

EQUIPPING LEADERS TO COACH – AN ANDROGOGIC LEARNING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Coaching is a powerful way of building oneself and others in a manner that drives effectiveness and the ability to create new possibilities; both important elements of a leadership skill set. The relevance of coaching in this context is explored. It is argued that the learning philosophy, context, tools and processes utilised in order to enable leaders to master the subtleties of coaching need to be inspired by the same principles which research has shown facilitates adult learning. This creates an effective and powerful way of enabling leaders to master the complexities of coaching.

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INTRODUCTION

The challenges facing leaders continue to grow in proportion to the increasing complexity of our society. As these challenges grow there is a linked demand for leaders to master an increasing range of competencies to handle the intricacy of such trials. In this vein, scholars Arthur, Day, Jaworski, Jung, Nonaka, Scharmer, and Senge (2000) and Day (2000), propose that there is a growing focus on leadership development driven by the urgent need for organisations to find ways of building their leaders' capacity to deal with the unforeseen challenges brought by our ever-changing global reality. This paper begins with the premise that one of these essential skills is coaching. We have chosen to adopt an 'integral' perspective on the topic of coaching – one which integrates different theories in the coaching field, where we are able to crystallise key insights and to add an extra dimension to the topic. This is a world-view strongly advocated by philosophers such Wilber (2000) and Merleau-Ponty (2002) and is underlined in the coaching philosophies of coaching writers such as Flaherty (1999), Winograd & Flores (1999) and Sieler (2003b).

For the purposes of this paper, we conceptualise the applications of coaching as occurring across two dimensions. Graphically, this is illustrated in Figure 1. below:

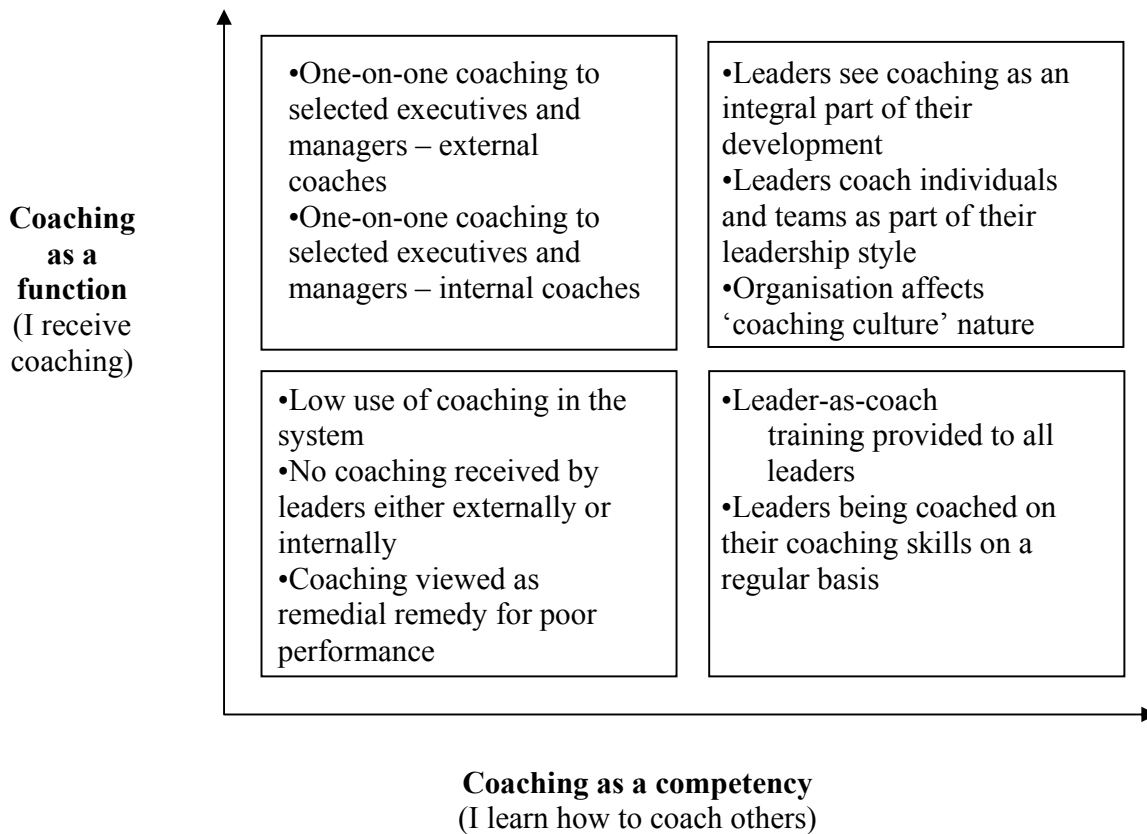


Figure 1. Applications of Coaching

Coaching as a function: Coaching in Figure1 refers to the process of one-on-one business or executive coaching, provided either by internal or external coaches. Together with their coach, leaders confront their competency to lead and structure a coaching programme tailored towards their developmental needs. This accords with a range of definitions of coaching postulated by researchers such as Flaherty (1999), Niemes (2002), Williams (2000) and Laske (1999).

Coaching as a competence: Coaching here refers to equipping executives with the competency to coach – either as an extension to their leadership armoury, or as a characteristic management style (Goleman, 2000; Sherman, 2002).

The combination of these applications of coaching directs the organisation closer to a ‘coaching culture’ in which the development of leaders, managers and executives is supported by coaching (Williams, 2000), and these individuals themselves are equipped to coach the people that they lead (Waldroop & Butler, 1996). The primary focus in this paper is coaching as a competence, equipping leaders with the capability to coach as a way of adding an additional facet to their proficiency as leaders.

This paper has been structured to:

- Reflect on the significance of coaching in the leadership skill set.
- Explore the challenges leaders, executives and managers have in acquiring, embedding and mastering coaching skills.
- Suggest some powerful methods founded in andragogic principles through which coaching skills can be transferred to leaders, executives and managers.

THE RELEVANCE OF COACHING IN LEADERSHIP

Creating a leadership lens

Research spanning 50 years that shows the complexity of the interrelationships between leadership and the social and organisational environment (Fiedler, 1996) is ignored when approaching leadership from a traditional perspective. Day (2000) argues that traditional leadership theory – such as transformational or charismatic leadership theory, has conceptualized leadership as an individual-level skill. A more holistic way of viewing the leadership challenge (Arthur et al., 2000) reflects the expanded role of the leader as:

“...the task of a leader to sense and recognize emerging patterns and to position him- or herself, personally and organizationally, as part of a larger generative force that will reshape the world.” (Arthur et al., 2000: 3)

The complexities and bounded chaos of the modern world have highlighted the inadequacies inherent in the current definitions of leadership and techniques of developing leaders. There is nevertheless an awareness growing that leaders are responsible for building a process to create shared meaning both in terms of enhanced value for the organisation and in terms of sense-making within a relational structure (Nelson, 1996). Leaders somehow, in some manner, need to develop a new cognitive, emotional and spiritual capacity that will enable them to notice and to pay attention to intangible sources of knowledge and knowing – the ‘knowledge for action’ espoused by Argyris (1993). The relevance of mapping the invisible territory of leadership – the tacit territory – is to develop a deeper level of knowing, a deeper level of awareness (Arthur et al., 2000). It is submitted here that coaching skills are a powerful vehicle through which to achieve this seemingly disparate set of objectives.

The significance of the above discourse lies less in trying to add even more required competencies to the already crowded lexicon of what being a leader entails. Rather, it is intended to signpost the fact that leaders equipped with traditional leadership tools alone may find it difficult to achieve the successes of leaders equipped by more powerful tools such as coaching. This paper strongly advocates and highlights the benefits that a systematic and measured approach to coaching leaders can take. This view is supported by various other proponents; Laske (1999), Eggers and Clark (2000), Hudson (1999), Kilburg (2000). Sadler (2003: 77) underlines this:

“According to Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989), leaders resolve dilemmas in the light of their own personal philosophies. These philosophies are usually tacit rather than explicit; they involve fundamental assumptions about human nature, about the roles of people in organisations, the nature of managerial work and the kinds of actions that contribute to organisational effectiveness. Like a geological deposit, these tacit philosophies build up over many years, through the experiences and influences that shape a person’s life”.

COACHING – A UNIQUE WINDOW

Defining coaching

Before exploring the unique role that coaching can play in complementing leaders’ skills, it would be valuable to spend some time exploring its dimensions. Coaching has become a clichéd word in social and management practice. It functions as an umbrella phrase which is used to describe processes as dissimilar as managing the strategy and implementation of the Saturday game-plan of sporting teams, to the casual words of advice offered in the corridor to a colleague struggling with some dilemma. Much of this confusion is due to the varied roots which have fed the current body of knowledge. According to Hudson (1999), the most basic root of coaching comes from the lineage of mentoring. The classic Homeric tale of Mentor, a wise and proven teacher who agrees to raise Telemachus (Odysseus’ son) while his father embarks on his epic journey underlines how far back the roots of coaching go. Eggers and Clark (2000) pinpoint the first reference to coaching in the context of management as being by author Miles Mace in 1958. Eggers and Clark (2000) trace an interesting blood-line for coaching:

- 1970's – the introduction of sport coaching methods into management literature and practice.
- 1980's – coaching as a developmental activity, free of its sports heritage.
- 1990's – coaching redefined within the paradigm of coach as a 'thought' or 'learning' partner.

A further perspective offered by Williams (2000), traces coaching's evolution differently, identifying the three separate streams of the helping professions (such as psychotherapy and counselling), consulting and organisational development and personal development training. In reality, coaching has become a strongly applied and researched process in the corporate context, with a track-record of twenty years in more developed economies. It has also developed a range of exponents, theories and schools which say and mean very different things when they use the term (Hudson, 1999; Kilburg, 2000; Laske, 1999).

What coaching is not

To start with a proposition about what coaching in a management or leadership context is categorically not: All too often the term is used broadly to embrace any kind of advice given in a friendly and constructive manner. Kilburg (2000: 59) highlights a literature review in which he concludes that the term executive coaching may simply be the newest label that practitioners are putting on a specific form of consultation they use in work with executives. This is damaging to coaching and leaves people with the illusion that simply by changing their tone of voice and their manner that inputs once seen as giving suggestions, answers, input and perspective and even manipulation, are now coaching. According to Flaherty (1999), a coach is *not*:

- Simply an accountability partner who supports someone to reach their goals.
- A disciplinarian who changes someone's unwanted actions.

- A cheerleader who supports from the side.
- A devil’s advocate who asks different questions or takes an alternative point of view, simply for the point of debate.

There are terms already for these roles – inspector, teacher, supporter and sounding-board. The danger of using the generic term ‘coach’ as a coverall for these is that it devalues and dilutes the true import of the role. It also leaves the leader with the illusion that simply by modifying elements as superficial as tone of voice, level of interest, or the number of questions asked, one can become a coach.

What coaching is

Coaching for the purposes of this paper has been framed within a philosophy of coaching which has been variously called ‘generative’, ‘ontological’ or ‘integral’ coaching. These words are used to describe a perspective on coaching which has academic and philosophical advocates.

Winograd & Flores (1999) are key figures in the formation of the discipline. Flores, a Chilean academic and modern management philosopher, was greatly influenced by the novel, yet biologically grounded teachings of philosopher Maturana (1998) on perception, cognition, language and communication. These concepts inspired research in which he particularly focussed on the existential philosophy of Heidegger (1999) and the linguistic work of Searle (1969). Flaherty (1999) has expanded these roots over the last ten years, into a category of integral coaching which blends the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (2002) and the work of modern philosopher Wilber (2000). A coach, from this perspective:

“Observes and works with key aspects of how the coachee (in our context, people who report to the leader) has structured their reality and the nature of their existence i.e. their perceptions and ways of participating in life” (Sieler, 2003a: 1).

In Flaherty's view coaching is thus:

"... (a) professional relationship grounded in mutual trust and respect and directed towards a set of clear outcomes, guided by presence and informed by broad models of what it means to be a human being" (Flaherty & Handelsman, 2004: 2).

The primary outcomes targeted by a coach working from this standpoint are competence and fulfilment. Flaherty & Handelsman (2004: 3) are specific in distinguishing these two concepts:

"Competence is distinct from a goal. A goal is something you achieve... Competence is a capacity that endures. It helps us achieve particular goals and stays with us afterwards... Fulfilment is a deeply felt experience that what we are doing and how we are living and who we are becoming is meaningful and worthwhile... From an individual perspective the value of fulfilment is self-evident. For organisations it makes a difference when people are fulfilled because they stay longer and generate better results."

The essential role of a leader-as-coach is thus to provide a powerful learning context in which coachees explore new distinctions that expand how they observe the world, enabling them to become more effective and powerful. Leaders-as-coach focus on enabling two specific outcomes for the people they work with; self-correction and self-generation. Flaherty & Handelsman (2004: 3) provide compelling distinctions for both:

"When we are self-correcting we have the capacity to observe discrepancies between what we intend and the actual outcomes, between the espoused values and our actual actions, and then bridge the gap. When clients are self-correcting, they are not dependant on the coach. When self-generating, we have the ability to

continuously renew ourselves by drawing upon resources from without and within.

When clients are self-generating, the development of competence becomes not a final end-state but a continuous process.”

Sieler (2003a), adds to these outcomes when he emphasises that the role of coaching is to work with coachees to help them understand how their way of observing the world (the issues, challenges and people they are dealing with) may be limiting the possibilities they are able to create. Coaches need to provide a context in which coachees are able to master new distinctions that enable them to develop in more powerful ways.

The challenges of transferring coaching skills

In the context of the above, the very nature of the coaching skills that are referred to has the potential to deeply challenge the leader’s own view of what constitutes best practice in managing people. This tends to lead to a paradigm shift for the leader. Working with leaders to transfer these skills has shown that the reasons for such paradigm shifts are as follows:

Advice versus insights. The whole thrust of the coaching process is to move the individual that the leader is working with (the coachee) to a point where they are able to see new possibilities within the challenges they are facing and are able to generate alternative options and behaviours from which to choose for themselves. The paradigm of the leader as expert, experienced and the source of knowledge is strongly challenged by this approach and often represents real difficulties for leaders. The tendency for those adopting coaching skills is to regress into ways they are comfortable with i.e. giving advice or telling people what to do. Also, this new role is likely to engender uncertainty and vulnerability in the leader who needs to come to terms with this new way of being.

Holding back versus intervening. The coaching process described places great store in the leader's ability to restrain him or herself from a rapid problem-solving approach, thus allowing the coachee the space and time to consider new options. Once again, it is notable that for leaders used to resolving issues instantaneously there are likely to be challenges to their patience and restraint, challenges which can lead to the leader reverting to type and taking control, rather than allowing the coachee to wrestle with the issue.

Questions and distinctions versus solutions. The coaching model favours the leader using powerful questions which cause the coachee to become aware of new possibilities or powerfully worded distinctions which help separate the issue into background and foreground elements, thus providing perspective and clarity. For leaders who've been trained, encouraged and rewarded for being 'one-step-ahead', the challenges of overcoming the ingrained impulse to identify and share solutions to the problem are likely to be considerable. There are also likely to be subconscious habits which are difficult to break.

For these reasons, the learning process used in bridging the leader's journey from their existing paradigm into this new and often uncertain one is key. A series of andragogic learning methods has been developed that enable impactful ways of highlighting, transferring and embedding coaching skills.

The andragogic learning model

The distinction between traditional pedagogic (teacher-centred) models of learning and more (learner-centred) andragogic models has been highlighted by the work of Knowles. Knowles' (1984) research and insights are captured in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Different Learning Modes

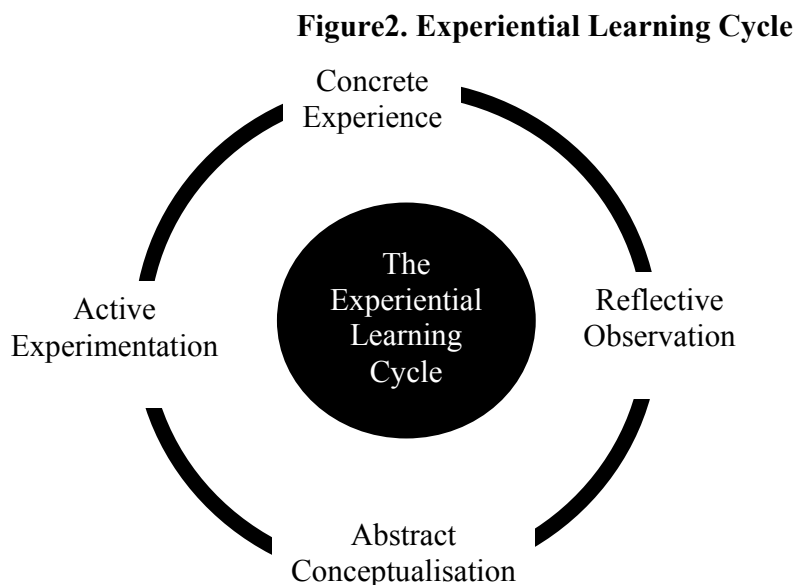
Aspect	Pedagogic	Andragogic
Learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependant on teacher • Teacher has full responsibility • Decisions as to what is learned and how, are the teacher's • Only role for learner to be submissive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner is self-directing • Drive is towards taking responsibility for self-concept • Feel resentment and resistance when feel others making decisions affecting learning experience • Energy gets diverted from learning when ability to be self-directing is absent
Learner's experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner has little experience of much value as resource for learning • Experience of the teacher or learning aids that count • Backbone of learning resides in the transmission techniques e.g. notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner enters with great volume of relevant experience • Learning seen as richest resource for self • Techniques need to make use of this experience • Individualised learning plans are key • Experience can also be source of bad habits and prejudices which learning must be designed to overcome • Rejecting learner experience is akin to rejecting the person
Readiness to learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students ready to learn what they are told • Readiness largely a function of age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness to learn based on need to know something to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives • Many triggers to learning exist

Source: (Knowles, 1984: 9-12)

Knowles' (1984) research provides insights for why learning methods that are informed by andragogic principles work well in the context of skilling leaders in coaching. The key hallmarks that delineate an andragogic learning approach are:

It must represent a strongly tailored context for development, in which the coachee (client) retains captaincy of the learning process and maintains responsibility for the outcomes of the process. In this learning process the teaching methods must play an important role in helping the leader to find out what drives their leadership behaviour and help to catalyse the desire to shift these behaviours towards a coaching way of being. The teaching methods need to ensure that leaders use their own experience in learning coaching as a basis for action, reflection and growth.

A second perspective as to why andragogic learning methods are valuable in the context of transferring coaching skills flows from the work of Kolb (1976). Kolb defines learning as a process by which knowledge is created by 'transforming learning into meaning'. The process is labelled as *experiential learning*, and occurs over the four phases pictured in Figure 2 below.



Source: (Kolb, 1976: 21)

The perspective outlined below on teaching coaching strongly mirrors this process of experiential learning. If the philosophy of integral coaching espoused by Flaherty (1999) is blended with Kolb's (1976) concept of experiential learning then:

Concrete experience - The leaders experience the learning process as one which forces them to become aware of the need to change what they are doing and how.

Reflective observation - The teaching methods encourage observations so that the leader becomes aware of and is able over the learning process to begin shifting their behaviour in ways which embed the skill and learning.

Abstract conceptualisation - The leader is able to pause and consider the various models and distinctions of coaching in a grounded way.

Active experimentation - The leader tries new practices designed to encourage acting and responding in a coaching way which further reinforces the learning.

TEACHING COACHING – ANDRAGOGIC LEARNING METHODS

The varieties of coaching teaching tools that mirror the above principles and that can be used to ensure an impactful learning process are as follows:

Coaching circles

Coaching circles help leaders to make sense of the dilemmas, challenges or issues they face in their jobs and to explore effective actions to resolve them. Circles also help them gain first hand experience in coaching their peers in ways that open new possibilities for action, reflection and learning. Coaching circles work on the basis of collaborative inquiry. In this context, asking insightful questions and reflecting on the possibilities they create is considered to be more

valuable and to have more impact than providing expert knowledge or specific answers to problems.

Typical coaching circles are composed of six leaders and one coach who meet for one day every six weeks. The leaders can be from within the same division or can also be leaders engaged in a similar activity e.g. a project or an executive development program. The coach helps the group to master the process and build their learning and coaching competence. The leaders are first trained in the basics of coaching dialogue, flow, questions and practices. During group sessions, each leader gets “air time” to address a project or challenge he/she brings to the group. The leader briefly outlines what he/she has done and the most pressing challenges or dilemmas he/she is facing. In response to the leader’s specific request, group members ask questions that help the leader to shed new light on the issues and to explore new possibilities for action. They avoid providing advice or trying to solve problems. Near the end of the time period, the coach intervenes to allow the leader to reflect on what was heard, which questions were helpful and what actions he/she intends to take. Other participants also reflect on what they learned from the exchange. The group takes a few minutes to share their insights and observations before moving on to the next “air time”.

This way of working together over time provides leaders with a wide range of opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and performance. When used effectively the circles achieve the following results:

Leaders learn to reflect – This means first and foremost that they learn to stop, i.e. to break away, if only momentarily, from the treadmill of immediate transactions. Reflecting on experiences makes learning explicit. In coaching circles, leaders practice paying attention to the process they are engaged in, to what they are learning and to their and the group’s

observations and requirements. They learn to respect silence and stillness as a means for action rather than to view it as time wasted.

Leaders learn to see from other peoples' points of view – In order to attend to their peers' needs and to be of service to them, leaders learn to detect underlying beliefs and assumptions and understand the way others see the world. They learn to pay attention to the language their peers use and the actions they take in order to access their world and to help them gain new perspectives from which to see their problems or challenges. The questions leaders raise challenge their colleagues' assumptions and push them to consider new possibilities for action. Through this process, leaders uncover important clues in relation to their own learning and development.

Leaders learn about themselves – Coaching circles provide a safe ground from which to explore personal strengths and weaknesses and to admit, "I don't know". Humility is a great asset for learning and leaders have ample opportunity to practice this with their trusted peers. Learning about oneself also means paying attention to one's mood, feelings, somatic responses and what triggers them. It means being able to detach oneself from the action and to observe objectively what has happened, e.g. what did I notice in this situation? How did I decide what to do? Gaining access into one's inner world is an essential step to coaching others with compassion and respect.

Leaders learn how to listen – Listening is often considered one of those skills that is easy to measure, i.e. the absence of speaking. In reality, listening is much more than that. In coaching circles, leaders develop their ability to suspend judgment so that they can listen fully to what others are saying. Listening requires patience, the ability to hold the other person with full attention and the ability to hold the silence long enough for the other person

to process what may have just happened. Leaders learn to listen in ways that generate possibilities for reflection and action. Their challenge is to integrate this skill in how they manage the web of relationships they must count on to meet their commitments.

Leaders learn to give and receive feedback – In coaching circles, leaders constantly practice their ability to observe others and to make assessments about their situations. They use these skills to ask open-ended questions during the circle time, and to provide feedback during the guided debriefing periods scheduled after each coaching session and at the end of each day. Debriefings are a common tool for leaders to review and learn from their actions. Giving and getting honest and precise feedback from a perspective of support and respect is probably one of the most potent actions leaders can take to develop themselves and those around them.

Leaders learn to ask the right kinds of questions – Asking questions is core to coaching circles. It's the glue that holds the process together. In an era when knowledge is created at an exponential rate and leaders are constantly asked to do more with less, the art of asking questions, if not a survival skill, is a key leadership skill. Questions help people in their reflection, challenge their beliefs and assumptions, and stimulate new ways of seeing the world which in turn generate different possibilities for action. Questions empower others to make their own decisions and to learn while doing so. Telling others what to do is often a short-term solution. A leader-coach needs to decide which method should be employed to achieve results in the short and long term.

All of the above skills are key in being able to coach and are transferred in this powerful, experiential way.

Learning pods

Pods represent collective learning communities that function as crucibles for sharing reflected learning. In the coaching learning process the leaders are divided into ‘learning pods’ – collections of four to six leaders who are going through the same learning experience. The pods become fora for collaborative learning in which the leaders being trained can share their experiences of coaching and complete shared learning exercises and projects. These projects can be directed at particular skills or development areas in the coaching repertoire. Examples of skills areas that can be included in this context are:

- Combined projects collating combined group research on coaching, its application and what success has been achieved.
- Group reflection documents which pull together lessons learned by the individual members into a synthesised format.
- Group insights about the coaching learning process.

All of these exercises can then be presented to and shared with other pods to enhance overall class learning.

‘Real’ plays

Coaching skills can only be learned when one is working with ‘live’ issues so that one is able to measure the impact of questions asked, distinctions given and practices assigned. A powerful learning method used during classroom time is to let members of the class coach each other one-on-one on real issues, rather than acting through the charade of hypothetical scenarios. It is essential to create an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality in the class before such a process is used. When the conditions are favourable it represents an authentic and memorable learning experience. The kinds of benefits flowing from this method are:

- **Coaching ‘feel’** – Leaders are able to get a visceral ‘feel’ for how coaching works in reality. They are able to see from the coachee’s reaction when questions have impact. They are able to watch the body language of the coachee to start calibrating the impact of the distinctions they make in opening up new possibilities. They will also be able to see, from the reaction of their coachee, when they are no longer making an impact with their coaching.
- **Real-time corrections** – The coaching instructor, who walks around the class whilst the one-on-one ‘real’ plays are in progress, is able to listen in and to stop a process and ask the coach if they would like to change approach or direction based on the response they have received. The instructor is also able to stop a ‘real’ play and get the coachee to give input on how they experienced the process and suggestions they have for the coach to work in a more effective manner.

Coaching demonstrations

Watching experienced coaches coach is an additional method used to role model the flow of coaching. Leaders are able to watch actual examples unfolding. The demonstrations can be used by the class to reflect during or after completion as to how and why certain approaches were taken and for leaders to watch the impact of effective coaching at work. This method has strong echoes of the ‘apprenticing’ tradition which is core to learning in many professions. It enables leaders to have the picture of ‘what good looks like’ as an ongoing point of reference as their own competency evolves. Coaching demonstrations by experienced coaches have a number of benefits:

- **Theory into practice** – the demonstrations reflect how the theory of coaching can be translated into practical effect and the impact of this on the coachee can be

closely examined. This serves to take coaching out of the conceptual and founds it in tangible execution.

- **Watching reality unfold** – Leaders are able to gain a view of the options at their disposal when confronted by actual cases and to watch how experienced practitioners navigate their way through actual challenges and shifts during the coaching session.

Revolving triads

An additional learning method, which can be used to enhance the ‘real-play’ scenarios discussed above, is to combine leaders into triads composed of a coach, a coachee and an observer. These triads then operate as ‘revolving’ perspectives, with each triad member playing a different role at different times. The leaders are thus able to experience the coaching process from three vitally different perspectives. This helps to keep the learning perspective fresh and energised by the possibilities that open up or close down depending on the role adopted. Each member gives feedback after each round:

- The client on how they experienced the impact of the coaching and the things they felt worked and might have been done differently.
- The coach on how they thought the session went and some views on what they could have changed.
- The observer with an objective reflection on how they believe the coaching worked.

Coaching assignments and feedback

The practical emphasis of the learning approach outlined thus far is further reinforced by the practice of leaders sourcing actual and willing coaching clients on whom they can refine their

coaching skills. Such assignments are then submitted to the coaching instructor in the form of written reports. The instructor is able to give insightful feedback on how the coaching process is unfolding and by coaching the leader through the inception, roll-out and completion of the assignment give powerful support to the process.

Personal coach

The above process can be greatly enhanced by the assignment of a personal coach to the leader. The personal coach is tasked with not only coaching the leader through their skills development as a coach but also through other challenges they may be experiencing. The sensation and experience of receiving coaching is perhaps one of the most powerful ways that a learner-coach can understand the impact of what happens in the coaching process. Living through the experience gives valuable insights as to what works and what does not work, as well as how it feels to be coached.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focussed on the various learning methods and techniques which have been deployed in order to enable leaders to understand and internalise the concept of how to coach others. It is important to stress that even after experiencing the full range of such techniques; (coaching circles, learning pods, 'real' plays, live coaching demonstration, revolving triads, assignments & feedback and personal coaching), even then, a leader will not have achieved full mastery of the coaching process.

Coaching is a competence that requires much practice and much experience – we know that the message has truly been communicated when a leader shares their realisation that coaching is in fact a life skill, a way of being that requires long-term commitment and ongoing practice.

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