

# From Coach Training to Coach Education: Teaching Coaching within a Comprehensively Evidence Based Framework

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## Abstract

This paper outlines the conceptual framework for coach education used at the Interdevelopmental Institute (IDM) that focuses on changes in adult cognition and social-emotional capability. The framework derives from research by Piaget, his followers in the Kohlberg School at Harvard University, and the Frankfurt School (Critical Theory). In the framework coaching is seen as a way of changing other minds by way of consulting to clients' mental process (process consultation). Material for coaching is found in the documented tendency of adult learners, coaches and clients alike, to embrace ever more sophisticated thought forms that aid them in dealing with the complexity of real life issues.

The author argues that research-based coach education should supersede coach training by strengthening capabilities grounded in the cognitive and social-emotional development of adult learners. Opening and changing minds is seen as a precondition of bringing about lasting behavioural change in others, and thereby improving performance, not only in coaching but in coach education as well.

The timeliness of the developmental approach to educating coaches lies in the fact that coach training is presently in a transition to adopting more research-based foundations. However, in the successful coach training organisations now vying for survival, these foundations are being introduced *ad hoc* and *eclectically* since they were not initially considered. By contrast, new programmes are needed that, from the outset, are grounded in research findings like the one presented here.

**Key Words:** coach education, adult cognitive development, capability, mental processes

## A. Introduction

Coach training is presently in a state of transition. Despite increasing interest in research-based programmes, few have so far emerged. In this paper, I present a model of research-based coach education, focusing on the intersection of theory, pedagogy and education. I propose that in contrast to coach training, coach education makes explicit epistemological assumptions. In the case of the IDM Programmes, these assumptions are: first, that adults are subject to the natural development over the lifespan of their thinking and emotion, and therefore at times need *help*, and second, that adults mentally construct their world from the inside out in ever more systemic ways that can be precisely assessed. Coach education as

here conceived is thus based on a constructivist theory of the mind and of helping, more precisely of helping people to become more self-aware.

This paper is structured in four sections, A to D. In A, I introduce the pedagogical assumptions the Interdevelopmental Institute (IDM) Programme is based on, pointing to the social science literature. Section B highlights the grounding of coach education in the documented tendency of adult learners, to increase cognitive capabilities to the point where the complexities of real life can be systemically, and therefore successfully, dealt with. The central section of the paper is C, where I outline in detail the three interrelated perspectives on the coaching client taught in the IDM Programme. I discuss the horizontal and vertical dimensions of human development addressed by the programme, the three perspectives the programme encompasses, the three pedagogical modules of the programme, and envisioned pedagogical and research outcomes.

I devote special attention to the sequencing of pedagogical modules embodied in the design of the IDM Programme. I also propose a framework for engaging in developmental research on coach education, and entertain some thoughts regarding the need for an expansion of *coaching ethics* concerns. The paper concludes with comments on the need for future *research in coaching*, in contrast to “coaching research.”

### *Epistemological Assumptions*

#### First Assumption

To the extent that people are *subject to* their own developmental level and development of thought forms over the life span, they can benefit from observers of their mental and emotional process. Such observers I call coaches. Coaches are observers of the mental processes that link their clients to themselves, to others, and the social environment. More succinctly, they are mediators between individuals, on one hand, and the ways in which they internally *construct* their thinking and emotions, on the other. In order to become more successful mediators, coaches need to be better informed about research findings regarding their clients’ present developmental state.

#### Second Assumption

In his book, *Dialectical Thinking and Adult Development*, Basseches (1984) explores a psychological phenomenon called dialectical thinking, and traces its evolution over the adult lifespan. Basseches shows that the potential of individuals, to think and feel in increasingly open and flexible ways, is reflected in the increasing use of more complex thought forms that can be objectively traced through semi-structured interviews. Interviewing for discerning thought forms requires a kind of active listening referred to as *developmental listening*. Since coaching takes place primarily in language and is based on listening, I propose that coach education that does not engage coaches’ own increasingly more complex sense of language and ability to listen is missing the opportunity to make a major contribution to client growth.

### *The Capability Paradigm*

The IDM Programme is best understood as based on theories of *Capability* (Jaques, 1994; Basseches, 1984; Kegan, 1982, Laske, 1999b) that give rise to a new paradigm of coach education. Capability is defined by adult-developmental parameters. It is about what people ARE, not what they HAVE (such as competences), and thus by definition transcends behaviourist approaches. The cogency of Capability Theory is straightforward: while one can suspend what one *has*, one cannot suspend who and what one *is*. Therefore, we can say that coaching competencies are used by practitioners *according to their present level of capability*. Capability grounds the actual *use* of competences (which is what matters, not competences per se). Accordingly, one and the same competence (e.g., powerful questioning) will be used very differently by individuals at different levels of Capability (Laske, 2006). This holds true for coaches as well as students of coaching: what individuals can “learn” is both enabled and constrained by their present Capability, and this Capability can be precisely assessed by the tools described below.

#### **B. Adults’ innate tendency to expand their capability**

According to research, Capability comprises two major strands: cognitive and social-emotional capability (Wilber, 2000). As people mature in their social-emotional capacity, they experience an associated tendency to overcome the rigidity of formal logical thinking. It is not that they suspend formal logic. Rather, they acquire dialectical thought forms that subordinate formal logic to more advanced forms of thinking without completely discarding formal constraints (Demick, J. et al., 2003, Section II). This helps them cope with the contradictions and paradoxes of real life (Basseches, 1984). The tendency is toward dialectical thinking. Dialectical thinking is a form of cognition through which things, events, situations take on the shape of organic forms. In contrast to things, Forms are subject to unceasing change, reside in larger contexts, and are related to other forms both outwardly and inwardly.

The concept of things as ‘forms’ is highly relevant to coaching, where change is a major topic. It is also crucial for coach education where the unlearning of clichés and recipes sometimes instilled by traditional coaching programmes is central. A coach who is able to think dialectically is aware of, and sensitive to, the fact that clients’ reality is in constant flux; is embedded in larger contexts, and relates to realities no rule or recipe can capture. For this reason, attention to thought forms of dialectical thinking is of paramount importance in coach education as well as coaching itself.

If the adult tendency toward dialectical thinking is a coach’s central resource for helping clients learn how to change their minds, then the mandate of coach education is no different from that of coaching itself, namely, to further the use of increasingly more fluid and systemic forms of thinking. This entails that the student of coaching must him or herself be seen as a ‘form’ in evolution, and must be addressed by using mind-opening pedagogical challenges. Such challenges include opportunities for students to acquire conceptual frameworks promoting their self-development as adults. However, a single framework will

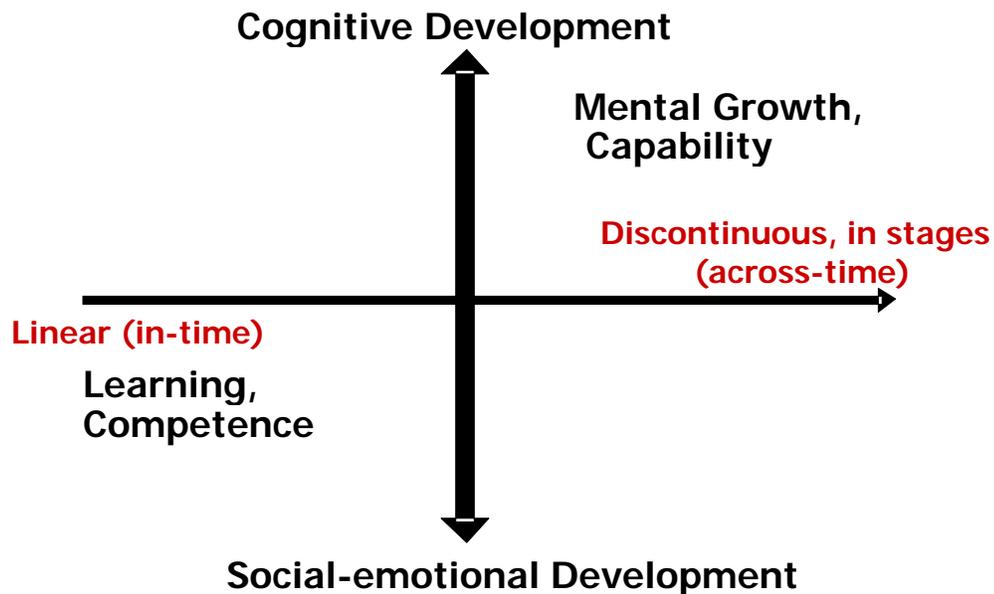
not suffice, given the complexity of client (and coach) personality and mental process. Rather, students will need to be exposed to different frameworks by which to exercise systemic thinking. Mastering multiple frameworks for use in coaching naturally enhances coaches' services to clients because clients can be understood from more than a single perspective. The dialectical developmental approach is in no way restricted to coaching. It pertains to all forms of *process consultation* (Schein, 1999) of which coaching is but a variant (Laske, 2006).

### C. An evidence based approach to coach education

#### 1. Two Dimensions of Coach Education

Present coaching and coach training is predominantly behaviourist in outlook. They tend to ignore individuals' developmental and cognitive levels, proceeding along a horizontal axis of linear, in-time progress of learning. In the IDM view, this exclusive attention to behaviour and learning ignores the vertical dimension of adult development, thereby relegating the latter to a hidden dimension (Laske, 2006). In the teaching at IDM, we include hidden behavioural dimensions such as self-conduct, task approach, and emotional intelligence along with the hidden developmental dimensions of cognition and social-emotional capacity.

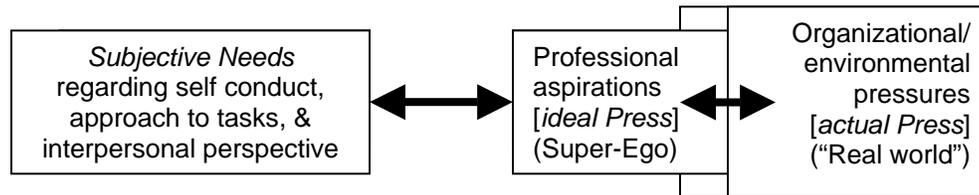
We can think of the two dimensions of human change (horizontal and vertical) as constantly intersecting. There is nothing humans do that does not require competence learning and capability simultaneously, as shown in Fig. 1:



**Figure 1**  
Integral coach education comprising the hidden (vertical) dimension of adult development

The reader may wonder what is meant by saying that the behavioural dimension of client functioning is a hidden one. The answer is simply that every individual carries into adult life a pre-adult character formation formed in coping with childhood and adolescence, and that this formation forcefully plays out in adult life. One way to conceptualize pre-adult liabilities is to distinguish, with Murray (2005), between subjective needs and inner and outer pressures. These liabilities are addressed in IDM teaching as the client's Need/Press Balance. Figure 2 provides an illustration.

As indicated, the third hidden dimension in adult functioning relates to how coaching clients manage their unconscious 'subjective needs' in relation to the twofold pressure of their aspirations (*ideal press*) and social reality in the form of organisational (or other group) culture (*actual press*). How this double pressure exerted on individuals manifests in their performance in life and work can best be understood by using a developmental lens through which behavioural data can be scrutinized. By developmental scrutiny, behavioural symptoms can actually be *explained*, rather than merely *described*.



**Figure 2**  
**Subjective need vs. ideal and actual press**

## 2. *Three Perspectives on Coaching Clients*

In most general terms, IDM teaching focuses on answers to the question of 'who is my client?' This question takes two related forms:

- What does my client think s(he) can do? (cognitive capability)
- What does my client think s(he) should do and for whom? (social-emotional capability).

As shown in Fig. 1 and 2, above, IDM teaching addresses three complementary hidden dimensions of adult meaning making. To do so, use is made of a specific research-based conceptual framework that has been developed in the social sciences, especially adult-developmental psychology. Students engage with each of these frameworks in separate modules of IDM Programme One, as follows:

1. Social-emotional self (ED): Gateway and Programme One Part A
2. Cognitive self (CD): Programme One Part B
3. (pre-adult) Need/press balance (NP): Programme One Part C.

These hidden dimensions are brought together throughout Programme One, most intensively in Programme One Part D. In this last section of Programme One, students are

asked to put all three perspectives on clients together in the act of writing a case study on a single client. The case study demonstrates students' ability to think about, and work with, clients in an evidence-based systemic way.

### 3. *Postgraduate Programmes Two and Three*

Once the foundational Programme One has been completed, and its mastery documented through a case study, all further study at IDM serves the purpose of becoming a more fluent and systemic developmental thinker. At this point, students may enter Programme Two. The requirement of this programme, to submit three case studies, adds to the depth of expertise of the developmental consultant and coach. Programme Two is conducted as a *master class* rather than a conventional training class. Participants are peers who exchange results of their research, and ideas about its impact on their coaching practice.

Programme Three, finally, gives students an opportunity to begin work on a PhD or EdD thesis. The student is *coached* and supervised in developing a thesis topic, the methodology needed for the study, and supported in gathering the empirical data required for thesis completion.

### 4. *Overview of Programme One*

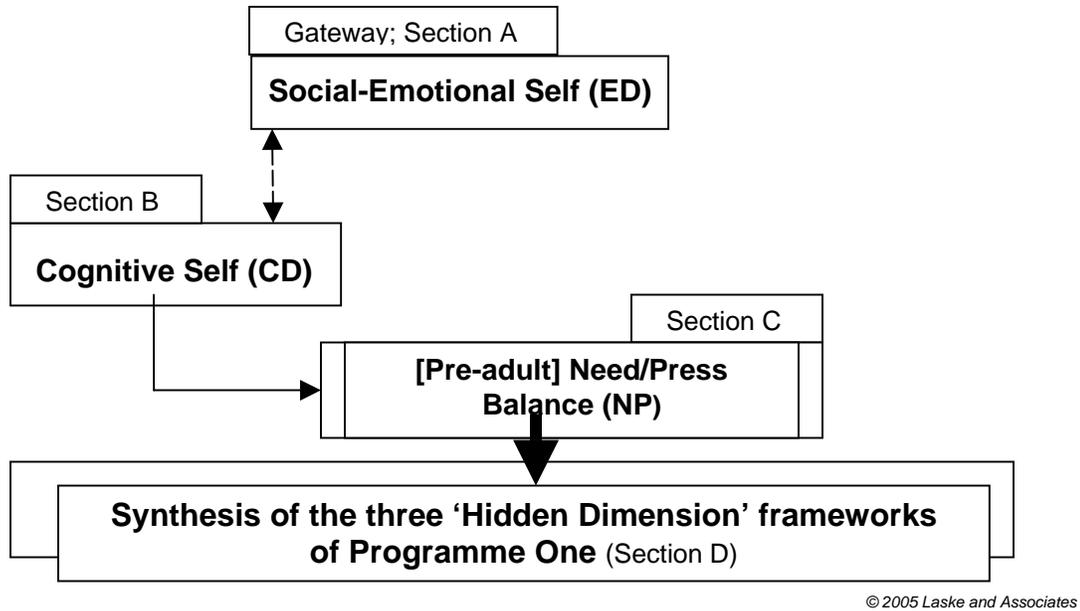
To the student, the three frameworks discussed appear as different sets of tools and perspectives (see Fig. 4 below). The first module (A) centers on learning, and internalizing, the levels of adult development, while the second (B) centers on acquiring a repertory of thought forms by which coaches can provoke clients to adopt ways of divergent (dialectical) thinking. In Module C, clients' and coaches' largely subconscious, internal conflicts (conceptualized in the tradition of Freud and Murray) are topical. In Synthesis module D (see Fig. 3), the three modules are brought together and exercised in a case study of an individual client. As a result, the student learns how to take a three-fold perspective on clients, assess clients' resources from three different vantage points, and develop highly personalized systemic coaching strategies based on understanding the (explanatory) relationships holding between the three perspectives.

### 5. *Outcomes of Programme One*

Since Programme One is the Institute's *foundational* programme, its pedagogical benefits should be explicitly stated:

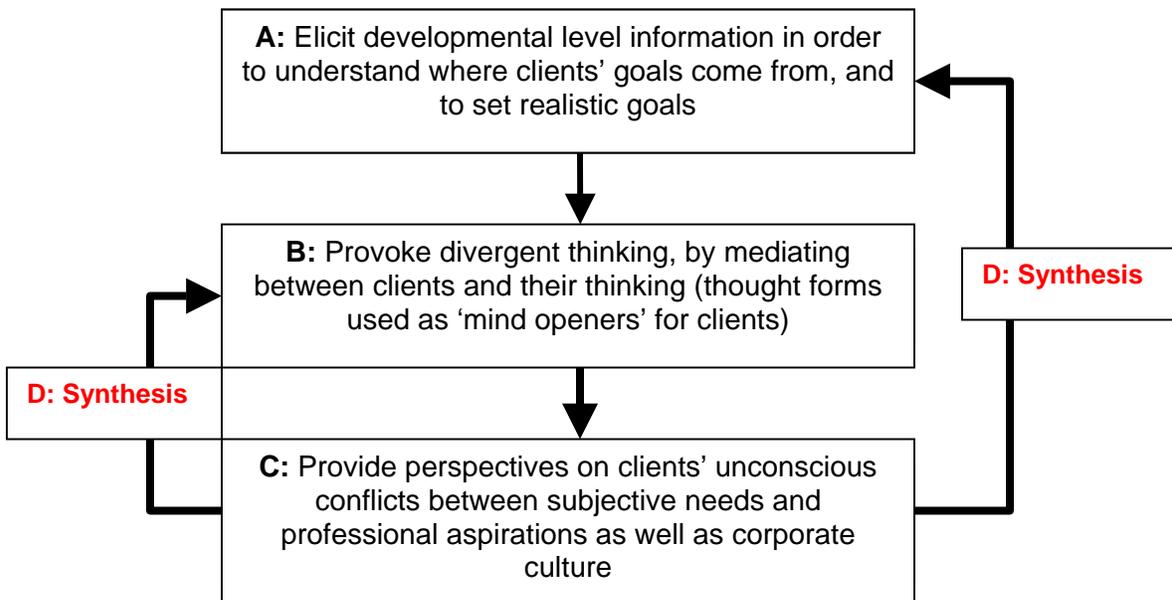
- 1 Coaches become professionals working within conceptual frameworks for decoding the meaning of the verbal material clients bring to coaching (and that's all clients bring!).
- 2 Coaches learn to elaborate idiosyncratic coaching strategies commensurate with specifically assessed client needs.
- 3 Coaches are trained to take multiple, complimentary perspectives, both on self and clients.
- 4 Coaches develop heightened coaching presence since they are self-authors working from a conceptual framework and a professional Persona (rather than their "own little personality").

- Coaches become capable of heightened active listening and powerful questioning, in a way that is not attainable within a purely behaviourist (horizontal) framework.



**Figure 3**  
**The Relationship of the three client perspectives taught in IDM Programme One**

In its entirety, then, IDM Programme One poses the following challenges for the student:



**Figure 4**  
**Flow of Basic IDM Coach Education in IDM Programme One**

6. *Pedagogical Sequence within Programme One*

Coach education is not merely an intellectual exercise focused on acquiring new tools and skills. It requires transformational experiences preceding work with clients. We need to think deeply about the sequence in which frameworks are presented to the student as learning modules, and how these modules are ultimately brought together in coaching work.

At IDM, we have resolved that, while all modules presented are rigorous in the sense of being research based, they should begin with teaching material that has a strong social-emotional impact on students in the sense of their self-development. In our experience, this impact is most clearly experienced by students in learning about developmental levels, as documented by the following testimonial:

*Thank you for Session seven [of Gateway], especially for your tolerance as my role-playing turned too personal ... Though unexpected, it is tremendously enlightening for me to get a grasp of my own developmental stage and the light this sheds on how I am handling life. I feel at once a tremendous sense of relief and wonder at the possibilities for growth, and a sense that I have wasted years in unfruitful attempts to please (internalised) others. I somehow needed both the vision of maturation contained in the developmental psychology material; and especially the basic recognition of the distinction between real and internalised others. Through this recognition I can now let go of the internal conflicts rather than trying endlessly to resolve them. I feel an emotional and even physical release of internal tensions. I know this growth will take more work, yet I sit here astounded, relieved and happy with the discovery.*

As demonstrated above, students who are challenged to understand clients' developmental level naturally begin to assess, and asked to be assessed in, their own level of meaning making, often with dramatic effects. (As one IDM student recently expressed it: "You are overthrowing the entire apple cart of my life!"). Assessments serve as interventions much as coaching does. With developmental assessments, there is a strong chance that 'digging down' into one's own developmental position in life will yield resources for further growth and learning otherwise not available. This is relevant since it could be argued that there does not exist a more potent predictor of coaching success than the coach's own adult-developmental level.

7. *Deepening 'Ergriffenheit' through Cognitive Coaching in Programme One*

Changing minds without first creating 'Ergriffenheit' (German for "being deeply moved"), or a state of emotionally based self-questioning, is nearly impossible. Research on emotional and cognitive development in adulthood indicates that there is a robust, although in no way one-to-one, link between these two strands of human development (Wilber, 2000; the correlation is 0.6, see Laske & Stewart, 2005). From a pedagogical vantage point, this suggests that once an emotional basis has been laid for increased openness to new ideas and perceptions, there arises in the student a concomitant ability to begin using thought

forms previously out of reach. At IDM, this rationale has led to making cognitive coaching the second crucial component of the curriculum.

A cognitive coach is a mediator between the client and his or her sense making system. To be equal to mediate for clients in this way, the coach needs to acquire tools and perspectives for determining the following aspects of the client’s thinking:

1. Fluidity of thinking
2. Capability of systemic thinking
3. Balance or imbalance of different classes of thought forms used.

According to IDM research, the first-mentioned aspect of cognition, fluidity (as assessed through a cognitive interview), has a normative relationship with social-emotional levels, as shown in Table 1, below:

<i>Social Emotional Development (ED) (Module A of Programme One)*</i>	<i>Cognitive Development (CD) (Module B of Programme One)*</i>
5(4)	>70
5/4	>60
4/5	50-59
4(5)	40-49
4	30-29
4/3 to 4(3)	20-29
3(4) to 3/4	10-19
3(2) to 3	<9

\* Otto Laske (1999), elaborating work by R. Kegan & M. Basseches.

**Table 1**  
**Normative alignment of social-emotional and cognitive capability**

The deeper importance of the alignment, shown in Table 1 above, is that it defines hypothetical norms for the cognitive-emotional balance in clients’ life and work. Where this balance is more than one level off, deep coaching issues are likely to lurk. Concomitantly, for the coach deep ethical issues arise as well, since having profound knowledge about clients’ way of being requires a commensurate coaching ethics, presently not in place (Laske, 2006). Knowledge about others raises the issue of doing harm, and not to do harm should be the uppermost principle of coaching work.

8. *Some Issues of Developmental Coaching and Process Consultation*

When one analyses stages of adult-development in relation to coaching practice, it becomes clear that there is a minimal as well as an optimal stage on which process consultation – consultation to the client’s mental process – can be authentically carried out (Laske, 2006, chapter 9). The minimum stage lies a small step beyond “other-dependence” (Kegan’s stage S-3(4), 1982), where an individual has mastered holding a second perspective in

addition to her own, and defines him/herself by others' expectations, but with some awareness of doing so. The upper stage is the conflictual one between (Kegan's) stages 4 (self-authoring) and 5 (self-aware), precisely notated as S-5/4, where a process consultant such as a coach is about to relinquish her professional persona in favor of intensely interactive scrutiny of herself with (equally developed) partners serving as midwives of her own development.

Another, presently undiscussed (not to say, taboo) set of ethical demands of coaching regards the adult-developmental compatibility of coach and client (Laske, 2006, chapter 9). Where a client is coached by a developmentally less mature practitioner than is the client herself (assume 'skills,' and focus on capability!), the potential of inducing developmental delay or arrest, and thus harm, is palpable, even if some cosmetic behavioural change can be instilled through coaching.

Present coaching ethics does not deal with either case of transgressing norms of professional ethics. This is so since coaching is presently grounded in behaviourist theories, and coach education – in the sense of advanced, post-graduate coach training – is in a state of infancy. Of course, this is to be expected of a social service that is still only an industry service, rather than a profession with a shared knowledge base.

#### 9. *Developmental Framework of Research in Coach Education*

It is probably clear to the reader that Table 1, above, proposes, in addition to pedagogical criteria, a framework for outcome research in coach education. As seen in column 2 of the Table, cognitive capability, measured in degrees of dialectical thinking, is constrained by social-emotional level and vice versa (Laske, 1999a; Laske & Stewart, 2005). Coach education research could ascertain students' entry level in terms of the two measures, and ascertain the effect of coach education on the student over a chosen period of time (such as a year). In this way, not only coach education outcomes, but by extension coaching outcomes as well, can be precisely assessed, and teams of coaches and entire coaching programmes can be managed. In the pedagogical realm, coach training programmes can be compared to each other in terms of their developmental efficacy, a criterion that is presently far from practitioners' minds.

A more general concern of coaching research as presently conducted is the 'Tower-of-Babel' character of the coaching theories now being built by practitioners. Assuming that it is sufficient to build a 'knowledge base,' research practitioners seem to neglect the issue of a consistent vocabulary, or of being able to compare study outcomes among each other. While multiplicity of approach is certainly desirable, indeed necessary, the present lack of a consistent conceptual framework and nomenclature could be seen as a severe hindrance to meaningful and successful coaching research. Where no consistent vocabulary of coaching concepts and outcomes exists, the relationship between the variables researched remains everybody's guess.

#### **D. Conclusions: the need for further research**

I have introduced, and surveyed, a novel pedagogical approach to coach education that transcends traditional coach training in the direction of strengthening developmentally nascent capabilities, both cognitive and social-emotional. In so doing, I have focused on the need to understand clients in greater depth than behaviourist paradigms, now pervasive, allow for. I have also stressed the need for emotionally impactful and research-based education based on the correct sequencing of educational modules.

In addition, I have raised some central issues of both coaching ethics and research. Ethical issues regard the developmental compatibility of coach and client, while issues of research concern the use, in empirical studies, of consistent, research-based conceptual frameworks.

As holds true for all pedagogical ventures, the IDM coach education programme described above, while based on substantial research findings, is itself in need of further research. In part, this research is carried out by students of IDM, in part it is a separate venture carried out by faculty. The following topics of mixed, qualitative-quantitative coaching research are presently in the forefront of work at the Institute:

1. What developmental shifts do students experience when learning about adult-developmental levels?
2. What shifts in the relationship between the cognitive and social-emotional development indicators occur in students in Programme One?
3. What kinds of systemic thinking are required by developmental coaches who merge social-emotional, cognitive, and behavioural coaching?
4. What parts of traditional coach training need to be *unlearned* to become proficient in developmental coaching?
5. How do students integrate conventional coach training with IDM teachings, both as learners and in their work with clients?

#### *Requirements of Professional Research in Coaching*

It may be premature to draw up a map of issues and results one should be able to expect from research on coaching. I would distinguish such research from contemporary coaching research, taking the latter to be a bewilderingly heterogeneous undertaking that presently lacks a consistent systemic framework anchored in established epistemology. The limitations of coaching research are due not only to its infancy and the lack of experience of the majority of its practitioners (PhD candidates), but the absence of its embedding in validated and proven frameworks that transcend behaviourist theories of human change. It would seem, therefore, that a distinction of approach would be beneficial:

- ‘Coaching research’ as research on a new profession called “coaching”
- ‘Research in coaching’ as a variant of what in OD has long been known as process consultation (and is in no way restricted to coaching).

The former is closer to sociological and marketing research than it is an in-depth inquiry into human change, while the latter is by definition more systemic and organisationally relevant. Both are potentially playgrounds of an ideological nature, but embedding in a more mature research tradition cuts down on false claims.

Another important distinction would seem to be that between research ON and IN coaching. At the present time, 85% or more of “coaching research” is close to marketing studies and therefore has little to do with exploring the *epistemological core issues* of coaching. I refer to these studies as research ON coaching (as a social movement). By contrast, research IN coaching is research such as adult-developmental research that is grounded in social science disciplines (developmental psychology etc.), and focuses on the relationship between the two parties to the coaching.

Some of the time-honored and persistent issues of research in the helping professions – and thus coaching as well -- are, in my view, the following:

- What does it mean to understand (or misunderstand) a client?
- How does a client’s presenting problem relate to the underlying client issues that the client is subject to (rather than conscious of)?
- What are the adult-developmental requirements of a helper?
- What are the mental demands of helping on the helper?
- How do helpers build a model of their client?
- What are the adult-developmental prerequisites of building a particular client model, in terms of dialectical thinking?
- What client models are there?
- How are particular client models used in practice?
- What is the effectiveness (ROI) of a particular client model, both short- and long-term?

These issues are all outside of research ON coaching, and will only be tackled by research practitioners embracing consistent conceptual frameworks that are conversant with contemporary epistemology.

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