

A NEW ASPECT IN DEVELOPMENTAL COUNSELLING: COACHING

© Szilvia Légrádi-Lakner
(University of Pecs)

laknersz@human.pte.hu

The article describes an emerging developmental approach, methodology, known as coaching. After introducing a brief history of its origin and spreading, the main characteristics and features of the coaching process are introduced. Through a comparison with other counselling methods, you can gain an understanding of what coaching is and is not. The article further describes coaching trends currently in use in Hungary, with a focus on the various techniques applied such as Gestalt, psychodrama, transaction analysis, supervision, NLP and others. The expected results of coaching are also presented by the author who herself professes this approach and shares her own personal feelings and experiences.

Keywords: coaching, emerging developmental approach

"People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are.
I don't believe in circumstances.

The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the
circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them."

George Bernard Shaw

What brought coaching to life...

At the 14th Conference of the Hungarian Organization Development Society, Mr. Lajos Mocsai, European master coach of handball, master teacher, the coach of the World and Olympic Championship silver-medallist female handball team gave a lecture about how competition and cooperation can be interpreted in professional sport and about the role and task of a coach for reaching the goals. For a sportsman it is no question that he has to provide a superior performance, stretching the borders of his own capacity. But without a coach it is quite unrealizable to get from mediocrity to excellence, to reach the top and to stay there as long as possible.

In business competition it also became inevitable to develop our personal achievements, and we need someone to stand by and for us in this personal progress of development: that is – using the present-day term – the coach; and the progress of development is coaching.

Coaching is an English word for training, more precisely the work done by the coach. The term got to the ideology of business life from sports psychology at the beginning of the 80's. Coaching started from the United States, and it has basically two roots. The psychotherapists' work can be considered as the first starting point, who realized that it is not only the people in crisis who might need advice (either in life or in management), but

also those, who would like to bring out more from themselves, who would like to be more successful and satisfied in their life.

The other starting point of coaching originates from sports: therapists built the mental techniques used by professional sportsmen into their self-consciousness training, and in the beginning it was called coaching.

Coaching can be employed when you need advice for life; when you are stuck in a certain situation in life and you want to move on; if you need inspiration; when you have a problem with a situation or a person, etc. It can also be used when you, as a leader, need someone to talk to, a "conversation partner" in your management work. It is essential for a leader to have effective communication with his employees. The key factors of management work are encouragement, counselling, help. For accomplishing these factors, human resource management disposes various methods, tools and techniques for leaders (e.g. mentoring, performance assessment discussions, etc.) A leader may also need a "conversation partner", when he is stuck in a workplace situation, and he is expecting a feedback. The leader's role involves a kind of loneliness, the higher he climbs in organizational hierarchy, the lonelier he will become, and it is harder to find partners to talk about his problems openly and honestly. The coach is a kind of interlocutor, who can connect business with relationship; who has an overview of the different roles of the leader which define his actions, reactions, decisions as a whole. Coaching is an area for the leader, where he can reveal himself.

The most important goal of coaching is to increase both personal and managerial efficiency. *In which situations is it beneficial to employ coaching?*

- if you face a new challenge (e.g. we get a new job, go to a new workplace)
- if something should be done differently from the way it was before
- if you are not satisfied with your present job
- if you are confronted with communication problems (e.g. as a leader: communicating the goals of the organization, increasing the efficiency of the meetings, successful motivation)
- if you feel that you never have time for anything
- if you get into a conflict
- if you must make a decision but have no one to discuss with
- if you have difficulties with certain people
- if you often feel strained and stressed
- if you experience inner insecurity (e.g. you get to a cross-road)
- if you need an "inner workshop" for the sake of regeneration, innovative solutions
- if you would like to analyze the perspective of your career (e.g. preparing a career map)

Why is personal efficiency so important? In our life, beside work, we struggle with family and health problems, we fight our inner battles, and strive to settle personal conflicts. With increasing personal efficiency, time devoted to these processes can be greatly reduced.

With increasing managing efficiency, the leader will be able to treat his colleagues better, to organize his time more effectively, to handle conflicts more properly, to make clear decisions, altogether to become a better leader.

During coaching the coach and his client work on releasing the power hidden in the client, because we all have the power and chance to make our life as happy as possible according to our apprehension, and to get the best

from ourselves. The coach relieves to find the key of change, helps the client to discover his hidden inner sources, because these all lead to find the client's best solutions.

Penetration of coaching

Business players started using coaching as a counselling technique some two decades ago. Corporate managers employed an army of advisors in nearly all fields of company life to improve efficiency and profit growth; management decision making; organizational development and sustainability. The common characteristic of such advisors was that they were principally attentive to corporate interests.

Since changes in business environment accelerated, market competition has become as fierce as ever. Neither organizations, nor individuals connected to them exist barely by themselves, they are all connected to each other, and these relationships are based mainly on financial basis, creating a harsh competition. During self-maintenance and progress in competition, trust may be lost, honesty may be questioned.

For leaders, coaching means honesty and disinterestedness. A coach works exclusively for the success and development of his clients. He accepts and supports them and accompanies them along the change process. He talks and listens, provides a supporting background, helps to find solutions for his client's problems (Vogelauer 2002). So therefore you can also say that coaching is a counselling concept, which

- provides support for solving problems deriving from different professional and job roles,
- clarifies problems related to the three /life/ areas (professional, job, private life), and answers relevant questions,
- develops the client's existing abilities and future potentials,
- integrates and connects the client's different roles in the areas of work, family, private life.

Coaching helps the client to clarify difficult questions, develop his intuitions and solve his troublesome situations, problems in life.

Through its widely applicable, solution-oriented and unique approach, coaching can help all business players to increase efficiency, effectiveness and satisfaction. Moreover, by concentrating on the individual, it supports the evolution of his hidden capabilities and self-awareness, as well as setting and reaching personal goals.

Coaching definitions and approach

Coaching is a time-limited, individual or team-based counselling concept, where the aim is primarily to solve the (difficult) situations and problems of the client. Coaching covers three areas: professional, organizational and individual. Coaching reinforces the personal autonomy and uniqueness of the client, thereby enables him to solve his problems effectively and independently. Coaching evolves the existing reserves of the client.

Zeus and Skiffinson give a clear definition of coaching, separating it into three parts. Firstly, coaching is a dialogue in a result-oriented context, where the coach helps to emerge the answers the client may already know, but has never conceived yet. Secondly, coaching is learning, but you should not forget that the coach is not a teacher, and he does not necessarily know certain things better than his client. While observing different schemes and

old innervations, he can incite them for new actions, never tried attitudes. Finally coaching is rather about raising the adequate questions than laying answers to their feet (Horváth 2006).

Coaching is the development of self-consciousness of leading and professional personality, but always in the context of particular competence and actual managerial tasks. Coaching is a task-, result- and solution-oriented process lead-on, where the emphasis is on strengths and on the mobilization of development reserves.

According to the interpretation of Főnix Coaching, "coaching is a counselling relationship between two persons. It is always a personal, interactive, highly focused process, which helps the individual and the organization to reach more satisfactory results quicker. With the help of coaching, the client sets more demanding goals, becomes more active, makes better founded decisions and exploits his existing, natural abilities. ...Coaching means a sequence of interactions, which happen at regular intervals. These dialogues encompass support, honesty, confidence, integrity and facilitation."¹

The definition of Flow Group is, "Coaching is primarily an approach. The coach starts out from the assumption that his client is capable of development, he will find the solution for the given problem, and he will take responsibility for it. In case the coach remains in the classical role of an advisor, which focuses on offering alternative options and pointing out the most adequate one, coaching simply loses its essence. After all, the essence of coaching is to bring out the numerous obstacles which stand between the client's hidden creative solutions and the realization of them, to make the client aware of them and to move them out of the way. This allows for improving the client's performance, which is the primary goal of coaching processes in the corporate arena."²

Studying the definitions above, we can say that coaching is *a tool for constant change, renewal and development*. The coach and his client are in an equal position, where communication is between "partners", and confidence operates on the highest level. The basis of this high-level confidence is that during the intercourse it is assumed that everyone has the necessary information, knowledge and power to solve their vital questions. Coaching is a *"supporting" intercourse system*, in which the coach and his client are seeking the areas to be developed together; where the partner also admits, which areas need to be changed to have a beneficial influence on his performance. This supporting process can speed up and ease the way, which helps to change the past innervations and bad habits, which hinder development.

Coaching vs. other counselling methods

The common characteristic of the following counselling methods is that each represents a helping hand in learning, life and our everyday acts. Each can be applied in the proper situation; in fact, the tools used in certain counselling methods are built into the methodology of various coaching approaches. So let us define, what is **not** coaching.

Coaching:

- *is not psychotherapy*

Psychotherapy examines the individual's personal history very deeply; it studies the elaboration of trauma from the past. Psychotherapy seeks why the

¹ www.fonixcoaching.hu

² www.flowsoport.hu

problem evolved and explores its roots. On the contrary, coaching works primarily with the present, concentrates on the future, and does not intend to examine past events. Coaching is built on psychological basis as well, but works with healthy people, and concentrates on the client's present and future. Personality is not the target of coaching, its aim is not to explore, analyze or interpret the personality, although the consequences of coaching can be described in psychological terms (e.g. activation, consciousness, motivation). It is the coach's responsibility to realize whether it is worth working on the specific problem with his available tools, staying within the boundaries of coaching, or another counselling method should be applied. The coach works in a solution-oriented and fully client-focused way.

- *is not mentoring*

From ancient times, the principle of mentoring has evolved as a personal, well-intentioned relationship between two people, who are of different ages and have considerably different organizational standing and life experience. An experienced leader or expert is called a mentor, when he guides and supports a new colleague, and also assists in the individual's personal development. He provides guidance in workplace situations, in a professional area and in learn new capabilities. He answers questions, gives information and advice. The essence of mentoring is the personal information-sharing between the mentor and the mentoree (protege), in a time-limited relationship.

- *is not experiential learning*

Experiential learning is a developmental method for groups, which builds upon learning by experience. During experiential learning, there is hardly any opportunity to deal with the individual problems of the group members in depth. In case of coaching, focus is not on general problems, but on those which the client is presently concerned about. Coaching is fully customized to meet the individual's private needs and desires. During experiential learning, the development process is followed through according to a pre-agreed structured syllabus, while during coaching the client defines the program, thereby shaping it to fully meet his needs. Experiential learning sessions are 2-3 days long events, while coaching may last for several months, so there is a possibility of getting through the restrictive factors, inhibition and as well as the period of fallbacks.

- *is basically not counselling – or is it?*

There is no agreement among experts on how coaching differs from counselling, or whether they differ at all. In my opinion, coaching is not counselling in the sense that the coach does not give exact advice or a particular recipe for solving actual problems. Nevertheless it is counselling in the sense that both the counsellor and the coach helps to identify opportunities for action and helps to make decisions related to business goals, strategies, organization, processes and methods in the client's life. The goal of counselling and coaching is to achieve such a change during the development process, which can make the client's life more complete, and increases his efficiency. The coach is the encourager and facilitator of positive changes, the specialist of human questions, and a partner for achieving success. In pursuance of problem solving, the coach teaches us to use our capabilities more freely and to reach high-spirited goals. The task of the coach is to give feedback and reasonably feasible perspectives and to potentiate the evolvment of still hidden gift. The coach is qualified and experienced in life-long development and its technology, both personally and professionally.

The main characteristics and features of coaching

"No one coaches like I do" – is the motto for the coaching platform of the Hungarian Organization Development Society. I experienced it personally at a coaching round-table discussion – where coaches of various background talked about the present and future of coaching, the boundaries of competition and cooperation – that so many coaches so many styles, methods, tools and process management. All this has to be appreciated, since diversity is one of the most important features of coaching. It is pointedly a personal kind of activity. Diversity is given not only from the uniqueness of the client and his situation, but also from the personality, experience and applied techniques of the coach. Still let us highlight the most important components, which are the characteristics of each coaching process.

Coaching is...

- *...a goal-specific and result-oriented process*: Coaching is always a developmental process. The goal of the coach is to "bring the client into a better situation", to help the client to feel the change. The basic goal of coaching can be the utilization and development of the client's hidden abilities. (According to Thomas J. Leonard coaching evolves the individual, if he is aware of his strength and weakness, because he becomes self-confident and makes preferable decisions after all.)
- *...based on an agreement*: The basis of coaching process is the agreement. In the coaching talk the coach and the client define a goal, and they make an agreement separately for the tools applied and for the hows of feedback. Anything may happen in coaching, for what there is an agreement. A fundament in this process is that the subject of the agreement is determined by the client, so the coach should not want to! (This kind of agreement should not be mixed up with business agreements.)
- *...action-oriented*: From the triumvirate of our thoughts, words and deeds it concentrates on the latter one. It is about moving on, activity and growth. The process does not end with theoretical problem solving or decision making. The emphasis is on realization, on the client's capability of action and initiative.
- *...designed for individuals*: during the process not a general problem solving is carried out, but they are looking for an answer for the client's actual problems. An important element is the "face-to-face" relationship, where the coach does not give standard answers or solutions, but shows the most adequate way in accordance with the situation.
- *...builds upon the principle of mutual confidence*: According to Lajos Cs. Nagy: "we have to win the client, we have to achieve that he opens up, because that is one of the basis of success. In case he does not unveil, it becomes hard to find a solution." During work the coach and his client create an atmosphere, where the subject of coaching gets support for putting through his goals, collecting his resources and evolving his talent. But motivation should always derive from inside. The coach cannot motivate his client. During their conversation they study and clarify the client's values, abilities, and set a goal to encourage him for reaching them (Horváth 2006). The main characteristics of the relationship: equal partnership, mutual confidence, honesty, openness, clear-cut intentions.

- ...*system-approach*: The human is placed in the centre. It correlates to him as a complex personality; his various roles in life are treated integrated. If problems arise in any of them, they influence the others, and they can be the causes of problems there. We take different roles in professional, organizational and private life. In the professional world the essence is to utilize our capacities and skills. Organizational world means our place in the company structure. Different behavioural patterns characterize a leader and an employee. Our friends, family and the attitude towards them belong to our private life. For the sake of creating personal integrity, coaching deals with all the three type of worlds. Although it concentrates mainly on the topics of professional and organizational world, it is done with the consideration of private world.
- ...*builds upon "here and now"*: Coaching is a dynamic process building from inside, which concentrates on the present and future. Coaching is always connected to real, interactive situations, where there is a possibility for elaborating the procured experience and for a fundamental change in the client's activity, who participates in the elaboration process actively. It may happen that the past somehow slips into the coaching process. In this case, the coach is responsible, how deep does he deal with the impact of the past that affects the present. It is not the purpose to get deeper, but in certain situations it is unavoidable to touch the past events.

The methodological variegation of coaching

The methods used in coaching work take their resources mainly from different psychological tendencies. Accordingly almost all the tendencies are represented in the coaching process in Hungary as well. Although in most cases they do not appear in their pure forms. During their work coaches combine the skill sets of different tendencies, either in accordance with the situation or on the basis of their experience. As a matter of fact a coach can become versatile in a methodological way, if he realizes which elements he can use worthily and authentically for his work. Let us take a look – without completeness – at the most important tendencies in Hungary.

The Gestalt-based coaching. The Gestalt tendency builds upon the phenomenon experienced in everyday life that if a situation is lived through a number of people, everyone will remember something else, everyone will emphasize different things. We all experience a kind of reality, which is a subjective reality; our former understanding and knowledge have an effect on it. During the Gestalt-based coaching the client becomes conscious of the behaviour patterns applied for the handling of the situations so far, and/or the prospective possibilities will be revealed. Coaches work upon Gestalt-basis respect the world view of their client, and they accept their resistance. They consider the change of perspectives important for the sake of recognizing new solutions, possibilities. Their skill is support and gentle confrontation.

Action-oriented coaching (with the approach of psychodrama). Psychodrama is a psychotherapy method of groups, in which the group members perform important life situations, where they can relive their situations; they can change roles, so they can overlook the given situation from another perspective. The method is action-oriented, since they not only discuss the tasks concerning the given situation, but also make the client play it, so he can try several kinds of solutions in a safe circumstance.

Decision-oriented coaching. The peculiarity about the decision-oriented coaching lies in its special methodology and approach, which allows the manager to reveal personal questions and solve individual problems by understanding his own position in its complexity (systematic approach). This enables the manager to become aware of the situation as it really is and be able to use the best of his knowledge, supported by strong inner beliefs, in stressing his own role and responsibility when creating and maintaining the situation. Thus, the manager comes very close to optimal problem-solving because instead of applying routine-like, trivial and conventional solutions he makes creative and unique decisions based on personal beliefs and abilities which could also bring forth the possibility of individual growth.

TA-based coaching. "According to transaction-based coaching, the main goal of coaching is to focus on the client's acts. The coach's aim is to help the feelings, thoughts and communication to be handled purely... The coach will not decide instead of the client, his task is not to save, but to trust in the client's responsibility taken towards himself and his freedom." (Szatmáriné dr. Balogh Mária)

The two principles of TA-practice are the agreement method and the open communication. The conceptions of transaction-analysis give an interpretational frame for the individual in troublesome and jamming situations, and they make changes and modifications possible. According to the transaction-analytic approach people, in general, are "all right" and they are able to develop, everyone has the ability to think, they are responsible for their decisions and capable for open communication.

Supervision-based coaching. We can talk about a kind of experienced learning when this tendency is applied in coaching. They start from actual problem and particular situations. The coach helps the client with series of questions to recognize his own problems and to find solutions. During the process he constantly gives feedback to the client, how do those things effect him and what kind of feelings are awoken, about which the client reports (Horváth 2006).

Systemic approach-based coaching. The basis of this approach is that the smallest part is also a whole – system. Systems have knowledge, goals and power. The task of coaching is to help to discover and to mobilize them. The constructive systemic approach intensifies the person's sense of responsibility, and encourages for autodynamics. In the coaching process the parties take the responsibility of themselves, their task is apperception, and they agree fairly.

NLP-based coaching. According to the NLP Institute: "Coaching is a process, in which the client builds a bridge between the present situation and the desired goals with the help of the coach. For this he identifies and removes the obstacles with the help of the coach. He finds and strengthens his existing resources, develops new resources for building the bridge and for crossing it. The speciality of NLP coaching is that for this bridge building work it uses the client's own experience and inner meaning system. Therefore the process is quick, powerful and enduring."³

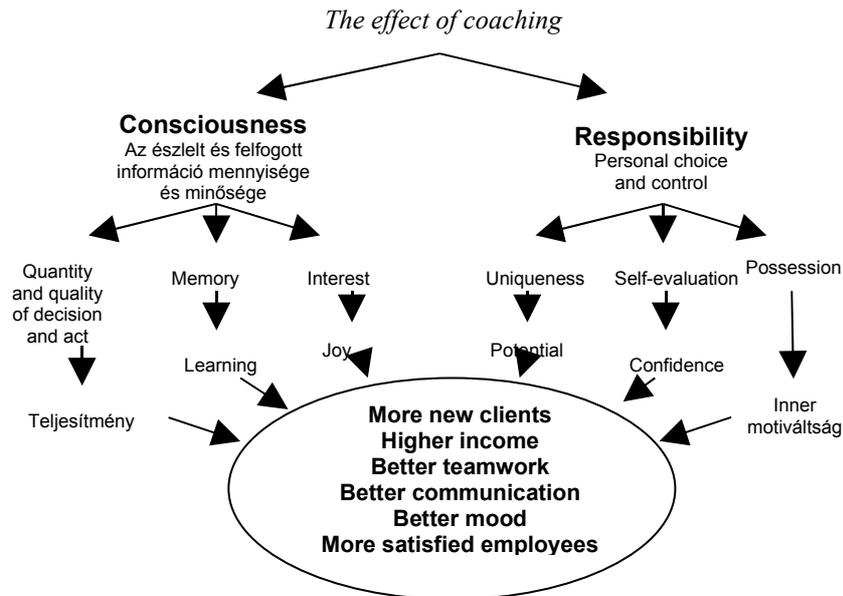
The successfulness of coaching

On the following figure John Whitmore shows his point of view about the effect of coaching on the participating client, and how his organization profits from this (Whitmore, 2002). It is well seen from the figure that the individual is studied along the dimension of consciousness and

³ www.nlpintezet.hu

responsibility: how conscious I am in my development, what kind of decisions can I take upon, what kind of performance can I present, how can I apply learning and interest as tools in the development process. Responsibility is about personal choice, control and feedback: do I believe in myself, where am I in the self-consciousness process, what motivates me in my life, where do I take energy from, how much do I undertake myself, to what extent can I build upon my strength and to develop my weak points.

When I found the answers to all these questions, consciously and with the responsibility towards my acts I go along the road I chose, then success will not keep me waiting, may it be on private, business or organizational level.



Conclusion

As a conclusion I would like to take some personal observations. Within the scope of the learning process, I acquired the basic knowledge for the coaching work, tested the acquainted techniques in life, and I got to recognitions, which helped me to define all that coaching means to me:

- a positive approach about human relations
- a supporting, incentive help for other people's rise and becoming a better person
- a conscious and still so "simple" communication style
- "artistic freedom"
- the importance of celebration at the closing of a process: which means the celebration of farewell, the feeling of ordinate handover, the account of time spent together, letting go, making "what comes next" unambiguous.

I close my article with the thoughts of Wiesner Edit coach, who taught me everything I presently use in my coaching work.

"The world's most beautiful thing is the coaching discussion. We get self-consciousness, knowledge, attention in it. We can play with our thoughts, we can doubt, we can be impertinent, we can try everything. We can be directors, students, we can let ourselves go and preen ourselves. We can be angry, weepy, smiley, incoherent and strict. We can be honest. (...) The

coach can be honest in every discussion, because with this he helps his client the most to train beside and with him freely."

References:

- HORVÁTH T. (2006). *Diagnosis about coaching in Hungary*. In: Photocopy handed out at the XIV. ODS Conference, 22-24. September 2006
- VOGELAUER, W. (2002). *Coaching-Praxis – Specialistic counselling and support of leaders*, KJK-KERSZÖV Legal and Business Publisher Ltd., Budapest, 2002
- WHITMORE, J. (2002). *Coaching for Performance*. Growing People, Performance and Purpose, Nicholas Brealey Publishing Ltd.