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## **Developing the Coach -Using work based learning masters and doctorate programmes to facilitate coaches learning.**

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“In a reflective practicum, the role and status of a coach take precedence over those of a teacher as teaching is usually understood. The coach’s legitimacy does not depend on his scholarly attainments or proficiency as a lecturer but on the artistry of his coaching practice.” The question is not how much you know, but rather how effectively you can help others to learn. (Schon 1987)

### **Introduction**

Programmes in work based learning (WBL) use many pedagogic devices, from delivering subject based knowledge through work place observation to facilitating professional knowledge and understanding on developing practice. We are concerned with the latter and specifically the role of the advisor within this context. Similarly, many different approaches are used in programmes designed to develop coaches. Some focus on teaching theory underpinning coaching practice, and some concentrate on enhancing the skill of coaches. Many incorporate a mixture of both. Here lies the long debated theory and practice divide issue in the development of practitioners.

In models of WBL that give primacy to the candidate within their work based context as central to the learning process, it can be argued that there is a greater opportunity for personal learning of a kind that is highly relevant to the coaching profession. Learning that relies strongly on understanding oneself and ones’ ability to communicate effectively with others. Theory is relevant to understanding the process, but the mastery of practicing effectively is in the foreground. Facilitating this kind of work based learning can thus be compared with the coaching process itself. When the work based learner is a coach this means that the approach to development being used is comparable with the processes the coaches are involved in. An element of modelling may be involved as the coach develops their own model of engaging with clients.

Accredited programmes of study necessarily require more than facets to the facilitation of learning. Whether it be professional or academic accreditation, benchmarks of achievement are measured through formal assessments. Involvement in this process will inevitably put another complexion on the relationship between candidate and learning facilitator. We now to on to explore the nature of the relationship between a facilitator and a candidate coach on work based masters and professional doctorate programmes, but begin by defining the coaching concept.

## **The concept of coaching**

Coaching was first formally identified as a practice within sales forces in the 1930s (Bigelow, 1938) but it is within the last decade that it has grown to be part of the accepted development portfolio of executives and managers in both private and public sectors. Coaching has also found popularity in other areas such as life coaching and coaching for performance. To simplify further discussion in the paper we focus attention on executive or work based coaching.

There is no commonly accepted definition of coaching but one of the more thorough is:

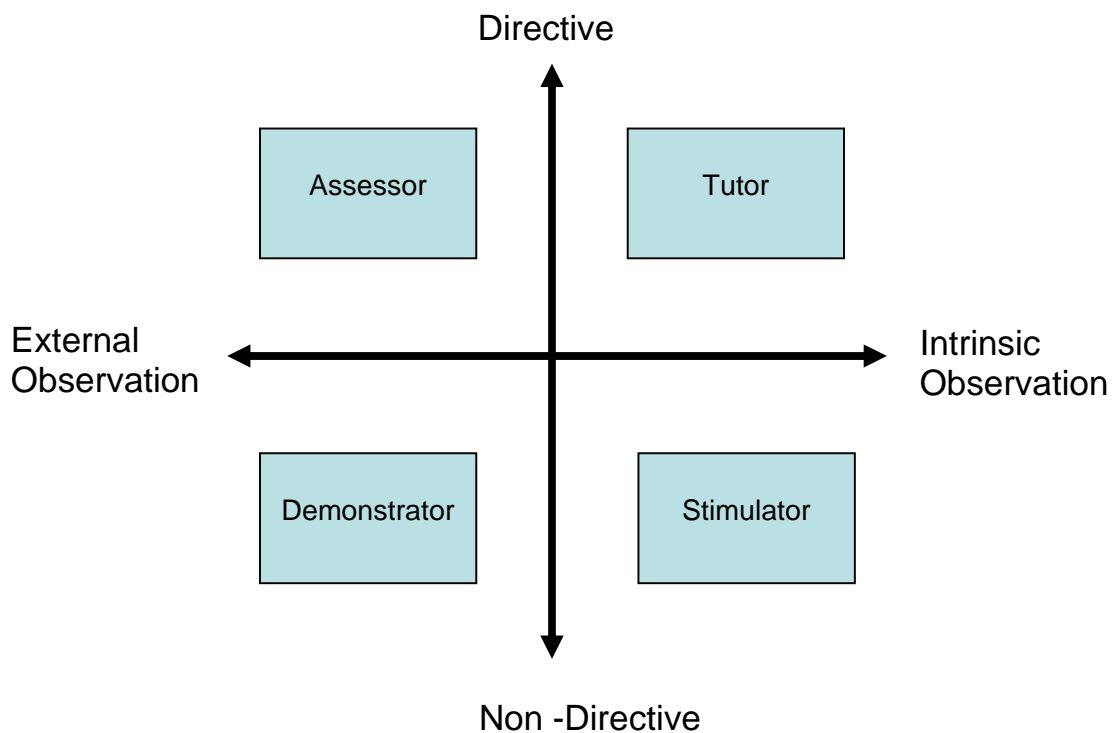
*“a collaborative and egalitarian relationship between a coach, who is not necessarily a domain-specific specialist, and Client, which involves a systematic process that focuses on collaborative goal setting to construct solutions and employ goal attainment process with the aim of fostering the on-going self-directed learning and personal growth of the Client”* (Grant & Stober, 2006)

The relationship is, by necessity, flexible and responsive to the needs of the client and their organisation. The process of coaching is therefore complex and multifaceted and this has led to a perception of it being ill-defined and lacking rigor. However there is a growing literature defining coaching's unique knowledge base (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004) and frameworks, such as that developed by Clutterbuck and Megginson (2005) in figure 1 below provide a means of exploring its complexity. In this model the coaching process or style is seen to be contingent up two major factors and these are represented by two axis of a grid. The vertical axis identifies the extent by which the agenda is set by the client or the coach – in effect the client-focus of the coach. The horizontal axis identifies the extent to which the observation or reflection is with the client (intrinsic observation) and how much with the coach (external observation). The role of coach then becomes clear within each quadrant.

The coach is seen as assessor and demonstrator when external observation is high, as can happen when performance coaching for improvement of a skill or activity. In tutor mode, the coach may suggest and identify new areas of knowledge or sources of information; for example when coaching a manager in their first strategic role. It is in stimulator mode that the coach enters what is perhaps their unique and defining function – the role of facilitating the learning of the client through insightful questioning. Here the coach is not seeking to impart new knowledge or assess the competence of the client rather they assist the client in analysis and reflection to achieve their full learning potential.

A coach will not expect to maintain one specific style throughout a coaching engagement. They will move fluidly (hopefully) between the styles in response to the clients’ needs. A coach may have a preferred style and this will define both the type of coach they are and their preferred client base. Coaching at Board level to seasoned professionals will demand a stimulator style whereas performance coaching for a specific skill may use a mixture of all four styles. Within all styles the coach invites the client to reflect upon their practice; the degree of direction the coach brings to this is perhaps the differentiator between them.

**Figure 1 Coaching Styles**



The definitions of coaching generally concentrate upon the stimulator quadrant, for example:

*'a learning relationship which helps people to take charge of their own development, to release their potential and to achieve results that they value'*  
Connor and Pakora (2007)

As with all definitions there is the potential for debate and it is not our purpose here to progress that dialogue. What is of note is that all definitions have in common the perspective of coach as the facilitator of the learning of the client in order to affect change in their practice or life process.

How this learning is enabled has been the subject of significant enquiry and review (Kampa Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). It is generally identified that the coaching engagement is a place for reflective dialogue and it is this dialogue which is the vehicle for learning and change. The development of such dialogue is well explored by Brockbank and McGill (2006). They distinguish between the internal reflection of the individual and the process of reflection-with-another (or coaching) which they identify as reflective dialogue.

Personal reflection alone relies upon the individual's own view of the world and contains

*'assumptions, beliefs, perspectives and ways of construing and acting upon experience'* (Weil and McGill 1989).

These may remain unchallenged during personal reflection whereas their exploration will be an explicit part of the agenda during reflective dialogue. As identified by Jarvis (1987)

*'Learning should be regarded as a social phenomenon as well as an individualistic one'*

and clearly reflective dialogue is a means by which such interpersonal learning can be explored.

The generation of dialogue is not trivial and it is well established that the facilitation of significant learning rests upon qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator [i.e. coach] and learner (Rogers, 1983:121). Research has identified that the competencies required of a coach are those which promote the reflective dialogue (Dingman, 2004):

- Interpersonal skills: empathy, encouragement, genuineness, authenticity, approachability, compassion, intelligence
- Communication skills: tact, listening /silence, questions, playful exchange
- Instrumental support: creativity, dealing with paradox, self-knowledge, positive regard, tolerance for intervention made, stimulation to think, feel and explore new ideas & behaviours, working on resistance to change

Further research into competence frameworks has been undertaken by coaching professional bodies such as ICF, EMCC and WABC and the interested reader is referred to them for fuller descriptions of the resulting frameworks.

The success of the interaction also resides with the client or coachee. They must be receptive to this interaction and research to date (Jarvis, Lane, & Fillery-Travis, 2006) suggests the attributes required are predominantly:

- A degree of self awareness –ability to reflect, sufficient to consider alternative points of view without becoming so defensive that they are rejected without consideration. (This includes the absence of psychopathology/disordered thinking.)
- Ability to give and receive feedback based on objective criteria.
- An ability to undertake a performance analysis to explore factors of influence helping or hindering change and use that information to supportively challenge ones own and others perspectives.
- A level of action planning sufficient to draw up a viable personal development plan that can be applied in the context in which the individual works.
- Ability to use a network of support.

In summary the coach is a facilitator of learning through reflective dialogue with a client who is motivated to achieve their potential within the defined area of concern. The coach will be working at three levels of awareness; personal, interpersonal and systemic and, of course, at the interplay between them.

Clearly there is comparison to be made with another facilitator of learning for mature students within a work environment and that is the role of advisor within WBL

### **The advisor as coach and mirror of the coaching process**

Conventional supervisory roles for higher degrees concentrate upon the generation of research training and research outcomes. They provide students with the opportunity to achieve their professional or academic goal and to learn about research within an academic community operating on pre- defined standards. In return for their contribution to this learning the supervisor has a willing worker on a research project within his area of expertise and own research focus.

Project work within higher WBL degrees, offers a radical alternative to this convention as explored by Boud and Costley (2007). Within this research they identify and expand upon the movement

*‘to focus learning in the ‘real-world’ projects of individuals and groups doing ‘real-time’ work, paid or unpaid’ (Boud and Soloman 2001).*

As such, the projects are the subject of 'learning agreements' explicitly drawn up between the candidate, their organisation and the university. This removes the project from both the location of the university and from the expertise or discipline base of the research supervisor. The knowledge is transdisciplinary and practice-based (Gibbons et al 1994) so the student becomes the 'expert' in terms of the existing context and knowledge boundaries. As a practitioner-researcher the candidate will be drawing upon a range of resources from themselves, within the work context and the university. They will be designing the project outcomes for impact within the work context as well as achieving academic standards. The result is a shift in power and judgement from the supervisor towards the student. The resulting collaborative engagement between supervisor and student can be acknowledged within WBL programmes by the change in name from supervisor to advisor and student to candidate.

Clearly the role of advisor is profoundly different from conventional research supervisor and requires a range of specific competencies over and above that of conventional research expertise. Boud and Costley (2007) found five clusters of competencies:

- Knowledge of work and its context – working cultures; their restriction and opportunities
- Learning consultancy skills – acknowledging candidates knowledge base, identification of learning opportunities, construction of project within the work context
- Transdisciplinary awareness –ability to identify and communicate knowledge which embraces a range of disciplines
- Enquiry approaches – knowledge of flexible and collaborative methods of enquiry leading to research and development opportunities
- Reflexivity and reviewing skills –a reflective and evaluative approach which incorporates both self awareness and management with formalised assessment protocols and procedures.

It is in the consideration of these competencies that a description of project advisor as advisor-as-coach becomes apparent. Specifically the aim of advising has shifted from achievement of technical outputs to development of the learning of the candidate. The projects are learner managed with a negotiated contract identifying fully the expectations of learner, organisation and advisor (through the university).

As identified by Boud and Costley (2007)

*' To support project work now is to find ways of assisting students to develop the expertise needed in any given situation... There is little appropriate didactic role in transmitting knowledge.'*

We would suggest that an advisor-as-coach construct is a more unified description of the advisory role. The coaching style of the advisor will respond to the ability of the candidate to engage in higher level analysis and reflection and we would expect a fluid movement between the assessor and tutor styles in response to issues such as meeting

academic standards and advising on research approaches. However, given the contextualisation of the project and the 'expert' status of the candidate in some of the significant knowledge realms of their project, the role of stimulator seems an appropriate and descriptive one within the realm of project development and activity.

The question for the advisor becomes not how much do you know but rather how effectively you can help others to learn (Schon 1987). The adviser-as-coach might facilitate learning through helping candidates make tacit knowledge explicit, encouraging synthesis of information or enabling space to find new ways of understanding.

### **Critique of current practice and its application to coach development**

WBL has been the pedagogic design for development of professional coaches through several professional Masters and Doctorate programmes. We would like to explore here what this design brings to the education of coaches specifically and how it can provide a vehicle for the development of competence beyond purely that which is assessed.

As identified above the competencies required for a professional coach are deeply rooted within self awareness, communication, relationship building, establishing trust and respect/rapport, facilitating depth of understanding. In recent years it has become clear that these personal and interpersonal competencies and qualities are important in high level professional practice in general (Eraut 2004). This is also found within professional doctorates where Costley and Stephenson (2008) found that candidates identified

*'that the learner-managed features of the learning process contributes significantly to the candidates professionalism over and above that which is gained from the specialist activities upon which they were assessed'*

The MProf and DProf programmes specifically require candidates to review their own learning to date; requiring deep reflection upon their professional development and practice. Candidates also make a claim for the recognition and accreditation of their learning from relevant certificated programmes and/or experiential learning. The consideration of learning and self assessment at both Masters and Doctorate level leads to the development of sophisticated analysis skills which are congruent with those expected within their coaching models i.e. in the assessment and feedback competence required to assist their clients. The adviser-as-coach provides support for reflection to enable connections between past, current and future learning. This promotes the kind of self knowledge that coaches might also encourage in order to grow their client's confidence to achieve.

This enrichment of their self awareness becomes the corner stone of further self development and drives the formulation of the programme plan itself. Within this document the candidate identifies the learning sought from the programme. The successful completion of this plan relies not only on reflection upon practice but also an analysis of requirements for further learning thus embodying the concept of reflexivity in



the application of the subsequent learning to their work. Supporting candidates through this process involves assisting them to develop a clear vision of their future and the means by which to achieve their goals. Here perhaps all four coaching styles in figure 1 may be used by the coach-as-adviser and the candidate experiences styles that may become part of their own repertoire.

The development of project work allows the senior professional coach to generate new knowledge using appropriate research approaches. The overall self direction and planning new directions for practice are appropriate and necessary for the coach to master if they are to promote them in their work with their clients. During the project the adviser-as-coach maintains a relationship with their candidate over what can be several years for a professional doctorate. A genuine, authentic relationship and approachable style are crucial to manage the inevitable changes and challenges that will occur during this period, and here again we see a parallel with those skills identified as essential for a good coach.

So far we have considered the learning achieved from the process of doing a WBL higher degree and some of the implicit learning achieved from the interaction with the adviser-as-coach. As we have considered previously, the advisor is not an expert in the organisational context or probably within the multi-disciplinary focus of the candidate's work. The advisor is required to sit with a relatively high degree of ambiguity and uncertainty as they cannot control or dictate the learning sought or achieved by the candidate. The candidate is also experiencing appropriate uncertainty in relation to the development and progress of their programme. The uncertainty of the candidate and the advisor is shared, albeit from different perspectives. The advisor will, in effect, be working for some of their role within the stimulator style. This shared exploration of uncertainty from two perspectives is at the heart of reflective dialogue and provides a mirror of practice for the coach and a deepened understanding of the experience of being a client.

## **Summary**

We have briefly explored the concept of coaching and how the skills required of a coach mirror those of an adviser on WBL programmes that can be provided for the developing coach. Coaching takes many forms, as does 'teaching' and we have outlined how some forms of coaching may be appropriate for facilitating WBL. Knowledge and understanding of coaching is derived from a wide range of other areas of practice such as sports coaching, psychotherapy, counselling and human resource management, and from the theories underpinning these areas. One might expect education to be another area, however, this is less well articulated, perhaps because many subjects are content-driven and taught rather than focused on the facilitation of personal learning to support real world projects. We hope this paper will encourage further exploration of coaching theory and practice to inform the adviser-as-coach learning relationship

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