

Introduction to Coaching Chapter (by Saul Brown, 2011)

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Chapter Objectives

This chapter:

1. Provides a brief history and an update on the current global, Asia-Pacific and Australian coaching industry, with a particular focus on workplace and organisational coaching.
2. Considers the different types and uses of coaching within organisations.
3. Examines the role that coaching plays within organisations as a development tool, along with the outcomes that can be achieved, and the evidence available to support coaching outcomes.
4. Examines current trends and future directions for the coaching industry, including the current move globally and in Australia to develop coordinated standards.

Introduction

Coaching within a business and organisational context has gained significant momentum in a relatively short period of time. In some form, the method is now used within the majority of large organisations in Western developed nations. In Australia, studies indicate that around two thirds of senior managers and business leaders have received coaching (Leadership Management Australia, 2006). Moreover, throughout the Asia Pacific region, coaching is used to varying degrees, often introduced via Western expatriates and multinational corporations. Coaching organisations and their clients currently exist in China, India, Japan, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and other countries across the region.

A Brief History of Coaching

The term 'coaching' has traditionally been associated with the sporting arena. Sir John Whitmore, originally a British motor racing champion and a leading pioneer of executive coaching, acknowledges inspiration from Harvard lecturer and tennis expert Timothy Gallwey:

*"Gallwey had put his finger on the essence of coaching... coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance."
(Whitmore 2009, p.10)*

Drawing on a philosophy that Socrates espoused some 2000 years ago, coaching centres on helping people to learn rather than teaching them. This method removes the focus from the coach as a teacher or mentor with all of the expertise or answers, and instead focuses on harnessing the innate capability and motivation within each individual who then determines their own best way forward.

Coaching as we now know it within organisations has further drawn on the knowledge bases and experience of other domains such as counselling, therapy, mentoring, training, and consulting (Greene & Grant, 2003). Despite similarities across these domains, there are also important differences. While coaching draws extensively on psychological theory, it focuses more on solutions and working with healthy populations compared with counselling and therapeutic approaches. Coaching is more about collaborative self-directed learning than the 'master - apprentice' relationship that is typical in mentoring. Similarly, training tends to be more one directional with knowledge or skills imparted by a trainer, with the learning uptake at the discretion of the trainee. The trainee is often less active in and accountable for their own learning compared to coaching, where the coachee ultimately owns the process and outcome. Consultants are seen as experts in a particular field, whereas coaches are experts in facilitating self-directed learning and clients' goal achievement.

Coaching does have similarities to the 'process consulting' methodologies developed by Edgar Schein in the late 1960's and utilised by many Organisational Development professionals today (Brown & Grant, 2010). Schein's process consulting is based on a collaborative process between the consultant and client. Together, the consultant and client diagnose issues, develop solutions and design interventions to 'help' the client organisation to 'help itself'. Schein (1999) contrasts process consulting with two other modes of consulting, namely the 'consultant as expert' (or the 'selling and telling' model) and the 'consultant as diagnostician' (or the 'doctor - patient' model).

Coaching - Definition & Description

Given the variety of influences on the development of coaching, definitions of coaching vary as do coaching processes and approaches. Greene and Grant (2003) broadly define coaching as:

"a collaborative, solution-focused, result oriented and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance, life experience, self-directed learning and personal growth of individuals from normal (i.e. non-clinical) populations."

The above definition further helps to explain what a coach does and how coaching differs from other modes of workplace interaction. The 'collaborative' relationship and rapport between the coach and coachee is an important foundation for successful coaching. Coaching is 'solution-focused' in that it is more focused on actions and the future than on analysing problems and the past, which is one of the key distinctions between coaching and counselling. Given the

prevalence of mental health issues within organisations and the broader community, however, some level of psychological knowledge and training is important for coaches. The Sydney University Masters Coaching program, for example, ensures that coaching graduates are equipped to identify when a coachee might require a more clinical or therapy-based intervention, and therefore when to refer to more appropriately qualified mental health practitioners.

As a start point, coaching requires that the coachee has a clear goal, or at least that the goal becomes clear over time. The goal-directed nature of coaching enables the development of specific action plans and then the tracking of progress and results within an ongoing learning loop in subsequent coaching sessions. Ongoing goals can be reviewed and adjusted as required or new goals set. Within each coaching session many coaches follow a systematic process, such as the G.R.O.W. model proposed by Whitmore (1999), of goal identification (G), followed by an exploration of the current reality (R), the identification of potential options (O), before a plan of action is generated (Will-Do). Over subsequent coaching sessions, the longer term coaching process produces a broader learning loop via the review and evaluation of progress along with the adaptation of both goals and action plans as required.

One of the key distinctions between coaching and other modalities such as teaching, training or mentoring, is that the coach is a facilitator of self-directed learning. Whereas a mentor or teacher might instruct on how to complete a specific task or solve a particular problem, the coach assists and supports a person to take greater personal responsibility to develop the skills, knowledge or problem solving capability where appropriate. The coach works to unlock an individual's potential to optimise their own growth, development and learning. That coaching has become such an important and popular development tool is a testament to its potential to optimise the accountability and development of individuals within organisations, with obvious flow on effects to organisational performance more generally.

Different Types of Coaching

The goals of coaching are varied. This diversity is reflected in the types of coaching that are available in the market:

- **Life coaching** focuses on personal goals to enhance life satisfaction and wellbeing.
- **Executive coaching** focuses on the development of executives to improve workplace performance.
- **Leadership coaching** focuses on enhancing the management and leadership capabilities of individuals in the workplace.
- **Career coaching** helps individuals maximise and navigate their career journey.

- **Business coaching** helps business owners and managers (often in small to medium businesses) in specific areas of functional capability (e.g. sales, operational efficiency, finance etc). Along with specialised business coaches, accountants and other professional service providers are increasingly providing such assistance as a value-added service. Some business coaching services, however, are perhaps better described as 'business mentoring' given that technical knowledge and expertise is often imparted by an 'expert'.

The types of goals addressed in coaching can be split into three broad levels. These levels include the development of specific skills and knowledge, the improvement of performance in specific areas, and developmental coaching based on behavioural change or personal transformation. In reality, coaching may move across various levels or operate at multiple levels. A coach may also move between coaching, mentoring, consulting and other modalities as appropriate. What is most important is that the coach is doing what is best for the coachee. The coach needs to be sufficiently skilled and experienced to make good judgements about the best methods to use at different times. Inexperienced coaches may be tempted to provide solutions rather than facilitate a more self-directed coaching approach. For some, this 'telling' approach is difficult to be aware of and even harder to control.

The discussion to this point has involved an external specialised coach working with an individual coachee. Over the past decade, however, additional coaching trends have surfaced and are also worthy of consideration. For example, dedicated internal coaches have begun to emerge within organisations, with the building of internal management capability receiving significant attention.

Human resource professionals are more commonly taking up roles as internal coaches. Internal coaching expertise can provide a valuable and cost efficient support resource to employees and executives and is certainly appropriate for some coaching goals. Conflicts can arise, however, if the goals require an exploration of more personal or career sensitive domains. The coachee may not always feel comfortable to 'open up' or the coach might not always be able to navigate the complex issues of confidentiality in the broader organisational context.

Coaching as a management capability has become extremely popular with many organisations running in-house 'leader as coach' programs or similar initiatives. This in itself is not entirely new as leadership scholars have noted the value of facilitative styles of leadership for at least fifty years. Hersey & Blanchard (1984) adapted their well-known situational leadership model to incorporate 'coaching' as one of the four leadership styles. Their original model used the term 'selling' rather than 'coaching'. Daniel Goleman (2000) also identifies coaching as an important leadership style in terms of creating a positive organisational climate, particularly, "to help employees improve performance or develop long-term strengths" (p.83).

Coaching as a management capability has much to offer but will not always be the best solution to facilitate growth, change or learning for individuals within organisations. Coaching skills are extremely valuable skills for managers and leaders to possess but as noted earlier they do not come easily and require practice to develop competence. The optimal solution may be to have the benefits of different approaches, with skilled leaders and HR professionals being able to coach and also able to make good judgements as to when to use internal or external coaches to achieve the best outcome.

Another recent trend in coaching is the emergence of group or team coaching. Group coaching can provide a broader range of perspectives and greater systemic awareness than individual coaching (Brown & Grant, 2010). Group coaching follows a similar systematic process to individual coaching with the added complexity of understanding and managing the group dynamics. Clutterbuck (2007) draws a distinction between group facilitation and group coaching. While group facilitation is generally about managing the group process and ensuring broad participation, group coaching is more goal focused and change oriented and can be directed at both the individual and/or group level. In a program at INSEAD, Kets de Vries (2005), one of the leaders in group coaching, also incorporates psychotherapy into coaching processes to enable transformational leadership development.

The Coaching Evidence Base

In Australia there are a number of world leading coaching researchers and practitioners. For example, Harvard University recently recognised Dr. Anthony Grant, Director of the Coaching Psychology School at the University of Sydney, for his pioneering contribution in developing a scientific evidence base for coaching. The evidence base that has been developed over the past decade or more allows coaching researchers to conclude that coaching improves individual, group and organisational performance and wellbeing in a number of ways (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh & Parker, 2010).

Traditionally, research into the impact of coaching has not been overly robust. Studies, however, involving randomised control samples and longitudinal data collection are now being undertaken and the depth and rigour of the evidence base is continuing to grow. While this growing evidence base supports that coaching generally has a positive impact, given the many dimensions of coaching there is arguably further work to do to better understand what works, in which situations and why? Coaching is gaining prominence both with academics and practitioners and its future appears promising given its relatively brief existence.

The Future of Coaching

Grant and Cavanagh (2007) see coaching and the psychology of coaching as continuing platforms “for facilitating individual, organisational and social change” (p.239). They also see coaching as a vehicle for the application of the emerging science of positive psychology. That is, there is a connection between coaching as an applied platform and positive psychology as the science of

optimal human functioning. Coaching and positive psychology may continue to intersect and enable positive growth, change, learning and development for individuals, groups and organisations.

Another current and future focus for coaching is the professional standards of the industry. Currently, the coaching industry is relatively fragmented with limited professional standards and no consistent form of regulation. At the present time, anybody can call themselves a coach and start a coaching business. This situation makes it challenging for the users of coaching to select suitable and reputable coaches. Thankfully, many organisations and HR professionals have become knowledgeable purchasers of coaching services, able to spot the well qualified and experienced from those that are less so.

A number of governing bodies have been established to provide membership services to coaches, develop codes of conduct, and accredit coaches and coach training providers. The largest of these entities is the International Coach Federation (ICF) based in America and claiming 15,000 members worldwide (www.coachfederation.org). The ICF and other governing bodies represent their members who themselves hold a diverse range of views on what coaching is and what it should become, which makes the move towards benchmark coaching standards challenging. Other stakeholders (e.g. psychologist groups, HR professionals, universities, coach training providers, coaching businesses, and coaching users) also have views on the future of coaching, adding further difficulty in creating unified standards.

In Australia, progress has been made towards the generation of a professional coaching industry. Standards Australia, with the support of various stakeholder representatives, has been working towards some initial guidelines for coaching within organisations. Although the initial draft is yet to be released, the guidelines are likely to require businesses providing coaching services to have:

- a minimum level of education and experience,
- ongoing professional development,
- appropriate professional insurances, and
- a code of conduct and ethical framework.

These standards will initially be optional but will provide a framework for the users of coaching to make better decisions in choosing coaching providers. The guidelines will be a step in the right direction towards an increasingly professional coaching industry.

Conclusion

The popularity of coaching has had a meteoric rise in the past two decades and coaching is now commonplace in most organisations, whether provided by an external coach, internal coaches, or as a leadership practice. As a method, coaching has much to offer in facilitating growth, change, learning and development in individuals, groups and organisations. To ensure the potential of coaching is realised, coaching researchers and practitioners must continue to

add to the rigour and depth of the scientific foundations of coaching. Stakeholders also need to work together to continue to professionalise the industry for the good of coaches, coachees and their respective organisations and communities.

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