

Student ID – 2541612

BMPF7303D - Coaching and Mentoring

Component 1 – Written Assignment

Word Count – 3086

I work as a Digital Skills Specialist at UWTSD, part of my team's role is to support both staff and students across the university to develop the skills and confidence they need to achieve their goals. I feel this has naturally created opportunities to use a coaching mindset, rather than only providing technical solutions. In my role, I work with people from different institutes and professional services, across different geographical locations. As a result, I have witnessed different sub-cultures that exist across different departments and contexts.

The organisational culture within the university as a whole is quite difficult to pin down. Recently our department has undergone a restructure, merging different teams. It is evident that there have been different cultures within different teams, and now we are navigating merging ways of working. As a result of the restructure, I am now taking on line-management responsibilities and hope to bring some of the coaching theories and methods that I have been exploring into my approach while supporting my team.

I am neurodivergent myself, having been diagnosed as an adult while navigating a new workplace. I feel this gives me an understanding of how to support neurodivergent people, but also in appreciating the need to adapt and support everyone as an individual, regardless of their neurotype. This is something I hope to demonstrate in my approach to coaching and feel would be appropriate for most organisational contexts. My main perspectives are based on experience of autism and ADHD, however my aim is to also be inclusive for other neurodivergences as well as to individual preferences generally.

I have approached my research into differing coaching theories and models through a neuroaffirmative lens. Although this is not a theory or model in itself, it is a framework informed by the social model of disability, and neuroinclusive approaches. Rather than replacing existing coaching theories, the aim is to adapt and critique based on principles of accessibility and equity.

This is the principle that I bring to my approach to interactions in the workplace and hope to foster when coaching. Neuroinclusivity is becoming increasingly important in the HE sector. An estimated 15-20% of the global population is believed to be neurodivergent (Doyle, 2020), while there is also evidence to suggest a distinct increase

in students reporting disabilities, including neurodivergence, between the academic years 2014/15 and 2024/25 (HESA, 2026). This would suggest a need for an organisation such as UWTSD to foster a culture around inclusivity for both staff and students. I would argue that such a culture in a university that begins with staff is easier to filter down to students.

One of the challenges when supporting neurodivergent people in the workplace is the fact that many feel tensions exist for them within the organisation's culture. The idea of people being a 'good fit' in organisations often hides unconscious bias and there is an argument that organisations should look to hire for "culture add, not culture fit" (Wallrich, 2022). Unwritten rules around communication or workplace hierarchies are often not intuitive to autistic people and there is often an entire 'hidden curriculum' for neurodivergent people to learn (McCarthy, n.d.). The reality for many neurodivergent people is that they feel like outsiders, or not part of the dominant culture, which may be based on arbitrary, neurotypical norms. In a report from The National Autistic Society (2016) nearly half of the respondents reported "bullying or harassment or other discrimination or unfair treatment due to their autism".

This attitude would not be part of the 'official' culture of organisations that claim to be inclusive and equitable. However, it suggests the difference in the real 'lived' culture for many neurodivergent individuals. To illustrate this point, City & Guilds Foundation (2026) found that there is a large gap between how confident employers feel about their support and understanding of neurodiversity and the reality of the lived experience of neurodivergent employees. "Employer confidence in neurodiversity readiness averages 70-75%, rising to 78%-80% among senior leaders" and "By contrast, only 32%-38% of neurodivergent employees report feeling psychologically safe to disclose, trusting that adjustments will be implemented consistently, and believing their organisation understands the impact of their neurodivergence." (City & Guilds Foundation, 2026, p.6). This could be an example of how Schein (2017) identifies differences between the espoused values and formal philosophy of an organisation, and the lived culture for employees.

A study by Watts (2024) describes specific concerns by autistic participants "that the purpose of workplace coaching was to improve their performance and 'fix them' to fit

into an ableist system”. Therefore, while evaluating coaching theories, I have done so through a neuroinclusive lens and a desire to use a coaching model that not only ‘fits’ within an organisation but could help foster a mindset of change and inclusion to bring the best out of individuals.

One of the goals of Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) is to “build internal resources, stability and self-acceptance” and to “enable the client to become their own self-coach” (Williams, Palmer and Edgerton, 2014, p.35). This can be an important factor for equipping people with the skills they need once the coaching sessions have finished. Particularly for autistic and other neurodivergent people who may have repeatedly had negative experiences in the workplace (National Autistic Society, 2016; City & Guilds Foundation, 2026).

One thing to be mindful of, however, is the assumption that people are jumping to unfounded conclusions or ‘thinking errors’. Many neurodivergent individuals have a number of real-life negative experiences in the workplace due to their differences and therefore it may be more difficult to challenge those assumptions.

Another point to consider is the prevalence of dichotomous thinking, also known as ‘black and white’ or ‘all or nothing’ thinking. This can be a real challenge for many neurodivergent people, and in particular those who are autistic (Stark *et al.*, 2021). This can often lead to the kind of ‘global thinking’ that CBC aims to challenge. For that reason, I believe that CBC can be a helpful tool, as long as the coach considers how neurodivergence and workplace experiences can influence the coachee’s perception.

CBC’s focus on self-acceptance and the idea of being “ok, just because I exist” (p.37) can be a powerful notion for neurodivergent people who fear rejection in the workplace unless masking themselves (Pryke-Hobbes *et al.*, 2023). This may be particularly difficult for those who experience Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD), something that commonly manifests in people with ADHD. RSD can cause extreme emotions in response to perceived rejection or criticism (Dodson, 2026).

There is limited peer-reviewed literature directly addressing CBC’s application to neurodivergent adults in a workplace coaching context. However, there has been some research on the suitability of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) on neurodivergent

people, which CBC has built its principles on. One study suggested that unadapted CBT did not align well with certain aspects of ADHD traits (William *et al.*, 2024). Traditional CBT techniques aim to reframe negative thoughts, but for many neurodivergent people their distress is caused by discrimination, sensory overload or burnout, and not through cognitive distortion. This is something that must be considered when using Cognitive Behavioural techniques. As the name suggests, CBC focuses on behavioural changes which can be useful when those behaviours are self-limiting. However, with neurodivergent people, this must be done carefully to avoid encouraging masking or individuals changing themselves in order to fit neurotypical norms.

As a neuroaffirming coach, it is so important to validate someone's reality and give them space to share their truth. However, at the same time it can be helpful to question any unhelpful or limiting narratives which could be hindering someone in the workplace. I do feel that CBC has strong potential to be neuroaffirming in its approach, when it is adapted, used flexibly, and considerations are made about how neurodivergence impacts people in the workplace.

Person-centred coaching, in my opinion, can also link well with a neuroaffirming approach. There is an emphasis on "non-directivity" (Joseph, 2014, p.67) which does not mean a lack of direction at all, but rather following the coachee's direction. This can be important for neurodivergent people as it could give them a sense of control, particularly for those who struggle with demand avoidance. Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is a behavioural profile, often associated with autism and ADHD, which can cause anxiety and significant difficulties with managing demands in the workplace (Kenny and Doyle, 2024).

A coach utilising the Person-Centred approach aims to trust the coachee to find their own direction (Joseph, 2014, p.69). However, in some cases, this could potentially lead to rumination or hyper-focus on specific details of a situation. This can be exacerbated by the previously mentioned 'black-and-white thinking' and responses to rejection sensitivity. As a result, it's important that the coach is still able to steer the sessions effectively if things are not progressing.

One of the key principles of person-centred coaching is that people are “intrinsically motivated to grow and develop....when the right social environmental conditions are present”. This does not necessarily take into account the struggles many autistic or ADHD individuals have with social environments. If a person is using large amounts of their energy to navigate workplace social dynamics, there may not be as much energy left for striving towards other goals. Autistic burnout is distinct from workplace burnout and depression and has its own characteristics associated with “chronic exhaustion, loss of skills, and reduced tolerance to stimulus” (Raymaker et al., 2020). These are all potential impacts that neuroaffirming or neuroinclusive coaches must be aware of in order to support coachees.

In my view there are elements of both CBC and Person-Centred Coaching which could be used in a neuroaffirming way. Both styles focus on empathy, creating a non-judgemental environment, and assisting coachees with reaching their potential. There are also tensions between the two styles, for example, Person-centred tends to be non-directive whereas CBC is more directive by the coach. Rather than using a mix of both theories without thought, I would suggest carefully selecting elements of each that seem to resonate with the coachee, and taking their lead on which aspects work best for them. I would say that a good understanding of these theories, alongside an understanding of neurodiversity can aid coaches in tailoring their sessions effectively.

In my view, the GROW model can be helpful when used as a general framework for sessions. It is a simple model which can assist both coaches and coachees to keep things on track and on topic. However, it should not always be strictly adhered to at the expense of allowing coachees to express themselves in their own way. This can particularly be the case with divergent or non-linear thinking, which is commonly associated with ADHD (Stolte *et al.*, 2022). What might seem like going off topic or jumping to something unrelated in a coaching session, could actually be a helpful form of expression.

In terms of setting goals, it is particularly important with neurodivergent people that coaches are accommodating to fluctuations in priorities, energy levels, and capacity. There are often high levels of masking in the workplace which can risk leading to burnout for many neurodivergent individuals (Pryke-Hobbes *et al.*, 2023). There can also

be significant struggles with executive function, which can cause difficulties with planning, goal-maintenance and organisational skills. These traits can all make achieving goals challenging, and coaches should be expected to show empathy and understanding. An appropriate coaching style needs to build flexibility into it, particularly in cases where a neurodivergent person is edging towards burnout. It can often be a fine line between 'coping' and 'struggling' (Doyle and McDowall, 2024, p.44). The GROW framework is something that can be applied across different coaching styles and theories. Therefore, I believe it fits well with either the CBC or person-centred approaches, as long as appropriate accommodations are put in place.

Having also researched other coaching theories, I would say that Positive Psychology Coaching is less suitable for use at my organisation, as well as when considered through a lens of neurodiversity. Some of the criticisms of Positive Psychology are its lack of definition of what constitutes positivity as well as potentially creating a "dichotomous division" between which behaviours, emotions or experiences are deemed negative or positive (van Zyl *et al.*, 2024). Other professionals suggest needing to find the correct balance between 'healthy positivity' and 'toxic positivity' (Stewart, no date). This could be especially true within an organisational culture that is fragmented in many ways, due to mergers, restructures, and multiple locations. A positive psychology approach could inadvertently push coachees towards expressing positivity or gratitude for situations before they feel ready to. I would argue that Cognitive Behavioural Coaching offers a more realistic approach to challenging negativity and reframing experiences while still acknowledging legitimate difficulties. I would also say that Positive Psychology Coaching may not be suitable for many neurodivergent people for similar reasons, as it could appear to be invalidating towards genuine negative experiences. Although it has its merits, I believe it is less universally applicable across this organisation.

Another coaching approach that I felt would not be as suitable is Transpersonal Coaching. This theory can appear too abstract and ambiguous for many people. This could particularly be the case for many neurodivergent people who prefer structure and clarity in their communication. Again, it could be a beneficial approach for some but in

general, it may not be appropriate for a workplace context. It can also present issues with measuring outcomes or managing actions when the approach is less tangible.

Throughout my research on various coaching theories and models, as well as on neurodiversity, something that has become clear is the need for coaches to continue learning and adapting their approaches. Flexibility and an openness to learning and growing through working with a range of people should be key. Coaches should be open to learning from their coachees as well, and not making assumptions about the best way to facilitate the sessions. As mentioned previously, the need to be flexible and change approaches from session to session is key.

I also believe that Universal Design Principles can often be applied to coaching scenarios to ensure approaches are inclusive. This could mean ensuring any documentation is checked for accessible format and language, and asking for feedback from coachees about clarity (McDowell and Doyle, 2024). It is also important to recognise intersectionality and identity too. There will not be a 'one-size-fits-all' theory or model and coaches will need to ensure that they adapt their style, while having a good foundational knowledge in multiple coaching theories.

The International Coaching Federation (ICF, no date) defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." Coaches should therefore ensure they have enough understanding to support their neurodivergent coachees to also reach their potential.

Within the coaching contract and at the beginning of the first sessions with a new coachee, expectations should be clearly communicated. This may be even more important when considering neurodivergence and to establish the boundary between coaching and therapy. There is often significant trauma from real experiences in the workplace, and it is important to know when to signpost or refer to other professionals. It is also important to consider one's own limitations as a coach, if there is a lack of knowledge or understanding of neurodivergence, then perhaps it is wise to know when to refer the coachee to someone with more experience or expertise. A lack of

understanding could be more damaging to neurodivergent people who are expected to 'fix' themselves rather than looking at the external barriers they are facing.

Worth considering is that sometimes no amount of coaching will help in a toxic work environment. In some cases, coaching is mistakenly used to try to fix issues in the workplace and find quick solutions. Coaching should not be remedial, but a developmental tool (Smith, 2025).

Wellbeing is also important to consider in a coaching environment. There may be instances where a workplace is toxic and damaging to someone's mental health. It is not always an individual's response to stress at work that needs addressing, sometimes the job itself is the problem (McDowall and Doyle, 2024, p.220). Often one of the problems with the notion of 'resilience' is it places the responsibility on the autistic or ADHD individual to manage their reactions to a workplace that won't adapt to their needs. Studies have shown that mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression are common alongside neurodivergence (Hollocks *et al.*, 2019). The coach should be mindful of this, while also recognising when a coachee requires referral for specialist support or therapy.

In my view, workplace coaching cannot be the fix for structural issues such as discrimination, bullying, and systems built without neurodivergence in mind. However, fostering a coaching culture can contribute to a shift in mindset and attitudes that support all employees to achieve their potential. Coaching can be structurally ineffective if workplaces remain unchanged but still emotionally helpful to individuals. Although none of the existing theories or models mentioned are perfect or ideal in terms of considering neurodiversity, they can give a good foundation and starting point for coaches to adapt. I would argue that one of the most important skills for coaches is the ability to adapt and be flexible to meet the needs of their coachee, and this is more important than having a fixed coaching style that strictly adheres to a model.

With a mix of elements from CBC, Person-Centred Coaching, and the GROW model, I have identified an approach to coaching which I feel would be appropriate to most organisations. It brings in elements of different coaching theories and builds on them to accommodate different styles. As I have also been considering a universal design

approach, it should be suitable with the different organisational cultures that exist across different teams and locations. This approach to coaching is well suited due to its emphasis on adaptability, flexibility, and meeting the needs of the individual to navigate their own experiences in the workplace. It should also be a suitable approach generally when considering neurodivergence, as it takes into account the needs of the individual, is led by the coachee while still providing a structure to keep things from straying too far from the goal of the coaching sessions. “The integration of neuro-affirmative coaching practices resonates with on-going efforts to create more inclusive work environments” (Antony, Ramnath and Ellikkal, 2024) and, in my view, should be a priority for coaches to explore.

References

- Antony, S., Ramnath, R. and Ellikkal, A. (2024) 'Empowering neuro-diversity: A neuroaffirmative approach to workplace coaching,' *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 19(1), pp. 49–59. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2024.19.1.49>.
- City & Guilds Foundation (2026) *Neurodiversity Index Report 2026*. Available at: <https://cityandguildsfoundation.org/what-we-offer/campaigning/neurodiversity-index/neurodiversity-index-report-2026/> (Accessed: 13 September 2026).
- Dodson, W. (2026) 'RSD: Meaning of Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria, ADHD Link', ADDitude. Updated 21 August 2026. Available at [RSD: Meaning of Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria, ADHD Link](#) (Accessed: 13 September 2026)
- Doyle, N. (2020) 'Neurodiversity at work: a biopsychosocial model and the impact on working adults,' *British Medical Bulletin*, 135(1), pp. 108–125. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bmb/ldaa021>.
- Doyle, N. and McDowall, A. (2024) *Neurodiversity coaching: A Psychological Approach to Supporting Neurodivergent Talent and Career Potential*. Taylor & Francis.
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2026) *Table 15: UK permanent address student enrolments by disability and sex 2014/15 to 2024/25*. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-15> (Accessed: 12 September 2026).
- Hollocks, M.J., Lerh, J.W., Magiati, I., Meiser-Stedman, R and Brugha, T.S. (2019) 'Anxiety and depression in adults with autism spectrum disorder: a systematic review and meta-analysis', *Psychological Medicine*, 49(4), pp. 559–572. Available at: doi:10.1017/S0033291718002283 (Accessed: 14 September 2026).
- International Coaching Federation (no date) *About ICF: Advancing professional coaching worldwide*. Available at: [About ICF | Advancing Professional Coaching Worldwide](#)

Kenny, N. and Doyle, A. (2024) 'A phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of adults experiencing pathological demand avoidance,' *Neurodiversity*, 2.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/27546330241277075> (Accessed 13 September 2026).

McCarthy, K. (no date), 'The hidden curriculum: what neurodivergent employees wish we knew', *Neurodiversity Academy*. Available at [The Hidden Curriculum: What Neurodivergent Employees Wish We Knew](#) (Accessed: 13 September 2026).

National Autistic Society (2016) *The autism employment gap: Too Much Information in the workplace*. London: National Autistic Society. Available at: [TMI Employment Report 24pp WEB.pdf](#) (Accessed: 12 September 2026).

Pryke-Hobbes, A., Davies, J., Heasman, B., Livesey, A., Walker, A., Pellicano, E. and Remington, A. (2023) 'The workplace masking experiences of autistic, non-autistic neurodivergent and neurotypical adults in the UK,' *PLoS ONE*, 18(9). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0290001> (Accessed 13 September 2026)

Raymaker, D.M., Teo, A.R., Steckler, N.A., Lentz, B., Scharer, M., Delos Santos, A., Kapp., S.K., Hunter, M., Joyce, A. and Nicolaidis, C. (2020) "Having All of Your Internal Resources Exhausted Beyond Measure and Being Left with No Clean-Up Crew": Defining Autistic Burnout,' *Autism in Adulthood*, 2(2), pp. 132–143. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079> (Accessed 13 September 2026).

Schein, E.H. (2017) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th edn. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Smith, M. (2025) *Coaching isn't remedial, it's a strategic investment- Academic Coach*. Available at: <https://academiccoach.info/blog/hscngokktk7nlyqatwpqe4s2vzxmv9> (Accessed 13 September 2026).

Stark, E. et al. (2021) 'Autistic Cognition: Charting Routes to Anxiety,' *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 25(7), pp. 571–581. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2021.03.014>.

Stewart, J. (no date) 'How to distinguish healthy positivity from toxic positivity,' *School of Coaching Mastery*. Available at: <https://www.schoolofcoachingmastery.com/coaching-blog/how-to-distinguish-healthy-positivity-from-toxic-positivity> (Accessed 13 September 2026).

Stolte, M. Tschentscher, N., Fischbach, A., Kalbe, E and Aretz, W. (2022) 'Characterizing creative thinking and creative achievements in relation to symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder,' *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.909202> (Accessed: 13 September 2026).

Williams, H., Palmer, S. and Edgerton, N. (2014), 'Cognitive Behavioural Coaching' in Cox, E., Bachkirova, T. and Clutterbuck, D.A. (eds) *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*. SAGE. pp. 34-50.

Wallrich, L. (2022) 'Making diversity work: Transforming assessment and selection to hire for culture-add, not culture-fit', *Occupational Psychology Outlook*, 1(1), pp.40-48. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsopo.2022.1.1.40>

Williams, S., Horrocks, M., Richmond, J., Hall, C.L and French, B. (2024) 'Experience of CBT in adults with ADHD: a mixed methods study,' *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2024.1341624> (Accessed 13 September 2026).

van Zyl, L.E., Gaffaney, J., van der Vaart, L. Dik, B.J. And Donaldson, S.I. (2024) 'The critiques and criticisms of positive psychology: a systematic review,' *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 19(2), pp. 206–235. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2023.2178956>. (Accessed: 13 September 2026).