

## Coaching in an Organisational Context in South Africa

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### Introduction

Coaching is a relatively new modality in the organisational context in South Africa. As with all things new this opens the possibility for innovative and impactful ways to work with development of human capital. But it also can lead to confusion or misuse through lack of experience and consistent application. The purpose of this article is to create a basis for shared understanding and definition with the intention of optimising the possibilities that coaching might open up, whilst sign-posting areas for circumspection and caution

The article is structured under the following headings:

- Section 1 - Towards a common definition of coaching
- Section 2 - Applications of coaching in an organisational context
- Section 3 - The impacts of coaching
- Section 4 - Cautions in using coaching

### Section 1 - Towards a common definition of coaching

Coaching is a modality to support human learning and development. It's a way of working with individuals and teams that allows for focussed and directed learning where the responsibility for the outcomes of the learning process and the decisions taken rest strongly with the individual or collective being coached. The coach acts as a learning partner to the individual or collective, but refrains from the application of solutions or knowledge or expertise they might possess, rather creating a learning container for the client to figure these out for themselves. This is different to other learning or development modalities such as teaching, training and mentoring (O'Flaherty & Everson, 2005b).

At its core, coaching could thus be defined as: "Coaching is a skillful methodology for developing ourselves (as coaches) and others (as coachees) so that they are more effective and fulfilled. It involves the development of

increasing competence in the person being coached" (Flaherty 1999). It is thus a learning modality where the learning opportunities areas profound for the coach as they are for the coachee.

Unpacking what seems to be a simple statement adds some insights as to the unique subtleties of this modality.

### Coaching misunderstood

To begin with let's take a look at what is NOT implied in this definition but what seem to be common public domain misperceptions of what coaching is:

All too often the term is used as a catch-all to embrace any kind of advice given in a friendly and constructive manner that isn't direct instruction. This leaves people with the illusion that simply by changing their tone of voice and their manner they can be considered to be coaching. But this hasn't addressed the WHAT of happens in a coaching dialogue.

With this illusion at play things once seen as giving suggestions, answers, input and perspective and even manipulation can now be called 'coaching'. Not so. A coach is thus not:

- Simply an accountability partner who supports someone to reach their goals
- A disciplinarian who changes someone's unwanted actions
- A cheerleader who supports actions and behaviours from the sideline
- A devil's advocate who asks different questions or takes an alternative point of view, simply for the point of debate

There are titles already for these roles - inspector, teacher, supporter and sounding board. Why bother using the term of 'coach' to rename pre-existing roles played, very necessarily and successfully, in organisations and life?

### What the definition does imply

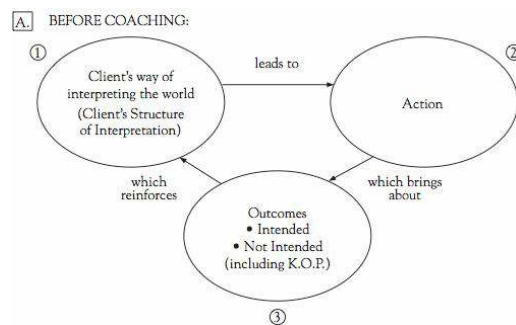
The premise of coaching defined in this way is that a person's behaviour follows from his or her 'structure of interpretation' (SOI) - a way of seeing and engaging with the world that is the product of their background, education and development path. This means that the way one sees the world at a particular moment determines the actions he or she takes. Each person's SOI is unique to them, and is shaped by his or her personal

experiences, beliefs and intentions. Since we are usually unaware of how our 'structure of interpretation' (SOI) is influencing our behaviour, the role of a coach is to find ways of making the coachees own SOI explicit and accessible to himself. By doing so, the coachee is able to observe something in ways that he was not able to observe before, and new possibilities for action become available. It is from this change in understanding and relating to the world that behaviours can then shift and desired outcomes reached.

Figure 1. below sets out what happens to a coachee before coaching:

- Their way of interpreting the world - SOI - informs certain actions e.g. talking a certain way to a team member, which generates certain intended (and often unintended) outcomes e.g. a breakdown in communication
- This reinforces the person's SOI, which is why they might keep repeating the action - resulting in them getting anchored in a way of reacting and the breakdown of communication repeating itself - unclear of what other options might be possible

Figure 1. The cycle of behaviour



Coaching works to enable people to transform who they are and reinvent themselves by helping them to see how their SOI, thinking and actions produce unintended consequences. Coaching as a process means partnering with a coachee to:

- Expand the horizons of their possibilities e.g. becoming aware of the way they are speaking to the team mate and the consequences of this
- Make and deliver on powerful new commitments e.g. committing to

change the way they interact with the team mate

- Alter their view of themselves e.g. understand what might be causing them to talk to the team mate in this way
- Foster new ways of being, skills and practices e.g. generate new ways of interacting with the team mate that might deliver different results
- Move past places where they are stuck e.g. finding another way to build their relationship and conduct conversations with their team mate that are mutually satisfying

The outcomes of coaching defined in this way are:

- That we want to leave the people coached (coachees) as *excellent long-term performers* in their chosen activities (e.g. conducting conversations with team mates that are skillful and effective). Coachees are encouraged to develop their capacity to produce outstanding results in a way that is meaningful for themselves and their colleagues. This capacity is built with the coachee in a way that can be transferred across to other tasks, projects, and challenges long after the coaching engagement has ended.
- Effective coaching also engenders the ability to *self-correct* so that clients are fully independent of their coach. (e.g. recognising themselves that they have or are about to have a less than optimal conversation with a team mate and are able to correct this in the moment, before the negative consequences occur) They become new observers of their thinking, speaking, and actions, quickly bring themselves back on course. They learn to correct from their own habits of thinking and acting and from the often subtle cues given off in conversations and meetings. Useful self-knowledge and deep listening come together to build this competence.
- Finally, coaching produces clients who can *self-generate*. (E.g. they take the

skills they learn and the awareness of themselves in building effective relationships with team mates and they apply them to other interactions - with superiors, subordinates and friends) They are able to continuously improve their skills because they've learned how to convert ideas into action, how to keep themselves open to learning, and how to scan the environment for innovation.

What makes coaching different to traditional learning modalities?

But what makes coaching different to other learning modalities such as teaching, training, mentoring? And what makes it a different skill to traditional management?

These other (extremely valuable) ways of working have at their core some assumptions that define how the roles are played out: (Based on Flaherty 1999)

When applied classically (which is not always the case but is a pervasive pattern in many organisations) these approaches to change are founded on the theory of behaviourism. The philosophy here is that changes in behaviour (e.g. building relationships with team mates) occur in response to some form of stimulus, or motivation. Motivation can come in two basic forms: motivation to move towards (positive, rewards) or to move away (punishment, pain) from something.

Under this premise, the way these roles get played out is about creating motivation to change in a particular way and providing a structure and/or process that keeps the person on track towards accomplishing certain goals. This premise, that the 'carrot and the stick' are the keys to change, shapes how the coaching process works, how the coach views the client and what the client accomplishes. (E.g. that the best ways to get the person to change their interaction with team mates is to punish them when they don't do it well, or to reward them when it works.) The application of the theory of behaviourism is manifest in traditional management, methods of teaching, sports coaching and even in parenting. Its belief systems, summarized below, under key sentences, tend to be highly familiar to today's managers.

**“Where There's A Will, There's A Way”.**

This belief is that the key ingredient to bringing about change is motivation. If we want “it” bad enough, we will do what is necessary to get “it”. This leads to the conclusion that at the core, it's a matter of will. “No will, no way”. This involves getting the person to see how important or beneficial this change is to him, and/or what the consequences are if he doesn't change, such that he is compelled to take action. (E.g. simply showing them the consequences of better relationships with team mates will make them want to change their interactions)

**Knowing = Results.** The idea is to give the person multiple sources of information that show what she is doing wrong, as a way of informing the client about what and how she needs to change. Being founded in the theory of behaviourism, the purpose of this information is to serve as an intervention and motivation for change. The assumption is that by informing the person about what is going on and what needs to change, she will readily take the necessary actions to get the desired, improved results. (E.g. just give them more information on how to interact with team mates and they will do it)

**Focus On The Problem.** Inherent in this approach is the view that there is a problem that needs to be addressed, and that in some fashion or form, something needs to be fixed. With a problem solving orientation, the context, is limited to that which is directly related to the problem at hand, where the solution lies and how to get the person to implement that solution in order to get the desired results.

**Many Hats.** With the reliance on the use of rewards and punishment as means of motivating the client to change behaviours, the sustainability of any changes requires continued stimulation by forces external to the client. The role played by the third party is one of a motivator, a director, an advisor, and a giver of feedback. (E.g. that motivating or cajoling somebody to get them to change their interactions with team mates is enough to make this shift happen)

Coaching by contrast is a way of working with a client as their own architect to navigate the change - either in a task or role or in their life overall. Many change interventions fall into the domain of what Chris Argyris calls 'single-loop learning' (Argyris, 1993) i.e. that the interaction takes place without challenging the basic premises of the accepted paradigm (SOI) of the individual. Coaching, in Argyris' terms, is imbued with 'double-loop' learning - in that it works with the coachee to challenge the fundamental assumptions of their existing perspectives and practices. This re-examination of the fundamental premises creates the conditions for major change - change with the coachee in the position of owning the locus of control for the change, rather than a third party (trainer, manager, mentor or advisor). Coaching is thus aimed at inducing awareness in people of what they are paying attention to as well as ignoring, as a key way of helping them to craft an alternative way forward. Coaching in this domain thus accepts that human beings are:

- Unique
- Complex
- Undergoing constant change

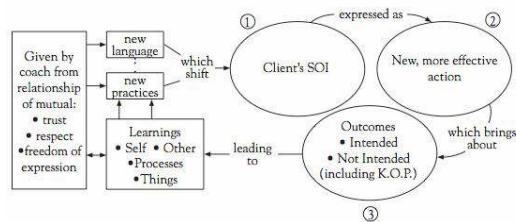
The approach is thus 'integral' - that is, the coaching takes account of the whole person. What gets left out in coaching will slow or curtail the intended outcomes (*long-term excellence, the capacity to self-correct, the competence to self-generate*) (Flaherty 1999).

Figure 2. below illustrates how coaching works. The coach is working with the coachee to:

- Understand their SOI and how this is intruding on the coachee's ability to create a new way of responding to their challenge.
- Working with the client to create new language (ways of expressing the challenge) and new practices (repeated actions that can build competence)

Figure 2. How coaching works

[B] DURING COACHING:



During the coaching interaction, the new language (E.g. talking differently about their interaction with team mates and exploring what the barriers to this might be) and new practices (trying new things e.g. letting team mates talk first by pausing before they say something so they can better judge what to say that will have the desired impact) bring forth more effective action by the client. Additionally, the coaching relationship and structure foster continuous learning.

After the coaching interaction, clients continue to improve competence by learning from life. This happens because they have developed a curious, open, confident and reflective response to life events. They also benefit from the extended organizational support that the coach encourages the client to harness and build into their coaching progress.

## Section 2 - Applications of coaching in an organisational context

Coaching can be used in a variety of different ways to support learning and development in an organisational context. There are a number of different dimensions of how coaching can be applied. The easiest ways to think of this is:

- **Function Vs. Competency.** Coaching as a function (something done to people and teams in the organisation - either by internal or external resources, or a combination of both) or coaching as a competency (a skill and language taught to people at different levels in the organisation to complement the existing management or supervisory skills they have). Within this distinction there is thus the possibility of:
  - Applying coaching to different levels of the organisation in different ways

- Having coaching which is applied to teams and individuals
- Using coaching as a stand-alone modality or, integrating it into the overall human capital development strategy of the organisation

**Building a Coaching Culture**

The most integrated and strategically sound way of looking at applying coaching in an organisation is to look at it as something that supports the human capital strategy as an enabler to the organisation's strategic intent. Figure 3. below tries to reflect this approach:

**Figure 3. Coaching as an Enabler**

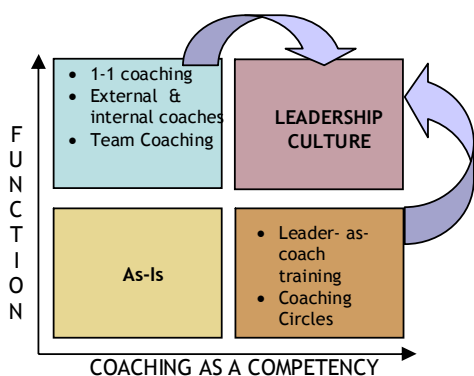


Table 1. below sets out how the various applications of coaching could be applied in the organisation to build an integrated leadership and coaching culture. These are intended as an illustration only.

**Table 1. Applications of Coaching in Organisations**

Axis	Possible Applications
FUNCTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with external expert to develop a Leadership and coaching strategy for the organisation</li> <li>• Hire executive coaches to work with executives and senior managers to partner on the implementation of their personal competency development plans</li> <li>• Have external coaches train internal managers to build coaching skills</li> <li>• Train and allocate internal coaches to work with managers and</li> </ul>

O N	<p>promising supervisors on their personal development plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hire external coaches to work with key teams in the organisation to develop team competencies and performance</li> </ul>
C O M P E T E N C Y	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hire external experts to run 'Leader-as-coach' and 'Supervisors-as-coach' courses to equip managers and supervisors with common coaching language</li> <li>• Assign each manager and supervisor people in the organisation (across function) to coach through annual performance plans</li> <li>• Evaluate managers and supervisors on quality of coaching based on coachee feedback as part of their performance review</li> <li>• Train managers and supervisors to conduct 'Coaching Circles' (peer coaching groupings where people from a similar level are assigned to cross functional groups to coach each other on challenges on a bi-monthly or quarterly basis</li> <li>• Build 'coaching proficiency' into performance review criteria as a way of embedding coaching culture</li> </ul>

Obviously, coaching can be used as part of an integrated strategy or applied selectively. Each of these applications can be severally applied in the case of the most compelling need of the organisation.

**Coaching in Leadership Development**

To delve a little deeper into coaching in the context of leadership development, the following might be useful.

Divine and Flaherty (2002) present a powerful case for leadership competencies being evidenced across a range of categories which they call 'domains of competence'. Using a framework rooted in the work of Jurgen Habermas (Braaten 1991) they explore leadership in a holistic way. Table 2. below sets out the three domains in which a leader needs to show up and be competent. The thesis of this view is that leaders need to master three key realms in order to be effective:

- **I**, constitutes the area of personal mastery, an arena in which the executive seeks to achieve competency in terms of knowing and managing themselves from the inside out.
- **We**, describes the domain of mastering the conversations and relationships with key people through whom the leadership influence is exercised, including the organisation itself
- **It**, outlines the sphere of tasks, processes and things - the tools which a leader needs also to master to make things happen

Divine and Flaherty have extrapolated this model to explore leadership competencies more fully by asking what qualities and skills a leader would have to master in order to embody the characteristics and competencies, these are contained in Table 4. below.

Table 4. Essential Qualities and Skills

Domain	Quality	Skill
"I"	Vision	Self-Observation
	Passion	Self-Knowledge
	Integrity	Self-Management
	Trust	Self-Remembering
	Curiosity	Daring
"We"	Empathy	Listening (to team/concerns)
	Reliability	Speaking (generating possibilities / inspiration)
	Openness	Setting Standards (developing others)
	Faith	Learning, Innovating
"It"	Rigor	Analysing (inhibiting factors/sources)
	Objectivity	Predicting (long & short term effects)
	Persistence	Simplifying
	Creativity	Building Models
	Focused	Organise/Prioritize/Release

Coaching would thus have as a core focus the building of these competencies in the organisation, in partnership with existing modalities such as training and development and mentoring.

### Section 3 - The impacts of coaching

Research on the impacts of coaching is sparse and has not yet kept pace with its roll-out. Two examples of international and local research show the compelling results of coaching

#### Global Research

In a paper submitted to the Manchester Review 2001, authors *McGovern, Lindemann, Vergara & Murphy* highlight the impacts of executive coaching. In a sample of 100 US executives they report coaching being reported as having substantial benefits. Figure 4. below reflects the reports the benefits experienced by executives undergoing coaching as being:

Figure 4. Intangible Benefits From Coaching



Key benefits are seen as being:

- Improved teamwork (experienced by 67% of executives)
- Improved stakeholder relationships (experienced by 71% of executives)
- Improved subordinate relationships (experienced by 77% of executives)

Figure 5. below highlights the tangible benefits experienced by executives who received coaching

**Figure 5. Tangible Benefits from Coaching**



Key benefits are seen as being:

- Improved company strength (experienced by 48% of executives)
- Improved quality of product and service (experienced by 48% of executives)
- Improved productivity (experienced by 53% of executives)

Local Research

Local research is more difficult to come by. However a project on which research has been conducted was for a Global FMCG company in South Africa which has over the last four years rolled out a comprehensive coaching training program for executives and managers on coaching skills as well as providing external coaches to the top 70 executives and internal coaches to the top 150 managers. The Centre for Coaching at UCT’s Graduate School of Business partnered with the organisation on the design of the intervention and recently completed a second research report on the impact of the process.

The 2007 research project was configured as follows:

- Invitation sent to random sample of 100 people across the organisation:
  - 66 respondents (66%)
  - Represents over 10% of population pool involved in the coaching process
- Focus groups designed and conducted by Centre for Coaching:

- 12 Focus groups - 65 people - different to survey respondents

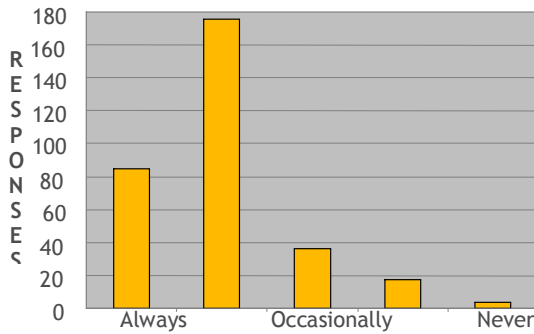
A number of key dimensions were assessed. Respondents were asked what they felt coaching’s impact had been on:

- **Amplifying Leadership** - making respondents feel more effective to lead and allowing a common language of leadership to emerge in the organisation
- **Accelerating Personal Growth** - enabling respondents to grow and evolve more effectively in their careers
- **Increasing Team Capability** - enabling teams to work more effectively together
- **Managing Change** - enabling respondents to cope with change better on their lives
- **Managing Conflict & Disagreement** - skilling people to better deal with conflict situations
- **Clarifying Direction** - Clarifying personal and organizational direction
- **Building Diversity** - enabling people to accept different views and integrate with people from different backgrounds
- **Enhancing Business Performance** - enabling better bottom-line results

The results show an overwhelming support for the effect of the coaching intervention and furthermore validate the results of an earlier research study done in the same organisation (Everson & O’Flaherty, 2006). A sample of some of the results is shown below:

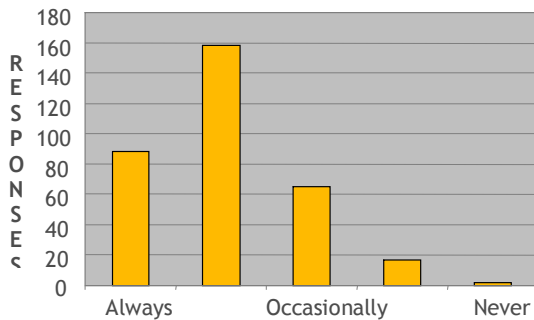


**Graph 1. Respondents Views - Impact of Coaching on Amplifying Leadership**



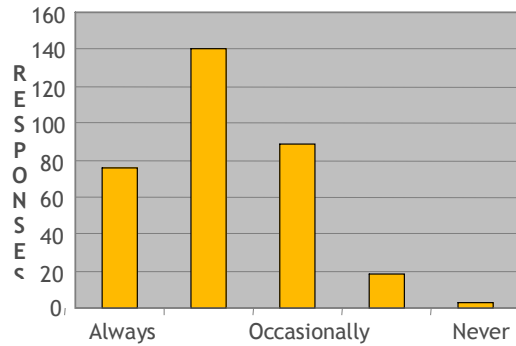
- “Coaching comes into leadership style very quickly, being more reflective before reacting, thinking before reacting.”
- “Coaching has matured me, made me grow as a person - made me more tolerant in terms of diversity - taught me to actively listen, helped me to be more empathic and compassionate in terms of my leadership. I have come to respect others point of view”

**Graph 2. Respondents Views - Impact of Coaching on Personal Growth & Development**



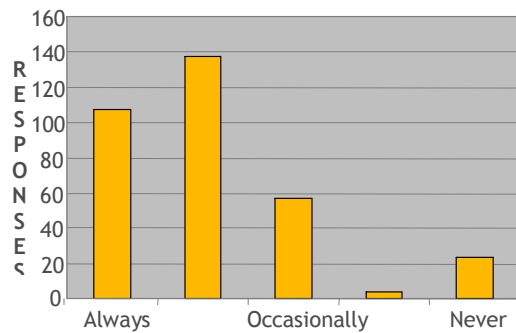
- “In coaching others, it emphasizes the leadership role that I have and is a very powerful tool that is used to provide guidance within my team. e.g. one coachee wanted to leave the company, to be able to guide someone on that decision is great.”
- “Coaching has made me ask the question, what could I have done to make this different?”

**Graph 3. Respondents Views - Impact of Coaching on Business Performance**



- “I think the impact of coaching on the company’s performance has been tremendous. People are being innovative.”
- “People are empowered, they are not running to you each time they don’t know what to do, but delegating responsibility and giving them power to make decisions”

**Graph 4. Respondents Views - Impact of Coaching on Building Diversity**



- “A Muslim member of the team admitted that coaching has allowed him to grow beyond the present and to realise that his religion has so much in common with other religions”
- “I have stepped out of my personality on occasion, and have tried to approach things the way I have seen people respond from learning from them in the coaching circle - it’s not only about looking at things in a different way, but also reacting in a different way.”



#### Section 4 - Cautions in using coaching

As with all powerful learning modalities there are always cautions and watchwords that apply. The very things that make coaching so powerful are the things that can cause deep disappointment and sub-optimal results when they are absent. The key aspects that organisations need to consider when introducing and rolling coaching out are as follows:

1. **Link to strategy.** Coaching interventions and programs that lack a strategic rationale and a direct link back to strategy are in serious danger of being seen as fads and unlikely to be taken seriously by the organisation. A clear question of 'How does the coaching intervention link back to strategy?' needs to be posed and answered. Coaching programs that are fragmented and patchy will achieve the results that they deserve
2. **Integration into human capital plans.** Coaching programs that aren't linked to and supported by or are supporting other human capital interventions are also like to be ineffectual. Clear understanding of how the coaching intervention is linked to the organisations leadership development and performance management philosophy must be present. Specific clarity on how the other human capital processes will support the outcomes of coaching also need to be clear
3. **Role modeling from the top.** Coaching programs not adopted by the senior executive team and role modeled as an accepted and require way of being in the organisation are also like to receive poor participation and buy-in from the organisation
4. **Common coaching language and approach.** There are multiple approaches and philosophies to coaching. Choose a common language and approach and standardize this for the organisation
5. **Choose certified coaches and practitioners.** In working with outside coaches and service training providers choose reputable practitioners who

are certified and have credible reference sites and previous experience

#### Conclusion

This article has sought to offer a clear and balanced view of what coaching is and is not and how it can best be applied in an organisational context. The kinds of impacts that can be expected from a coaching intervention were discussed and grounded in both local and international research findings. Finally, a few notes of caution were sounded as it is important that all current and potential users of coaching understand that coaching is not a silver bullet and that the optimal conditions for success need to be created in order for coaching to take root and flourish in any context.

Despite the note of caution, it is heartening and most encouraging to see what an impact coaching can have on both individuals and organisations. This modality needs to be encouraged and promoted wherever appropriate.

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