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Chapter 8

Learning, Training and Development in focus: Coaching Psychology

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Overview

This chapter offers an introduction to the academic field of coaching psychology, offering some definitions and an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of coaching and the current state of research. The chapter then turns to the practical application, describing one of the most popular models for structuring a coaching conversation, the GROW model, and highlighting some core coaching skills. The chapter will end with a few words about working as a coach – what types of coaching roles are commonly available and what factors an aspiring coach might need to think about if they are considering taking coaching further.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you will:

- Understand the ways in which individuals in organisations learn and develop through coaching
- Appreciate the differences between coaching, mentoring and counselling
- Know about the theoretical underpinnings and have an understanding of the current developments in relevant research
- Appreciate the practical application of coaching
- Have some ideas for incorporating coaching in your work

What is coaching?

The conceptual roots of coaching psychology can be traced right back to Homer's *Odyssey* and the character Telemachus who had meaningful one-to-one conversations with his trusted wise old friend Mentor. This, of course, gave us the word 'mentor' and established the idea of a one-to-one conversation that focuses on the development of one of the parties. We can see the origins of modern-day coaching in the work of Maslow and Rogers in the 1960s, who pioneered humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1967) and the behavioural scientists of the early 20th century who were concerned with behavioural change. There are occasional references in the psychological academic literature to workplace coaching from the 1920s onwards (such as Griffith, 1926), but arguably the game-changing publication was Gallwey's 1974 book *The Inner Game of Tennis*. In this, Gallwey proposed that the inner, psychological game of a tennis player was as important as their external game, suggesting that training needed to focus on a player's mental state as much as their technical skills. This idea was soon adopted by the business community and the field of workplace coaching became increasingly established through the latter part of the 20th century (van Nieuwerburgh, 2018).

The most famous definition of coaching comes from Sir John Whitmore – one of the founders of developmental coaching. He suggests that

“Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.” (Whitmore, 1992, p.8).

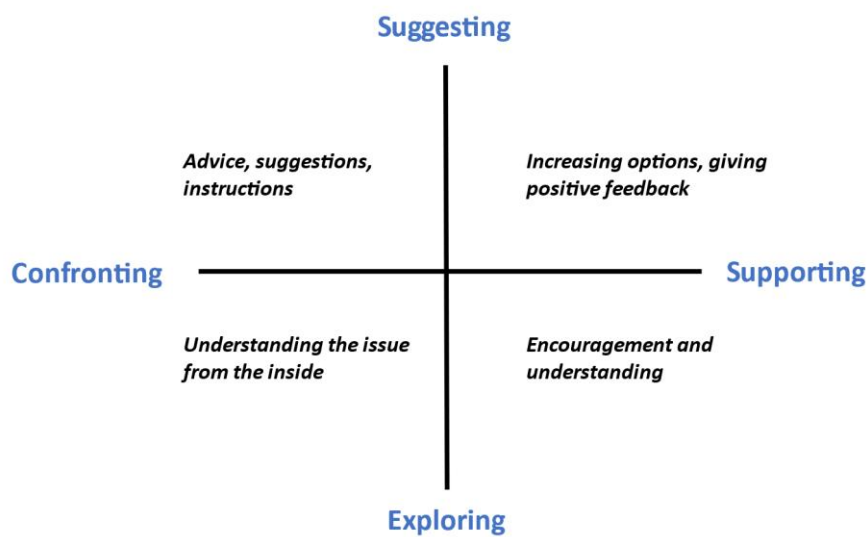
This quote reflects one of coaching’s key tenets, highlighting that coaching is not about telling people what to do, or advising them, or giving them answers; it’s an approach that empowers people to make their own choices and solve their own problems. A more process orientated definition comes from Bachkirova, who explains:

“Coaching is a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools, and techniques to promote desirable and sustained change for the benefit of the client and potentially for other stakeholders” (Bachkirova, 2018, p.1)

Her definition highlights that coaching conversations need to have a structure and a goal and will often make use of a range of coaching-specific techniques. She also stresses one of the key ethical principles underpinning coaching, that it is client-led: the topic discussed in a coaching session must be of interest and of value to the client themselves. The ‘other stakeholders’ she mentions, will usually be the client’s organisation or line manager, who may well be funding the coaching and might have a vested interest in the outcome. This tension between the goals of the client and the goals of the organisation can sometimes need to be managed carefully, and a three-way contract, negotiated collaboratively between the coach, the client and the organisation, is often a valuable starting point.

Coaching usually takes place in a one-to-one conversation, although it is possible to use coaching approaches and principles within a group setting. It is usually goal-directed and person-focused, meaning that it is the client who sets their own goals, and the coach supports the client to identify their own solutions. But coaching can take many forms. De Haan’s blended model of coaching, (Figure 8.1), illustrates the range of approaches.

Figure 8.1 De Haan’s Blended Model of Coaching



Adapted from de Haan, (2008)

Coaches mostly position themselves in the bottom right-hand quadrant of de Haan's model, encouraging and supporting their clients. However, they might move into any of the other three quadrants, sometimes even within a single coaching session, depending on the demands of the context, the client and the particular issue under discussion.

Coaching is in some ways similar to other developmental approaches, most notably mentoring and counselling. The difference between coaching and mentoring is straightforward: good quality mentoring makes use of coaching skills, and can use coaching models, but a mentor tends to be someone who has specific existing expertise in the client's field or industry. As well as giving the mentee the chance to explore and reflect on their own thoughts and feelings (as you would in coaching), a mentor can offer advice or access to specific opportunities (Clutterbuck, 2008).

The difference between coaching and counselling is a little more nuanced. Some would suggest that the key difference is whether the process aims to unpick the past to understand the origins of any blocks or patterns of unhelpful behaviour (counselling) or it is focused on identifying solutions and plans for the future (coaching) (Grant, 2006). But this isn't wholly convincing. Although there are some therapeutic approaches that are, more or less, exclusive to either coaching or counselling, there are others such as cognitive behavioural or humanistic approaches which are described in almost identical terms in the counselling and the coaching literature (Bluckert, 2005). An alternative explanation for the differences between coaching and counselling lies in the attitudes or expectations of the clients. The coaching 'brand' is goal-orientated and future-focused, and so it may be that clients who are looking for a goal-orientated, future-focused conversation opt for coaching, and those who are interested in unpicking patterns of past behaviour opt for counselling. Thus, it is the attitude of the client, rather than the nature of the therapeutic approach that leads to a difference between coaching and counselling (Yates, 2011).

Coaching Psychology

The field of coaching is unregulated. Anyone can decide to call themselves a coach and set themselves up in business, charging vast sums, using any kind of untested techniques and adhering to no ethical codes; and no-one could stop them. To try to impose some standards, rigour and professionalism on the field, the sub-discipline of Coaching Psychology was developed in the 1990s by, amongst others, Tony Grant in Australia and Stephen Palmer in the UK. Coaching psychology aimed to distinguish itself from coaching by identifying coaching practices that have a solid evidence base, grounded in psychological theories, and by conducting academic research that develops and evaluates tools and techniques that are valid and reliable. This approach is summed up by Grant (2006, p.15) who describes coaching psychology as ‘the systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experience, work performance and wellbeing for individuals, groups and organisations’. The efforts to apply rigorous scientific methods to this field have led to significant robust research data (as we will see in the next section), and have been recognised by the profession, in the establishment of a new Division of Coaching Psychology within the British Psychological Society in 2021.

Coaching psychology is grounded in psychological theories. The earliest theoretical underpinning to coaching was behaviourism. Behaviourism focuses exclusively on observable behaviour, and early incarnations of coaching were all about changing and improving performance. The GROW model (Whitmore, 1992) - explained later in this chapter - is a behavioural model, focused clearly on developing plans to change behaviour but also draws on our understanding of cognitive processes, making use of goal setting (Locke & Latham, 1990), problem solving (Palmer, 2011) and decision-making techniques (Kahnemann, 2011).

These days, coaching draws on a wide range of psychological approaches, including behaviourism, humanism, existentialism, learning theory and social psychology. One of the most popular recent approaches builds on the research conducted within the Positive Psychology movement, described in more detail in Box 1. Practical coaching approaches are also adapted from other fields of applied psychology including health psychology, counselling psychology and family therapy.

Coaching psychology has set itself up as a scientifically robust field of applied psychology, but let us now have a look at the evidence for its effectiveness in practice.

Box 1**Positive Coaching Psychology**

In 2000 Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi wrote a seminal paper that launched a new field within psychology, which they called ‘positive psychology’. The traditional model of psychology, they explained, was a deficit model, one in which researchers and practitioners sought to improve the lives of those who were struggling. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi argued that whilst that was an important endeavour, psychology had the potential to reach more people. They proposed their new branch of psychology as one that would run alongside the traditional approach, but would be directed towards those whose lives were already reasonably good and aimed to offer them techniques and approaches to help them to flourish.

The field of positive psychology has become closely linked to coaching psychology (Lomas, 2020). Coaching has been described as a 'natural home' for positive psychology (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007) and the synergies are not hard to find. Positive psychology and coaching both strive to inspire growth and change by focusing on the positive aspects of human nature, and both aim to support optimal functioning in individuals, groups and society. This shared philosophy has led to the description of coaching as 'an ideal vehicle through which the science of positive psychology can be applied' (Kauffman et al, 2010, p.159).

In practical terms, positive psychology has contributed numerous interventions which can be used in coaching. One set of exercises capitalises on the value that gratitude can have. Gratitude exercises can be used in coaching as a way to boost positive emotions or help difficult relationships (Passmore & Oades, 2016; Trom & Burke, 2021). Strengths (defined in positive psychology as things that you are naturally good at and enjoy doing) offer another group of exercises which have been shown to be effective in coaching, particularly valuable in the workplace, raising self-awareness and boosting confidence (McQuaid, Niemiec & Doman, 2018).

Does coaching work?

The evidence-base for workplace coaching is growing in scale and is becoming increasingly academically rigorous, but the effectiveness of coaching is not a straightforward thing to measure (Tooth, Nielsen & Armstrong, 2013). Many studies focus on the client's view of whether the coaching was effective. This is, without doubt important, but is of course quite subjective. Other studies use the opinion of the coach as a measure, which is even less robust – even the most reflective and objective of coaches is likely to be biased towards a favourable assessment of their own practice. A more rigorous measure is to link the outcome measure with the goal that the client set during the coaching: if a client wanted to improve their time keeping, you could measure how many times they have arrived late to work before and after the coaching; if they wanted help with motivating their staff, you could assess whether their team's productivity has increased since the coaching. But not only do these then make for complicated research projects, there can be all sorts of other confounding factors which make it very difficult to know whether a positive change observed is actually the result of the coaching itself: perhaps the better time-keeping coincided with the purchase of a new alarm clock, or the increased productivity was actually down to the motivating power of a pay rise.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the evidence base is growing in size and quality. The first set of studies focused on the effectiveness of coaching tended to be small scale, and outcomes were often measured by self-report surveys (Grant, 2009). Although not the gold standard of academic research, these kinds of studies do offer some useful data suggesting that coaching has a positive impact on goal accomplishment (Fischer & Beimer, 2009), professional growth (McGriffin & Obonya, 2010), professional relationships (Kombarakaran et al., 2005), managerial flexibility (Jones, Rafferty & Griffin, 2006), productivity (Olivero, Bane & Kopelma, 1997) and resilience and workplace well-being (Grant et al., 2010).

More recently, several meta-analyses have been published. Theeboom, Beerma and van Vianen (2014) looked at different kinds of coaching (executive, life and health) and examined the impact of

the coaching on the individual. They found that coaching overall had a significant positive impact on clients, and specifically helped with skill development, well-being, their ability to cope and attitudes to work. Interestingly, they found no link between outcomes and number of sessions (a single session was shown to be as effective as a series of six), although offered the plausible explanation that people facing more complex challenges were more likely to end up having longer coaching relationships.

Jones, Woods and Guillaume (2016) conducted another meta-analysis, looking at studies which had been conducted into executive, or workplace training. They found that coaching had a positive impact overall on organisational outcomes, and at the individual level, people benefited from coaching in terms of their skill development, their attitude towards work and their performance. They also found that internal coaches (i.e. coaches employed by the same organisation) were a little more effective than those brought in from outside, but there was no discernible difference between face-to-face and blended coaching (i.e. face-to-face plus online).

Finally, in 2017, Burt and Talati (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials (highly rigorous studies) for executive coaching and found positive benefits for performance, well-being, coping, work attitudes and goal-directed self-regulation.

The evidence seems to be fairly compelling: coaching does work. The next step then is to try and understand how it works: what is it that happens within a coaching conversation that makes a difference?

How does coaching work?

Recent reviews have identified several specific factors which are consistently shown to have an impact on positive coaching outcomes, most frequently the self-efficacy of the client, the range of tools and techniques used by the coach and most powerful of all, the working-alliance between the coach and client (Bozer & Jones, 2018; de Haan et al., 2013; Grassman et al., 2021; Molyn et al., 2021). Let us examine each of those in turn.

Self-efficacy of the client

The more confident a client feels about their ability to make a change, the more likely they are to put their plans into action (de Haan et al., 2016). Bandura explains that self-efficacy leads people to set themselves challenging goals, and to expend more effort achieving them (Bandura, 1986). Coaching has been shown to build clients' levels of self-efficacy through, for example, raising self-awareness, encouraging clients to take responsibility and offering opportunities for positive feedback (Whitmore, 2002), so coaching that helps to boost clients' confidence makes clients more likely to put their plans into action.

Range of tools and techniques used by the coach

One intriguing finding in the literature is that no one approach seems to be better than any others (Wampold, 2001). The evidence seems to suggest that person-centred, solution-focused, cognitive-behavioural and positive psychology approaches are all equally likely to produce a positive outcome for a client. This calls into question the value of learning about different coaching approaches - it would certainly save a lot of time if we just picked one approach to study, so why do we bother? There are two other research findings which support the development of expertise in more than one approach (de Haan et al., 2013). The first is that although the specific approach that the coach takes

doesn't seem to make much difference, the commitment that the coach has towards their particular approach does: it doesn't matter which technique you use, as long as you are genuinely convinced that the approach works. It therefore makes sense to expose yourself to a wide range of approaches in order to find the one that works best for you. The second relevant finding is that whilst no one approach seems consistently superior to another, having a range of different techniques at your disposal, does seem to help. A varied professional toolkit allows you to pick and choose the specific technique that you believe is best going to help your particular client with their particular issue and this seems to have a positive impact.

Working alliance

Beyond anything else, the working alliance seems to be the key to successful coaching. The working alliance consists of the combination of three different factors: a clear and agreed goal for the session; an explicit and shared understanding of the process; a good relationship between the coach and client.

Most coaching models (discussed in the next section) include a goal-setting stage near the start of the conversation, which allows coach and client to spend some time identifying, clarifying and agreeing a goal. A clear and agreed goal for the session is useful because it ensures that the conversation is focused on the matter at hand, and makes sure that both coach and client have a shared understanding of the priorities.

The second important aspect of the working alliance is the shared understanding of the process. To establish an explicit understanding of the process, the coach needs to spend some time before the coaching begins, making sure that the client understands what coaching is and how it works. Then as the coaching itself progresses, the coach should share the process with the client throughout, being explicit about, for example, the models they are using, and explaining the value and purpose of any of tools used.

The third aspect of the working alliance is the client-coach relationship, and two specific aspects of the relationship have been explored in some depth: trust and interpersonal attraction.

Levels of trust have been shown to link with positive coaching outcomes (Boyce, Jackson & Neal, 2010), and the value of trust is thought to be explained by the idea of psychological safety (Mayer et al., 1995). The client's trust in the coach allows them to show vulnerability and therefore explore their weaknesses and limitations. Through this, the client builds self-efficacy and can identify solutions to their own problems.

There is some evidence that commonality between the coach and client leads to positive outcomes, in particular same-sex pairings seem to work particularly well, as do coaches and clients who share similar attitudes, beliefs and values (Bozer et al., 2015). This success is explained by the similarity paradigm, or homophily, which is the tendency for humans to identify and attract people similar to themselves (Byrne, 1997): people imagine or anticipate that those who share their own values and worldview are more likely to be trustworthy and therefore are more likely to have open and honest conversations.

Existing research thus shows us that coaching does seem to work, and offers some suggestions of the particular aspects of coaching that seem to make the difference – a good working alliance, a

range of techniques at the coach's disposal, and a focus on boosting the client's confidence. Let us now turn to more practical matters, and consider how to coach.

How to coach

Most coaching conversations, certainly most good coaching conversations, follow some kind of process model. A model can help ensure that you make the best use of your time with your client, that you don't get side-lined, and that you see the topic through to a useful conclusion. There are many different models that you can use, and many coaches will have a number of different models that they will rely on, picking and choosing the one that seems most suitable in the moment.

One of the most straightforward and widely used models is a behavioural model, known as the GROW model (Whitmore, 1992). The GROW model offers four distinct stages for each conversation, and the coach should gently steer the client through each stage, making sure to cover all four, in order, within each conversation. In practice, coaching conversations are rarely that neat, but keeping this structure in mind, and returning to it when you feel you have gone off track can help to make sure that your time together is well spent.

G is for GOAL: in the first stage of the interview, you and your client need to make a decision about what you are going to talk about. The content of the goal should always be determined by your client – it is never the coach's place to suggest something, but as the coach, you might be well placed to decide whether the goal your client has suggested is specific enough to be covered within a single coaching session. You can also play an important part in helping your client to work out what they want to discuss. Clients can often arrive at coaching knowing that something isn't quite right, but needing a bit of help to crystallise that vague sense into something that they can work on; this stage can take some time and you might find that you need to do quite a bit of exploring before the goal feels like the right one. In these situations, your G-R-O-W structure might end up being more of a G-R-G-R-G-R-O-W process, but that's fine.

R is for REALITY: This is when you encourage your client to explore their own thoughts and feelings. During this stage you might find yourself using lots of open questions to really encourage your client to open up. Prompts such as 'tell me more' or 'how did that feel?' can be useful, as can short summaries of your client's story so far. During this stage, you are aiming to get your client to talk about what led them to this point, what they have tried so far. I often start this stage asking clients to 'tell me the story so far', which is a form of words that I find can encourage clients to open up.

O is for OPTIONS: Once you feel that your client has had a chance to tell their story, and has perhaps understood themselves better after talking this through, you can move on to the Options stage. In this stage you need to achieve two things. First, you want to encourage your client to identify as many possible solutions or suggestions as possible, and then second, you want to get your client to evaluate these options, narrowing them down, ending up with just one or two that seem to be most helpful. Coaches often make use of specific techniques in this stage including mind maps, scaling and visualisations.

W is for the WAY FORWARD: In your final stage, you invite your client to draw themselves up an action plan. The action points need to be specific and ideally time bound, for example you might ask 'When do you think you will be able to do that?', and it can be useful to spend a bit of time here

talking about any barriers that might get in the way, and how your client could pre-empt or work round them.

All four sections of the model should be covered in each coaching conversation it can help to share the model explicitly with the client at the start. It's a simple model to explain, and this transparency creates the sense that keeping the conversation on track is a joint responsibility. It also demystifies the process which can serve to empower the client.

Coaching Skills

Alongside making use of coaching models, a coach needs to develop a wide range of coaching skills. Some of these draw on Rogers's work on humanistic counselling (Rogers, 1967). Rogers proposed that for change to occur in a therapeutic context, there were five 'core conditions' which he described as 'necessary and sufficient': *necessary*, in that change cannot take place without them and *sufficient* in that they are all that is needed for the change to take place. This might seem like a somewhat extreme position to take and a more common contemporary view within coaching, is that these core conditions are useful to help change to take place, although perhaps neither necessary nor sufficient (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017).

The core conditions are:

- 1) Two people (the coach and client) are in psychological contact – they are both psychologically present in the space together and connecting with each other. This can involve effective rapport building and the art of building relationships and establishing trust quickly.
- 2) The client is 'incongruent' – there is something that the client wants to change, or a problem they want to solve. One challenge that coaches can face is the potential tension that you can face when negotiating a three-way contract between you, the client and the client's employer but even if the employer is paying, and wants the coaching to focus on a particular issue, the coaching is not going to work, if the client has no intrinsic interest in that goal.
- 3) The coach is 'congruent' – the coach is focused on the client and their issues – not distracted or pre-occupied by their own issues.
- 4) The coach feels 'unconditional positive regard' (UPR) for the client. The coach accepts the client for who they are and believes in their potential. A coach might not agree with the choices that they have made, but needs to find a way to value them for themselves, regardless of what they have done. This is not always easy to achieve, and coaches are well advised to arrange regular supervision to help make sure that issues such as this don't jeopardise the quality of the coaching. Supervision offers coaches a chance to talk about their work in a safe, confidential environment to make sure that there aren't any issues that may be getting in the way of the coaching. If you ever find yourself feeling less than unconditionally positive towards your client, this might well be a useful thing to raise in supervision to try and find a positive solution.
- 5) The coach manages to communicate this UPR to the client to some degree. The coach can communicate their empathy with the client through their active listening, appropriate responses and thoughtful comments.

There are a number of skills needed to achieve these five conditions including rapport building, empathising, self-reflection, and active listening. In addition to these, coaches also need to be skilled in a range of active listening techniques, such as summarising, reflecting and paraphrasing and asking questions to challenge, to probe or to stimulate new thinking.

Box 2

Technology in coaching

Traditionally coaching has taken place in person, face to face either in a traditional office, or often in a more neutral space, such as a coffee shop. More recently, coaching has been increasingly conducted online. This trend had been noted before the 2020 pandemic, but the lockdown, as it did in so many spheres, increased the pace of the adoption of technology. Taking the use of technology in coaching a step further, Grassman et al. (2020) have explored the idea of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Coaching. Although this might sound like a strange idea, the authors argue that AI has already made great inroads to coaching, in the form of self-help apps and websites that support people to make changes in their lives. They also point to the obvious benefits that AI could bring, including anonymity, flexibility and reduced costs. They suggest that AI seems to be capable of guiding clients through a number of steps in the coaching journey, including, rather surprisingly, establishing the all-important working alliance. They point to studies that have shown that clients have managed to bond with virtual therapists (Bickmore et al., 2010) and other studies that indicate that clients feel more comfortable self-disclosing to virtual agents (Gratch et al., 2014). Grassman et al. also note limitations and question whether AI could help clients to identify their problems effectively, or give personalised feedback. Their conclusion is that in time AI will be incorporated within coaching programmes, but won't take the place of human coaches.

Working as a coach

Coaching has become enormously popular as an approach to workplace learning and development and is now one of the most popular approaches to professional development in organisations (CIPD, 2021). The coaching industry is currently estimated to be worth \$15bn per annum worldwide, and the International Coaching Federation estimates that there are around 90,000 coaches across the globe (ICF, 2021).

Coaching empowers others to take responsibility, make their own decisions, use their creativity, solve their own problems and feel more confident about their choices. The skill to help others improve their own performance, leadership or decision making will be useful whatever your role. If you are a manager, a colleague, a trainer, a mentor, and even a friend or a parent, the skills of non-directive, active listening, empathising, asking good questions and suspending judgement can and will be useful for you whatever direction you want your career to go in. But perhaps you are interested in finding out how to make coaching a more central part of your career?

Coaches work in a variety of settings, in-house – usually within a learning and development team, working for an external consultancy, or working freelance. Coaches can choose to specialise, working either with particular topics or particular groups of people. Some of the most common include executive or performance coaching (which I tend to join together and describe as ‘workplace coaching’), life coaching, career coaching, retirement coaching, maternity coaching and weight loss coaching. Although it might seem logical to offer a broad range of services early in your coaching career, in order to capitalise on a wide potential client-base, in fact, you are more likely to be successful if you have a particular niche, as it’s easier to create the sense of expertise (Van den Born, & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013). Many coaches too have a portfolio of expertise, offering facilitation, coach training and consultancy services as well as coaching.

Becoming an accredited coach is worth considering. This will demonstrate your own professional standards to your potential clients, and will encourage you to develop good professional habits. There are some influential professional bodies (listed in the ‘Explore Further’ section at the end of the chapter) all of whom offer the chance to become accredited. The requirements for accreditation vary from one professional body to another, but generally they include a requirement for some formal training (initial training and CPD), considerable experience, regular supervision and adherence to an ethical code.

Conclusion

The skills that you develop as a coach can add value to whatever strand of organisational psychology you decide to pursue and coaching itself can be a meaningful and fulfilling aspect of your work. We have looked, in this chapter, at definitions, theories, and the empirical basis for coaching psychology, and have focused in on some specific skills that coaches need to develop. I hope this has inspired you to want to find out more!

Case Study

Bethan had spent her 20s working in a niche consultancy firm and worked her way up to Director level. She absolutely loved working at the organisation, and really enjoyed the fast pace, the stimulating colleagues and the challenges of the work itself. She worked long hours and socialised almost exclusively with work colleagues and clients, but in her early thirties, she realised that this intensity wasn’t great for her physical or mental health and started looking round for a new job. She received some offers, but none of them seemed quite right, and now she had one particular job offer which seemed to tick all the boxes; but still she hesitated. Bethan came to see a coach to try and work out what she should do next.

The coach suggested that they should use the GROW model, and explained the four stages. Establishing the goal took a little time, but eventually Bethan identified that what she wanted was to feel more confident about the decision she thought she had already made.

During the Reality section, the coach asked Bethan to talk about the last six months of job hunting and Bethan spoke about the various jobs she had applied for and the conversations she had had. The coach listened attentively, summarised to help Bethan clarify her thoughts, and then asked if she could offer a reflection. Bethan had been talking a lot about other people’s views – what her husband thought, how future recruiters would perceive her, what her current boss would say, but

hadn't spoken much about what she herself wanted. 'What about you?' the coach asked 'when you think about doing this job, how does that make you feel?'. Bethan admitted that she didn't really know, and the coach encouraged Bethan to do a short visualisation exercise, in which she imagined herself in that job. This helped Bethan to feel a little more confident about her own choices, but she was still unsure. The coach suggested that they should try a thought experiment. She asked Bethan to imagine that she had taken the job and that six months down the line, all of Bethan's worst fears were realised: her colleagues were mediocre, the work was repetitive, the promised pay rise had not materialised. The coach asked 'What would you do then?'. This was a light-bulb moment for Bethan, as it dawned on her that if she wasn't happy, she could leave.

Moving on to the Options stage, the coach asked Bethan a direct question 'What do you think you need to do, to help you to decide?'. The question seemed to help Bethan to take a bit more control of the situation and she identified a few concrete suggestions for next steps.

In the final stage of the conversation, the Way Forward, Bethan developed an action plan, and the coach invited her to consider what barriers she might encounter and what support she could put in place. The coach ended with a scaling question, asking Bethan to estimate, on a scale of 1 – 10, how confident she felt in her decision. Bethan said that she was currently at a seven but felt confident that the steps she had planned would push her up to the eight or nine she needed to make the choice.

Explore Further

Professional Bodies can provide you with a wealth of information and support if you are interested in finding out more about working in the field. These include The Association for Coaching (<https://www.associationforcoaching.com/>), the International Coaching Federation (<https://coachingfederation.org/>) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, (<https://emccuk.org/>).

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Van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2021). *An Introduction to Coaching* London: Sage. This is a great practical guide to help you to develop your own coaching skills

Yates, J. (2022). *An Introduction to Career Coaching* (Second edition) Hove: Routledge. This might be of interest if you like the idea of combining coaching with career support

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