

An Integrative Model for Executive Coaching



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Abstract

Executive coaching has grown in popularity, but in spite of this growth, the use of sophisticated approaches appears limited. This article brings together a series of evidence-based approaches to build an integrated model for executive coaching, which can be described as integrative coaching.

This model uses the concept of working at multiple levels with coaches; behavioral, cognitive, and unconscious. It combines these elements into “streams,” which the coach works across seamlessly. The model recognizes the central importance of building a coaching partnership and the role of emotional intelligence in this process with a focus on improving performance at work.

Key words: Executive coaching, integrated model, cognitive behavioral coaching, humanistic coaching, psychodynamic coaching

Introduction

The past decade has seen a significantly growth in executive coaching with a corresponding increase in the number of academic contributions (Grant, 2004; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). In spite of this increase in writing and reflection, the range of coaching models available to coaches owes more to the experience of coaches with backgrounds in counseling and psychotherapy than those with a back- ground in business. We have seen the development of rational emotive behavior therapy (Sherin & Caiger, 2004), psychodynamic coaching (Rotenberg, 2000; Kilburg, 2004), solution-focused coaching (Grant & Cavanagh, 2002), and cognitive coaching (Neenan & Dryden, 2001). In contrast, there have been few contributions with a strong conceptual grounding based within the fields of change or leadership development. No coaching models have emerged from popular theories, such as transitional change (Bridges, 2003), or from developmental leadership models, such as emotionally intelligent leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis & Mckee, 2002). An exception to this is the exciting contribution of action frames theory (Cocivera & Cronshaw, 2004) and Laske's (1999) contribution on the theme of development coaching. This dearth of cross-fertilization and the focus on transferring a single model from its therapy origins to coaching has left coaching without a holistic model which the executive coach can use as a guide within the business world. Further such single models fail to reflect accurately the true eclectic practice which have developed in the world of therapy (Smith, 1982; Mahalik, 1990; Arnkoff & Glass, 1992; Hill & Corbett, 1993).

This article aims to begin the process of developing a model which is designed for the executive boardroom rather than one that has been transferred from the therapist's couch. Although it is not claimed that the integrative model is unique, the blend of elements provides a distinctive approach. The model is strongly evidence-based, and it is hoped others will reflect on it and develop it further.

It could be argued that the primary objective of executive coaching is to facilitate performance enhancing behavioral change within the workplace. This view is widely shared by writers (Levinson, 1996; Popper & Lipshitz, 1992; Thach & Heinselman, 1999). However, many writers in the field implicitly put the same amount of value on well-being and self-regard as goals in themselves. It is acknowledged that such factors are important, alongside deepening self-awareness and a stronger motivation to act.

However, the primary measure of success of executive coaching is its impact on the development of more effective work- place behavior.

Overview of the Model

The Integrative Coaching Model consists of six “streams.” The “streams” flow together in a seamless way, with the coach moving between streams in the movement. Although the model suggests a typical pattern of immersion, moving clockwise, the pattern is not fixed and instead responds to the moment to moment changes observed by the coach in the room and his developed intuitive response.

The first stream (developing the coaching partnership) draws on work from the humanistic tradition. The second stream (maintaining the coaching partnership) draws on both emotional intelligence and aspects from the psychodynamic tradition. The coach needs to start here to create an effective relationship between the coach and coachee, and to maintain this throughout what we call the “coaching partnership.” Without this initial investment in the relationship, progress on change will be difficult. The work of maintaining the relationship continues through the coaching experience as the coach pays attention to his interactions with the coachee.

The following three streams, where the focus of change occurs, build on Schein’s work (1985) on organization culture. Schein identified five levels which he suggested exist within organizations; artifacts, behaviors, mind sets, emotional ground, and motivation. These levels can equally be applied to the individual within the organization.

The third stream (behavioral focus) is at the core of all executive coaching: behavioral change. The aim is to support behavioral change and to achieve this through deepening the coachee’s problem-solving and planning skills.

The fourth stream (conscious cognition) draws upon cognitive–behavioral coaching interventions. The aim of the work in this stream is to deepen the coachee’s understanding of the relationship between their thoughts and their behavior.

The fifth stream (unconscious cognition) focuses on the cognitive processes which are outside of conscious awareness. The aim of the coach in this stream is to deepen the self-awareness of the coachee by bringing into conscious awareness aspects of thought and motivation that inhibit their effective behavioral performance. This stream draws upon the psychodynamic tradition, but can also uses techniques from psychological

specialist approaches including motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Passmore & Whybrow, 2007) and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR; Shapiro & Forrest, 1997).

A sixth stream surrounds the model. It is the cultural context in which both coach and coachee operate. The coach will consciously hold an awareness of the boundaries and codes which this stream imposes, which may be ethical, legislative, or organizational.

While working in each of these streams, the coach should maintain in his or her mind the overall goal of helping the coachee enhance his work performance.

The Coaching Partnership: Streams 1 and 2

Before any coaching to enhance performance can begin the coach needs to build a relationship with the coachee. The potentially close and affirming relationship of coaching demands mutual respect and trust before deeper work can begin. Although these are central to establishing a successful relationship, this is not enough by itself. This perspective that Roger's (1957) conditions are necessary but not sufficient is one shared by other writers (Patterson, 1984). The coach also needs to continually work on this relationship maintaining the coachee's trust and respect.

What constitutes the necessary conditions for the formation of such a relationship? This question has in part already been answered for us by the work of humanistic writers such as Rogers (1957). He suggested that a series of elements needs to be in place for a successful therapeutic alliance to be formed. It can be argued that these relationship elements are of equal importance in any work with individuals in the consulting world. The closer the relationship and the smaller the group, the stronger the investment the consultant (coach) needs to make in the relationship. It is also at the start of the relationship when the relationship is most fragile that the coachee is asking themselves, "Do I trust my coach?", "Do I like my coach?", and "Do I value what my coach is offering?"

Although Roger's six conditions are useful for the executive coach to understand, the executive coach in the 21st century needs to take account both of metasearch over past 50 years since Roger's original writing (Patterson, 1984) and also the corporate environment in which they work.

Five elements are critical to help build a “coaching partnership” between coach and coachee.

The coach needs to hold a positive self-image. The coach needs to believe he is able to work constructively in an adult relationship within another person. This may be viewed as the “I’m ok” part of the transactional analysis (TA) model.

A second element is a belief in the coachee: positive regard for the coachee. The belief by the coach that the coachee, as an adult, is able to find, through appropriate support and challenge, answers to their own problems. This may be viewed as the “you’re ok” part from TA.

A third element is the ability of the coach to display empathy during the coaching relationship. The coach needs to demonstrate during coaching that he understands and cares about the coachee.

A fourth element is that the coach needs to act openly and honestly in his relationship with the coachee. To be able to express what he feels in an open and honest way, in contrast with feeling or thinking one thing, and communicating something else. Such duplicity will leak out and will damage the relationship. This is not to say the coach continually expresses his feelings, but rather manages this process sharing insights or views only when this is judged to be of value to the coachee.

A final element which the coach needs to pay attention to is the focus. The coach needs to ensure the coachee is at the heart of what the coach does. This means the coach uses questions, challenges, support, and contributions with the sole objective of meeting the needs of the coachee.

It can be argued that the result of these daringly simple responses enables a warm, trusting, and open relationship to develop. A relationship in which the coachee is able to share the full truth of his or her perception and feels accepted rather than judged. It is also a relationship in which the coach is able to gradually increase the level of personal challenge without devaluing the affirming nature of coaching. I have noted earlier that while Rogers argued that such a relationship by itself has a positive effect, this was not fully supported by counseling research. This view is also supported by my own research (Passmore, 2006) on the value which executives experience from coaching. The findings suggest that although a positive coaching partnership can help build the

coachee's self-esteem, by itself this is not enough for executives to meet their expectations or needs.

Once a relationship has been formed, the role of the coach is to maintain this relationship. To achieve this goal an effective coach needs to play attention to three aspects: (1) his own emotions and behaviors, (2) the emotions and behaviors of the coachee, and (3) the coach needs to manage his emotions and adapt his behavioral responses appropriately to maintain both professional detachment while offering personal intimacy. These components make up the building blocks of emotional intelligence (Caruso & Salovey, 2004; Stein & Book, 2000). Research (Stein & Book, 2000) suggests that those with high emotional intelligence are more likely to be able to form and maintain effective relationships.

As part of this use of emotional intelligence, the highly effective coach will consider transference and countertransference issues within their relationship with the coachee. These aspects are of particular importance in the executive suite where power and influencing are seen as key skills and role modeling is seen as a way to learn at the most senior level. The result is that the coach can be seen as the superhero (or supervillain) as characteristics of others are projected onto them in the relationship. These aspects can offer a useful tool to work with, but equally, if not identified, can be damaging to the relationship.

These two aspects of building and maintaining the relationship form a ring around the three remaining streams. They hold the relationship together and provide a safe space in which the coach and coachee can work together in partnership.

Behavioral Focus: Stream 3

The third and most popular stream in which the coach works is that of behavioral coaching. For this stream I have drawn upon the behaviors and artifacts levels within Schein's (1985) model.

Whatever the coach's theoretical orientation, a focus on external behavior and how this is adapted is a central feature of almost all executive coaching relationships. In the workplace, few employers are concerned with deeper invisible attitudes held within the "black box of the mind." All that the employer can see is expressed behavior, and the individual's ability to manage and adapt these behaviors to individuals and situations in order to deliver organizational objectives.

The popularity of behaviorism is rooted in the 1920s, with the work of Pavlov (1927). Pavlov uncovered the concept of conditioned reflex; a response to a situation that is an adaptation to environmental conditions. Although it can be acknowledged that human motivation is more complex and broader than that of other species, the use of an appropriate rewards or punishments are still common features within the workplace. This view informed much of subsequent management writing during the pre and post-war period, with a belief that, with an appropriate stimulus, behavioral change could be brought about. Much of management writing has not acknowledged its behavioral basis, but in management today performance-related pay, performance management, goal setting, and the use competency frameworks all have links back to behavioral thinking.

The development of these behavioral concepts over the past 50 years has contributed considerably to our thinking and practice in management, human learning, and,

more recently, executive coaching. The most popular example is the ubiquitous GROW (goal, reality, options, way forward) model. The model initially developed by Alexander (Alexander & Renshaw, 2005) has been popularized by many coaching writers, most notably Whitmore (2002), as well as being used in many of the multinational corporations as their in-house coaching model.

GROW is a four-step coaching model and has traditionally been viewed as a non-psychological model, suitable for coaches without psychological training. The coach adopts a Socratic learning style, using open questions to help the coachee move through the four steps. It aims to help coachees achieve enhanced performance or achieve a stated goal.

The first of the steps is the identification of a goal. The second is a review of the current reality, the third a consideration of options, and the fourth a conclusion and the agreement on a way forward. There is considerable debate about the nature of goals, and I have written more specifically about these elsewhere (Passmore, 2003; Passmore, 2007).

Although rejected by some coaching psychologists as a non-psychological model, GROW is a simple and useful tool that can easily be taught to coachees during the coaching process. More sophisticated behavioral models have been developed which complement the essence of GROW (Passmore, 2005; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). These add elements such as explicit statements about contracting, the ground rules of the

coach-coachee relationship, and the more legal contractor aspects of times and fees, or have been developed for the coaching-manager.

This approach is of greatest value at a start of a coaching relationship, where the coach will work with evidence at its face value and seek the easiest solutions to issues. Approximately half of executive coaching interventions stay in this stream once a “coaching partnership” has been established, and for some coaches, particularly novices, all their work, rightly, takes place in this stream.

Conscious Cognition: Stream 4

The effective psychological coach, having established the relationship and explored behaviors, is able to explore the cognitive patterns which sit behind the visible behaviors. For this stream I have drawn upon the mindset level within Schein's (1985) model. Schein describes these as the way the organization, or in this case, the individual sees the world and frames their experience.

In this stream the coach would draw upon cognitive-behavioral techniques developed by Beck (1976) and Ellis (1962). A limited amount of work has been done to translate these counseling models to coaching (Neenan, 2006; Neenan & Dryden, 2001; Peltier, 2001), and these offer an excellent starting examples for the executive coach.

Cognitive-based interventions have grown significantly in popularity in the United Kingdom, and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2005) current guidelines make cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) the first line treatment for a range of clinical disorders. Although this popularity has yet to extend to executive coaching, the model, as adapted by coaching authors (Neenan, 2006) is a valuable tool in the coach's toolkit.

An experienced coach would begin to explore thought patterns when judging that the coachee was displaying or holding irrational thoughts that might inhibit successful performance. Such irrational thoughts might be harsh judgments about themselves or judgments of their current or future abilities. The key feature is that the judgment is irrational or not substantiated by facts. Coachees in senior positions often experience escalation thinking. One event triggers thoughts and anxieties about another and another; for example, low sales this quarter lead them to worry about a fall in the share price, reducing confidence in the company, speculation of problems and further falls, culminating in a vote of no confidence at the Annual General Meeting.

The approach to working in this stream shares many of the principles which can be applied to the other three streams. First, it is a dynamic process where both the coach and the coachee are constantly changing. Second, it is a collaborative process between the coach and coachee. Third, the approach is focused on solutions and particularly on an agreed goal. Fourth, it places an emphasis on the present. Fifth, its desire is to use the process to give the coachee the ability to act independently in the future.

The central concept within this stream is encouraging the coachee to identify the irrational beliefs and then help the coachee to challenge these. This two-stage process is supported through the diverse range of cognitive-behavioral and rational-emotive behavioral techniques used within counseling. However, the coach should aim to identify clearly how the process would support the delivery of the explicit goal. Typical techniques are reframing, immersion, visualization, and the use of homework tasks to support activities within the coaching process.

In reframing, the coach engages in a process of moving the coachee from a view of the world that is not based on rational evidence to one that is, through encouraging him to adopt different positions. Questions might include: "How would your boss, mentor, or colleague view this situation?", "What other possible outcomes are there?", and "How likely is each of the possible outcomes?"

Immersion in counseling is often used as a way to overcome irrational fears. This is a way for the coachee to test their world-view gradually, moving away from ideas such as "I can never do a presentation to the board as I am useless at public speaking" and building a different view grounded in evidence: "I can do a presentation to the board if I prepare thoroughly and practice my presentation."

Visualization is now well used in sports, and experience suggests that making reference to its sporting use, be it a baseball player's pitch or a 100m athlete's desire to leave the blocks at the "b of the bang," acts to improve its face validity for senior executives. However, in spite of this, tasks are not always completed. Task performance can be improved by encouraging coachees to talk about what might get in the way of successfully performing the task. This improves the likelihood of the task being completed.

The last example is the use of home-work. Although in other streams we would encourage the coachees to reflect on the session, and maybe to practice new

behaviors, in this stream the homework task is essential. From my own experience the most common is encouraging the coachee to monitor their automatic thoughts, and then encouraging them to continue the process of challenging these thoughts day-in-day-out, preferably with an alternative script that has been rehearsed in the coaching session.

Many of these techniques can be used equally successfully in the fifth stream, which works at the deepest level with coachees.

Unconscious Cognition: Stream 5

The fifth stream is unconscious cognition. This stream echoes the two deepest levels of Schein's (1985) model; emotional ground and motivational roots. The emotional ground is the pattern of feelings that shape an individual's meaning, but which are deeply hidden and are likely to be outside of conscious awareness. Motivational roots are the fundamental driving forces which shape the individual's behaviour. These, too, are often outside of conscious awareness for most individuals.

For some people this has echoes of the psychodynamic tradition. Some elements within this tradition can be used successfully in the business environment. However, for senior executives the overt discussion of "phantasy" or "night dreams" can lack face validity. As an alternative the coach may look for patterns of experience which may provide material to work with. Equally suitable and less contentious is to explore unconscious aspects of motivation. This draws upon techniques from motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a technique which has been developed in addition counseling to help address low motivation to change. This approach desires to help the counseling client bring into conscious awareness the consequences of their behaviors and thus stimulates a stronger motivation to act. MI offers an additional tool for coaches to work at the unconscious level and is particularly useful where the coachee is resistant to change.

As with humanistic, behavioral, and cognitive streams within the model, MI has a track record of evidence-based application for alcohol and substance abuse counseling (Burke, Arkowitz & Menchola, 2003; Miller & Moyers, 2002; Solomon & Fioritti, 2002), management of chronic illness (Channon, Smith & Gregory, 2003; Prochaska & Zinman, 2003), and teenage contraception counseling (Cowley, Farley & Beamis,

2002). Despite this track record, the use of MI in the coaching sphere to date appears to be limited. Experience of using this approach in executive coaching suggests that it can be of immense value (Passmore & Whybrow, 2007).

The MI approach requires the coach to recognize and understand ambivalence as a natural part of the change process (Miller & Rollnick, 2002) and to move from using cognitive questions that explore beliefs and thinking patterns to exploring the coachee's motivation.

A starting point for the coach is identifying which stage the coachee is at in their personal change journey. To identify this, the coach could ask the coachee to rate their perceived readiness to change on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being that they have already made change and 0 being not at all interested in changing (Miller & Rollnick 2002).

The coach then works with the coachee to help build arguments for change. Traditionally, this would be accompanied by identifying weaknesses in the opposing arguments, and in effect arguing against the individual. MI takes a different perspective of change and seeks to work alongside the person, to help them to better understand the consequences of their actions, and to conduct more rational thinking processes around the advantages and disadvantages of the behavior. Once a commitment exists, change will follow naturally through a skills development process. A useful framework which is helpful with those used to working in commercial environments is the Balance sheet technique (Miller & Rollnick 2002).

As the coachee shows signs of a readiness to change, there is a decreased discussion about the problems which they are encountering in the workplace and an increase in change talk. As fits the integrative coaching model, there is a strongly collaborative approach, with the coach being an ally of the coachee, rather than being an expert into whose hands the coachee casts their troubles or an authority issuing advice.

Coaches would work in this stream where the coachee has been referred by others concerned about their work performance or when their behaviors are having a significant negative impact on others. In these situations, the coachee may be highly resistant to change, yet continues to attend coaching, as the organization has mandated their attendance. MI provides an effective tool to explore motivation and work with the coachee to assist him in developing a stronger motivation to change.

MI is not the only approach in this stream, but is the one I would most frequently use. An alternative would be to draw on psychodynamic techniques; however, these need to be treated with caution for the reasons above concerning face validity. Other options are approaches such as EMDR, which again carries with it a caution because of the need for specialist training before the application of the approach.

Systemic: Stream 6

The last and final stream which the coach works within is the environment and cultural context. This is the system which the individual coach and coachee work within. In some respects, this stream captures and surrounds the preceding streams.

Like the first stream, the coach works simultaneously in this stream and in one of the three action streams of behavioral, conscious, or unconscious cognition.

In this stream the task for the coach is to help the coachee to understand the wider system within which they work, and how this system influences the coachee's behavior and those who the coachee works with. In this stream the coach seeks to bring the views, thoughts, and opinions of these individuals into the coaching process. These may be individuals who the coach works alongside, such as members of the team or it may be individuals from suppliers, customer organizations. Lastly it may include individuals and organizations from the wider environment who create legislation or influence the way work is conducted or people behave.

As well as helping the coachee to draw upon the influences of these individuals, the coach needs to make explicit their influence, on both the coachee and the coach.

In recognizing these systemic elements, the coach is able to help the coachee to work appropriately within the boundaries of legislation and regulation, as well as the cultural conventions which guide and bound their behavior.

Conclusion

The Integrative Coaching Model brings together for the first time a series of discrete approaches and has blended these in a way which is designed to meet the explicit needs of executive coaching.

The model argues that developing and maintaining a coaching partnership with the coachee is critical. Without such a partnership little or no progress can be made. However, the partnership, while building self-regard, is by itself insufficient to enable the coachee to move forward to adopt the behaviors which will enhance their workplace performance. To help this movement toward enhanced performance, the effective executive coach needs to work in four streams of change. They need to work with what they can see: the behavior. They need to work with what they cannot see, but what they hear expressed from the cognitive processes at work. Third, they need to work with what they suspect, at the level of the unconscious. Lastly, the coach needs to work within the system which the coachee is bound by. In doing this the coach needs to move effortlessly between the streams, moment to moment, within the coaching relationship, responding to the demands and needs of the coachee.

The model offers executive coaches a starting point. It is an invitation to work in an eclectic way, mixing tools and techniques from methodologies, but with a focus on the primary objective of executive coaching; enhancing performance in the workplace.

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