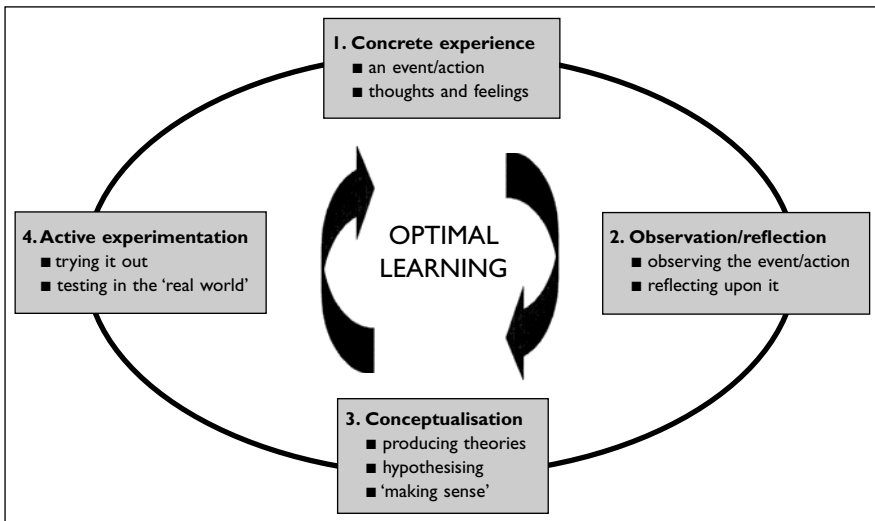


Figure 1.2 Kolb's learning cycle

(adapted from D. Kolb, by permission of Pearson Education, Inc.)

learning, but that everyone learns the most from working through the full cycle.¹ Development coaching provides the structure and setting for the individual to learn in this reflective way.

While development coaching is appropriate for anyone, it adds the most value to the organisation when it is offered to senior executives as their roles involve managing considerable complexity and a wide span of discretion. Further, they exercise a substantial influence on the rest of the organisation.

To address this complexity and its concomitant challenges, development coaching requires a longer term investment on the parts of both the organisation and the individual. While skills and performance coaching are essentially focused on the short term (that is, usually looking at a one-year horizon), development coaching tends to look at a one- to five-year horizon. The process helps the client to develop a detailed understanding of his or her situation and role, to articulate a personal and business strategy and to apply the action arising from this over the next two or three years in the context of his or her longer term career.

The objectives of development coaching are more client defined than with skills and performance coaching. Since development coaching clients are typically more senior, there is a greater coincidence between their interests and those of their organisations than with more junior clients. Indeed, many development coaching clients pay for the coaching out of their own budgets. Even where there is a separate organisational sponsor, the sponsor has to respect and trust the client to use the experience in a way that balances the organisational and individual interests. If feedback to such a sponsor is required, it is likely to cover progress towards agreed objectives, rather than the processes and detail of the coaching programme (that is, the 'what' rather than the 'how').

Development coaching is highly individualised. Skills and performance coaching tend to operate with either explicit or implicit reference to a common set of competencies or preferred behaviour, while a development coach meets an individual with little preconceived notions of what his or her response to the environment should be. Because development coaching is helping senior executives to develop the capacity to define their *own* view of successful personal and corporate performance, and strategy flowing from this, it is clearly inappropriate for the coach to interject a preconceived notion of what optimal behaviour or strategy should be.

THE COACH'S RESPONSE: Development coaching takes an holistic approach to the individual, recognising that reflective learning crosses over professional and personal boundaries. It embraces wider influences on individual behaviour, from all elements of a client's current and past, personal and professional lives.

Development coaching is a more emergent process than skills or performance coaching. The process begins by identifying the agenda and development goals, but, more often than not, the agenda alters depending on changing circumstances in the client's world.

However, while development coaching may emerge in a way that maximises its flexibility and helpfulness to the client, it should also be a managed process. Regular review sessions are built in for the coach and the client to reflect on the work they have done and its relationship to their agreed agenda.

The type of relationship implied by development coaching is of an equal partnership. The client is recognised to be expert in his or her field, while the coach is expert in providing the necessary conditions for the client's learning.

Development coaching typically lasts for 12 to 18 months, although coaching relationships can last for years. Clear contracting and re-contracting should be undertaken at regular intervals to ensure that the focus of the coaching is still appropriate, and the investment of time and money remains justified.

Three Dimensions of Development Coaching

We consider now three dimensions of development coaching: professionalism, purpose, and the central place of the relationship between coach and client. In our view, a proper understanding of the nature of these is essential to the successful delivery of development coaching.

Professionalism

Professionalism in development coaching will include at least the following elements:

Being objective/disinterested

The coach should be able to maintain neutrality and transparency, offering clear and focused reflection of his or her client's thinking and feeling. It is important, therefore, that he or she keeps in place the boundaries and personal support to maintain this neutrality and objectivity. It also means that the coach needs to be explicit about times when he or she may wish to 'stretch the boundaries' of the coaching role (for example when offering advice, which is actually operating in a more traditional consulting role).

Clear contracting

In development coaching the relationship is often triangular, with the company sponsoring the client, being, as it were, an equal or secondary client. Since the sponsoring organisations fund coaching, they can reasonably expect that their objectives and views of the client's working situation influence the coaching work. As we described earlier, in performance coaching that influence may largely define the agenda; in development coaching a more even balance is held. This represents a challenge to the coach in maintaining his or her professional integrity towards an individual client while remaining accountable to both the client and sponsoring organisation. This implies open negotiation and the boundaries agreed being maintained rigorously (we describe this in detail in Chapters 5 and 6).

Supported by explicit standards of conduct

These may include:

- demonstrating professional rigour underpinned by full session notes and a focus on results
- holding a proper balance between corporate and individual interests
- maintaining transparent processes and open communication with all parties
- maintaining a researched referral network for related services (for example psychometric assessment, team facilitation, media/presentation training, outplacement, counselling)
- demonstrating a formal and reliable means of monitoring and reporting on progress of the contract

Founded on an ethical base

This means guaranteeing confidentiality with regard to personal information from coaching sessions (within the agreed limits of the contract) and with regard to information about the company gleaned as a result of coaching. In our own practice, we are specifically debarred from acting upon information so gained and regard ourselves as 'insiders'.

Committed to ongoing personal and professional development

This means that the coach should have a structure in place to extend his or her own ability to empathise with the client and the client's situation and to extend his or her knowledge and understanding of the context of organisational and business life. We will elaborate upon this in Chapter 6.

Purpose

Coaching is an activity with a 'hard' purpose. It seeks to enable the individual leader to increase his or her impact and contribution and should subject itself to scrutiny of its outputs.

The purpose of coaching varies in terms of the context within which the coaching takes place (for example level of management of the individual, nature of role or job, nature of transition being faced or of the organisational change). But, in any context, the task of coaching is to help the individual to adapt congruently and therefore creatively and innovatively to the challenges involved. If that adaptation is inhibited so that the individual is unable to function optimally, then coaching may address the 'blockage' in order to clear the way towards greater performance. (If that blockage is deep seated, then it may be appropriate to refer the client to therapy, after which he or she may return to coaching to complete the developmental task as originally agreed upon.)

The main outputs of development coaching are:

- the development of perspective (making sense of, or patterning, reality as a result of forming a clear point of view) and taking action in the light of it
- increasing the capacity for dealing with complexity and ambiguity
- the development of a flexible 'repertoire' of behaviour, enabling adaptation and a versatility of responding to different circumstances

The Relationship

The relationship between the coach and client is central to the success of the coaching process. When a client selects a development coach, he or she is choosing a relationship with an individual, not a service from an organisation. The relationship is the vehicle for the work and any technology or tools offered as part of the coaching process are simply there to provide material for reflection, or support the focus and purpose of the contract.

The coaching relationship represents a collaboration between two people with the goal of a growth in self-awareness and functioning of the client as the common objective of both. In this collaboration, the development coach provides the learning context, while the client, usually a highly able and well-functioning leader, brings his or her understanding and knowledge of context to the enquiry. The relationship is essentially one in

which power is equal. Indeed, we believe that a view of coaching based on the idea of a coach as guru or expert is unhelpful.

Summary

Table 1.1 summarises the key characteristics of each type of coaching.

In reality, there is, of course, overlap between the three types of coaching. Our categorisation is intended to indicate the *primary* focus of the coaching in question rather than to imply that the categories are sharply boundaried. Even with a development coaching client, a coach may at times find him or herself in performance or skills coaching mode.

However, despite these likely overlaps, it is advisable that the coach clarify with the sponsor the primary type of coaching being sought and how he or she would propose meeting that need. In addition, coaches who are offering all three types should be transparent with the client about which mode(s) they are operating in at any one time.

In Chapter 2, we move on to consider the factors that have influenced the emergence of development coaching as a professional discipline.

Note

1. P. Honey and A. Mumford, *Using Your Learning Styles* (Maidenhead: Peter Honey Publications, 1983).

Table 1.1 Key characteristics of types of coaching

Type of Coaching	Typical Agenda Issues	Coach Role/Style	Contracting and Feedback	Typical Duration and Frequency of Meetings
Skills	Just-in-time skills, for example for presentations, dealing with the media, negotiating Individual support following a training programme to embed learning and apply it to the workplace	Skills expert Directive style	Clear goals and simple contracting Review and feed back to sponsor at the end (from client and coach)	2–3 two-hour meetings over 1–2 months
Performance	Clarifying expected performance in current role or project Maximising performance in a current role or project Changing behaviours based upon feedback Preparing for a new role (for example functional to general management promotion) Support during induction to new organisation Support during change initiative	Mixture of expert and facilitator Directive management of programme and non-directive style of coaching	Contracting required to agree goals and align expectations Review and feed back to sponsor at the end (from client and coach)	Weekly or fortnightly one-hour meetings over 3–6 months
Development	Rich analysis of current organisation and of managerial/leadership objectives Planning and implementing personal and business strategy in light of these Identifying strengths and weaknesses in personal performance (through self-reflection and/or feedback) and developing in response Planning for next role and identifying development needs Charting future career over 1–5 years	Non-directive, partnership approach Sounding board	Complex contracting to establish agenda Regular re-contracting to reflect changing circumstances/priorities Nature and frequency of reviews and feedback to sponsor agreed as part of contracting	One-and-a-half-hour meetings every 2–4 weeks over 6–18 months

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