

# COACHING WITH THE KIEL COUNSELLING MODEL:

SYSTEMIC COACHING WITH TWO COACHES  
FOR ONE CLIENT AND A REFLECTING TEAM

## ABSTRACT

The main aim of the article is to introduce systemic coaching alongside the Kiel Counselling Model, and to show its historical and theoretical roots. The article also shows the practical implementation of the Kiel Counselling Model in a coaching session. It works with two coaches for one client, as well as a reflecting team that brings ideas, fantasies and compliments for the client into the process.

### Keywords

systemic coaching, solution-focused coaching, Kiel Counselling Model, reflecting team

## ABSTRAKT

Głównym celem tego artykułu jest przedstawienie systemowego podejścia Kilońskiego Modelu Doradztwa oraz ukazanie jego historycznych i teoretycznych korzeni. Autorzy pokażą również zastosowanie modelu podczas sesji coachingowych – na jednego klienta przypada dwóch coachów oraz zespół odzwierciedlający, którego zadaniem jest m.in. generowanie pomysłów klienta.

### Słowa kluczowe

coaching systemowy, orientacja na rozwiązanie, Kiloński Model Doradztwa, zespół odzwierciedlający

## INTRODUCTION

Coaching can be described as the business of asking good questions. We would like to start with some for our reader: How will you know that reading this article will have been useful to you? You will approximately spend twenty minutes of your daytime today reading this text. What is it that you would like to learn specifically? How and where will you be able to apply your new knowledge?

Coaching can be understood and conducted in many specific ways. This paper aims at exemplifying one coaching model that originated in Germany: the Kiel Counselling Model. In the early 1980s, Uwe Grau, a German professor for educational psychology at the University of Kiel, his assistant Jens Möller, Johann-Ingi Gunnarson, a trainer in the national handball league at the THW club in Kiel, and Jürgen Hargens, a systemic coach and psychotherapist, together developed a specific coaching construct, consisting of various systemic and constructivist approaches. This became known as the Kiel Counselling Model.

The Kiel model was originally utilised by sports coaches for elite athletes and was later applied in business and management. After having developed the Kiel Counselling Model in Germany and having conducted numerous training courses at universities and in large companies, Uwe Grau and Johann Tomaschek ran the first intensive Kiel coaching training in Austria.

Coaching moved from sports to business mainly due to the rapid need for constant innovation in keeping up with competition, not only in sports, but also in business. This increased the time pressure on finding solutions and innovations, the need to develop people and curb replacement and to develop new skills to meet new demands (Kennedy 2009). Now, coaching is increasingly present in the personal development and human resources area. In the United Kingdom in 2003, coaching was the second fastest growing economic area after I.T. (Kennedy 2009).

The aim of this article is to illustrate the historical and theoretical roots of the Kiel Counselling Model and to show how it works in a practical coaching session. The main specificities of the Kiel Counselling Model are explained, namely that two coaches work with one client and how reflecting teams present in coaching sessions support the client in finding solutions (Berg, Szabo 2005).

## THE KIEL COUNSELLING MODEL AND ITS HISTORICAL ROOTS

In order to answer the question of where the Kiel Counselling Model comes from, it is worth taking a closer look at its development process. It all started in the 1980s at the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Kiel, and in the “Ostsee-halle” – a gymnasium in Germany – together with Johann-Ingi Gunnarson (trainer of the THW national handball team), and Jens Möller (one of his assistants). Drawing

these men together was the pragmatic question of the possibility of using psychology for Gunnarson's daily work in a sports "team system", and a pragmatic curiosity to experiment with systemic approaches in a "non-clinical and non-therapeutic" field like sports (Grau 1988; Hargens, Grau 1990; Hargens 1992).

One of the starting points in the process of shifting coaching from a sports to a business context was a player who made a lot of technical and tactical mistakes in a handball game. He failed tactically, but the game was still won in the end. The spontaneous reaction of the trainer was to approach the player at the end of the game and say: "A relapse has to come at some point – when that happens, it's important to remember that this game showed you exactly what you need to work on in the next training session. The next game will be in two weeks." So, a solution-driven coaching technique was applied, reframing the situation for the player. Technical and tactical mistakes could have been seen as failures by the trainer, but here the player was supported and his successes were highlighted: in the end, the game was won and the team still had time for two weeks of individual training before the next game. This approach to solution-driven coaching was adopted in the business context with the same methods (e.g. reframing, solution-orientation etc.), taking into account that individuals (players) are a part of systems (team of handball players) (Nelson et al. 2007; de Jong, Berg 2013).

In the business context, coaches and clients also work together on individual solutions to problems, taking into account that managers, team members and executives are part of social systems.

One of the main differences of the Kiel Counselling Model compared to other coaching models is its origin. The systemic approach in the Kiel Counselling Model actually originates from neurophysiology (Maturana, Varela 1987), and cybernetics (Foerster 1982). It was also adopted in the 1950s and 1960s by communication science (Watzlawick 2000; Watzlawick et al. 2009) and has been further developed in the context of psychotherapy (Erickson, Rossi 1979). In the 1980s, the Kiel Counselling Model was one of the first coaching models to be applied to the business world.

Apart from its theoretical background, the Kiel model differs from other coaching models in the construction of the practical coaching process: In the Kiel model, coaching is a process with two coaches and one client. Through working as a coaching duo, several methodological possibilities open up. The coaches can mutually and openly exchange ideas in front of the client (meta-dialogue), and can also act as a "reflecting team", or with other coaches as a "reflecting team" observing the process, act as a source of new ideas for the client and highlight the client's resources and competencies in a specific part of the coaching process. Both particularities – of having two coaches for one client, and the concept of the reflecting team – are explained later in this article.

The Kiel Counselling Model can be seen as a model that has travelled a long way and has 'migrated' to Austria. Through Uwe Grau and Jürgen Hargens (Hargens 1992), both Germans, it was possible for Hans Tomaschek to bring the Kiel Counselling Model to Austria. Once there, it was applied to the business context and became the basis for training future coaches in the former M.O.C. (now the European Systemic Business Academy)<sup>1</sup>, led by Hans Tomaschek then and his son Michael Tomaschek now. The Kiel Counselling Model has now been taught and applied in Austria since the 1990s along with systemic coaching, and qualifies coaches, managers and executives to support their clients in the processes of 're-construction' and professional and personal development (Schloem, Tomaschek 2010).

### **THE KIEL COUNSELLING MODEL AND ITS THEORETICAL ROOTS**

As mentioned, the concept of coaching has migrated from the world of elite sports to the world of business as a solution-driven one-on-one consultation process for supporting managers and those in leading positions (Kossik 2011). In order to understand the theoretical roots of the Kiel Counselling Model, we would like to underline two theoretical concepts: systems theory and solution orientation.

#### **SYSTEMIC COACHING**

The coaching process can be described as an expert communication process (Tomaschek 2006). Coaches and clients interact cooperatively on an equal level, with the client being the expert in the specific consultation context and the coaches being experts in leading the coaching process of finding solutions (de Shazer et al. 2006).

Following the systemic approach in coaching – rooted in systems theory and systemic family therapy – Kiel is founded upon two basic principles (König et al. 2002; Tomaschek 2007; Tomaschek et al. 2011). First, all people are part of one or more social systems. Examples are families, the work place, projects, circles of friends, organisations, sports clubs etc. Second, a change in one person in a system changes the whole system. Think of a mobile for children, the child moves one part of the mobile and the whole mobile moves. Coaching is directed at single people in one-on-one interactions between clients and coaches. All clients are part of systems, which cannot be changed by coaching, since these systems are not in the coaching session, but the client is. So the principle of systemic thinking lies in the fact that if the client changes, the system changes as well. If one element of a system changes, the whole system has changed.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.esba.eu>.

The following ten statements can be made about systems theory and then be applied to coaching:

- A social system is defined by its members, who through communicative acts, construct the meaning and limits of the system.
- Any groups of people can be regarded as a social system. Single members are defined as individual, mentally living systems.
- Every system is in a constant process of change.
- Every change within a member can lead to a change in all other members who have a relationship with that member.
- The respective condition of a system represents the only current possible way of adapting to all impulses of the environment of the system.
- The respective condition of the system can always be seen as a subjective reconstruction by an observer; every perception is dependent on the observer.
- Different ways of reconstructing the conditions of a system open up different options for change.
- Interventions cannot causally bring forth certain changes in certain systems.
- Interventions can cause an impulse of change in a system, if they fit in the current state of the art/condition of the system.
- The stimulated system defines, by itself, in which direction and to which degree the impulse causes change.

### **SOLUTION ORIENTATION**

A key aspect of the Kiel Counselling Model is the focus on solutions (Berg, Miller 1992; Berg 2005; de Jong, Berg 2013). As a matter of principal, coaching is not intended as an on-going, indefinite consultation process, but rather about fulfilling a specific coaching mandate and achieving a mutually outlined goal for the particular session (de Shazer 1985). The basic assumption is that clients who come to see a coach are interested in solving their problems, and therefore making the next steps towards the solution, once identified. The advantages of a positive focus are in being able to gear towards the positive, towards the solution and a future which can facilitate change in the wanted direction (Sparrer 2007; Berg, Szabo 2005). This is why solution-based conversation can be more effective than problem-based conversation. Coaching with the Kiel Counselling Model works with exceptions, since these point to possible solutions. Exceptions to a problem can be created by coaches and client and can be used to construct new solutions. Each change in how the clients describe an aim (solution) or what they do, influences the future interactions of all those involved. Furthermore solution-driven work means seeing resources in people (salutogenesis) which can be seen as a health-promoting approach to coaching (Antonovsky 1997; WHO, 1986).

The underlying assumption is that people have everything they need in order to solve their problems. It is also important to know that change always occurs and that problems do not stay problems forever. One assumption is that only small changes are necessary, and that these can lead to major changes.

Another particularity of the Kiel Counselling Model is its approach to the coach–client relationship. The client is seen as being the expert, for his/her experience, problems and solutions. The coaches are the experts in taking the client to see and find his/her solutions. Solution-driven coaching methods and their tools have become established standards in the development of the social skills of executives and managers (Kossik 2011). In order to better understand the mindset of the coach, the rules and principles of the Kiel Counselling Model are described in the next section.

### **BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE KIEL COUNSELLING MODEL**

The coach's mindset can be described by three terms and with one general rule (Hargen, Grau 1990): cooperating; reflecting; making public and respecting.

#### **COOPERATING**

...on the same level is a prerequisite to coaching.

The coach and the client will cooperate in order to differentiate the client's concerns, to define specific goals and to clarify the coach's mandate. The client and coaches work together in order to release resources, and therefore coaching can be seen as a joint process between client and coaches.

#### **REFLECTING**

...creates the possibility of change on all levels, especially when the reflection happens as a joint undertaking. The coaches and client jointly ponder and comment on issues and solutions, thereby co-creating the possibility of change. The coaching process can be seen as a room for reflection. It therefore creates the possibility for change on all levels. With two coaches, further different ways of thinking can be opened. The client can benefit from two completely different perspectives, supported by the different age, gender and working background of the two coaches. The more they differ, the better it is for the client.

#### **MAKING PUBLIC**

...is one of the key methods in resolving negative circles of interactions. In order for coach and client to feel well in the coaching session, both should make public their thoughts, ideas, but also doubts. Clients can on the one hand say that the coaching is not going in the right direction and that goals need to be re-determined. Coaches can

on the other hand express their doubts and feelings too. Making public in this sense supports a healthy way of cooperation between coach and client.

### **RESPECT**

... for the uniqueness and original personality of the client (who and what they are) as a foundation of the coaching relationship.

Throughout the whole process the coaches will respect and appreciate the client's construction of reality (problems and possible solutions) and expertise (about resources, projects, system characteristics etc). The coaches respect the system the client lives in without stepping into it. The coaches ask questions to support the client in finding their own solutions, but never suggest specific solutions to them.

The coaches have the opportunity to openly address everything that emerges during the session and that is relevant to the coaching process. As these issues are verbalised in front of the client, he or she has the opportunity to react to what the coaches bring up, which can be helpful in jointly working towards a solution and clarifying a goal. The guidelines for 'making public' therefore help to resolve negative interaction circles in communication. Rather than not openly communicating, which often happens in companies where communication is hierarchical and therefore rather closed, a coaching session can be used as an open communication platform. All partners in the interaction are asked to make public what they think and feel, rather than just take home impressions of what could have been important.

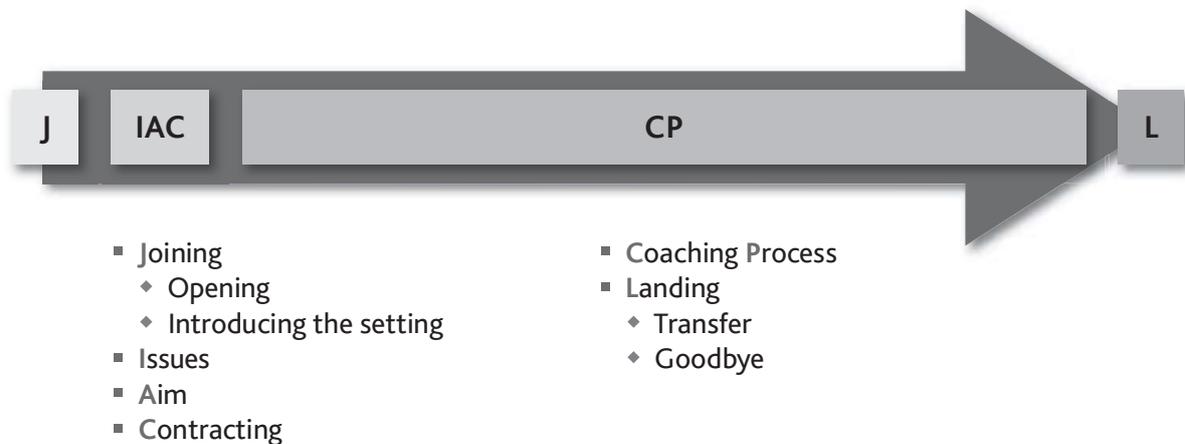
The next section will give an insight into a practical coaching session with the Kiel Counselling Model.

## **THE KIEL COUNSELLING MODEL AND ITS PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS IN A COACHING SESSION**

After having introduced the historical and theoretical roots of the Kiel Counselling Model, its practical code of conduct is introduced here. As already mentioned, the Kiel Counselling Model works with two coaches and one client as well as a reflecting team. A typical coaching session can be understood as a structured coaching process. This process can be described by the following phases presented on Figure 1.

In the joining and opening phase, coaches and clients set up a relationship of trust. They develop a common understanding of coaching and what coaching can and cannot do. The coaches explain how coaching works and discuss the basics, like voluntary participation in the coaching, that no question *has* to be answered, but *can* be answered, and the price of the coaching. The coaches then explain with which methods they work (question techniques, experiments, methods of visualisation etc.).

FIGURE 1. STRUCTURED COACHING PROCESS



Source: Tomaschek (1998).

The coaches centre on:

- Establishing a trustworthy and cooperative relationship with the client (rapport),
- Clarifying how clients were referred to coaching, and which issue led to their deciding to consider coaching as the means to an end,
- Clarifying clients' questions about Kiel coaching, and 'coaching' in general,
- Explaining the setting and the roles of both the coaches.

In the problem clarification phase, the coaches ask: What are you here with? Which issues have you brought with you? In this phase the client explains their problem and why they are there. The job of the coaches is to listen and to differentiate between different issues.

In the goal-defining phase, the coaches and client work towards a goal in the future. They talk about what needs to be changed in order for the problem to (dis)solve. The goal is worded according to "SMART" rules and written down.

In the contracting phase, the coaches and the client talk about how the goal can be reached within one coaching session, and how they can work towards that goal (e.g. with which methods).

Then the actual coaching process starts, and the coaches and client work to the goal with the chosen methods in the contracting phase.

After the coaching process, the coaches try to support the client in the landing and transferring phase, which means making sure the client can concretely apply the solutions they worked on in their professional life. The coaches may ask questions like, 'Which concrete steps can you now take in order to implement your goal?' Finally, after 60 minutes, they say goodbye.

## THE TWO LANDMARKS OF THE KIEL COUNSELLING MODEL: TWO COACHES AND A REFLECTING TEAM

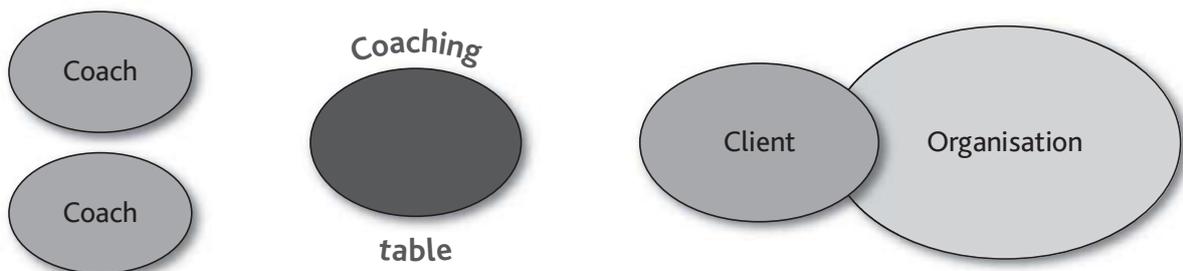
### TWO COACHES FOR ONE CLIENT

One particularity of coaching with the Kiel Counselling Model is that the number of coaches does not depend on the number of clients – two coaches always mutually cooperate with one client (Wandas 2012). In this way, meta-dialogue between the two coaches is made possible. Meta-dialogue in this case is the process of openly reflecting the situation of the client. For this purpose, the two coaches turn towards each other, face each other and openly reflect about what they think and feel about the coaching process so far. If possible the meta-dialogue does not last longer than five minutes, starting and ending with a compliment on the resources of the client. The client is invited to interrupt the two coaches or to listen without being a direct communication and interaction partner for these five minutes. Through the meta-dialogue possible solutions, ideas or fantasies in the heads of the two coaches can be presented as “possibilities”, or next steps in the coaching process which can be discussed, and further compliments can be paid to the client.

Uwe Grau and Jürgen Hargens once explained the roots of the meta-dialogue (Wandas 2012) in an interview. They had the feeling that their own ideas could also be helpful to the client, and so they came up with the idea of reflecting their ideas and fantasies in a meta-dialogue between themselves, having the client take over the role of the listener for three to five minutes. This way, their own ideas could be openly reflected during the coaching process and the clients could decide whether or not they were useful. The most relevant advantage of the Kiel Counselling Model therefore, is that two coaches bring two different perspectives into the coaching process.

The coaching setting can be visualised as it is presented on Figure 2.

FIGURE 2. COACHING SETTING



Source: own elaboration.

The coaches and clients together form a counselling system that can be held up-right in the long run with the aim of (dis)solving problems. Coaching is a concept of external counselling for clients, separated from the organisation, although the client is part of an organisation (or another social system). The client is at the centre of the coaching process, which builds upon the main principle of cooperation. The client brings constructions of problems into the coaching session. During the conversation about the problem-system, additional information is brought to light. The coaches and client develop changed perspectives about the problem-system together. The change of perspectives makes the development of alternative ways of action possible. In everyday life, a client can then implement the changed ways of action in relation to the occupational setting and system.

In the Kiel Counselling Model there is no hierarchy between the two coaches. It does not make a difference who asks which question, or who starts to ask questions. After the coaching session the two coaches have the possibility to reflect on their methods together, which would also be possible for coaches working on their own under supervision, but more specific reflection comes from working as a coaching-team.

In the phase of defining aims and contracting, it is especially important for the coaches to work together to find one goal that is clear to all the interaction's partners. Therefore, a so-called "cockpit cross check" is run between the two coaches in order for them to agree on one goal with the client and how to work on this goal in the coaching session.

### **THE REFLECTING TEAM**

The reflecting team is a team of three to four other coaches observing the coaching session from a distance of about 10 meters. The reflecting team's duty is to reflect upon the coaching process as soon as the two main coaches say so (Tomaschek 2006; Wandas 2012). They reflect upon the coaching process and possible solutions for the client in a positive, solution-driven way, complimenting and appreciating the client's competences and solutions so far. The reflecting team switches their places with the coaches and the client, who then sit in the chairs of the reflecting team for five to seven minutes, just listening. When the reflecting team is done with generating ideas and compliments they end their reflection and go back to their seats. Then the main coaches and the client go back to the coaching table and continue the session. The client then decides if they want to take up some of the reflections from the reflecting team and carry on with them, or if the reflections were not helpful in the next steps towards a solution.

## DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

In closing, we would like to ask you to scale how useful this article has been to you as a reader. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 is not useful at all, 10 is very useful) how would you rate the article for yourself? How will you apply its content in your working life? How could you start working with a second coach in your daily work, thus applying some aspects of the Kiel Counselling Model? What would be the advantages of working with a coach in training?

The main aim of this article was to introduce the Kiel Counselling Model to newcomers and to talk about the specific setting and exemplary methods coaches use in the Kiel Counselling Model. For this purpose, the Kiel model's historical roots in sports and its transfer to business were explained as well as its theoretical roots in systems theory and solution-driven thinking.

The mindset of coaches working with the Kiel Counselling Model is one of the most important tools: reflecting, cooperating, respecting and making public one's own thoughts, ideas and fantasies in the coaching session.

In the end, the practical coaching process was outlined and two of the specificities of this coaching model were introduced: working with two coaches instead of one, and working with a reflecting team. On the one hand, it can be stated that these methods and settings have shown the best possible results for clients in the past, since two different coaches have more ideas than one coach and can together apply more and different methods than one coach (e.g. meta-dialogue). On the other hand, the economic point of view has to be taken into account: clients have to pay for two coaches in this coaching model, or one of the coaches is a coach in training. Having a reflecting team at hand in practicing coaching is very rare, but can also be done in team coaching with non-coaches. In this case, lay people can be briefed to play the role of the reflecting team, thus adding ideas and compliments to the coaching process. Still further research needs to be done on the effectiveness and the concrete effects of coaching with one or two coaches for the client so that evidence can be added to existing and future coaching models.

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