

## COACHING AS A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE IN HRM

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**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to indicate the direction of changes in the instruments of people management, which will correspond to greater interactivity, strengthening the creativity of thinking and flexibility of action of managers and employees by incorporating constructive dialogue into coaching practice.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The article is theoretical and based on literature studies on the subject.

**Findings:** Coaching is, next to mentoring, the most mature form of supporting human potential, bringing out the best in people. Constructive dialogue is at the heart of a coaching relationship, based on respect and trust, constructive communication, strong questions, feedback and self-reflection. The article presents the essence, models, conditions and benefits of using constructive dialogue in coaching and tips for the use of the DIALOG tool.

**Practical and social implications:** Analyses have shown that not every supervisor can and should be a coach. In order for a manager to use the key element of the coach's work – constructive dialogue, in his cooperation with subordinates, he should be a participant in the coaching process, learning and practicing this way of communicating and shaping a strong superior-subordinate relationship. It is a ground for changing old habits, readiness to take on challenges, acquiring new competences based on the potential and strengths of the manager and employee.

**Originality/value:** The article is aimed at managers to increase the effectiveness of people management by creating a safe, creative space for development, building relationships of partnership, trust, respect and openness.

**Key words:** coaching, dialogue, constructive dialogue in coaching, DIALOG tool.

**Article category:** Viewpoint.

### 1. Introduction

Management based on coaching and constructive dialogue provides the basis for improving collaboration, communication and developing team intelligence in the organization. It is a management style where goals and results are achieved through conversation, inquiry

and openness to new points of view. Such a management style can be described as dialogic human resources management.

Modern time is a world of changeability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – the world of VUCA. It is directly related to management and risk management, it describes the environment of companies characterized by rapid changes in a very short time. Hence, managers should consider and implement new patterns of thinking and acting in an environment of increasing randomness and diversity of employee teams. Autocratic management methods and hierarchical structures are no longer the best solution in most organizations. If we want to develop more ideas, have more teamwork, collective wisdom and flows of meaning, solve more complex problems, we need skillfully conducted conversation, exchange of ideas – we need dialogue. The use of constructive dialogue can broaden the perspective in any situation and help create new ideas.

The subject of considerations in the presented text are the theoretical and real premises and conditions for the application of constructive dialogue in the practice of people management, i.e. – dialogue management of human resources. The aim of the article is to indicate the direction of changes in the instruments of people management, which will correspond to greater interactivity, strengthening the creativity of thinking and flexibility of action of managers and employees by including constructive dialogue in the practice of coaching. The analysis will be carried out on the basis of a literature review of the subject.

## **2. Dialogue as a basic tool in coaching**

In the literature on the subject, coaching is defined in many ways. Let's make a brief review of the definitions. Of course, this will be a subjective choice – using the author's privilege, I present only those definitions that refer to coaching as a dialogue. Coaching is "a conversation or series of conversations between one person and another (...) that is supposed to bring benefit in the form of progress" (Starr, 2005); coaching is "a conversation, a dialogue through which the parties interact in a dynamic exchange to achieve goals, improve action, and make progress" (Zeus, Skiffington, 2002); "The core of coaching is conversation. It is a dialogue that takes place between you and me, in the context of clearly defined goals. It is a conversation that allows you to look at the problem from different perspectives and consider different strategies of action at critical moments" (Clutterbuck 2009); coaching is "a process during which, thanks to a partner relationship, based on respect and trust, constructive communication, strong questions, feedback and self-reflection, the client transcends internal limitations and overcomes external barriers to achieve the selected goals and achieve the assumed results" (Czarkowska, 2021); Coaching conversation is practiced by people with different primary education: psychology, management, and others (Renton, 2009). In an attempt to somehow organize the

definitions presented (and many others), I would repeat after M. Sidor-Rządkowska (2022) that "the essence of coaching is conversation, and the axis of this conversation are insightful, properly asked questions", with the term "conversation" replaced with the term: "dialogue".

Dialogue is the heart of the coaching relationship, and at the same time a necessary condition for individual and social development in the work environment (Jeruszka, 2019). It is thanks to dialogue that we can talk about a real meeting of two people. Without such a meeting, without naming and expressing one's own thoughts, without empathetic opening and hearing the thoughts of another person, without an exchange of views leading to the co-creation of new solutions – it would be impossible to get to know oneself, create bonds, or individual or social progress. It can be said that establishing a dialogue is not only a natural, innate human need, but even constitutes our humanity.

Why do we talk about dialogue in the organization – about dialogue coaching and dialogue leadership?

The ability to talk together and think in a team can become a source of competitive advantage and organizational efficiency. A dialogue approach can foster better understanding between colleagues and generate better ideas, as well as tuning in to other people's "frequency". I. Kozieja-Grabowska (2016) claims that dialogue "has great potential for better understanding of people, cooperation, learning", dialogue is "a source of transformation and verification of one's own behaviour and beliefs." The quoted author (Kozieja-Grabowska 2013), based on the results of research, indicates the following benefits of dialogue in the organization: better understanding of our thinking methods, our own and other people's behavior; improving relations with employees; development of team intelligence, creativity and trust in the team; strengthening relationships between team members and perceiving a common goal; solving problems together, which in our time are more and more complex and complicated (not on one head); treating the organization as a holistic system (not us vs them); averting crises and conflicts and understanding how they occur. The list is not endless, and each of us can add new benefits to it from practicing dialogue.

In dialogue, we cultivate the "win-win" principle, because the other party is not the enemy, but a partner with whom we focus on the problem and choose a solution that will bring maximum satisfaction to each party and maintain a friendly atmosphere of cooperation. In dialogue, no one tries to defeat others, but everyone can expand the field of discussion and meaning. Nowadays, we need practices that support better communication and team solutions to various problems.

The theory and practice of dialogue in the organization was explored by William Isaacs (1999), according to whom dialogic leadership consistently, continuously discovers through dialogue the hidden creative potential in every situation, in every person. This process is supported by four main skills:

1. the ability to bring out people's true views, to express themselves in their own voice,
2. the ability to listen carefully, with empathy and understanding,

3. the ability to respect the right of others to their own opinion,
4. the ability to suspend preconceived notions and one's own certainties.

In other words, a dialogue leader practices dialogue and is also a good coach – asking questions, drilling, developing the potential of his team. It cultivates speaking with one's own voice, listening with understanding and patience, respecting the right of others to one's own opinion, suspending one's own views, and giving people the right to express their own opinions. He encourages his team to use dialogue.

A dialogue can concern two people or a group of people. "Coaching," writes D. Clutterbuck (2009), "is always an action undertaken with someone, not for someone. Therefore, the responsibility lies with both parties: the coach and the employee. Both parties must demonstrate mutual trust and openness, which are necessary for the right relationship between them. The employee and the coach must perceive the effects of their actions as their joint success".

### **3. The essence of constructive dialogue**

According to the PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language (<https://sjp.pwn.pl>), constructive means: giving positive results, bringing something new, concrete, capable of developing something creative, new, valuable.

Dialogue can be constructive, i.e. leading to mutual understanding and cooperation despite differences. It must bring something meaningful and give concrete results. Constructive dialogue must be thoughtful and rational. It consists in limiting oneself to the topic that was its seed, without dragging out accusations from the past, pointing out negative character traits or questioning someone's value as such.

Such dialogue is a peaceful action and an active opposition to all forms of violence in employee relations. In a social working environment, there is always communication between people, which can contribute to both building understanding and conflicts. In the workplace, we more often want our communication to be constructive. Working with a team of people, it is impossible to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts.

The crisis of constructive dialogue is particularly noticeable today, in times of strong polarization, bipolar ways of acting and thinking, and the accompanying radical assessments and social attitudes. Such phenomena are a feature of the contemporary social condition in Poland and in the world. A low culture of dialogue and a lack of skills associated with it leads to many risks, the consequences of which usually last for many years.

O. Rzycka and W. Porosło (2018) highlight the usefulness of the tool of constructive dialogue with employees in managerial practice. According to the quoted authors, in the coaching style of management, the basic way of solving problems is dialogue based on

partner relations. The ability to communicate constructively, to build a culture of dialogue, a culture based on mutual respect, appreciation and trust, is the most important attribute of a modern manager. One of the models of coaching work is the GOLD model (Rzycka, Porosło, 2018). It is used by the manager in working with employees in a situation where the employee's actions have caused negative consequences or when the level of performance of the assigned task does not meet the manager's expectations and the manager wants to use this opportunity to support the employee in development. It is used during the coaching process to draw constructive conclusions from the mistakes made and to learn from one's experiences. In practice, the GOLD model is a conversation focused on goals, results, learning and conclusions. The structure of the GOLD model is based on four key questions:

1. G – *what was your goal?* – What was your goal? What did you intend to achieve? What was supposed to be the result of your action?
2. O – *what was the outcome?* – What is the result? What have you actually achieved? What went well?
3. L – *what did you learn?* – What have you learned? What are you smarter about? What is the lesson for you after this experience?
4. D – *next time what will you do differently?* – What will you do differently next time this type of situations? What other opportunities do you see now? What will you do more? What will you do less next time?

This model assumes that it is worth using the mistakes made to develop awareness of the consequences of one's decisions and actions, readaptation, and actively and constructively draw conclusions. This creates good conditions for the learning process and personal involvement in the search for better and better solutions for the future (Czarkowska 2021). The use of coaching as a constructive dialogue is possible in a learning organization when the employee's right to make mistakes is recognized and conditions are created for correcting and improving work (Jeruszka, 2019).

Regardless of whether we are talking to a dissatisfied customer, or we have a different opinion than a co-worker, or we go to ask our boss for a raise, it is worth using a constructive dialogue. Be honest, substantive and specific. A constructive exchange with a client can protect the company from a negative opinion, a constructive exchange with a colleague can lead to a common position on the matter, a constructive exchange with a supervisor can result in a better salary or bonus. Constructive dialogue is the key to success and successful communication.

#### 4. Conditions for Conducting a Constructive Dialogue in Coaching

Without efficient, effective and ethical communication, management cannot exist at all. Competencies related to the process of constructive communication are complex and much-needed competences, although still too often ignored (Jeruszka 2020). This type of communication is intended for supervisors and employees who value the individual responsibility of each person more than top-down management of people.

"Communication is not limited to sending, receiving and exchanging information. Messages, often issued in the form of commands, not only inform, but also shape and change reality, activate, block or eliminate specific actions. Communication can consist in the transmission and exchange of explicit content. However, it can also encourage reflection, independent search and investigation. It can inspire, destroy stereotypes and routines. Knowledge and understanding, which are achieved on one's own, are valued the most" (Oleksyn, 2006). Therefore, the importance of more sophisticated forms of communication and various forms of indirect influence, which, however, require higher competences than those needed in the process of transferring and exchanging information, is growing. The importance of constructive dialogue is increasing. As A. Szewczyk (2016) writes: "conducting a constructive dialogue in coaching is an art that should be explored and applied, using tools appropriately selected for the situation, the person undergoing the coaching process and the context [...] Dialogue in coaching is an art, because you need tools and a properly trained and prepared person who knows the workshop – various techniques and knows what tools they can use".

How should we have a constructive dialogue?

First, think about what we want to achieve with it, i.e. what is the purpose of dialogue. And then we try to direct the conversation in a way that will enable the coachee to achieve the intended result. Just setting the purpose of the conversation will allow us to stay calm – we will not get distracted and resort to "small conversations", i.e. short, casual chats on an unimportant topic.

Secondly, adjust the intonation of the voice, the pace of speaking, the language and the style of messages to the interlocutor and the circumstances of the conversation, remembering that among all the information that reaches us during a conversation, 7% is derived from words, 38% from tone of voice, and 55% from body language. Thanks to this, it will be much easier for us to catch the thread of understanding, and thus support the coachee in achieving the goals he or she sets for himself.

Thirdly, involve the other party - the coached person in the conversation. A monologue is not an appropriate form of communication. You should show the other party that you are interested in what they say. We ask strong, deepening questions, paraphrase, nod, maintain eye contact. We show a genuine commitment to helping the coachee learn (Silsbee, 2004).

Finally, remember to describe everything we talk about in detail. Nobody likes vague information. If we are able, let's use data and numbers, give specific examples and be sure to remain objective. Let's not forget that everyone perceives reality in a slightly different way. Our beliefs are influenced by the environment, culture, values – and we must respect this. Therefore, in every conversation, it is worth issuing messages that will be unambiguous, clear, precise and, of course, devoid of any stereotypes or prejudices.

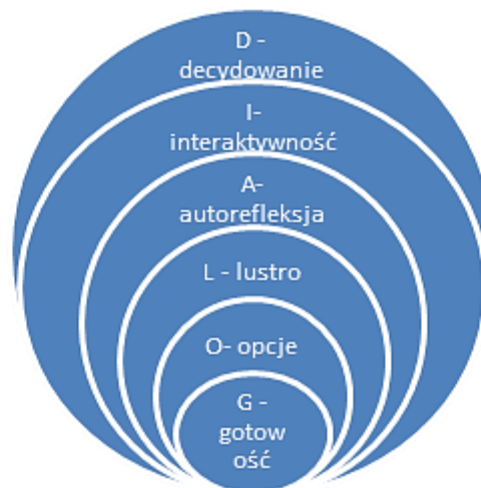
In order for our dialogue to run smoothly and actually be constructive, it is worth remembering a few rules:

- substantive – communicate in a way that sounds professional and to the point. Present facts, use specific data. This will make your argument clear and logical;
- intention – always be prepared for the conversation, determine the purpose of the conversation, what you want to gain from it. Think about whether you will have to negotiate or convince the other party to your point, whether the techniques of exerting influence will be useful, etc.;
- attitude – always try to be positive – both to the conversation and to the interlocutor, even if the dialogue is about a conflict or dispute. Such situations are natural and will happen – you don't have to adopt a hostile tone because of it;
- argumentation – only specific arguments used throughout the conversation will help you achieve your goal. The specific word is key here – if you are not able to meet the expectations of your interlocutor at the moment, explain to him why the situation is like this. Don't give evasive answers – be precise.

These principles can be applied in the workplace to make our communication constructive.

## **5. The use of the DIALOG tool in coaching processes**

The DIALOG tool can be used as a base – a ground for conducting a constructive dialogue during a coaching session, it can also complement the coach's workshop. The DIALOG tool helps you climb higher in your development and achieve your goal when the conditions expressed by the acronym DIALOG are met. The individual letters mean: D – the client's (mentee's) decision-making, I – interactivity in the coaching process, A – client's (mentee's) self-reflection, L – a mirror that allows you to see the image on the other side, O – options for action (possibilities), G – readiness to change (Szewczyk, 2016).



**Figure 1.** DIALOG tool.

Source: Szewczyk, 2016, p. 87.

The individual stages of the DIALOG tool indicate important issues that are part of the dialogue process that takes place during the coaching session. This tool also shows which areas should be paid attention to in order for the dialogue in the coaching process to be called constructive.

How should I use the DIALOG tool?

Each of the listed stages can be used one after the other, according to the order of the acronym DIALOG, or it can be appropriately moderated by the coach depending on the needs of the situation, context, and purpose of the coaching process. A. Szewczyk (2016) claims that "In a hypothetical situation during the session, when the energy drops and the client does not see a way out of the situation and loops on the problem, then it may be a good practice to use stage I – interactivity with stage A – self-reflection together, and adapt stage L – mirror to it, which will show different perspectives. In other cases, the aspect of the client's readiness for change may be important and this stage may be discussed several times in a given coaching session".

The stage – deciding – indicates that the client is the decision-maker, but the coach should effectively support him in making a decision. The next stage of the DIALOG tool is its interactivity. The coaching process is an interaction: each deliberate action of the coach causes a reaction from the client. From the first meeting, the customer is inspired to act. The coach's task is to encourage the client to interact and act through properly formulated questions, coaching techniques and feedback. It is important that these questions are simple, accurate, encouraging the client to think, analyze their own thoughts and see new aspects of different situations. It is also important that the coach, when giving feedback, does not succumb to the temptation to advise or instruct; it should contain only possible observed facts, without associations or interpretations of the coach; It should be delivered in constructive language that is full of benefits for the customer. The next stage of the DIALOG tool is self-reflection. Coaching is a process whose main goal is to strengthen the client and support them in making



a change on their own based on their own discoveries, conclusions and resources. The essence of coaching is learning, self-discovery, and development, thanks to which the client approaches specific results described by indicators at the beginning of the process. Self-reflection is needed by the client to constantly monitor whether he is going in the right direction. The next stage of the DIALOG tool is the mirror. The metaphorical meaning of the mirror in the tool is intended to show the coaching process as a mirror in which the client looks at himself and reflects, putting him in a state of curiosity: Oh, when I make a change, my life will look like this.... The mirror as a metaphor allows the client to broaden their perspective: the client can see their image – here and now – how it is now?, me and my reality; But the client also wants to see himself after the change, he wants to see his future – what does my future look like in ten years?, me in the future. The magic of the mirror allows the client to see what they need to grow and achieve their goals. The options stage aims to generate new opportunities, various options of action that will lead the customer to the assumed goal. The coach's task is to create a new space that will foster creative thinking, searching for solutions, and generating ideas. The last stage of the DIALOG tool is readiness. This stage is designed to direct the customer's attention that they are responsible for the change and that the right time for it is right now. Coaching is an opportunity for those who feel ready for change and are motivated to make this change.

## 6. Summary

There are many ways to understand coaching. They oscillate from a very narrow understanding of this concept as a set of techniques and tools aimed at interaction, to theories in which coaching becomes a philosophical concept, understood as a comprehensive vision of thinking and acting. We have paid attention to the definitions of coaching that emphasize the use of dialogue to strengthen interactivity, creativity of thinking and flexibility of action.

Constructive dialogue supports the development of modern management, the art of conversation, teamwork and joint thinking, an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust in order to be able to use the development potential of the individual and the team to the fullest. A dialogue leader who has specific coaching competencies is the manager of our times, times when problems cannot be solved by one person. Here we need dialogue, team wisdom, cooperation.

Coaching has become a part of the development practice of individuals and organizations. However, the results of research, especially quantitative ones, the effectiveness of coaching interactions, the use of coaching tools by managers towards their subordinates are far too rarely presented. We know little about the effectiveness of coaching in the work environment, how it works and what its effects are. The results of research on the effectiveness of coaching in organizations – if they are given – are not supported by any description of the procedures for

their collection and analysis. This is the direction of further research, especially quantitative research, on coaching as a constructive dialogue in people management.

It should also be noted that new technologies are changing the way we communicate. Electronic communication has become common: by phone, e-mail or instant messaging. Dialogue and direct conversation become a challenge. Nothing can replace face-to-face contact and a real face-to-face conversation. Electronic communication has its weaknesses: it is difficult to build trust, dialogue space using long-distance communication; it is easier to hide real intentions when there is no direct contact; it is easier to be disengaged, to remain "out of the conversation"; misunderstandings, misunderstandings and misunderstandings are more common; it is more difficult for people to be honest, it is easier to pretend to be someone or even change their identity.

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