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Abstract

The Problem.

The interdisciplinary nature of the theoretical base of coaching creates practical approaches that are strongly influenced by organization-friendly theories, and fields such as counseling, psychotherapy, and philosophy. This eclectic use of theory creates uncertainty and sometimes leads to criticisms of coaching as being atheoretical and underdeveloped empirically. So, it is a difficult task for human resource development (HRD) professionals and particularly buyers of coaching to judge the relevance of numerous traditions of coaching and evaluate them for their HRD agenda.

The Solution.

We highlight the theoretical foundations of coaching and develop a structural analysis of coaching engagement to indicate the potential interplay between organizational and individual agendas and to help HRD professionals become better informed about the value of coaching in the context of wider HRD paradigms.

The Stakeholders.

HRD professionals, external coaches, internal coaches, and line managers who use a coaching approach, peer coaches, and leaders will benefit from the content of this article.

Keywords

coaching, human resource development, organizational agendas, value of coaching, theoretical traditions of coaching, coaching genres

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Introduction

Enhancing organizational and individual learning and developing human potential is the main purpose of human resource development (HRD; [Hamlin, 2007](#)). However, at the same time Hamlin argued that one of the failings of HRD is that trainers and developers often lack credibility in the eyes of line managers. By contrast, coaching is gaining in popularity and becoming one of the prominent activities that serve the learning and development aims of HRD; in fact, [Bartlett \(2007\)](#) asserted that coaching is one of the fastest growing techniques for HRD.

In [Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterbuck \(2014\)](#), we described coaching as “a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools, and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders” (p. 1). The benefits of coaching are widely recognized ([Coutu & Kauffman, 2009](#)). When asked to explain the healthy growth of their industry, coaches commented that “clients keep coming back because ‘coaching works’” ([Coutu & Kauffman, 2009](#), p. 27). However, survey results also suggested, that “the industry is fraught with conflicts of interest, blurry lines between what is the province of coaches and what should be left to mental health professionals, and sketchy mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of a coaching engagement” ([Coutu & Kauffman, 2009](#), p. 27).

Thus, much confusion exists in relation to the nature and scope of coaching as a helping intervention. As [D’abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum \(2003\)](#) pointed out, “the published research literature, as well as opinions expressed at conferences, online and in the popular press, fails to agree on what mentoring, coaching, apprenticeship, and other developmental interaction constructs represent” (p. 361). They suggest that the confusion occurs when descriptions differ from author to author and when similarities and differences are explored. This lack of clarity gives the impression that coaching is a blend of approaches, making it a difficult task for HRD professionals, and particularly buyers of coaching, to judge the relevance of numerous traditions of coaching and evaluate the value of them for the overall HRD agenda. In particular, the eclectic use of theory creates uncertainty and an unnecessary mystique, leading sometimes to the denigration of coaching as atheoretical ([Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008](#); [Peltier, 2009](#)) and the charge that it is underdeveloped empirically, especially in relation to applications within human resources (HR). This in turn leads to difficulty in judging the value of coaching for HR ([Robson, 2011](#)).

[De Jong, Thijssen, and Versloot \(2001\)](#), for example, conceived coaching as “a self-evaluation” process of planned training on the job with other elements of it being job instruction, apprenticeship, and inquiry. Although “self-evaluation” sounds narrow, [De Jong et al. \(2001\)](#) conceptualized it as continuation of inquiry, involving continuous goal setting, feedback setting, and reflecting on past experiences. The role of the coach in this process is helping with these activities. However the process in this example is modeled on clinical supervision in which the balance of power is skewed toward the coach. In most recent coaching discourse, however, the expectation is of equality of power, whether the coach is external, internal to the organization, or carrying out coaching in a line management capacity. For example, in research by [Ellinger](#)

et al. (2008) examining the ineffective coaching behaviors by managers, it was noted that behaviors associated with command and control were ineffective and not conducive to empowerment and involvement by employees. In recent grounded theory research by Towell (2013), undertaken with line manager coaches from private and public sectors in the United Kingdom, findings suggested a change in management style is taking place from “command and control” to “empowerment.” Managers interviewed indicated that as individual empowerment grows through use of a coaching style it helps facilitate a change in organizational culture. Employees surveyed confirmed that this approach was more motivating and created more trusting relationships with their managers. From this latest research, a shift in organizational culture can be discerned, with more emphasis on empowerment.

Despite issues in conceptualization, coaching continues to demonstrate evidence of value for HRD. Recently, Schramm of the Workplace Trends and Forecasting Program at the Society for Human Resource Management, identified the top four issues facing HR in 2013 (Douglas, 2013). These “people issues” are typical of workplace challenges, not just in the United States, but also in organizations worldwide, and are known to be successfully addressed by coaching interventions (e.g., [Ladegård, 2011](#); [Moen, 2011](#); [Slåtten, Svensson, & Sværi, 2011](#); [Wasylyshyn, 2003](#)):

1. Retaining the best employees in light of recent improvements in the job market.
2. Increasing emphasis on nontraditional workplace benefits, such as flextime and telecommuting.
3. Developing the next generation of corporate leaders as many baby boomers are set to retire.
4. Keeping corporate knowledge and finding skilled workers.

However, even as coaching can be a powerful ally in HRD, it is also a relatively new field that tends to draw from many domains of knowledge. This leads to rich but inconsistent discourses in description of coaching services and may seem incompatible with specific needs of HRD professionals.

In this article, therefore, we start from an analysis of the coaching engagement (or alliance) which will help to explain why and how the growing theoretical foundation of coaching is heavily influenced by other fields of knowledge. The map of the theoretical influences on coaching, which follows, also shows how coaching is different from some other more established practices, such as psychotherapy and mentoring. We argue that the multitude of influences in coaching leads to the multitude of coaching approaches that can be used by a knowledgeable HRD professional according to the three HRD paradigms: learning, performance, and meaning of work ([Bates & Chen, 2004](#)).

A Structural Analysis of Coaching

In Figure 1 below, we set out a structural analysis of the coaching engagement, breaking the main facets of the coaching engagement into vital components. We argue that

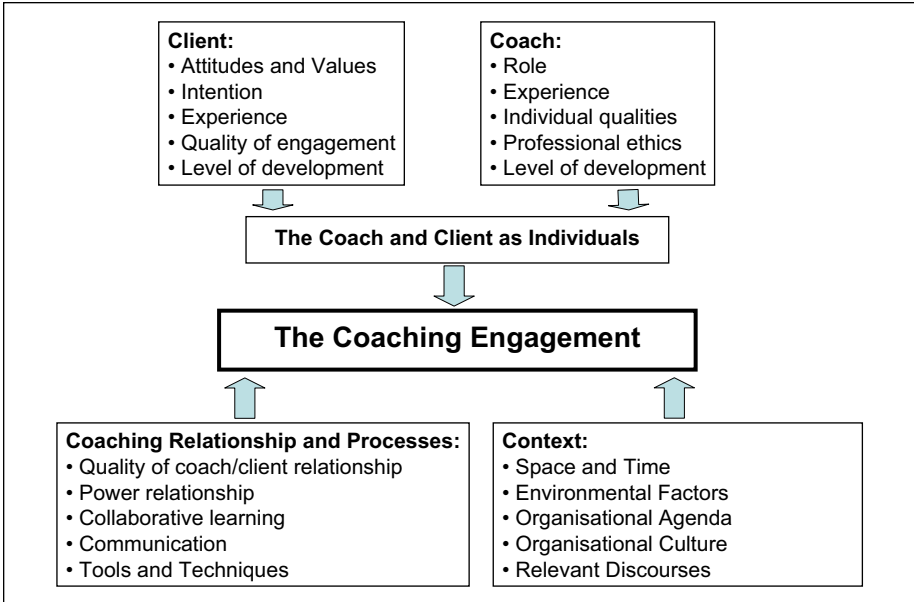


Figure 1. A structural analysis of the coaching engagement.

all the main elements are of equal importance: (a) the client as individual, (b) the coach as individual, (c) coaching relationships and processes, and (d) context. The combination of all four needs to be in place for coaching to be successful. Moreover, these elements help to position coaching as different to other practices. For example, context in this analysis is equally important as the individual coach and client, and their relationship. This makes a subtle but substantial difference in comparison with counseling and psychotherapy. In coaching, and particularly in organizational coaching, the role of the organization, not only as a sponsor but also as a partner in setting goals, evaluating progress, and enabling multiple perspectives on the client is significantly different from the focus on the individual needs of the client in counseling.

We now describe specific components within each element to show how they play a significant role in the outcome of coaching according to current research and conceptual thinking.

The Coach as Individual

Considering the role of the coach, buyers of coaching may need to reflect on issues such as whether an executive coach is required or whether an internal coach would be more suitable, depending on the needs of particular client (Hawkins, 2012). Similarly, is it important for the coach to have particular domain experience or to have underpinning knowledge of specific theories or tools (Ives & Cox, 2012)? Other components are individual qualities of the coach, such as interpersonal skill or level of extraversion

(Passmore, Holloway, & Rawle-Cope, 2010), which should be congruent with their coaching approach and style. Some attributes of the coach, such as the level of professional ethics, are so important that the coach should provide evidence for this at the outset (Brennan & Wildflower, 2014). The level of adult development can also affect how the coach understands and communicates with the client and how effective he/she might be with clients at different stages of development (Bachkirova, 2011, 2014).

The Client as Individual

Attitudes and values of the client, particularly in relation to new learning and potential change are important for the HR practitioner to know when planning a coaching intervention. Although to a certain extent a coach will work with values and attitudes to help clients understand themselves better, the intention and readiness of the client for coaching are as crucial a contributor to success as the qualities of the coach (Bachkirova, 2011; Boyce, Zaccaro, & Zazanis, 2010). Also, the key is the quality of the engagement with the coach and commitment to the process. Although, again even though a coach is trained to generate rapport and to foster client engagement they cannot create it on their own. HR practitioners may find it useful to monitor such engagement from the perspective of the organization. The level of adult development is also an important component in relation to the client and may indicate a match or mismatch with the client's coaching goals as discussed by Berger (2012) and Bachkirova (2011). In addition, the prior experience of both the coach and the client will be central to the learning and development made possible in coaching because they provide the material for the engagement (Cox, 2013).

Coaching Relationship and Processes

The third facet focuses on elements of the relationship and the processes that are created between the client and the coach as individuals. It emphasizes the quality of the coaching relationship developed through a focus on equality of power, collaborative learning, communication, and the use of various tools and techniques which aid development. As mentioned earlier, power is a key differentiator in coaching: the coach and the client are equals—there should be no hierarchy in the relationship (O'Broin & Palmer, 2009). This is why, when managers first use a coaching style, they often find it difficult to sustain because the organizational agenda often takes precedence. In coaching, the client agenda is paramount, but achieving that is generally to the organization's benefit as well and when they are equal then collaborative learning can be achieved because there is also openness and trust.

How coach and client communicate is what really distinguishes the way the coaching works and the way in which learning is achieved. Coaching can be viewed as a type of extended cognition, an alliance, where a new piece of knowledge may result in either a new explanation or is used to fill a gap in an existing explanation, but where both help the alliance to move a little closer to a more complete understanding of the task and its resolution: "Each type of learning may also result in a new set of questions

as the alliance realises what else it needs to learn” (Cox, 2013, p. 107). Coaching thus involves a number of practices that are generally associated with learning and with good communication. These include listening, clarifying, encouraging reflection and criticality, questioning, and so on, which have been proven to be most effective in facilitating collaborate learning in coaching and similar practices (Cox, 2013).

Specific coaching tools and techniques are used similarly to provide a focus for conversation and move thinking forward (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2004, 2009). Having a large portfolio of tools appears, from observation in assessment centers and workshops, to be associated with greater confidence on the part of the coach, in his or her ability to help and hence with a calmer, more reflective coaching style, and with higher levels of listening and mindfulness. Some of the ground rules for coaches extracted from observations include

- Always attempting to understand both the technique and the theory or body of knowledge behind it;
- Reflecting upon and practicing each technique on oneself before applying to clients;
- Not using techniques without the client’s understanding and assent (not least so that they can contribute to making them work!);
- Always using techniques within the broad philosophy of coaching; and
- Having lots of tools but not necessarily using them—indeed, there is a *prima facie* negative correlation between reliance on tools and the experience/competence as a coach.

A recent study of coaches’ usage of tools and techniques in goal setting and goal pursuit (David, Clutterbuck, & Megginson, 2013) found a significant difference between coaches in Europe and the United States. Both tended to start out their coaching careers with a high level of dependency on a specific tool or technique (often the GROW—Goal, Reality, Options, Will—model). With experience, European coaches took a much more nuanced view of the role and nature of goals, seeing them as evolving and emergent. They focused more on the coaching conversation and less on the mechanics of goal setting and goal pursuit. Indeed, they often saw the techniques they learned early in their coaching career as obstructive to the coaching process and relationship. U.S. coaches, however, tended to remain strongly wedded to goal techniques, possibly seeing them as having more traction in a corporate setting.

Although HR practitioners may not be able to influence this aspect of coaching engagement directly, they can contribute to the potential quality of coaching relationship by providing an opportunity for clients to choose their coach from among two or three with whom they could first have a chemistry session (Wycherley & Cox, 2008). They could also ensure that they hire coaches who can prove their coaching process skills not only by their testimonials but also from more rigorous selection processes, such as validation by experts and assessment centers.

Context

The fourth facet is context. As well as practical elements of time and space for ensuring coaching can take place, there are other important issues, such as the organizational agenda and how that can be met, plus the contextual understanding of both coach and client.

[Cox \(2003\)](#) suggested that the process skills of coaching and mentoring, such as active listening, questioning, and challenge, cannot be independent of context because application depends upon the amount of background knowledge the coach has, as well as the context within which he/she is working, and through which the action is framed. As [Eraut \(1994\)](#) argued, process skills are dependent upon the field of acquisition, suggesting that situations are not only affected by the current context of use but are likely to be influenced by previous contexts of use. In addition, the culture of the organization is important as stressed in [Cox \(2012\)](#), where the research showed how even unfounded suspicion regarding management motivations can undermine the true intentions of the organization.

Similarly, wider social, political, and economic factors can affect coaching. [Jones, Armour, and Potrac \(2002\)](#) argued that coaches (and clients) are social beings operating in a social environment so “coaching is fundamentally about making a myriad of connections” (p. 35). They suggest this explains why the quest to find a one-size-fits-all model of effective coaching is so elusive.

The organizational context of coaching is also a factor that should be a focus of attention for HR practitioners. They need to ensure that the client’s line manager is involved in the process of goal setting and supportive of coaching in principle. The coach should also feel supported in any intervention that is required from the organizational context.

Summarizing the role of all the elements of this structural analysis, we suggest they are already influencing coaching practice, professional development, and training. However, buyers of coaching would also benefit from considering a combination of these factors and the role they may play in the results of coaching. For example, it could help HR practitioners to generate a set of questions that would assist in the process of making decisions about coaching as an intervention, when monitoring the coaching process and in evaluating the results of coaching.

The above analysis also demonstrates that coaching is an applied discipline and by definition draws on subjects such as psychology that enhance the knowledge of the constituent elements and mechanisms of practice. Coaching is not a simple intervention and its complexity derives from the combination of diverse elements that are usually studied within a range of other applied disciplines. Therefore, it is natural that the growing field of knowledge specific to coaching draws on a multitude of interdisciplinary theories and knowledge sources. HR practitioners can draw from their knowledge of these subjects for setting up appropriate conditions for coaching interventions and evaluating coaching outcomes.

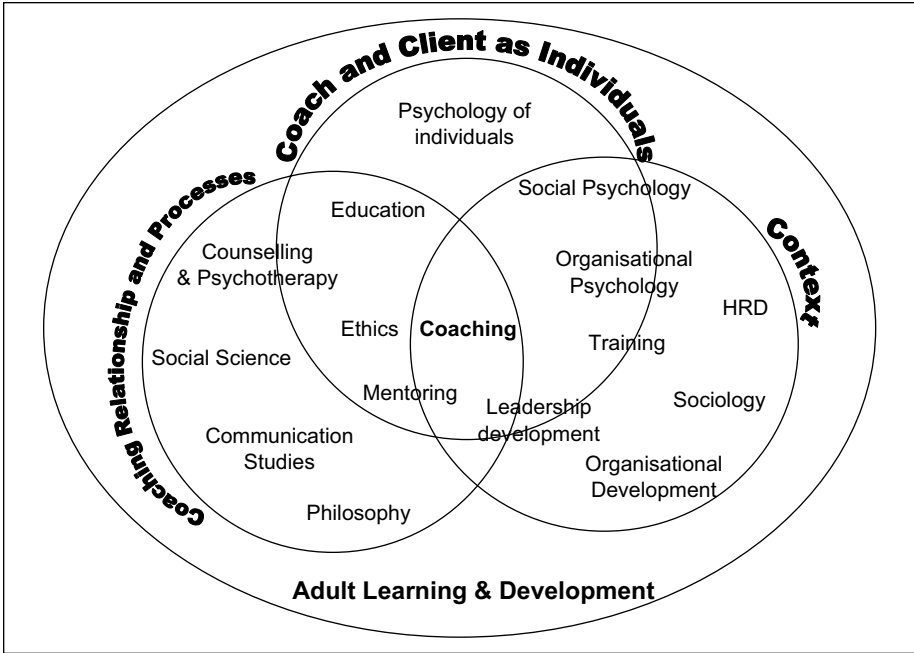


Figure 2. Area of knowledge relevant to coaching.

The Use of Theory in Coaching

In this section, we map a variety of disciplines and subject areas that underpin the practice of coaching. The three overlapping circles in Figure 2 illustrate the three main elements of coaching engagement and relevant areas of knowledge. For example, knowledge related to “Client and Coach as Individuals” is generated from many branches of the psychology of individuals, such as developmental psychology or positive psychology. Knowledge relevant to “Coaching Relationship and Processes” is also well developed, for example, in various schools of psychotherapy, education, and communication studies. Knowledge about the “Context” of coaching is a substantial area and only some relevant disciplines are indicated, such as Sociology, HRD, and Organizational Development. This mapping is of course approximate. Many fields of knowledge indicated in Figure 2 also overlap and draw on each other.

The areas of the overlap between the three circles indicate theories and research generated specifically for coaching. These areas are quite sparse so far in relation to fully developed theories (Bachkirova, 2011), but as highlighted earlier, there is a substantial and growing body of research that identifies factors contributing to the successful outcomes of coaching and providing meaningful descriptions of the coaching process. This area also includes well-referenced texts, such as Cox, Bachkirova, and Clutterbuck (2014), Passmore, Peterson, and Freire (2013) or Palmer and Whybrow (2007), which present solid adaptations to coaching approaches, theories, and research that were originally developed in other subject areas.

In Figure 2, encircling the different theories and research relevant to coaching is the field of Adult Learning and Development. We believe that this field provides the foundational underpinning for coaching (Bachkirova et al., 2014). Adult learning is defined by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) as “the extension and clarification of the meaning of one’s experience” (p. 11). Such learning, we would argue, is implicit in any coaching meeting. Furthermore, change is also intrinsic to learning: Any discernible change in behavior or attitude can suggest that learning has taken place (Bachkirova et al., 2014). Several theories of adult learning can be seen as key in the process of learning and change that occurs during the coaching process.

a. Andragogy

In his theory of “Andragogy,” Knowles (1990) identified six main characteristics of adult learners that impact on the way they learn or approach learning. Adapted for the coaching context, these are

1. Adults need to know what they will be learning. This appeals to their self-concept as independent learners and is at the heart of coaching: The agenda always belongs to the coachees, or is carefully negotiated so that ownership is theirs and they know the course of the learning (Bachkirova et al., 2014).
2. Adults are self-directed. As people mature, they become more self-directed and autonomous (Knowles et al., 2011). They like to be treated as equals and shown respect for what they know. For this reason, an important feature of coaching is providing very specific feedback to the client that is free of evaluative or judgmental opinions (Cox, 2012).
3. Adults have a wealth of prior experience. The reservoir of experience that adult clients have is the vital catalyst for learning and unlearning (Cox, 2012). Coaches are ideally placed to challenge clients’ existing assumptions in relation to new learning or new experiences.
4. Adults learn when they have a need to learn. They seek coaching generally when their life or work situation creates a need to know or understand or when a change is needed.
5. Adults are relevancy oriented. They frequently seek immediate application of what they learn so that the new learning can be applied to problem solving. In coaching, this suggests that clients may want to work, at least initially, on immediate problems.
6. Adults are internally motivated. They are usually motivated toward learning that helps them to solve problems that have an “internal payoff” (Knowles et al., 2011). External motivators, such as requirements by the line manager, have some relevance, but internal needs and values can be more powerful motivators. In coaching, the emphasis is on promoting a sense of connection between the client’s needs and values, and the outcome of the coaching.

b. Experiential learning

Another learning theory that influences coaching practice is experiential learning, as first articulated by John Dewey (1910). In experiential learning theory immediate experiences are the basis for observation and reflection. Reflections are then assimilated into premises from which implications for future action can be considered. Kolb (1984) suggested experiential learning should not be seen in terms of outcomes, but rather as a holistic process involving four modes of learning (feeling, reflecting, thinking, acting), which represent a learning cycle:

- a. concrete experience which arouses feeling;
- b. reflective observation that involves reflecting on and describing the experience and feelings;
- c. abstract conceptualization that can be aligned with critical thinking; and
- d. active experimentation where the outcomes of thinking are put into action.

In Cox (2013), an experiential coaching cycle was introduced that expands this learning cycle and recognizes the often difficult transitions between the modes that necessitate dialogue and support through coaching. Coaching can then be viewed as the dialectic process that integrates experiences, concepts, and observations to facilitate understanding, provide direction, and support action and integration.

c. Transformative learning

Transformative learning ([Mezirow, 1990](#)) involves fundamental modification to beliefs, principles, and feelings. Mezirow explained how it entails significant shifts in perception that can change our understandings of ourselves and how we make sense of the world. Transformative learning refers to a process by which we transform our

taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7)

[Mezirow \(1990\)](#) proposed a tripartite *ex post facto* reflection process that generates the kind of single, double, and triple loop learning described by [Argyris \(1976, 2002\)](#) and [Flood and Romm \(1996\)](#). This process involves reflection on “the content of the problem, the process or procedures followed in problem solving, or the presupposition on the basis of which the problem has been posed” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 6). Reflection on presuppositions is what Mezirow defined as “critical reflection” and it is this that results in transformative (triple loop) learning. From a coaching standpoint, meaning perspectives are especially difficult to transform, but they do need to be challenged if deep learning is to occur.

Diversity of Coaching Approaches

As has been shown, a wide range of different disciplines and areas of knowledge contribute to the practice of coaching. These disciplines can include management, education, social sciences, philosophy, and psychology. Furthermore, within each of these established fields there are numerous traditions and approaches because each has its own assumptions about human nature and how individuals grow and change. Each of them has its own internal logic within a particular paradigm of knowledge to help clients achieve their coaching aim congruent to the needs of the organization.

Cox et al. (2014) articulated 13 specific theory-based approaches to coaching, the majority of which were originally developed in the field of psychotherapy but consequently were adapted to coaching (see Table 1). For example, one approach comes from the theoretical field of positive psychology (Boniwell et al., 2014); another describes an original theory specifically developed for coaching (Bachkirova, 2011, 2014). In addition, there are various genres of coaching, such as executive coaching, performance coaching, or career coaching that are also built on relevant research and practitioner observations and reflection. Cox et al. (2014) argued that a theory-based approach can be applied in different genres of coaching and show how a specific genre can draw on particular theory-based approaches.

We now draw on Bates and Chen's research, which identified three paradigms for practice within HRD (Bates, 2002; Bates & Chen, 2004) to illustrate how specific traditions of coaching can be theoretically compatible to the specific HRD needs of organizations or individual employees.

1. The main outcome of **the learning paradigm**, according to Bates and Chen (2004), is providing individual learning experiences, which may eventually lead to building learning systems on the level of organizations. Individual learning is underpinned by a variety of adult learning theories and models, including the principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1990), which is well connected to the foundation of coaching as argued earlier. From this perspective, we might say that all types of coaching match this paradigm in principle, as indicated in Table 1. Even coaching for development of the most basic skills implies learning and aims to provide individuals with learning opportunities.

For example, building on the work of a number of developmental theorists (Berger, 2012; Kegan, 1982, 1994), Bachkirova (2014) discussed the developmental approach to coaching which fits within this learning paradigm. She explains how this approach assumes that people go through "significant changes during their adult life, for example in the way they make meaning of their experiences, reason about their values and act" (p. 132). In addition, these changes occur in "a logical sequence of stages and influence the way people feel, make meaning and engage with their environment" (p. 132). Bachkirova introduced a model of working with clients developmentally that does not involve measurement or scales, but works instead with the themes that clients

Table 1. Overview of Theoretical Traditions of Coaching and Their Paradigm Connection.

Theoretical traditions	Brief description	Potential paradigm connection
The psychodynamic approach to coaching	The premise of this approach is that current behaviors and feelings are powerfully affected by unconscious motives rooted in earlier experiences. Coaches use awareness about the working of the unconscious for deepening their practice.	Learning paradigm
Cognitive-behavioral coaching	This approach facilitates self-awareness of underlying cognitive and emotional barriers to goal attainment and aims to equip the client with more effective thinking and behavioral skills.	Learning and/or performance paradigm
The solution-focused approach to coaching	This approach is based on the premise that knowing how a problem arose does not necessarily tell us how to fix it. It aims at assisting clients to define a desired future state and to construct a pathway in both thinking and action that assists them in achieving that state.	Learning and/or performance paradigm
The person-centered approach to coaching	This approach is based on a key assumption: the actualizing tendency—a tendency of people to develop in positive and constructive ways when the appropriate conditions are present. The main purpose of coaching is to provide such conditions, including positive regard and quality listening.	Learning paradigm
The Gestalt approach to coaching	The main principles of Gestalt are creative adjustment to a changing environment that emphasizes the need for clients' moment-to-moment awareness in relation to their experience, external world and blocks to awareness. Gestalt coaches use their own subjective experience when appropriate as part of an authentic dialogue.	Learning paradigm
Existential coaching	Existential coaching is based on three principles that describe the human condition: relatedness, uncertainty, and existential anxiety. It involves descriptive exploration of the clients' worldview from the context of their presenting concerns.	Learning and meaning-in-work paradigm
Ontological coaching	Ontological coaching implies working with individuals with a focus on their language, emotions, and physiology (body posture). The coach attempts to be a catalyst for change by triggering a shift in the client's "way of being."	Learning and meaning-in-work paradigm

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Theoretical traditions	Brief description	Potential paradigm connection
Narrative coaching	In this approach, clients are seen as <i>narrators</i> and the coach helps them to identify new connections between their stories, their identities, and their behaviors using the narrative material in the session. The coach enables clients to generate new options and to create new stories of their lives in action.	Learning and meaning-in-work paradigm
Psychological development in adulthood and coaching	This approach is based on research and theories suggesting that developmental changes in meaning making, worldviews, and maturity of the ego occur in a logical sequence of stages throughout the life of the individual. Knowledge of developmental trajectories allows coaches to be better equipped to understand the diverse needs of their clients.	Learning and meaning-in-work paradigm
The transpersonal approach to coaching	This approach recognizes dimensions beyond the personal and facilitates the experience of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy. The coach engages with clients in variety of ways that enhance various manifestations of the transpersonal, such as creativity.	Learning and meaning-in-work paradigm
Positive psychology approach to coaching	This approach to coaching is based on positive psychology as a discipline where the focus is on a positive spectrum of people's experiences. It involves consistent shifting of attention away from problems and weaknesses to opportunities and strengths.	Learning and performance paradigms
Transactional analysis and coaching	Transactional analysis is an interactional approach to coaching based on several notions such as ego states, life scripts, and interactional patterns. TA involves a thinking framework and accessible language that can be shared with clients for greater understanding of the motivations, interactions and coaching goals.	Learning and performance paradigms
The NLP approach to coaching	The NLP approach attempts to identify patterns that represent the way individuals construct their realities to control their inner experiences in various environmental contexts. It involves many techniques, such as matching and pacing; working with well-formed outcomes, and anchoring.	Learning and performance paradigm

Note. NLP = neuro-linguistic programming.

bring to the session—concentrating on the themes that clients are concerned with in different periods of their lives:

If clients are dealing with important dilemmas or transitions in their lives (a theme that often occurs in developmental coaching) this perspective may help coaches and clients to understand that transitions may be not just an adjustment to environmental changes but also an internal process that has specific features. This can be helpful for clients as it will help them to understand what they are going through and to see the specific landmarks of this process. (Bachkirova, 2014, p. 142)

Using the special nature of the coaching relationship and helping them understand the context within which they are working and the constraints of organizational culture, for example, is an important aspect of developmental work with clients.

Another approach very compatible with the learning paradigm is Gestalt. Bluckert (2014) explained how in Gestalt the emphasis is on the biological law of balance and the organism's attempts to regain balance through "creative adjustment." In Gestalt coaching, the coach uses the cycle of experience (Siminovitch & Van Eron, 2006) as an orienting framework and works with what is happening in the present moment to free up energy and so help release clients from the traps of unfinished business or redundant ways of thinking. The learning inherent in this approach is quite powerful and can result in significant development for the client.

2. The outcome of **the performance paradigm** is improving individual job performance (Bates & Chen, 2004). On the level of the individual, this paradigm focuses on outcomes of individual behavior "and holds that HRD will have value only if it can connect the unique value of individual employee expertise with the strategic goals of the organization" (p. 349). On the level of the organization, this paradigm emphasizes "how to solve problems or take advantage of opportunities for enhancing the performance of organizational systems" (p. 357), which implies that the organization's goals and HRD's goals are deemed to merge.

Coaching in service of this paradigm may include some specific genres such as performance coaching, coaching in the workplace by a line manager, and some forms of leadership coaching may also be conceived within this paradigm. Some of the theory-based approaches appear to be a good match with this paradigm, behavioral and solution-focused coaching being good examples.

Cavanagh and Grant (2014) explained how the solution-focused approach to coaching involves helping clients to define their desired future state and to develop thoughts and actions that will assist them in achieving that state. A clearly identified outcome is vital in this approach and the client is asked in a variety of ways to describe what that outcome will look and feel like when it is achieved, before being helped to find ways of getting to that outcome. The link with the performance paradigm is evident here.

It should be noted that although the majority of theory-based approaches appear to have an agenda for the learning and development of individuals, they also may be

compatible with the performance paradigm if the client (individual and organizational) sets a specific, usually practical, goal that does not require deep interventions. It is only when achievement of such performance goals is met with serious obstacles that a wider agenda for the coaching might be advocated and approaches such as psychoanalytic or cognitive-behavioral could be well placed to continue the process.

3. The outcome of **the meaning-of-work paradigm** is enabling meaningful work for the individual and building socially responsible organizations. The focus of this paradigm is on the need for the “humane, holistic development of individuals in work contexts” (Bates & Chen, 2004, p. 356). Within this paradigm, individual development is concerned with how individuals experience work and how they make meaning from that experience. At the organizational level, this paradigm suggests that “all organizational activity, including HRD, has a pre-eminent responsibility that goes beyond organizational boundaries” (p. 356). Bates and Chen noted the implication of this: “HRD practice is thus, seen as driven by an overarching concern and responsibility for the health and humanness of our organizations, society, and the world as a whole” (p. 356).

Many coaching approaches are highly compatible with this paradigm. Existential coaching, for example, aims at exploring the clients’ worldview and challenges them to consider the issues related to the meaning they place on their work and responsibilities associated with this. Some forms of developmental coaching, as a genre and as a theory-based approach, imply holistic approaches to the way clients engage with their working environment and make meaning. Narrative coaching invites clients to explore the stories they construct about their working identities and their behavior and to change these stories if they do not serve them any longer.

Lee (2014), for example, described how the psychodynamic approach brings particular depth and insight to coaching, and is useful in contexts where clients “are interested in exploring the roots of their meaning-making patterns, or where they feel stuck and are prepared to do what it takes to achieve an enduring shift” (p. 35). Lee explained how the effectiveness of the coaching comes from the capacity of the coach to “flex his/her style, to draw on multiple approaches, and so respond usefully to the changing needs of coachees” (p. 35). He advocated using the psychodynamic approach within an integrative coaching framework, suggesting this is a powerful method for evoking change. This approach has synergies with the meaning in work paradigm discussed by [Bates and Chen \(2004\)](#), where emphasis is on the holistic development of the individual and how he/she makes meaning of current experience. It draws on theories of individual psychology to explore attitudes and values in the context of previous life experiences.

From the above, it can be seen how all of the approaches can be used to address coaching in at least one of the three HRD paradigms identified by [Bates and Chen \(2004\)](#)—to encourage learning, to increase performance, and to enhance meaning in work. It can be seen how the approaches, although focusing initially on the individual, use particular strategies to help the client integrate, understand, and sometimes challenge the wider organizational context.

From Theory to Practice for HRD Purposes

In this section, we present three case illustrations to show how the richness of the eclectic use of theory adds to the rigor and can inform the resolution of organizational coaching and stakeholder issues such as retention, work–life balance, or keeping corporate knowledge, identified by Schramm (2012).

Case Illustration 1: Retaining the Best Employees

Waseema was part of a management acceleration scheme in a blue chip organization in the United Kingdom. External, performance coaching was offered once she was identified as high potential in order to fast track her to a management position.

When the coach first met with her, Waseema was uncertain about her ongoing commitment to her role in marketing. The coach worked with Waseema over a period of 6 months to unpack the issues underpinning this uncertainty. So, rather than supporting the development of management skills, the coaching focused on enabling Waseema to identify exactly what her hesitancy involved. During discussions the coach used both Transactional Analysis (TA) and developmental coaching strategies to enhance learning, and it emerged that Waseema's relationship with a powerful marketing director made her uneasy. The coach helped her understand the relationship, see it from different perspectives, and to put in place strategies for self-care when working with difficult people.

Although it seemed as if the coach was appointed to work with the organizational agenda of management development, initially what Waseema needed to work on was her individual agenda—her self-confidence. What started as a management development assignment for the coach turned into a retention issue for the organization because Waseema would certainly have left the organization if she had not received appropriate and supportive coaching. This illustrates the shifting nature of the coaching agenda and the need for the coach to be highly skilled and responsive.

Case Illustration 2: Keeping Corporate Knowledge

Michael had been working in a large government sector organization for 30 years and was seriously considering early retirement. He was disenchanted with the focus on new recruits, new technology, and new systems. In an environment of financial cost cutting, the organization was keen to support the retirement decision, even though Michael had considerable expertise in his area.

After discussions with his director, Michael was provided with a short period of internal coaching to support a transition to part-time working with a view to retiring in a years' time. During the coaching, the coach used a person-centered approach ([Joseph, 2014](#)), and through their conversations, it transpired that Michael deeply desired to share his knowledge with younger people coming into the organization and to leave some kind of legacy—a generational tendency identified in adult learning theory by Erikson (1959). However, current organizational systems did not support such

exchange. With his coach, he examined a variety of ways of imparting and sharing knowledge. He explored ways of introducing a mentoring scheme—something not just for himself, but for others in the organization that were within 5 years of retirement. As a result of Michael's efforts, the organization has shifted from one focused solely on new technologies and young "whizz kids" bent on change, to one that values existing and even historical knowledge which can be considered alongside the new. The organization benefits from learning from past working practices.

So, again, the initial coaching purpose changed: The coaching was put in place to support gradual retirement, a kind of performance coaching, but the paradigm shifted during the coaching so that Michael was focused on meaning in work. Previously unarticulated organizational and individual needs were met through the coaching and the initiation of the mentoring scheme. The organization has retained staff, distributed its corporate knowledge, and provided nontraditional work: Michael has since negotiated a job share and is working flexi-time until he decides finally to retire.

Case Illustration 3: Developing the Next Generation

Ivan is a highly intelligent, creative individual with energy and a strong ability to get things done—when he is in charge of them. His sponsor (boss) had been working with him for some time on a major barrier to further career progress. In his current role, within the marketing and sales support function, Ivan needed to persuade others to change the way they ran their parts of the business, and particularly how they focused efforts. He had no direct authority over these people, who were fiercely protective of their own independence. His performance was measured on theirs, so when they failed, so did he. However, his abrasive style and assumption that anyone intelligent should be able to see from the figures he provided exactly what had to be done meant that there were significant performance problems across much of his area of responsibility.

The initial focus of coaching was on "fixing" what was seen as a lack of persuasion skills. It soon became clear that, while he was able to take these on board intellectually, this very narrow goal focus was obscuring a deeper set of issues. The emphasis of the coaching, therefore, shifted from a performance focus to Ivan's sense of personal identity and purpose and to how he could use his strengths to contribute more widely to both the sales function and to society generally. The learning and meaning-of-work conversations drew on a range of theoretical bases, including transactional analysis and positive psychology.

These interventions enabled Ivan to recognize how his impatience with others might be seen as arrogance. His response to the suggestion from his boss that he could lead a social responsibility initiative for the company, working with people who have learning disabilities (something he would previously have dismissed without consideration) was now to see the learning potential for himself. With the help of the coach, he was able to apply a model of diversity appreciation acquired in this context, to his relationships with colleagues, developing his own personal philosophy of partnership working that became key to collective performance improvement and a model for other parts of the organization.

Conclusion

In this article, we have highlighted the multifaceted nature of coaching, the outcome of it depending on the interplay of four elements: coach and client as individuals, coaching relationship, and context. There is no surprise, therefore, that many practical and theoretical traditions influence the field of coaching and lead to the wide variety of genres of coaching and theory-based traditions of coaching. We explained how we do not see this variety as a problem, but rather consider it to be a good match for the enormous diversity of individual and organizational needs if approached in an informed way. From the point of view of the range of genres and traditions of coaching, therefore, we see this as an opportunity rather than a problem. The diversity of coaching approaches allows coaches to draw on the most appropriate techniques and models to meet organizational and client needs, as illustrated in the case studies above. In all cases, there is the need to consider the issues facing the client and the organization; decide which paradigm appears to drive the coaching assignment, learning, performance, or meaning-of-work; and select appropriate coaching approaches.

From the point of view of HRD practitioners, such an informed way of selecting and engaging coaches would mean careful consideration of the current learning and development agenda of the organization, knowledge of the main coaching orientations and genres, and consideration of matching between them. It is possible that this matching may be multileveled: Some agendas are more suitable for developing coaching skills in managers or/and growing a good pool of internal coaches with the focus on performance improvement needs. Other agendas could be applied to retention or talent development issues in the organization with opportunities for learning and development wherever they might lead. In this case, investment in carefully selected professional coaches may be useful.

Finally, we hope that we have shown that any individual coaching case will bring to the fore the complexity of factors that influence it: the richness and fluidity of the client's needs, the particular contextual situation, the model and individual qualities of the coach, and the nuances of coach and client relationships, and their response to the constantly changing situation in the organization. However, the strength of coaching is in its tailor-made individual approach to each client. This combination highlights the need for HRD practitioners to be more knowledgeable of this complexity and less reliant on the existence of a neat solution suitable for everyone. It shows that, instead, they need to remain sensitive, flexible, open-minded, and creative when applying coaching in their organizations.

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