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Modified Scientific Approach to Coaching

Abstract

This article discusses issues related to the terminological ambiguity of the coaching concept. This paper is the expanded and updated version of the scientific description of coaching from 2011. A thorough review of coaching definitions found in the literature is performed, and several definitions of coaching incorporating the key aspects of the issue are presented. Furthermore, an analysis of coaching varieties is presented, along with a synthetic approach to key forms of coaching.

Keywords: coaching, definition, classification

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Introduction

The notion of coaching became highly successful during the first decade of the 21st century. Interesting, its popularity continues to increase each year. Recalling the research conducted by the Chamber of Coaching in Poland and the Coachwise, the average annual growth in the number of coaches since 2012 is 15 percentage points in Europe and 20 percentage points in Poland. In comparison to 2011, the number of searches on the term “coaching” has significantly increased. In the Ebsco database, for example, the number is currently at 189,381, which represents an increase of 19 percentage points. This article provides an expansion of the study published in 2011, titled “Scientific approach to coaching”. It includes updates of new information from the past three years. The coaching phenomenon shows a very high dynamic of change concerning the concept of coaching and the science slowly emerging from it.

Selected definitions of coaching

When analyzing the literature on coaching, we can encounter a number of different definitions, some of which are very broad and even inaccurate. For the purposes of this article, only the most relevant coaching definitions will be cited below.

V. Lombardi, one of the pioneers of coaching and one of the most famous football coaches in the United States, who uses a very innovative approach to training, stated that “coaching in its truest sense, is giving the responsibility to the learner to come up with their own answers.”

R. Dilts treats coaching as a technique for exposing human strengths, reconciling personal barriers and weaknesses on the way to success, and improving self-functioning in a team. Dilts emphasizes solving problems through the use of new approaches and modes of action.

S. Maynard, as the first foreign researcher on the subject, has tried to form a definition of coaching, which she later described as an academic definition. She states that coaching is a “designed alliance between a coach and a student in order to foster skills for success in an educational environment. It is an individualized process, which facilitates goal clarification and achievement. Coaching

stimulates and motivates students towards goal achievement by providing structure, support and feedback.”

The approach of S. Caldwell is also worth noting; Caldwell defines coaching as the “[a]rt of facilitating achieving results, learning and development of another person.” She states that there is no single, universal definition of coaching and that people understand the concept variously. When examining the literature, we can reach the same conclusion. Moreover, we may be tempted to argue that people are ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory in their understanding of the concept of coaching. Therefore, for the purposes of both science and practice, it is worth proposing a definition that will be broader and logically combine previous definitions, in order to simplify the examination of the term.

A very interesting approach, but one that is applicable only to individual coaching, was proposed by A. Cooper and O. Cooper, who stated that “coaching is a professional service using proven methods of work with that person to effectively deliver results that this person wants in every aspect of their professional and personal life. The purpose of coaching is to remove any obstacles that prevent these individuals from achieving their goals.”

J. O’Connor and A. Lages offered a very comprehensive and simultaneously thorough definition of coaching, which they defined in two dimensions. The first dimension is more detailed and is recognized as a set of activities assisting in the implementation of new tasks, achievement of finer results in professional life and skills development, as well as overcoming problems. The second dimension relates to more general measures to find direction and balance.

In Polish coaching research, besides Kutz, Ratajczyk and P. Pilipczuk formed a vast and comprehensive general definition of coaching supplemented by a set of detailed features. According to them, coaching is a process of strengthening and giving support to individuals coached during their pursuit of change.

In the analysis of terminological concepts of coaching and in search of its scientific method, it is worth looking back to the ancient era and philosophy. According to W. Tatarkiewicz – Socrates, the creator of the dialectical movement, claimed that dialectics is a “method of philosophical discourse of ‘pulling out’ real meanings and definitions of terms and their correlations by the teacher from his students. It is based on one of the two methods:

- **Elenctic** – which is a method of oppositional discussion, in which the defense of one point of view is pitted against the defense of another, where one participant leads another to contradict himself or to make an absurd thesis,
- **Maieutic** – that helps the students to realize the truth, which they already know, through skillfully asking questions. This method assumes that each man has intuitive knowledge about concepts.”

Through the study of such definitions, it can be concluded that the maieutic method is the cornerstone of modern coaching.

Overview of major coaching variations

Due to the fact that coaching may refer to social, business or career development aspects, a whole range of coaching variations has been established. Only selected variations that are discussed below, while the remaining variations are presented in a rather synthetic manner. For this reason, the author will attempt to assess selected variations, as well as to group them into certain homogeneous sets, beginning with the presentation of the characteristics of the most common, and usually the most general, forms of coaching.

Life coaching (personal) is the basic variation of coaching. It deals with objectives or problems related to the client's private life. It may include family areas or the search for meaning or happiness in life. Life coaching may not seem to be associated with business coaching; however, in reality, a lot of professional problems result from personal problems. For example, an employee will work more effectively if he likes his job and is happy in his private life.

Business coaching directly refers to the business area and deals with everything associated with the effectiveness of a company. Business coaching can, for example, address problems related to business management, management of different departments, or acquisition of useful business skills. It covers areas ranging from leadership skills to performance efficiency improvement to effective sales.

Next, we can differentiate career coaching, which closely relates to business due to the specific objectives involved. Career coaching is used when objectives relate to career development, such as a promotion, change of professional profile, start of one's own business, change of employment, or development in order to place a specific job position.

Another variation is leadership coaching. This coaching often refers to the managerial team. It is associated with the development of skills and areas generally associated with leadership (like team management skills development and becoming a leader). Negotiation and communication skills may become very important here. Leadership coaching can be expected to relate to skills acquisition for conducting coaching sessions or ability to work as a manager or coach.

The fifth variety of coaching, which is arguably one of the most important, is provocative coaching. Based on the work of Hollander and Wijnberg the provocative style has found representatives and recipients in many places in the world.

Its representatives argue that, thanks to doing this type of work, the customer gains a much more realistic perspective on his or her own life, the ability to laugh at his or her problems, greater assertiveness, and a desire to look for change and solutions rather than use excuses for failures. A provocative coach holds a distorting mirror in front of the customer. This is done in all possible ways: exaggeration, redrawing, interrupting the client's speech, distancing, and amusing. Sometimes provocative coaching offers surrealistic, shocking and chaotic interpretations of customers' behavior, but this is done with great concern and affection, thus reaching extraordinarily positive results. Provocation that lacks sympathy and a sense of humor may develop into mocking and plain cynicism; therefore, provocative coaching must be based on the common plane of these three elements. Provocative coaching is unexpected, surprising and full of paradoxes that disturb customers' comfort zone and break down its patterns. One of the overarching rules is the principle that provocation always refers to thinking patterns, stereotypes and behavioral patterns of different people. Provocation is used in initiating certain behaviors in the coachee:

- manifestation of self-esteem both verbally and non-verbally
- ability to behave appropriately when acting and maintaining relationships with people
- spontaneous and direct manifestation of one's own, real, deep feelings to close others
- engaging in real-life testing of psychosocial reality and learning distinctions necessary to respond in a flexible way.

The most common classifications of coaching

This section presents the most frequently occurring classifications of coaching.

Due to the type of support needed by the subject, coaching can be divided into:

- individual coaching, where the supported subject is one person;
- relationship coaching, the purpose of which is changing the interaction of two or three people (e.g., coaching spouses or business partners);
- group coaching, where the coach works with several group members, supporting the development of groups and teams and helping to achieve the expected level of efficiency;
- team coaching, where the team becomes the subject of support; and
- self-coaching, which is a systematic reflection on one's own development in which the supported subject becomes his or her own coach,

- Based on the work of O'Donohue, Fisher, Whitmore and Maynard, according to the life areas affected by intervention, the following categories of coaching can be distinguished, among others:
- life coaching (personal coaching), which focuses on the topic of one's personal life;
- business coaching (directed towards middle level managers), the goal of which is to offer customer support in developing competencies necessary in the achievement of professional plans and, as a result, professional career development; in business coaching, sessions are closely related to topics about work and its processes, with coachees both increasing their managerial qualifications and improving selected competencies in order to increase their personal effectiveness;
- educational coaching;
- sports coaching;
- health coaching; and
- spiritual coaching (soul coaching).

According to Parsloe, Downey, Thorpe, and Clifford, a detailed breakdown can be performed in each of these areas.

In terms of the subject's supporter (i.e., the coach), coaching can be divided into:

- external coaching, where coaching is performed by a coach from outside an organization; and
- internal coaching, where coaching is performed by an organization's employee, such as a supervisor or HR specialist (managerial coaching).
- In terms of the type of organization for which coaching is provided, we can distinguish:
 - corporate coaching, which is carried out in large organizations and corporations; and
 - small business coaching, designed for small and medium-sized business owners and managers.

According to the level of support within an organization – that is, the hierarchical level of the manager that is receiving the service – coaching can be divided into:

- executive coaching, designed for upper management; and
- managerial coaching, conducted for lower (so-called line managers).

In relation to the manager's career stage within an organization, we can discuss the following types of coaching:

- career coaching, the goal of which is connected to the manager's career development;
- newly assigned leader coaching, which is intended to prepare the coachee for the role of a leader, the responsibilities and the method of leading a team and handling business tasks;
- transition coaching, for a person changing his or her career path or leaving a corporation, such as in the case of retirement;
- high-potential coaching, intended to help develop the potential of those who have been recognized as crucial for the future of a business or are included in an organizational plan for promotion and succession; and
- performance coaching, which aims to develop the skills of a manager in achieving better results, understanding expectations related to his current or future position and preparing for further professional development.

Many of these types of coaching may overlap. The general theory of the coaching process deals with coaching psychology, a new and dynamically developing department of psychology. In the case of business and managerial coaching, the theory also covers issues related to economics, HR and management.

A number of other varieties of coaching can be found in the literature or other source materials. The Table 1 presents the synthetic characteristics of other variations of coaching often found in the literature.

Table 1. The synthetic characteristics of other variations of coaching often found in the literature

Various forms of coaching	Short definition
Executive coaching	Coaching designed for superior management
Corporate coaching	Business coaching for organization support
Tool coaching	Coaching for specific skill development
Performance coaching	Coaching focused on goal achievement
Leadership coaching	Coaching for developing leadership skills
Expert coaching (specialty coaching)	Coaching focused on subjects related to coachee's occupation
Co-active coaching	Coaching based on the assumption that the customer is able to find answers to questions
Shadow coaching	Coaching based on observation of work of a manager or of a group of managers and their shared analysis

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Various forms of coaching	Short definition
Integral coaching	Coaching inspired by theories of Ken Wilber an American writer and promoter of so called integral psychology, a combination of psychology, philosophy and mysticism
Somatic coaching	Coaching supported by relaxation techniques
Co-coaching (supervising)	Coaching where two coaches work together and are simultaneously undergoing coaching
VIP coaching	Coaching aimed towards so-called "higher spheres"
Sales coaching	Coaching designed for sales staff; designed to develop sales skills and sales personality.
Diet coaching	Coaching for dieting, healthy lifestyle combined with morning workout routine
Auto-coaching	Coaching based on independent, regular work on oneself, consisting of self-motivation and asking yourself questions in order to find the answers
Zen coaching	Coaching based on searching for the method of being in a moment and life in space; focus on customer expectations
Unitive coaching	Coaching life variable based on depth psychology by Carl Gustav Jung, Gestalt psychology, humanistic psychology and existential philosophy

Source: Ratajczyk and Pilipczuk, <http://www.iccpoland.pl/Artykuly/> (15.11.2011).

Summary

In summary, it can be stated that a scientific approach to coaching does exist. In this regard, coaching is a process that enables the enhancement and support of the coached individual or group in their pursuit of change. This is achievable thanks to coaches' effective use of questions, their everlasting motivation and the assistance they offer to enable their coachees to reach their goals. Through coaching, individuals' or teams' potentials are strengthened, and restrictions and barriers are eliminated. We can find systematic classifications of coaching in the literature. There is also a very impressive list of coaching varieties; however, it is worth paying particular attention to the most frequently used varieties that utilize the most interesting coaching tools.

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