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# Introduction

Achieving the goal, getting from A to B, crossing the chasm, getting to where we want or need to be, making the most of what you can be, achieving your potential – applicable to us all, but particularly pertinent to the philosophies of those with senior leadership responsibility. These people, who are nominated executives, are typically those who command significant resources, the most important of which is, of course, the human resource, that is, you and me.

At this point, some of our readership is considering the relative value of people compared to other assets, such as natural resources, capital, technology, market and product resources. That can be seen as a tragic comment on our commercial philosophy. It shows how far our analysis of economic and business models have objectified the human race, reducing them to intervening (and sometimes interfering) variables. It's a debatable point, but if people are removed from organisations they tend not to operate effectively – even an automated warehouse needs an engineering team to maintain and rectify faults. Executives often have the nominal responsibility for setting and executing strategy. As Larry Bossidy, ex-CEO of Allied Signal, states succinctly, 'people bet on people not strategies' (Tichy and Charan 1995).

It's clear we need the right people doing the right things in organisations. Here we will concentrate on the executive population. As we have seen too often in recent times, when organisations employ the wrong people, do the wrong things or both, it can create massive and negative impact on markets, consumers and employees. Recently there has been an unprecedented catalogue of corporate scandals which has massively impacted business confidence. Between January and August 2002, share prices fell 40 per cent on both sides of the Atlantic, stimulated by the fraud and bankruptcy at energy trader Enron. Subsequently Global Crossing,

Xerox, Tyco, Worldcom, Adelphia, AOL Time Warner, QWest, Halliburton, Johnson & Johnson and Bristol Myers Squibb all reported trading difficulties, either sponsored by inaccurate reporting, fraud charges or investigations by the SEC.

It's useful to debate with those who lead organisations how they value their people. Many say employees are the corporation's key asset, the most valuable resource, often providing the competitive advantage for their business. Unfortunately, few seem to act in a manner consistent with those statements. This mismatch or disconnection, often combined with adverse media comment on the equity of executive reward packages, can lead to a cynical and negative response from the workforce.

This book is about one method for developing people, specifically executives, hence executive coaching. It is also about building coaching competency for executives, so, we hope, doubly useful.

## **A Unifying Philosophy**

Sentiments which best capture the tone of our collective coaching practice come from Kahlil Gibran ([1926] 1987, p. 67). He reflects, in his timeless manner, our feeling about the role of the executive development coach when he speaks to his description of teaching:

No man can reveal aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge,

The Teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness,

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, But rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.

Whilst we share a diverse breadth of experience of success and failure in international executive coaching, there is a unifying philosophy which brings our practice together. The values underpinning this philosophy are familiar: passion for people growth, development responsibility for potential, nurturing and exploiting scarce leadership talent. Whilst in practice this philosophy is often broadly expressed in stylistic terms, at the core of our coaching philosophy remains an enduring theme: 'The desire to create a significant and qualitative difference at work by helping to deliver human potential.'

Most contributing coaches describe their 'personal journey' leading them to executive development coaching. Our belief is that in the process of

change the coach is rarely untouched by the experience of development they provide. Indeed, for many, such personal development opportunities are a powerful driver to sustain commitment to their professional coaching practice. As we will see later, those who authorise and execute programmes of change are well placed to enjoy considerable development as a result.

## **My Journey to Coaching**

For my part, the journey to coaching craftsman continues. Early international manufacturing management experience with Unilever in the UK and Germany informed and stimulated my preference for working directly with people contributing product value rather than with inanimate objects. Only after considerable experience, coaching study, training and development did I feel equipped to take responsibility for contributing directly, as a coach, to others' development. Only with deeper organisational insight, self-knowledge and awareness about the personal implications of significant work and life transition did I feel authorised to coach others through such experiences.

Twenty years later, I find I have still more to learn than I have already learned. Having tutored and coached on several continents with over 2000 managers and leaders, it feels timely to reflect critically on our experience to date and capture what we feel are valuable, coachable themes. These themes we see as central to the successful development of executives in organisations and thereby to the successful development of business organisations.

But the route to coaching described above sounds rather too neatly prescribed. My development as a coach was more of a roller coaster of opportunism rather than a planned progress towards a desired career goal – often incoherent and only with the benefit of hindsight having any clear linkage. I know it's no different for many others, maybe for you too. Careers aren't neat sequential packages of growth and success. That's another myth – to which we make executive reference later – careers happen in hindsight and often make sense only through the discipline of writing a CV. As a result of our selection, assessment and coaching practice, we have reviewed thousands between us. My colleague Bill Best describes them as: 'often colourful works of fiction, seeking to weave a coherent storyline through an apparently random sequence of events.' As is widely reported, single lifelong careers occur less often in contemporary business.

As a coach, colleagues and clients describe my strength as commercial focus and directness. I can only concur. I experience strengths in stamina and

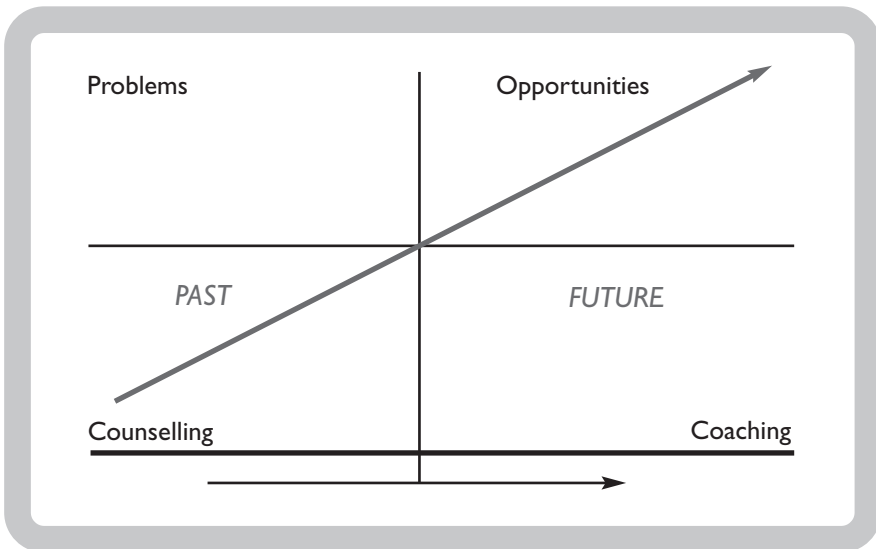
perseverance. I know my way around executive boardrooms and appreciate the pressure of leadership in organisations. I ask challenging questions but still remain overly optimistic for clients, and too easily frustrated to have achieved mastery of the coaching craft yet, but I'm working on it.

Much of my development as a coach is the result of experience with clients, my fellow authors and of course my wife, Julia, so my heartfelt thanks go to them all for their help.

The following chapters distil a collection of coaching experiences from successful practitioners. One of the key indicators of success in coaching as in other walks of commercial life is repeat corporate client business. All the contributors to this book have at least ten years' continuous success in executive coaching consultancy.

The case studies are presented to illustrate the executive coaching assignments conducted by the authors. They are future focused, seeking to build on the experience of the past to promote a solid foundation for development coaching assignments to come and thereby help improve their chances of successful outcomes.

Whilst coaches sometimes need to refer to past patterns of behaviour and historical experience, the core of development coaching is concerned with achieving goals by doing things differently or doing different things in the future. Figure 1.1 contrasts development coaching with counselling.



**Figure 1.1** A development coaching focus

## **Executive Coaching Assignments: Some ‘In the Box’ Thinking**

Executive and leadership coaching has grown and continues to grow significantly as a popular development tool. A brief foray into any search engine creates hundreds of coaching providers presenting their unique selling proposition. It’s an extremely fragmented market, unregulated and characterised by small-scale providers as described in the contemporary review of executive coaching by West and Milan (2001). Indeed Berglas (2002) projects that from a base of 10,000 executive coaches in the US today, he expects there to be 50,000 in five years’ time.

Large development organisations (including the ‘big five’ consultancies and university business schools) tend not to provide significant development coaching resource. Indeed, in bidding for a large-scale coaching assignment recently, we found ourselves able to offer more experienced senior coaching resource than several business colleges ranked in the top ten of European business schools. As suggested in a recent review of executive succession in the UK’s *Financial Times* (Moerk 2002):

Business schools provide more general development for executives. But the frequency of this approach is in direct contrast to its effectiveness. We found that HR directors rated standard business school programmes as less effective than individually tailored ones, particularly coaching. One-to-one coaching focuses on leadership skills, such as emotional intelligence and strategic orientation. The growth of coaching for senior executives shows many organisations are on the right track with individual development.

Coaching is clearly a very popular contemporary development practice. Hallstein Moerk, senior VP of Human Resources at Nokia, recently described the role of coaching in his portfolio of education and development offerings: ‘We think coaching is a most powerful tool.’ Highlighting one key benefit derived from coaching, he continues: ‘People do better in their jobs when they have opportunities for self-reflection which coaching provides’ (Moerk, quoted in *Financial Times* 2002).

## **An Executive Coaching Taxonomy**

Table 1.1 shows the origin of coaching and the attitude of client organisations requesting coaching. These reflect the approach of a consultant coach entering a client organisation intending to coach specific executive

**Table 1.1** Organisations as coaching clients

	Assistance receiving (reactive)	Assistance seeking (proactive)
Bridging the gap (demands of the past)	Change-resistant Denial/bad hire Job jeopardy In crisis	Change-oriented Overtaken by events Overpromoted Self-awareness
Extending competence (demands in the future)	Change compliant New environment New demands Wait and see/fast-follower	Change-focused Looking ahead Predicting change Staying ahead of the game

incumbents. We can classify the commissioning client organisations and/or individuals according to the development needs that are identified and one's perception of their approach to coaching.

'Bridging the gap' refers to those instances where there is an agreed level of performance that the individual is failing to meet, or at least some shortfall from a minimum acceptable performance is identified (not always by the individual). This is based on what individuals in the role have needed to do in the past and need to do now.

'Extending competence' covers those instances where current performance is acceptable, or even very good, but the need for something extra, some additional competence, is expected or predicted to grow in importance. If the need for 'extra' or new competence is 'real', and we'll explore this later, it is of course only a matter of time before not having this competency becomes a shortfall and hence shifts into 'bridging the gap'.

Given that this separation is arbitrary, the reactive/proactive split is even more so. In general terms, we see a difference between those who seek out help and those who take it up as a last resort. 'Assistance receivers' respond to circumstances and some stimulus in the environment. It might be that they've tried other routes, unsuccessfully, find they don't have sufficient expertise, or even time, or maybe are simply following what others have done without giving too much thought as to whether there might be other ways of tackling the same issue. It is literally putting yourself in others' hands – like going into receivership when you're bankrupt but, in this case, with reference to ideas or options.

The 'assistance seekers' are more proactive in looking for help that can accelerate change, in this case through enhanced learning and development. We could distinguish them from 'receivers' in that they approach obtaining assistance with a much lower level of reluctance. This is not to say they are better at doing it, as judgment may not always match motivation, that is, they may get the wrong help.

From experience, we know that organisations, divisions, departments, teams and individuals don't fit neatly into one box in all activities. For example, many technical departments, such as IT (to target an easy stereotype), are often heavily focused on extending specialist technical competence and pursue this proactively, whereas they may not address, say, the skills necessary for the effective management of people, in the same fashion.

In each of the quadrants in Table 1.1, I have used some terms to describe the likely occupants. At present, we experience a significant number of assignments in the top left-hand quadrant, although this is slowly changing. These are the emergency calls. 'We've tried everything else but if John doesn't change that's the end of the line!' These individuals may have been promoted into positions for which they do not currently possess the skill to perform effectively. Occasionally, this was known or suspected, but they have been promoted based on their potential and they were expected to develop the skills quickly. Alternatively, the job characteristics or environment may have changed significantly around a previously competent individual. In any event, the realisation is that the individual is not coping and things cannot continue as they are; similar to those individuals used as examples of ineffective leaders in Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (1996). Important here is the reactivity of either the individual or the commissioning client, 'problems' are generally at an advanced stage and the coach is playing the role of 'remedial paramedic'.

There are different approaches to contracting coaching from client organisations dependent upon corporate as well as national culture. In the US, clients have a more progressive approach to coaching their leadership talent. It reflects a development philosophy that is more 'you don't have to be ill to get better' than 'call in the remedial help'.

The top right-hand quadrant is again occupied by those who may have been overpromoted or left behind by changes in the demands of their environment. By contrast, they may have been identified earlier or at least the coach probably gets to them sooner. Here there is a more concerted effort to avoid derailment, and the coach hopes they have been brought in sufficiently early. This said, because of the nature of the change required to bridge a gap, a certain amount of time pressure exists.

The development needs of those in the lower half of the table differ from those above, in that here they are looking at 'extending competence' for the individual. That is, the individual's current level of performance is acceptable, in that they are probably meeting all the demands of their role, as it has been defined in the recent past. Now, either because of promotion, significant changes in the organisation or the market, new competencies are

demand. In this respect, a shortfall is being anticipated or predicted but has not yet had significant impact. If the need for the competency is real, this will become a genuine and recognisable shortfall in the near future.

Those in the bottom left-hand box are faced with a perceived need to change, although what this means and how difficult it will be to achieve may not be clear. However, being ‘assistance receiving’, they might be seen as changing only as the need to do so becomes more obvious, in fact as the likelihood of a shortfall becomes more concrete. More importantly, in this instance, they may pursue other methods of achieving the change in individuals, for example issuing lists of new competency requirements, promoting the need for change or running general training or orientation programmes, before bringing in a coach.

In the bottom right-hand box, there are those that might be perceived as ideal clients, both ‘extending competence’ and ‘seeking assistance’ in a proactive fashion. This combination can reduce the time pressure associated with achieving the desired change, at least in comparison with the other categories, however, those pursuing change proactively are rarely less demanding. In this group, I would include those clients who install or assign a coach in advance of individuals taking up new and more demanding posts.

So having looked at what the clients might be, let’s take a look at what that might mean for the coach beginning and managing an assignment with them. Table 1.2 has the same categories as Table 1.1, but here the descriptors refer to the issues that coaches may need to be aware of in dealing with the different types.

In the top left-hand box, there is possibly the most frequent UK coaching assignment, ‘job jeopardy’. It is probably most frequent because it is often the easiest to sell; ‘distress purchasing’ is a very successful area of retailing. Generally, by the time the coach gets involved, decisions

**Table 1.2** Coaching: vendor beware!

	<b>Assistance receiving (reactive)</b>	<b>Assistance seeking (proactive)</b>
Bridging the gap	‘Easy to sell’ Strong imperative ‘Last roll of the dice’ May be too late	Ready for the sell Timescales tight Promises count Benchmark to aim at
Extending competency	Question the sell Not convinced yet Must convince on benefits Manage timescales	Looking to buy Quality supplier critical Needs possibly unclear Could aim too high

have already been taken about what to do and the main discussion between the client and the coach is ‘how soon can you start?’ Whilst this is good news for development coaches selling work, and for internal coaches trying to raise the profile of coaching as a development option, the downside is obvious. Coaching is rarely, if ever, an instant fix. Where it is, there is either a simple skill to be learnt and applied or the coach is unusually gifted – I have only experienced the former. In this box, the time and emotional pressure is likely to be high and the expectations of coaches occasionally borders on miracle working. In any dealings with clients, setting and managing expectations is always critical but, in addition, coaches need to manage their own expectations – can they actually help the individual achieve the change desired? It may be prudent to decline the assignment, but at the very least one should be absolutely clear about what might realistically be achieved in the time available.

In the top right-hand box, clients may have ‘discovered’ or realised the need for an individual to develop but differ from the previous example in that they are more prepared to obtain assistance for them to achieve this. With more faith in the contribution a coach can make, expectations might actually be higher. Consultant coaches will get the business if they can demonstrate, or convince others that they have, a way of facilitating the desired change. In doing this coaches obviously need to be realistic about what *can* be achieved and by when. As always, targeting where some ‘quick wins’ might be obtained is vital and this should be based on what is impacting most negatively on performance at the moment.

In the bottom left-hand box, the client is concerned with developing competence in an individual in a more proactive way but the decision to involve a coach is probably based on less proactive thinking. They may be following what others are doing (including using coaches), identifying a lack of in-house expertise or just finding themselves short of resources to facilitate an individual’s development. The issues confronting an external consultant coach here are familiar – does it really take that long and must it cost that much? There is a need to demonstrate that one has a clear method of achieving the desired change, but first the change or development needs clarifying. This means defining what will be observed that is different from today’s performance and how it will be measured – some criteria for success. Anyone with experience of developing competency frameworks for executives within organisations will appreciate the occasional tendency to generate an ideal shopping list that is too often based on ‘sound bites’, for example ‘entrepreneurial thinking’.

In the bottom right-hand box, those that are looking to pre-empt the need for change are also pursuing ways of staying ahead of the game in

bringing it about. There are some ‘mature’ coaching organisations that either coach internally, or appoint external coaches where appropriate, as a matter of course, and regard them as a vital component in maximising personal development.

In summary, executive coaching resembles other areas of change and the matrix presented above can be adapted and applied equally to large-scale organisational change. Clients approach change with different perspectives – meeting needs that are apparent, predicted or even created. They may have a clear notion of what is required, or not, and a realistic or overly ambitious view of how easy this might be to achieve.

Distilling research from numerous corporate examples, Kotter’s (1995) ‘eight steps to transforming your organisation’ checklist for change demonstrates the parallels between what is required for successful organisational and personal change:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition
3. Creating a vision
4. Communicating the vision
5. Empowering others to act on the vision
6. Planning for and creating short-term wins
7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change
8. Institutionalising new approaches.

Indeed, the checklist served as a powerful prompt in a recent executive coaching assignment. Tim, the president of an international investment business, used the eight steps as a review formula whilst acting out his personal coaching development agenda. In his case, Tim’s leadership development agenda as incoming president and CEO was intrinsically linked to the development of the business. Restructuring, building and leading an emerging executive team required Tim to learn ‘on the run’ as he built and led a reformed organisation acting in quite uncharacteristic ways.

As Witherspoon and White observe (2001, p. 28):

Coaching for development can be intense, analytical, and may represent more threat to some learners than coaching for skills or performance. Of all the coaching roles, coaching for development tends to involve a deeper focus on

executive development and personal growth. As one coach has said, this [type of coaching] is easy for people who are introspective and enjoy root canals!

They identify four distinctly different roles based on a primary function of helping and teaching the client how to learn:

1. Coaching for skill acquisition (learning focused on current task)
2. Coaching for performance
3. Coaching for the 'executive's agenda'
4. Coaching for executive development (focused on the future, exploiting potential talent or moving into a new situation).

Here we will focus on item 4, but occasionally stray into the territory of 1, 2 and 3.

So why don't all organisations provide an internal development coaching resource and practice themselves? We have discovered many reasons. Most commonly, it is part of a general avoidance of assuming responsibility for people development, including executive development. Some of the most frequently mentioned reasons we heard were:

- We use experts. Business schools/external agency programmes satisfy all our management and executive development needs
- Development of our people is all outsourced as it is too expensive to employ full-time resources
- Development of our people is not a high priority for our managers or executives.
- Development of our people is not a priority
- Development of our people is not part of our key strategic business goals
- We 'buy in' talent when required, we don't 'grow our own' talent
- Investment in people development has been found not to be worthwhile historically
- Our managers/executives are not skilled in this area.

Many would concur that at the heart of development and learning in organisations is feedback. Physical systems work more effectively with feedback (for example electromechanical or electronic devices such as an engine

management system is dependent on regular, timely, reliable feedback). Even learning to play a sport like golf relies upon feedback, albeit acceptable to varying degrees. So why not people development? We found the most commonly expressed reasons for not giving feedback are:

- Feedback is too difficult, we have not been trained to give it
- It exposes judgments and risks stable relationships
- It provides an unclear benefit for tangible discomfort
- Tasks with tangible benefit are more attractive/preferable
- Don't know what development feedback is or how to do it.

Most organisations operate sub-optimally, and one responsible element may be the absence of, or presence of poor, feedback. Our aim is to help to develop individuals inside their working environment. Many have experienced the impact of external agencies providing public development programmes, such as business schools who claim to offer a complete leadership development process. Unfortunately, such development progress is rarely sustainable, as the participants' environment – including immediate work group – is rarely party to the development experience. Whilst typically a useful individual networking experience, development benefit can be significantly enhanced and extended by 'in-house' development coaching back at work.

### **Myth: All Feedback is Developmental**

One example illustrative of the power of development feedback emerged during a leadership team development programme at a Rolls-Royce subsidiary company in Derby, England. The division's MD was discussing feedback with his newly appointed Marketing Director, Richard. I was the coach in this development conversation, encouraging both to give feedback and we were in the early exchanges about current practice inside the business when the following dialogue took place.

*Me:* 'Do you give Richard regular feedback at work?'

*MD:* 'Yes, I think I do. I've given Richard quite a lot over the past 12 months since he's joined the company. We have a good relationship in that respect, I think.'

*Richard to MD:* 'You do give me regular feedback; but it's always of one type – positive. I don't believe there aren't areas for me

to improve. It takes the edge off the positive comments and the praise too.'

*Me to MD:* 'Why do you think Richard sees the feedback as all positive?'

*MD:* 'I'll ask him in a minute, but from my side, my sense is that I try to be positive and encouraging all the time with my people. I don't want to demotivate or hurt them.'

*Richard to MD:* 'When you deny me the feedback for improvement (development feedback), you deny me the opportunity to improve and that hurts me.'

The MD at this point looked very thoughtful. Later, he described his personal philosophy and values to his team, which helped Richard and his peers understand why they only ever received positive feedback. All his team members requested more critical feedback and shortly afterwards the MD felt able to begin to factor in developmental feedback to his executive reviews.

Whilst executives commonly cite 'not enough time' as a good reason not to coach or develop people, it can be illuminating to explore how executives do spend their time. Time management consultancy is now a mature industry and training opportunities are legion. It is rare to find executives who will admit to having any 'free' time on their hands. It is seen as worthy to be overloaded, under constant time pressure, continuously busy, with no time for non-work activity such as vacations or family. A laudable expression of the Protestant work ethic perhaps, but it raises the questions:

- Is it inefficient/ineffective to be this busy?
- Is our executive confusing being busy with doing business?

If you have enjoyed the luxury, as we have, of 'shadowing' business leaders in a typical day's work, you will have found that, like us at work, they choose elements in their daily work routine, with sometimes up to around 30 per cent of the daily schedule being self-selected. Again, like us, they choose to devote significant periods to:

- Aspects of work they enjoy
- Aspects of work they are good at
- Aspects of work which add value, are recognised and rewarded.

Referencing Hercules' Law (Chapman 1982), 'A strength overused becomes a weakness', it can be equally applicable to enthusiasm, intelligent analysis, thoughtful introspection/reflection, strategic focus, detailed, objective decision-making and using intuition/gut-feeling in decision-making, so that overemphasising those areas of work which we prefer and where we excel risks ignoring other potentially key parts of work that are necessary.

We all agree that time, like people, is a very precious resource for organisations. It represents the opportunity to add value, exploit assets and create profit. It is, therefore, disappointing to discover how much time we spend waiting. Most of us spend a lot of time waiting. You do, we do, even highly paid senior executives do, although they can become very upset when it happens. It's part of our lives. It's the period between having decided what we want/need to do and doing it. Academics describe it sometimes as queuing or the phase between analysis and implementation, a natural place to 'dwell' when we've decided what needs to be done but have yet to do it. Have you ever stopped to work out how much time you're in this state? Don't do it now, it may constitute waiting. Unless you've attended one of the ubiquitous time management programmes, you probably haven't. Think about only the time you can control, not traffic jams or delayed flights.

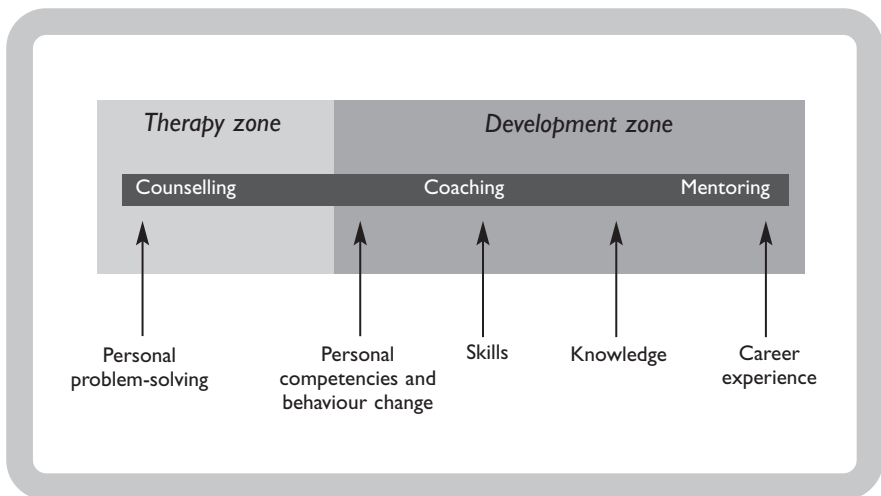
Think about those times when you've decided to implement change – give up smoking, go on a diet, give more feedback, coach someone with potential, take a committing, uncharacteristic, perhaps risky or unusual step. You may be visualising what it may look like when achieved or reflecting on the plan leading to implementation. Saul Bellow (1976) describes it as being often pejoratively labelled as 'sloth, inaction, sleeping at the wheel'. In reality, it can comprise our most creative moments. They also include the moments before waking or sleeping, where many issues of the day are reflected upon and sometimes resolved. We can also label it as denial, hesitancy, avoidance, procrastination, building up courage or momentum, but it appears in the same form, *inaction*. Our belief is that coaching is about helping others move more quickly to action than other development activities.

Coaching is one useful tool in developing leaders now and for the future. It is a core competence for many successful executives – developing others has become a sustainable competitive advantage – particularly in those service organisations that have little or no other comparable asset. This book is all about executive coaching – coaching for those with senior leadership responsibility in organisations. It presents a philosophy, model and practice of coaching which has been effective for clients and professional coaching practitioners who have contributed to this book.

As already indicated, the term ‘coaching’ covers a wide range of applications. A helpful concept here is the ‘coaching continuum’ (see Figure 1.2). Different coaching styles are set out on a scale whose variation indicates the depth of relationship between coach and subject. This reaches its greatest intensity on the far left – the interpersonal or therapeutic counselling context, assumed to be outside the typical organisational setting. However, today, with the transformation of family life as a traditional and stable source of counsel, the challenge to the manager of people to adopt such a role is common and widespread. For completeness, mentoring has been placed on the far right of the figure. Although having much in common with the coach, often demanding a similar closeness of relationship, the mentor may often seek different objectives and be in less frequent contact with the participant.

This book has been written with both the consumer and the provider of the coaching service in mind. So if you’re either coaching or being coached, at the executive level, then this book should enhance your understanding or inform your practice, or both. If you believe, as many of our corporate clients do, that a key element in the skills repertoire of successful executives is the development of self and their people (McCall 1998), be they direct reports or immediate team members, then building coaching skills is key to developing this strength.

McCall, as a result of extensive research conducted by the International Consortium of Executive Development, outlines the 11 dimensions



**Figure 1.2** The coaching continuum

proposed as criteria for early identification of global executives. Four of the 11 refer to aspects of people development:

- Brings out the best in people
- Seeks and uses feedback
- Is open to criticism
- Learns from mistakes.

For many reasons in our postmodernist business society, we occupy a point of development maturity in the process which creates and sustains corporate life where coaching (or targeted development) is popular and appears to be able to deliver enhanced development outcomes.

Let's also outline what this book is not about. It's not about an in-depth exploration of:

- Life coaching
- Fitness and sports (individual and team) coaching
- Career coaching
- Therapeutic counselling
- Life-balance readjustment
- Family therapy/relationship development.

However, our coaching conversations often touch on all the above. For example, it is common for coaching conversations that examine the nature and quality of relationships at work to include discussion of characteristic approaches to managing relationships outside work. It is familiar for male executives, having embarked upon a coaching programme and receiving considerable feedback, to recount the responses of their partners on sharing the content of the work-related feedback. To quote one recent comment, a partner remarked: 'I have been trying to tell you that for the past 15 years with no success ... why should you need a highly paid coach?'

This book is not about speculative theory, about what *might* happen. It's about what has happened and how it was achieved. Not that we eschew relevant theory or useful models, we present several that have been tried and tested in practice. Unlike some of our more academic counterparts, we present only those models that have worked in the past

for real clients. R.D. Laing, in *The Politics of Experience* (1990), echoes our feelings precisely when he says 'Theory is the articulated vision of experience', likewise, for us, 'this book begins and ends with the person'. Another point of departure from our more theoretically biased colleagues is that these models are derived from experience. Having worked and debated at length with our academic peers, we can support the hypothesis that most useful models in this area are derived from leading-edge practitioners in business.

### **Myth: Coaching is the Contemporary Development Panacea**

It is apparent from popular and academic literature that coaching has enjoyed growing corporate success and commensurate popularity over recent years. For a commentary on the executive coaching market and its growth, both West and Milan (2001) and Fitzgerald and Berger (2002) accurately capture the current market status and characteristics. Whilst it is a fashionable development activity for companies and executives, coaching is popular for many reasons, in our view some of them more worthy than others. A cursory review of hundreds of assignments suggests coaching is popular with clients because:

- It is viewed as an executive status symbol
- Targeted coaching delivers better returns on training and development (T&D) investment than the 'director's sheep dip' programme popular at university business schools and external public programmes
- It provides further justification for the existence of the HR department
- It is a reward or perk for the successful completion of a leadership role
- It forms part of a retention strategy, where high turnover threatens sustained business success
- It provides one element in a corporate recruitment package, potentially enhancing corporate competitive advantage where talent is a scarce resource
- 'Big hitters'/'gurus' say it is important (Jack Welch, Larry Bossidy, Jim Collins)
- It is an effective device for developing the emerging and existing leadership potential of an organisation

- It represents a potent resource for resolving performance and career development issues.

You can probably tell that we left the best two until last. Our collective belief is that effective coaching can accelerate the process of reaching the point of action described above. Whilst contemporary development models are presented and reviewed in the following pages, our approach is predominantly pragmatic. We are, in common with our clients, primarily concerned with action, getting things done, achieving plans and goals. Our book is a companion for anyone considering executive coaching from a practitioner or consumer perspective. Both will gain benefit in terms of practical insight and understanding best practice.

### **Myth: Executive Coaching Delivers Easily Predictable Outcomes**

Maybe we've all been doing it wrong all these years? In our experience, coaching rarely follows a simple sequential process with easily predictable outcomes. It may lend itself to both a scientific approach (applying a logical, structured coaching methodology employing well-researched, reliable and valid analytical tools) as well as aspects of an artistic framework which captures a more flexible, intuitive style.

The transition development model described below is our preferred starting point for a discussion about development and change with executives. In terms of the application of an existing model or theory to a coaching assignment, the challenge for the coach is to remember to use the experience of the person to be coached to build *their* world model. As the late R.D. Laing, a radical therapist, describes eloquently (1990): 'I can never truly *give* you my experience of the world but I can begin to understand yours.'

We believe executive coaching can be usefully defined as a *craft*. The quality of workmanship created is determined by the nature of the raw material, the coach's tools and his acquired skills and talent, built through experience 'on the job'. The choice of which tool best suits which assignment is a measure of the skill of the coaching practitioner, as in any craft. So here these approaches are presented as a buffet, a kind of menu, a pick-and-mix, designed to provide some of the key ingredients for effective coaching practice. It is not intended to propose a prescription, encouraging the standardised application to every assignment. It would be rather convenient if learning and development was a 'straight-line process'

logically building in sequence from A to B. It would be profoundly helpful if it followed a simple causal flow, control these variables in this manner and out pops the desired development outcome. It would confirm the validity of all those simplistic consultancy models with boxes and arrows used to impress leaders in organisations anticipating or experiencing dramatic corporate change.

Numerous stories about large-scale change programmes abound, often ending with a less than completely successful outcome. Kotter (1995) describes organisational change as probably the most challenging contemporary aspect of the executive role. Implementing change is tough and fraught with uncertainty. 'Expect the unexpected' seems to be part of the necessary built-in flexibility of any change initiative. Our experience focuses more on the personal impact of change on the executive responsible for delivery. To illustrate, we turn to the case of an executive employed by a global car manufacturer, recently promoted.

## *CASE STUDY*

### **Changing the Leader's Style**

Responsible for the project leadership and delivery of a new medium-sized global car, Phil, a VP and senior leader of this US auto manufacturer in Europe, invited me to attend his project review meeting. Most of the programme was a departure from traditional practice for the project team, learning new skills as they moved through the development stages of the project. I too was in the early phase of building my executive coaching experience.

A project remit involving 'concept to customer' planning, including engineers from many different cultures all contributing to the project delivery, reflected the scope of the programme. The project was in trouble. Missing both interim budget and schedule goals, Phil's approach was to increase his control and become even more of a micro-manager of the project.

A four-hour project review ensued. It explored the most minute detail of the development process, finally alighting on one area of brake technology and the associated challenges.

### *CASE STUDY cont'd*

Phil took the engineering team responsible for the hold-up to task. In public, under the gaze of around 50 participating international project team members, Phil dissected the problem and challenged the responsible team to resolve the technical and organisational issues acting as a bottleneck for the entire project.

Phil was, and is, a very fast analyst, invariably arriving at a logical proposal for resolving problems before anybody else. He was known for his 'big brain' and capacity to see to the heart of an issue – first. But, as Goleman suggests (1996), substantial intellectual capability just gets you to the executive starting post.

We both came out of the meeting tired, but for different reasons. Me from listening and familiarising myself with a new business vocabulary, shorthand, mnemonics as well as process issues (power, alliances, conflicts and so on). Phil from doing most of the talking, chairing the meeting and attempting to personally resolve most of the technical and organisational problems facing the project. In short, Phil was a very hands-on leader.

He asked me straight off, 'How do you think the meeting went?' I liked his direct question. It suited my style, was why I liked it. I referred to the textbook on giving feedback for coaches. Characterised by objectivity and distance, it was an approach I rarely employed.

### **Myth:** Giving Feedback in Practice is Reflected by Textbook Checklists

As we subsequently discussed in our lengthy debrief – almost as long as the meeting itself – I gave him my feedback based on what I felt was effective. Phil wanted to know about how effective I thought he had been in leading the process. I was comfortable to share my perspective but explained that this was based on both my observation and my interpretation of what I felt 'effective' may be.

This is commonly a point of departure from the textbooks on coaching feedback. I find that experienced executives often express a need to explore the values and experience of the coach. They want feedback,

***CASE STUDY cont'd***

'warts and all', unexpurgated. Even impressionistic feedback is legitimate to many executives we have coached. They want to know how they appear on first meeting.

In Phil's case, my first impressions supported his view of his emerging development agenda. He appeared in my office one evening enquiring about executive coaching. 'Hi, I'm Phil. Tell me about coaching as I'm in a new leadership role, running a new project in a new way.' He is about 2 metres tall, with a direct economical manner of expression and a booming voice. He towered over me as he stood at my desk. After a few minutes, he invited my early impressionistic feedback: 'What do you think so far?' 'Well, you have an aggressively ambitious business agenda and you present yourself in a similar manner', I suggested. 'OK. Thanks for your candour. That's what I've been told before and I need to do something about it.'

Textbook checklists concerning feedback refer to objectivity in feedback, avoiding potentially polluting the feedback with an overlay of coach values and prejudices. In Phil's case, as in others, he expected a judgment concerning his effectiveness. We later unpacked the additional learning from this exchange and explored Phil's characteristic style of giving feedback. Clearly, the arbiters of Phil's effectiveness were the project team themselves and their subsequent performance.

**Coaching: Art or Science?**

It is both an art and a science, because it's a craft. Coaching embraces both the unpredictability and predictability of human behaviour. Science teaches us theories and rules to learn and reduce uncertainty, to build predictability; take the experimental method, for example, it's about ensuring the same procedure or method creates the identical outcome. Most of us want to understand causality. Large numbers of people watch news broadcasts seeking to understand the root cause of an event. We like to know what we need to do to achieve the desired outcome, science can help us with either the answer to that question or propose a method to find an answer. There

are numerous models and theories of human development (Hudson 1999) which have been useful in executive coaching. In terms of the application of an existing model or theory to a coaching assignment, the challenge for the coach is to remember to use the experience of the person to be coached to build *their* world model.

We have observed too many coaches attempting to ‘shoehorn’ an existing model into a coaching transaction when it is clearly inappropriate. Although commonly practised by academic researchers, the act of forcing the fit of errant data to an existing model is not good scientific practice.

So, in summary, it seems that a purely scientific, logical, stepwise methodology for achieving development has considerable limitations for coaching. As described in Figure 1.1, coaching focuses more upon future possibilities, less on historical problems.

Ed Schein (1996) performed a valuable service to coaching by categorising organisational cultures hierarchically (executive, engineering and processing cultures), helping to understand better the characteristic corporate challenges which face each one.

There are many useful frameworks for structuring the coaching process but the nature of each coaching assignment is unique. Given a similar personality profile and a similar coaching context, outcomes rarely appear similar. The challenge remains: no two coaching assignments are the same. Whilst we present here some *typical* or *common* coaching development issues – significant career development, new role transitions, managing cultural diversity, building and sustaining successful virtual teams, leading corporate change initiatives – each individual coaching assignment is unique and, as yet, no development process panacea exists.

Whilst we will describe practical examples of the above as well as propose our views of best coaching practice, there remains no prescription for success in these development challenges. Despite numerous attempts from contemporary organisational theorists and consultants to synthesise the diversity of corporate life into tidy packages of insight, it often has the appearance of organisational stereotyping, and can be equally useful in practice. Defence organisations, pharmaceutical companies, engineering, high-tech, sales focused, trading companies, financial services, Chinese family businesses, French-based multinationals, Middle-Eastern oil corporations all share some common characteristics, and the coach needs to understand the cultural corporate context of each one to be effective inside them.

As described in Chapter 3, there are some generic analytical tools we can apply across many coaching programmes to aid understanding of the individual executive’s work environment and, whilst there may be many

more similarities than differences, it is often those differences which can provide a key to enhance coaching effectiveness. Analytical tools and models designed to aid understanding of the individual *are* widely employed as are a broad range of coaching methodologies (Hudson 1999). We also apply a methodology to coaching reflected in the ‘A4’ approach common in most of the following chapters that contain practical coaching examples. We track milestones and review progress using conventional metrics, and we do agree success criteria prior to the commencement of coaching. So, quite a logical, rational, almost scientific approach, one might say. So where is the art in coaching? It represents the other half of the coaching craft. It’s born out of experience, of both mistakes and successes. As most of us have felt, the impact of personal failure can lead to more deep learning than comparable success.

The hunch, instinct, the feeling, the imaginative insight and improvised intervention may be the most critical determinant in achieving commitment to action from a coaching partner. Our preferred coaching relationship approach is to form a partnership with the coaching participant. This is not always possible in every assignment and in every coaching session. The role of ‘coach as expert’ is sometimes required. Here lies danger for the inexperienced coach. The power imbalance implicit in playing the role of expert can be problematic, in that it can lead to a lack of ownership of development actions on the part of the coached.

Other artistically derived approaches such as taking a holistic rather than atomistic or compartmentalised approach to coaching, dealing with the whole person – not just focusing on skills building, the ‘bolt-on behaviour’ approach – demand a more creative and flexible coaching style. The coaching process, when effective, always reveals insights for both coach and coaching partner. However, revelational insights and major surprises for the coach can distract from focus on the coachee’s development at a critical time. Whilst they both need to achieve a development goal, often within a prescribed timeframe, the route to its achievement is often co-determined, in close combination with the coaching partner.

## Review Questions

1. Do you currently coach others? If so, how would you describe your style?
2. Do you need to? If you answered yes to this and no to the above, why don’t you?

3. What is your ambition for coaching (self or others)?
4. Where are you in the matrix?
5. What do you think are your strengths and areas for development as a coach?
6. What are the business goals that will be achieved by coaching (others or being coached yourself)?
7. Describe your approach to change. How have you developed over the past five years? Had you taken a video of yourself at work, at home and in social settings five years ago, would you see any visible differences in your behaviour compared with a video taken today? If so, how did this happen? If no visible change is evident, why do you think there have been no changes?

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