

COACHING AS A PROFESSIONAL TOOL FOR PERSONAL AND CAREER SUPPORT (TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE HUMANISTIC FORM OF MANAGEMENT)

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to frame coaching as an effective tool to support the complex process of pursuing professional and personal life goals. This article is a concise description of the various components of professional coaching. The analysis also takes into account the importance of the humanities and the humanistic form of management in modern business organizations.

Design/methodology/approach: Due to the complexity of the issue addressed, the article uses a comparative-descriptive analysis method.

Findings: The conducted analyses made it possible to verify the thesis according to which coaching is a conversational method of support, the essence of which is, based on the majeutic method, a Socratic dialogue, conducted from the level of the heart/feeling. Coaching is based on the ability to listen at a level appropriate for coaching, also on the ability to ask questions characteristic of coaching, and the ability to identify areas in which coaching is currently most often worked on.

Research limitations/implications: The subject of coaching as a helping profession is multifaceted, so the author of the article, acting selectively and deliberately, considers only the key elements of the professional coaching process.

Social implications: The scientific basis of coaching is the humanities and social sciences, especially philosophy and psychology. Coaching is the practical application of humanistic and social knowledge. Humanistic knowledge focuses on human beings and the multidimensionality of their lives. This multidimensionality can be successfully applied to the need to lead a satisfying professional life, as well as a sense of fulfillment in private life. Coaching as a helping profession is an effective tool for supporting psycho-physical health and shaping well-being.

Originality/value: Coaching still belongs to rachitic phenomena with not fully developed formal and legal imperatives; a profession whose formal principles need to be refined. For this reason, it is worth taking up the subject of coaching as a helping profession, showing its professional-therapeutic dimension.

Keywords: Coaching, Socratic dialogue from the level of the heart/feeling, humanistic management, corporatism, concern for quality of life and building well-being.

Category of the paper: Review paper.

1. Introduction

In the article, using the method of comparative-descriptive analysis, I make an effort to characterize the issue of coaching, which nowadays, along with many other pro-social professions based on the humanities and social sciences, especially psychology, co-members the subcategory of helping professions. I present coaching as an effective tool for professional personal and professional support. I recognize that coaching serves its purpose in terms of both personal and professional support. Any criticism of coaching as an obscure and layman's, because not fully formed method of helping, or a tool for forcing continuous development, is most often related to a lack of professional, substantive knowledge of coaching and an incorrect understanding of the concept/profession.

The answer to the question of what coaching is ambiguous. Currently, there are many definitions of coaching. These definitions are recognized by both international and Polish institutions for professional coaches. One such institution is the International Coaching Federation (ICF Poland) – the oldest international coaching organization, established in 1995, which recognizes coaching as „a form of accompanying the client in a creative process that makes them think and inspires them to maximize both their professional and personal potential” (icf.org.pl).

Specialists in the fields of self-development, counseling and coaching explain in different ways what coaching is. It can certainly be admitted that coaching is interdisciplinary in nature, and the cited classical definitions of coaching most often call coaching a professional support tool based on psychological, philosophical, sociological and management-counseling knowledge. It is not uncommon for coaching to be captured simply in the form of an ongoing, processual method of providing assistance in the mentee/coachee's self-directed pursuit of a self-determined goal. According to Robert Kozłowski, a practicing coach and coaching teacher, „coaching is about supporting people to travel the path to achieve a goal. Although the coach accompanies the client/mentee on the journey as a journey of life leading to a goal clearly defined by the client, the coach does not direct the client and does not suggest to the client what to do to achieve that goal. The coach's task is to support the client in making the intended change on his/her own” (Kozłowski, 2016, p. 12).

In Poland, the professional principles of coaching, were first described by Małgorzata Sidor-Rządkowska, putting coaching imperatives into a system of 14 ethical principles of coaching. These principles have not lost their relevance even today, constituting a kind of coaching precodex rooted in humanities (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2022). According to these principles/rules, a professional coach is bound by strict ethical and humanistic orders of action and behavior. Among the professional principles of a coach's work, the principle of systematic improvement of competence and the principle of concern for one's own development as a professional coach deserve special mention. Of equal importance is also the principle of increasing trust in the

process of building relationships, the principle of truthfulness and the principle of loyalty, the principle of respect for the client's autonomy; also the principle of being the ultimate judge of one's own professional decisions, the principle of keeping commitments and skillfully questioning one's own decisions, the principle of taking care of one's own psychophysical condition, also Kant's principle of the difference between the end and the means to the end related to the postulate of non-instrumental treatment of the other person. To the aforementioned principles should be added the principle of cordiality based on friendly cooperation with other coaches and the principle of maintaining professional self-respect (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2022, pp. 53-54).

Nowadays, the coaching form of employee support finds application in those organizations that place special emphasis on human/employee empowerment and introduce a humanistic management culture. Humanistic management is a form of management through values. The humanistic form of management through values seeks to link moral postulates with the business world, while treating human beings as a special value, since they are autotelic (Szulczewski, 2011, pp. 143-159).

2. Humanistic form of management in the face of corporatism. Coaching as a remedy for dehumanized management styles

Humanistic management was born, as it were, in the form of a reaction to our times, a notable feature of which is the ubiquity of business organizations and the corporatization that prevails in them. This corporatism manifests itself in patterns of extremely hierarchical management based on instrumental coercion of efficiency, productivity and performance (Smelka-Leszczynska, 2024, pp. 151-153), also the constant, permanent need to control the employee as a result of the lack of direct trust in that employee. This corporatization is also externalized in the willing and increasingly intense seizure of power and available resources of the company, while shifting responsibility to the employee and his team/environment (Kostera 2015, p. 53).

It has been noted that - in the hitherto inhumane atmosphere of corporatism – the humanities and the humanistic form of management can become „a possible inspiration for individuals and groups seeking renewal and change (...). Humanistic management can be defined in three ways. First, it is management whose goal is the human being, his well-being, emancipation and development. Humanistic management adopts Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative as a principle, postulating that man should never become a means to an end, including such ends as profit, economic growth or efficiency (...). Second, humanistic management draws on the contributions of the humanities in the broadest sense, seen as a body of knowledge and culture offering contextual knowledge and sensitivity to political, historical and ethical traditions (...).

Third, humanistic management focuses on the human perspective, is interested in the human condition, the human experience, it is, as it were, management from the human level” (Kostera, 2015, pp. 53-54; Taylor, 2020, pp. 384-385).

Humanistic management unites around an ethos of shared values, such as responsibility, loyalty, dignity and respect, and common goals binding together leading principals of moral conduct, plans and actions. For this reason, „a morally intelligent organization is an organization whose principles are based on important values and whose members act in accordance with them. The main characteristic of a morally intelligent organization is that it is formed by morally intelligent people” (Szulczewski, 2011, p. 158; Lennick, 2007, p. 172). For this reason, the awareness and axiological sensitivity of the employee plays an extremely important role today. The axiological sensitivity of the employee is greatly enhanced by the adaptation of a coaching work culture in the organization. Awareness and axiological sensitivity of a person/employee are most often developed with the help of professional coaching as an effective, albeit non-invasive tool for creative development, which finds its application both in work on areas of professional and private-personal life. The skillful use of coaching as a support tool requires knowledge of the professional principles of its application.

3. Principles of professional coaching

Professional coaching enhances „individual, continuous and comprehensive development of a person’s competencies, inspires and helps build valuable attitudes, supports the development of new strategies, behaviors and facilitates the achievement of desired goals and results” (Wilczynska, 2023, p. 19). It is worth adding that coaching increases the client’s self-awareness, improves self-cognitive processes, influencing the reduction of stress levels, allowing to lead a more balanced life, positively influencing the quality of communication, with a clear reference to humanistic values.

Among the most frequently mentioned types of professional coaching, the following deserve mention: first, executive coaching dedicated to executives and senior managers. This type of coaching focuses on working in the area of intensely changing forms of management and business development strategies of the organization; and after second, close to executive coaching, business coaching, whose main goal is to optimize „management processes and work on business goals and results” (Wilczynska, 2023, p. 21). Business coaching strengthens the effectiveness of managerial activities in the business sphere and effectively supports the implementation of business projects. The third type of coaching is career coaching, dedicated to people focused on professional development. This development may involve the need to acquire new competencies/skills, or to make changes that will improve professional work and contribute to the client’s desired career goal. Another, fourth type of

coaching is life coaching identified with personal coaching or personal life coaching (Ramirez-Cyzio, 2010). This type of coaching deals with personal life and most often involves the issue of changes carried out within it. These changes may involve the need to develop a balance between the private and professional spheres of life. They also not infrequently involve the need for self-discovery and gaining insight into oneself. This need requires working through, as part of the coaching process, the area of (limiting as well as reinforcing) beliefs, including the client's values, taking into account the client's preferred gradation of values/hierarchy of values (Wilczyńska, 2023, pp. 20-21).

The mentioned types of coaching refer to individual coaching. However, it is worth mentioning that today team and group forms of coaching have also developed. These forms, although similar, are not the same (GROWTH ADVISORS). Most often, clients of team coaching (team coaching) know each other, form one team, and during the coaching process pursue one common goal. In contrast, in the case of group coaching, clients do not know each other and, although they form a group, they do not constitute a team. In this situation, the goals of the group members may differ, may be different, formulated differently. The group is united only by dedicated group coaching. An example of dedicated group coaching, can be coaching directed to people after a breakup, after the trauma of divorce, coaching dedicated to women after the loss of a child, parenting coaching directed to parents of children with disabilities, also to parents of children with mental development disorders, neurodevelopmental disorders (for example, to parents of autistic children, etc.). In contrast, in the case of team coaching, nowadays in business, consider, for example, the special role of agile coaches, who help team members reduce redundant/bureaucratic tasks and consolidate the resources inherent in the team, i.e. the potential that team members probably do not see in themselves (Adkins, 2020, p. 54). Regardless of the type of coaching, the coaching method of support involves working in accordance with the rules described in the codes of international, and nowadays also Polish, professional coaching organizations (Chamber of Coaching)¹.

4. Coaching process as an empowering maieutic dialogue from the level of the heart

The traditional coaching process, regardless of the type/type of coaching, consists of a series of one-and-a-half or two-hour meetings. These meetings are held systematically over several months, usually at regular biweekly intervals. Of course, the described model of meetings is not the rule. The most common model involves „six two-hour sessions over four months”

¹ Professional coaching organizations include the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the International Coaching Community (ICC), the Chamber of Coaching - an independent coaching organization representing the interests of the professional coaching community in Poland. www.izbacoachingu.com.

(Rogers, 2010, p. 18). The actual coaching process is preceded by a pre-coaching session, during which the coach „prepares the client for the first session by requiring the client to do some paperwork, sometimes including certain exercises” (Rogers, 2010, p. 18). The pre-coaching meeting ends with the signing of a (individual or managerial) contract and the official conclusion of the agreement.

The task of the client is to set a list of proposed topics, and therefore the goals that the client wishes to achieve using the coaching form of support. The positively formulated goals most often take the form of dilemmas (e.g., the dilemma of which career path to take) or puzzles (e.g., the disjunction of considering the topic of what to change in order to work better while maintaining as a constant the principle of work-life balance) (Rogers, 2010, p. 18). During a coaching conversation, the client discusses the proposed topic with the coach. The conversation follows a specific pattern, that is, a selected coaching structure appropriate to the situation. During the session, the coach adapts/adapts the structure to the topic of conversation. At the end of the session, the client and the coach carry out an evaluation (follow up) of the conducted session. This evaluation involves obtaining feedback on the quality of the conducted session. The feedback is referred to as constructive feedback.

The client leaves the session with a clearly defined, precisely developed plan of action by him regarding the topic and purpose of the conversation held with the coach. The professional coaching relationship: coach – client, is a parallel relationship. The parallel relationship means that the coach does not step into the role of a teacher, mentor, tutor or psychotherapist. In a parallel relationship, the coach also steps out of the role of an expert and is not an expert on the subject. The coach becomes merely a conversational companion working with the dialogical method of asking questions.

The source of the dialogical, philosophical-therapeutic method of coaching is the *majeutic* method, called *midwifery*, used by Socrates, the ancient philosopher (Negri, 2016, pp. 65-75). Socratic dialogue has contemporarily become the basis for building a coaching relationship based on the value of interpersonal trust. Socrates' *majeutic* dialogue, as a supportive, therapeutic conversation, is a leading tool of coaching. Coaching dialogue is an empowering encounter, an empathic relationship of „deep contact between individuals” (Czarkowska, 2016, p. 151). For this reason, it is not uncommon to associate coaching practice with dialogue conducted from the level of the heart.

Dialogue from the level of the heart is marked by full commitment, empathy, inner openness, courage to be authentic, sincerity, and at the same time dialogic presence and attentiveness of the coach during the conversation with the client. This attitude strengthens the coaching relationship. A valuable aspect of the coaching relationship is also the increase in the level of trust between the coach and the client as equal actors in the relationship. The coach conducts this type of dialogue from an open, pure and strong heart level (Czarkowska, 2016, p. 145). The subjects of the relationship: the coach and the client, are able to „express their opinion, respectfully but consistently defend what is important to them, honestly and in

agreement with each other agree or disagree with the other's proposals, and the interlocutors' declarations are consistent with their actual intentions" (Czarkowska, 2016, p. 150). The issue of conducting conversation from the level of the heart prompts one to ask about another important substantive issue of coaching. This issue is the problem of attentive listening during a coaching session.

5. Levels of listening in coaching

The gift of listening is a special competency that fosters openness to those around you and promotes a sense of belief, appreciation and understanding. Listening is also a key skill of a professional coach. A good coach „is able to listen in a special way, so that he or she is also able to see what remains unspoken" (Starr, 2015, p. 71). There are many different forms of listening. In professional coaching, there are several levels of listening – those levels of listening that are most valuable in coaching require a focus on what is deeply human, humanistic, presence-based, and allows one to look at the client holistically. „The level of listening changes with the effort put into understanding the person and the topic of conversation" (Starr, 2015, pp. 71-72). Among the various classifications of listening levels, the one proposed by thought leader and career counselor Julie Starr is particularly noteworthy.

Julie Starr distinguishes the level of cursory listening. Cursory listening is the lowest level of listening, at which the listener usually pretends to listen by wandering his or her thoughts elsewhere, ignores parts of the conversation, and loses the meaning by running his or her thoughts beyond the subject matter taken up by the client (coachee). Superficial listening is a form of superficial listening that does not work in coaching. A cursory listener forgoes engagement in listening and attentiveness, which is a particularly important skill in the coaching process. A slightly higher level of listening is that of conversational listening. This type of listening is most often wrapped up in conversations that follow a triadic pattern: listening – speaking – thinking. According to Starr, at the level of conversational listening, „we focus not only on the other person and what they are saying, but also on ourselves and what we are saying, what we are planning to say" (Starr, 2015, p. 73). In coaching, this level of listening is also insufficient. In a coaching conversation, we enter an even higher, and thus deeper, level of listening. This higher/deeper level of listening is sometimes referred to as the level of active listening. Active listening, is the leading competence of a professional coach. In active listening, the listening coach focuses on the client's statements and recording facts and filling in gaps, prioritizing listening and processing information over speaking. A coach at the active level of listening focuses attention on the client while trying to „understand what the interviewee is saying by asking clarifying questions, repeating parts of the client's statement or summarizing the information heard" (Starr, 2015, p. 74). The active level of listening takes into account

paraphrasing and mirroring the words/sentences spoken by the customer during the process. The last and highest level of listening is the intensive listening level. At this level of listening, the coach demonstrates a high level of perception and perspicacity.

As a listener, the coach calms and quiets his mind, is fully focused on the client of the coaching process, and focuses his full attention and awareness on the client. The intense level of listening is sometimes referred to as the higher/deeper level, as it is directly associated with mindfulness as presence, focus and engagement close to meditation. This level of listening as information retrieval, Starr describes with the following sentences: „In my experience, it is a service-focused attitude – a desire to understand, to help, or to provide support; in any case, it is an intention for the benefit of the speaker and his or her development” (Starr, 2015, p. 76).

With such an understanding of service, Julie Starr also links the concept of intuition. Starr believes, among other things, that intuition is a valuable cognitive tool successfully used also by a professional coach. Intuition as a tool of cognition refers to those specific forms of communication that occur in places inaccessible to our consciousness, in other words, in areas not registered by consciousness (Starr, 2015, p. 80). „Intuition is the brain’s ability to understand the message of situations or people by going beyond the signals to which we normally respond (...). Intuition makes use of knowledge we already have and that is communicated to us through thoughts, feelings, images and sounds” (Starr, 2015, p. 80). Intuition, as a function of the mind and body, does not require the use of language. The form of intuitive cognition is facilitated by experience and the stock of skills one possesses (Starr, 2015, p. 82).

6. Formulation of questions in coaching

As demonstrated earlier, the foundation of coaching is dialogue based on building an empathetic relationship. It is worth adding that the essence of this relationship is professional coaching questions. Among the leading coaching questions are open-ended questions. The use of such questions not infrequently involves the ability to transform closed questions. These usually begin with the participle „if”. Skillful posing of open-ended questions involves avoiding this participle, as well as the important competence of shying away from/avoiding suggestive, homing, rhetorical or interpretive questions, and abandoning the analytical search for the perfect question.

Tony Stoltzfus, an American coaching instructor, argues that „a derivative of the problem of finding the perfect question is intricate questions” (Stoltzfus 2012, p. 13), which should also be avoided. The key to success is simplicity, or more precisely, simplicity in the style of asking questions. When posing a question, one should keep in mind the not-so-easy skill of interrupting the client at the right moment. It is a disadvantage, especially for novice coaches, both to

interrupt the client too seldom and to interrupt the client too often, even habitually. An undesirable form of questioning in the classic coaching process is also the case beginning with the pronoun why. This pronoun introduces a question that hides, according to some coaching practitioners, a blameworthy request for an explanation or an obligation to offer an exculpatory explanation (Stoltzfus, 2012, pp. 12-16).

7. Coaching as a competency-based tool for support in various aspects of life

According to Ewa Mukoid master certified coach, coach mentor and supervisor, coaching competencies are excellent, distinctive tools used in working with people, through which people enhance the level of life satisfaction, also life harmony, especially emotional balance. During an empowering coaching conversation, the level of proactive behavior of the client also increases, exerting a positive influence on his psycho-physical well-being in various aspects of life (Mukoid, 2017, pp. 437-438).

Coaching support also strengthens the mental resilience of the mentee/coachee. Strengthening mental resilience can equally apply to personal/private life, social life and professional life. „Mental resilience is a personality trait that largely determines how an individual responds to challenge, stress and pressure, regardless of the prevailing circumstances” (Clough, 2016, p. 157; Strycharczyk, 2012). The topic of mental resilience is related to the issue of resilience and hardiness. Working on resilience as commitment, calm flexible control response, correct and skillful evaluation of the stressful event, and working on hardiness as an active response to the stress-generating difficulty, is a very common theme in coaching processes (Clough, 2016, p.158; Kellerman, Warsaw, 2023, p. 25).

However, coaching is used not only to cope with challenges, but also to improve talents and social competencies, point out ways to support people in their development and struggle with the disadvantages of life. As a helping profession (helping professions), coaching is an excellent tool for expanding consciousness, transforming identity (Mukoid, 2017). As is already known, coaching teaches the ability to ask the right questions (some of which fall into the category of difficult questions), reinforces the habit of active listening, teaches the skill of sincere appreciation, as well as taking care of one's own natural abilities (mukoid.com).

The ability to sincerely appreciate the client is done at several levels: the level of enjoying the progress that the client has made in the process of pursuing his or her goal as a result of working with the coach; the level of expressing faith in the other person/client reinforced by the effects of the client's work to date. At this level, the coach appreciates the client by emphasizing the importance of the client's resources. The client's resources are the skills, competencies, positive habits and abilities possessed by the client, which can become the seeds

of the client's future success. Client appreciation is also done at the level of appreciation as defining identity, or „expressing in a positive way who a person is” (Kozłowski, 2016, p. 32).

8. Conclusions

The purpose of the article was to present coaching as a tool for professional personal and professional support. Conducted in a succinct outline, the analysis focuses exclusively on the descriptive principles of professional coaching, that is, coaching as a dialogical relationship with a parallel position of the subjects of the relationship. Also coaching as a conversational method of support, the essence of which is the Socratic maieutic dialogue, conducted from the level of empathy, emotion and heart/feeling. Reflection on the present issues was also accompanied by a description of the levels of listening in coaching, a characterization of the leading questions for coaching by type, and an indication of the areas in which coaching support method is most often worked on today.

Such a special area today is business organizations, which are replacing the instrumental-corporate style of management with a new, humanistic – focused on the human being and his values – form of leadership/leadership. The humanistic management style thus focuses on the employee as a human being and awareness of the multidimensionality of his life. This multidimensionality can be successfully applied to both the need to maintain satisfaction in one's professional life and a sense of fulfillment in one's private life. Coaching as a helping profession can be considered an effective tool for supporting psycho-physical health, a tool for growth and compensation of quality of life, and a reliable accessory for building well-being.

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