Book Reviews

Coaching for Change

John L. Bennett & Mary Wayne Bush, Routledge Abingdon 2014
ISBN: 978-0415898034 (Paperback)

Creating a Coaching Culture for Managers in Your Organisation

Dawn Forman, Mary Joyce and Gladeana McMahon (eds.), Routledge Hove, 2013
ISBN: 978-0415690225 (Paperback)

Coaching as a Leadership Style

Robert F. Hicks, Routledge Abingdon 2014
ISBN: 978-0415528061 (Paperback)

Reviewers: Anouschka Klestadt and Suzan Langenberg

Introduction

Since World War II, the world of organisations has changed profoundly. This change can be partly attributed to psychology as a science, which introduced the human factor. Since then, we are witness to a growing tension between the increased pressure on optimising efficiency on the one hand and the focus on human relations in organisations, including the idea of personal development on the other. Hence it is not surprising that the need for

an intervening coach to manage this tension is of increasing importance in the private and public sector.

Throughout the past 20 years, the "coaching industry" has become booming business. The number of certified professional coaches worldwide has grown to approximately 50,000. These data suggest that the figure of non-certified coaches and organisations specified in coaching services represents a tenfold or more. How should we interpret that this growing market implies an indispensable need for coaching? And in the apparent exhaustiveness of the literature that is produced on the subject we, as readers, wonder if there is still something left to be added both in reflection and the practice of coaching. The three works discussed in this review, both different and complementary, represent a suitable sample to answer these questions.

Coaching for Change

Coaching for Change introduces the complex labyrinth of all the aspects related to the subject of coaching. The setup of the book resembles a study book: very well structured with a brief summary, some elementary questions and an extended reference list at the end of each chapter. Professional coaches who want to reorient themselves with respect to current coaching methods and models, related disciplines and their subsequent approaches are well served with this book. The central question this book poses is: "What can or should be the role of coaching in an environment of continuous change?"

This question is addressed from a research perspective, giving both a quantitative and a qualitative overview of research findings coming from scientific field studies, comparative analysis of empirical data and related models and methods circulating in learning environments. Certainly, the book gives the reader an overall insight in the history, the current situation, benefits and doubts concerning the booming coaching business. All these issues are discussed in their relation to change and the result is definitely worth the effort. We would like to question however, if in the end such an extensive ambition of providing an all-encompassing work can be convincing and workable enough for teachers, students, coaches, consultants, human resources and change practitioners, leaders and managers throughout the world (p.10), the audiences this book targets. Realising an access to the field of coaching related to (organisational) change is an immense mission, certainly when it claims to include empirical and comparative research, literature studies and realistic applications on "the work floor".

In the first two chapters the authors try to find a way through the question of definitions. Definitions of coaching vary and differ, depending on the perspective: "no two definitions are the same" (p.15). The absence of one clear definition on coaching and/or change in this book challenges every single professional coach to create one of his own. This opportunity can only be fruitful when the key factors of coaching, such as "Engaging in a discovery process, using a repeatable process, investing in behavioural change" (p.15) are included. The most important key for the (future) coach is to emphasise his guiding – not unique helping – role towards his coachee. As a result he distinguishes his specific support

from professional helping relationships, and he avoids possible future (unrealistic) expectations and misunderstandings.

The following chapter explains the "Foundational Frameworks of Coaching" with no fewer than 16 different (scientific and professional) approaches towards coaching and their respective objectives. In chapters four and five, the authors demonstrate insights in different approaches of the coaching process (different models of contracting and their respective phases) and the necessary coaching skills needed to realise the objectives as set out during the contracting phase. That the role of coach is far from simple, and that it demands a complex range of skills from the coach is also clear for the authors: "Effective coaching is the use of 'challenging' (…) In general, the coach must be friendly without being a friend and balance high support with a high level of challenge – holding the client accountable – and to encourage deeper reflection and stimulate a change in circumstances that will enhance to drive the act (…). Coaches should help clients develop independence from the coach and an interdependency with the client's support network" (pp.112-113).

In the following three chapters (six to eight), the ascertainment that "change is the 'new normal' in organizational life" (p.127) is introduced as the new paradigm for coaching. Understanding change is a process individuals, groups and managers experience in coaching, passing through the same five stages: "awareness, acceptance, commitment, integration and mastery" (p.142). Change needs to be actively implemented in the coaching practice. It can be unattended and/or planned, but change always challenges the creativity of all stakeholders involved especially of the coach.

In the third part (Integration and Application), coaching and change are brought together. The role of the manager is exemplary for this convergence of change and coaching. "Managing involves achieving results through others, (…) these roles are complementary, not contradictory" (p.264). The organisational paradigm "all coaching is about change" becomes explicit in the different targets and tasks of a manager. The authors are well aware of the fact that for the manager, implementing change in his role as manager/coach is a demanding process. They illustrate this by distinguishing no less than twenty-three coaching roles for the manager towards the implementation of change.

The final chapter on "Developing Change Coaching Mastery" touches upon the complex and multi-layered role of a coach. The reflective practitioner is "someone who lives reflection as a way of being (…) understands that no two experiences are alike, and therefore, he cannot simply rely on learned paradigms."(p.320)[1]. Along these lines the authors clarify their initial agenda on how they see the development of a professional coach. In addition, they distinguish effectiveness and reflection by emphasising the necessity of the coach's awareness of the fact that every single coaching process is at the same time unique as well as a learning process for the coach himself. The more experienced the coach is, the more risks he takes, meanwhile reflecting on his actions, and the more oriented he is towards the coachee's needs. We think this is an inspiring insight in coaching, because it follows

---

1   Knudsen, Christian and Haridimos Tsoukas (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Organization Theory. Meta-theoretical Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

the upcoming, transforming perspectives on future leadership[2]: managing is no longer just about controlling the hierarchically organised processes, it is instead about activating networks of experts and searching for trustworthy cooperation in horizontal organisations.[3] This affects the future role of the coach directly because he no longer performs in a strictly defined organisational framework. This diagnosis is confirmed in phrasing the skills and competencies of a coach as self-knowledge, self-confidence, reflection (*in* and *on* action) (pp.329-331), courageously following one's intuition (p.323) and seeking actively for feedback (p.325).

Extensive amounts of literature, methods and models are presented to the reader, but an outspoken preference of the authors for one of the described perspectives and frameworks appears to be lacking. Even a professional coach and reader struggles to discern the essence in this rich exposé.

In describing the ethical context of coaching in chapter twelve, the authors focus – albeit brief – on the contradictory roles that manager/coaches have to cover. In the previous chapters however they have claimed the opposite. We personally would have preferred if the authors had integrated the concept of *ethics* throughout the whole book. Had they done this, their view that "Ethics and coaching go hand in hand" (p.284), would have been more substantially motivated.

In the references for stakeholder analysis, neither the views of founder Edward Freeman[4], nor recent analysis by Karl Weick[5] or Robert Phillips[6] are included. Because we agree with the authors that you cannot coach, nor think about it without the implication of change, we are also convinced that this key information cannot be withheld. We respect the fact that such an approach of the coaching subject might go far beyond the scope of the authors. At the same time however, by presenting the argument that coaching is fundamentally embedded in change, we would expect a more in depth concept of change. In line with this, we feel a description of the apparent influence of the political, economic and financial features of the current fluctuating global market, would not have been out of place in this book. The authors however, chose to present readymade frameworks and models which highlight partial aspects of what change can mean in an organisational context. In our view, this book could have been much stronger if the authors would have explicitly given their own selective vision on coaching amidst the richness of literature they present.

---

2   Nick Petri, *Future Trends in leadership, a white paper*, Centre for Creative Leadership (www.ccl.org), 2011.

3   Klaus Scala, Ralph Grossmann, Marlies Lenglachner & Kurt Mayer (eds.) *Leadership, Learning for the Future*, Information Age Publishing, 2014, pp 273-333.

4   Edward Freeman 'Stakeholder Theory 25 Years Later', *Philosophy of Management*, Vol. 8 number 3, 2009, pp 97-108.

5   Karl Weick & Kathleen Sutcliffe, *Managing the unexpected*, John Wiley & Sons, 2007.

6   Robert Phillips, *Stakeholder Theory and Organizational Ethics*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003.

Creating a Coaching Culture for Managers in Your Organisation

In the second text under review, the editors present us a charming pallet of tasty *hors d'oeuvres* in the field of coaching. It touches on practically all major themes and repeatedly manages to pick out valuable insights regarding these themes. The relatively concise contributions by various experts in the field lead us from a view on a changing world and the place for coaching therein, onto the practicalities of implementing a coaching culture in an organisation.

The importance of coaching is presented first through a few reflections concerning the world we live in today and how coaching seems a logical answer to the features and challenges this changing world present to us. Availability and speed of communication, the shifting role and position of government from a decision-maker to a facilitator, and a sociological focus on the question of well-being are stated as important developments that the (western) world is undergoing. The new paradigm in which people are seen in terms of their future potential rather than as resources to be managed is perfectly in sync with the parameters that define coaching according to the chapter "Why the emphasis on coaching for organisations?"

"Building a coaching culture" shows how by doing so, values like valorising the problem-solving potential of all employees and "stimulating mutual support and the ability to challenge each other from a position of shared organisational interest" (p.28) become central. "The journey towards a coaching culture" touches upon a few key factors in achieving success at implementing a coaching culture where the focus lies on a multilevel approach integrating and acting on both process and content information ensuring engagement of all parties. In "Why some leaders and managers are reluctant to be coached" both environmental factors (the politics of how being coached is perceived in organisations for example) as well as personal factors (e.g. a mismatch between someone's personal approach to learning and coaching) are mentioned. "Encouraging managers to coach colleagues" continues with a few practical insights that can make the difference in the implementation of a coaching culture, such as the importance of showing the advantages of coaching as well as hearing others in the organisation speak positively about it. The emphasis here is on human factors that need to be taken into consideration. Defining the borders of the possibilities for an internal or external coach leads the reader to situations that are beyond the scope of either. "Dealing with complex coaching incidents" gives an overview of other fields of expertise that the coach may need to hand over a situation to at some point as well as the importance of supervision for the coach himself. "Action learning as a complement to the coaching ethos" introduces a method, described in some detail, of discussing individual cases in a group setting whereby a free exchange of questions and thoughts helps individuals to resolve their own issues. At the same time coaching skills are put into practice by all participants in the action learning setting. *Simple techniques to get you started* highlights some of the crucial aspects of a coaching process (contracting with the coachee, questioning techniques) and gives a one-page overview of the pros and cons of different coaching methods. "Measuring the success of your organisation's achievements through coaching" explains a three-level measurement

approach (individual learning, behavioural change and improvement in business effectiveness) in a 5-step process (preparation, design, implementation, analysis, and communication of findings). Finally, the classical discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of involving an internal or an external coach is addressed in "When to use in external coach". Research results and checklists help in making this choice.

The strong point of quite a few of the contributions to *Creating a Coaching Culture for Managers in Your Organisation* lies in the fact that the experience of authors is transformed into valuable insights for a practitioner. The reader gets practical insights and concrete tips that bundle a long time experience into valuable advice regarding the concrete implementation of a coaching culture rather than merely scratching the surface. Instead of reproducing theories and models that can be found in most standard works on coaching, the authors give insight into what they have done with these models themselves and how they have turned them into valuable tools that work for them. A good example of this can be found in "Application of presupposition in motivating change" in which theory about change and the role of Neurolinguistic Programming is explained in function of understanding and influencing people while they are dealing with change.

The positions proposed in this work are frequently illustrated by short case studies. These form pleasant reading and clearly support the ideas discussed in the different chapters. However the brevity of these descriptions makes it difficult to see as a reader how the antagonists moved from where they started off to where they are now. Hence the gist of the transformation that coaching clearly incited is sometimes hard to grasp.

Introducing a coaching culture represents a radical shift in the way people see themselves in collaborative situations. Aside from changes in people's attitude towards learning and hierarchical relationships, the question concerning the implications on a structural organisational level has not been treated in this work but appears to be very relevant. *Creating a Coaching Culture for Managers in Your Organisation* may be the victim of its own concept. As it provides a very practical support based on the sharing of valuable lessons learnt by experts in the field, it may leave the information-hungry reader longing for more in-depth discussion of the real challenges the authors have encountered.

Coaching as a Leadership Style

In the final work reviewed, Robert F. Hicks, as Clinical Professor of Organisational Behaviour at the University of Dallas Texas, has taken up the task of giving a comprehensive view of how coaching as a leadership style provides many answers for the questions healthcare organisations are dealing with.

Hicks first of all defines for us the "Elite Professional" as an ambitious and competitive, action-oriented expert, motivated by a meaningful challenge but not oriented towards giving others feedback. Still, he values his autonomy and control. With an appropriate amount of humour, Hicks illustrates how this profile of an expert is commonly found in a healthcare setting, and what pitfalls he and his organization encounter in times that demand changes. Both the growing complexity of healthcare services as well as an aging

population needing care demand more cooperation, information exchange and teamwork in the healthcare sector. Changing from an attitude favouring autonomy and individual accountability towards coordination presents an inevitable and major challenge in health-care organisations.

For Hicks the solution is clear-cut: leaders throughout the healthcare business need to make a transformation towards a coaching leadership style. Fundamentally this means a radical mind shift from an expert-culture towards addressing the resources of each problem-owner in finding his own solution to the problem.

Hicks presents the reader a "Four-Square Coaching Framework", representing four crucial elements of a coaching leadership style. He distinguishes thought from action and proposes two ways of approaching both. As a coach, one either supports or challenges thought and action. The first two options are more consonant, the latter represent a disso-nant mode of communication.

"Support-for-Thought" serves to establish rapport between coach and coachee, to convey mutual respect and collegiality and to help clarify the coachee's narrative and build a plat-form for understanding. Hicks falls back on Eric Berne's *Transactional Analysis*, which dates from the 1950s. First he illustrates the language use associated which each ego state, thereafter explaining concrete tips for communicating from an adult ego state. In addition, Hicks describes questioning and listening skills and focuses on a solution-oriented approach presenting different principles to underpin the importance of not indulging on problems.

"Challenge-for Thought" is about understanding and helping the coachee uncover what it is he wants. Hicks accentuates that this needs to be defined as concretely as possible (at indicator-level), in positive terms within the coachee's own reach and span of control with a continuous focus on what success looks like and what it takes to achieve it.

"Challenge- for-Action" is entirely directed towards inciting the right action for the coachee. Hicks makes a plea for a slow, gradual approach in reaching sustainable behav-ioural change. Key questions in this phase are: what does the coachee need to do? How is the coachee going to do it and when and where is he going to start doing it? Three types of experiments (observing, thinking and doing experiments) pave the way towards actions that lead to the realisation of goals.

"Support-for-Action" is all about the motivational aspect of realising the desired changes by taking concrete actions. Here Hicks describes both basic and crucial aspects of resistance as a phenomenon in the process of reaching awareness by the coachee. Inspired by motiva-tional theory accentuating the coachee's assessment of the importance of the goal and the level of confidence he experiences, Hicks moves on to a concrete approach for dealing with a lack of it. He finishes his exposé with a road-map that applies the four elements fluidly in cases described at a conversational transcript-level.

Hicks deserves credit for writing a truly comprehensive guideline that sharply focuses on immediate implementation in a needy work field. The *Four-Square* approach is pragmatic and simple in a step-by-step sense, making it accessible to all those interested in working with it. It is overwhelming in its goal-orientedness and its precision for aiming at target. And this, in our opinion, is also its soft spot. By being so focused on reaching goals, Hicks

omits communicative elements that are more confrontational, despite the "Challenge-for-Thought" part of the model. Excluding confrontation means evading surprising elements, it means limiting and downsizing the unexpected in favour of achieving a goal which is put forward by the coachee himself. Yet applying such a total approach also elicits a sense of absoluteness, a sense of being led into a system, a mode of thinking, leaving little room for criticism from the coachee himself. For Hicks, coaching is a "helping hat" that relies on the person himself as the major source for solving problems. However, the method for reaching this is made so explicit and in such detail, that this frame of reference can also become a dominant discourse laming the creativity and maybe even the personal intuition of the coachee who thinks he is solving his problems himself.

Conclusion

In this day and age, digital technology theoretically allows for a fully customised learning path for each individual according to their personal needs and timing. The endless availability and choice of information, learning input, advice and material through the internet forces teachers and learning specialists, and likely also managers and leaders, to pinpoint and articulate the added value of human intervention in a learning process. In this sense, technological changes bring along a repositioning of authorities and also a redistribution of power, to the extent that knowledge represents power. Transferring knowledge and learning become more egalitarian practices than they used to be.

Coaching unites both the idea of "helping" and "learning" in the ambition to help people help (understand) themselves. It seems logical that both individual coaching as well as coaching as a leadership style, have gained a great deal of attention both for people's private lives and in organisations. After all, mastering our own lives, being responsible for our own choices and positioning ourselves amidst all information we are confronted with, cannot be achieved simply by following a single authority. We have to learn to reflect and act.

Still, however up to date the different approaches to coaching we have been introduced to are, we can also easily go back to ancient Greece in our reflections on coaching. The ancient Greek "confidante" of the wise man, the sovereign, the king resembles our current coach in a number of ways. These prominent figures sought a permanent opponent, someone of a lower status who was involved in criticising the (political) mind-set, personal behaviour and (lacking) self-knowledge of the one in charge. The opponent, "the critical guide", was a kind of professional "contra-speaker" who ran the risk of being excluded and/or ex-communicated because of his criticism[7].

It is precisely this critical element that in our opinion is currently missing in the way coaching is conceptualised. Although the three books show a more than respectable attempt to reach a profound level of realism with respect to the coaching profession, the aspect of *criticism* as a coaching skill in the coaching practice is almost absent. However, in

---

7   Wim Vandekerckhove & Suzan Langenberg, Can we organize courage? *Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies* (EJBO) Vol 17, 2012, pp 35-44

our view – certainly in case of an external coach – a critical approach expressed through contra-speech or frank speaking is indispensable. First of all, it makes the whole coaching process more powerful and profound. Coachees are in need of someone who "finally tells them the truth", not about themselves (that is their own task), but about what they truly bring about (reactions, opinions) in others. Secondly, if coaching is an important factor in bringing about change, the coaching-setting can provide a safe and confidential haven, an open space where coach and coachee practice and simulate the harshest of criticisms and the toughest forms of resistance. The reality of change will only be a milder and more manageable version of what this confrontation brings about in terms sense-making and reflection. By taking the risks of being sharp and critical, a coach has an added value to offer for which he has a unique position. For us then, future developments for coaching should move into the direction of the coach as "contra-speaker."