

Critically examine a range of underpinning theories and differing perspectives in relation to mentoring and coaching, and explore the issues that can arise from these. Identify a model(s) appropriate for the needs and culture of your organisation with a clear rationale for the choice of model(s).

- critically examine a range of underpinning theories and differing perspectives in relation to mentoring and coaching, and explore the issues that can arise from these;
- critically evaluate the relevance and value of a range of coaching or mentoring models, and identify a model/models appropriate for the needs and culture of their organisation

My current role is as a mid-level manager at a University. I am Head of a unit of around 25 people in a variety of roles. I have previously undertaken training on coaching within the workplace and have applied this learning over a period of a few years, mostly as part of the development and growth of individuals within my team and to improve the effectiveness of the team. I have observed over this time many themes that relate to the culture of the Organisation I work within and this has led me to develop an interest in organisational behaviour and culture and how this affects the confidence and autonomy of individuals. I have team members at various levels within the organisation; some are managers, some are managers of other managers, some have no management responsibility at all, however the impact of the organisation on performance is a theme for all. I will first examine further the culture of my workplace before going on to identify and critically evaluate the coaching theories and models I feel are most appropriate for this kind of organisation.

We can define organisational culture as “a pattern of basic assumptions that are considered valid and that are taught to new members as the way to perceive, think and feel in the organisation” (Nelson & Quick, 2007). Using a questionnaire adapted from Harrison (1992), which measures an organisation’s dominant culture across four archetypes: Power, Role, Task and Person, I identify my organisation as having a Power and Role culture. It is easy to understand why this is when considering Johnson and Scholes’ Cultural Web Model (Businessballs.com, 2026). For example the power structures within the organisation are very much parent/child modelled, with a ‘higher ups’ know best approach to decision making. The organisational structure is very hierarchical, with decision making pushed upwards out of fear and favoured individuals being sought out, like a sort of cronyism. The control systems are very much around micro managing expenditure, risk averse approaches from HR that support what is favourable to the Organisation not the individual employee, performance management being about managing the worst case scenario and loose control until something goes wrong, resulting in a blame culture that links back to the lack of willingness to make decisions. It may also fall into Steinhoff and Owens cultural metaphor, the Little Shop of Horrors, in which ‘the organisation is viewed in terms of its unpredictability and chaotic nature. Organisations in this culture either

have a Napoleonic complex (that promotes dominance and control) or Jekyll and Hyde personalities (that promote uncertainty and chaos)' (Bates, 2015, p. 186).

The organisation is also in a time of significant change which when considered under Schein's three levels of culture (2017), states that much of the organisation's values come from the founder or current senior management. Within my organisation, this would be the Vice Chancellor (VC) and their senior management team. We have had a new VC in recent years and this has brought in a flurry of change. She has brought in many other new senior colleagues who share the same vision which has resulted in a change in the corporate values which conflict with the existing culture. Many of the stories and myths related to the existing culture have come from idealised views of premerger values and culture and these have evolved again with some of the old symbols, control systems and power structures changing, meaning that many of the basic assumptions, the 'invisible, pre-conscious, unspoken, 'taken for granted' understandings held by individuals within an organisation concerning human behaviour, the nature of reality and the organisations relationships to its environment' (Buchanan, 2023, p.170) are now out of step with the corporate values.

Humanistic coaching theory, specifically person-centred coaching, applies well in this kind of organisation as it encourages self-actualisation so that the employee can realise their own potential, according to Maslow's hierarchy of need (1943) and focus on their own development rather than the surrounding 'noise' from the organisation. The person-centred approach, developed by Carl Rogers in the 1940s and 50s, emphasises 'the agency of the person and their ability to make conscious choices' (Joseph, 2014, p.65). Humanistic coaching can also be considered coaching through facilitating (Bates, 2015, p.59) as it assumes that the coachee has the knowledge to come up with the answers and the coach facilitates them to get to them.

In an organisation where an individual is subject to conflicting messages, person centred coaching can support the use of simple models such as GROW, to encourage the coachee to consider their own environment and options more objectively and enable them to plan their work accordingly. GROW can be described as follows:

"With the emphasis on performance and outcome, the GROW sequence starts by asking the client to identify a Goal or outcome which they want to achieve. Once this is identified, the coach helps the client to track back to their current Reality. Once the client has explored where they are now and where they want to be, they are then helped to explore all the Options for getting there. Finally, having decided upon options, the client explores the Will to act" (Connor, 2017, p. 114).

This can be similarly compared to encouraging a growth mindset in employees. A growth mindset is based on the assertion that "ability is acquired through effort and that failure is an opportunity for learning and improvement" (Desveaux & Ivers, 2024,

p. 273) which is very much compatible with Humanistic coaching theory in terms of the idea of the individual using those experiences to find answers and develop. In an organisational culture where employees struggle to self-determine, using a person-centred coaching approach alongside the GROW model allows the coachee to develop a growth mindset by encouraging them to think about the things they do know and the things they can control to come up with options to solve workplace challenges. In the example from Desveaux and Ivers (2024), this kind of approach reduced burnout and encouraged continuous improvement of professionals in a challenging healthcare environment. GROW “provides a clear and simple structure for any coach to use as the foundation of their coaching conversation, when trying to enable a behavioural shift that encourages the client to see new possibilities and new ways to overcome a challenge or barrier to change” (Leach, 2021, p.176), which reinforces the a Humanistic, person-centred approach.

Similarly, the OSKAR model can also be used with Humanistic theory. Whereas GROW concentrates on the gap between the coachee’s current ‘reality’ and where they want to be or, ‘goal’, OSKAR is a solution-focussed model that focuses less on problems and more on what is already working. It can be described as “the principle of transferring ownership of the coaching process by stimulating the person being coaching to analyse their own situation and articulating how they can change” (Bates, 2015, p. 125). Also very much in line with Humanistic theory, it assumes that people are competent and have the answers to their problems (Connor, 2017, p.110). In my organisation however, this may be less helpful as it assumes that all barriers are placed by the individual whereas they may very well be placed by the organisation, with the individual having less control over that. Therefore GROW accepts a more realistic examination of reality and encourages the discovering of solutions despite this, whereas OSKAR may be overly positive ignoring legitimate obstacles.

One criticism of a humanistic approach to coaching is that ‘not everyone seeks empowerment or feels comfortable when empowered...some people clearly want to be instructed in what to do’ (Bates, 2015, p.59). However, I would argue that this is precisely why coaching may be valuable in my organisation. In a hierarchical environment where power is not readily delegated, it is understandable that employees may avoid taking ownership of their work and instead wait for instruction. However, for the organisation to function effectively, managers need to encourage self-determination and coach employees to identify the boundaries of their autonomy within that environment.

In such a fractured working culture with no clear values, Transpersonal coaching theory could also be helpful as it encourages the employee to explore what is authentic for them and where their own values may be at odds with the Organisation’s. In contrast to Humanistic approaches, the Transpersonal approach to coaching is ‘undeveloped in comparison with most of the other approaches to coaching’ (Rowan, 2014, p.155) and although Rowan wrote this in 2014, twelve years later I have still struggled to find many practical applications of this as a

coaching tool. The Transpersonal is 'devoted to the idea of development...what holds people back is not the facts of their situations, but the false assumptions they make about the,' (Rowan, 2014, p.148), it also takes a holistic approach to the individual to support growth and transformation (Steyn, 2026, p.2). To understand this better, we might consider it in the context of organisational culture. A weak culture as defined by Buchanan (2023, p.186) is 'one in which there is little agreement among employees about their organization's values and norms, the way things are supposed to be, or what is expected of them'. Buchanan's discussion of managing versus tolerating culture (2023, p.179) touches on whether or not an employee's values and beliefs can be changed by the organisation's culture, but I would argue that they should not but rather the coachee should be encouraged to explore the assumptions they are making and the perceived barriers the competing values are creating for them and this is where a Transpersonal approach is relevant.

Coaching in this example should encourage the employee to envision a way out of the negative thoughts they are experiencing. Transpersonal coaching supports the use of techniques such as mindfulness for example, to 'deepen presence, strengthen self-awareness, and promote emotional regulation, thereby supporting clients' personal growth and transformation' (Steyn, 2026, p.8). Mindfulness works well as a technique with a Transpersonal approach as it 'is about dealing with thoughts in a detached, de-centred and non-judgmental manner' (Bates, 2015, p.136). In Steyn's study (2026), this allowed participants to be their more authentic self by integrating the multiple aspects of themselves, for example allowing a better work/life balance, and it is this that I think appeals to me in terms of application in my own organisation.

For these reasons, Transpersonal coaching is also helpful during times of change, such as a restructure in the example of my organisation. In my organisation, staff have newly gone through a restructure and are undergoing a period of intense change. Rowan states that Transpersonal coaching is often best used when a person hits crisis and is rethinking their whole life (2014, p.149) and this is exactly where a lot of staff find themselves after going through an emotionally challenging experience such as a restructure. In this situation, Transpersonal coaching can be used to support the coachee 'to disengage from whatever beliefs are holding them back from their higher or deeper possibilities' (Rowan, 2014, p.153). Having observed a number of staff within my team who are at a crossroads and have reached a position of such negativity that they are almost unable to function, this may be a useful approach.

That said, Transpersonal coaching 'adopts a sceptical attitude to the concepts of goals and tasks' (Rowan, 2014, p. 153) so is less useful when used with GROW. For the manager or leader who uses coaching approaches in a more informal way with a view towards continuous improvement and achieving of specific goals within the workplace, a Transpersonal approach is arguably less helpful or appropriate as the manager would need to be able to let go of these expectations and provide a more of a comforting presence. Given this, it may be better left in a formal coach/coachee

relationship. However conversely, it may be a useful form of coaching to use with the managers themselves as it encourages values-based leadership and creativity, perhaps encouraging the manager to see past task-orientated approaches and consider the bigger environmental picture. Another reason a Transpersonal approach might be challenging is that it does rely on a more openminded and creative approach to coaching. Some people struggle to take mindfulness seriously in the workplace, let alone being open to spirituality and certain personality types may be more open to this kind of approach than others.

Transpersonal coaching theory does not lend itself well to working with coaching models as it is not based on fixed processes; 'it is a truly experimental point of view, which simply says – 'let's try it and see'' (Rowan, 2014, p.150). However models that might work with a Transpersonal approach are Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the Skilled Helper model. AI uses four stages; Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny, to focus on the positive aspects of change and 'develop new perspectives and uncover blind spots which prevent the client from moving forward' and encourages a move from "problem-solving to possibility-building" (Connor, 2017, p. 110). This has overlap with the Narrative coaching model also where a coachee might examine the stories that they tell about their workplace and its culture and how they can reframe these stories or create new stories (Tee, 2022, p. 396).

Transpersonal coaching is very much around the coach being 'a wise companion on a journey' (Rowan, 2014, p.152), and this is very much what the Skilled Helper model expects of the coach and is 'used within a coaching or mentoring relationship characterized by respect, genuineness and empathy' (Connor, 2017, p. 124). The Skilled Helper was developed by Gerard Egan in 1975 and it can be described as 'a three-stage model in which the objective is to achieve lasting change and empower people to manage their own problems more effectively' (Bates, 2015, p. 116). It works by exploring the current situation, challenging the coachee's understanding of the situation and encouraging them to see a preferred picture. This is compatible with the Transpersonal theory if we consider Rowan's assertions about using it to encourage the coachee to challenge the assumptions they make about the situation they are in, providing the coach with some form of structure in a fairly nebulous theory, to encourage the coachee to reframe their narratives in a non-judgemental way. Conversely, the Skilled Helper is still very focussed on goal-setting and can ignore feelings, which is not in line with the Transpersonal theory (Connor, 2017, p.125) however Egan himself advocated for wisdom when using coaching models, which involves 'understanding and managing the limitations of the models we use, the limitations in ourselves and in our clients and the contexts in which we operate' (Connor, 2017, p.125). And as the Transpersonal approach is a little more experimental, limiting ourselves to coaching models to interpret it might be a mistake. Reflective models such as Kolb and Gibbs might be more helpful with a Transpersonal approach for example. Kovacs tells us that "regardless of the method used, one of the core elements of reflective practice is the use of incisive questions,

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which may be used in conjunction with a model of reflection such as Gibbs (1988) or Kolb (1984)” (2022, p. 107) and what is more reflective than coaching in the Transpersonal sense.

I have critically examined the Humanistic and Transpersonal theories of coaching as being suitable for use within my organisation. Alongside this, I have critically evaluated the relevance of the GROW and OSKAR models in relation to both of these theories and Appreciative Enquiry and the Skilled Helper as models that can be used with the Transpersonal theory. My conclusion is that no single theory or model is universally applicable within my organisation but that it depends on the needs of the individual coachee, however these give a good basis for further use and exploration.

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