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What Communications or Relational Factors Characterize the Method, Skills and Techniques of Executive Coaching?

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This article aims to clarify executive coaching by describing the coaching process through an examination of relevant theory. Establishing a relationship based on mutuality between the coach and the coachee is central to the coaching process as we see it. For the coachee to achieve independence and greater control of his or her own learning, the coach has to have advanced communication techniques and skills. Thus, the conversation between the coach and coachee, where a case in focus is brought in by the coachee, resides at the heart of the coaching process. We discuss different techniques and skills needed for this process, with the most obvious ones being powerful questioning and active listening.

INTRODUCTION

Executive coaching is a fairly new discipline related to growth and development, although the interest for executive coaching has escalated during the last decade (Grant, 2006; Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999), and the market is still growing (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). Until recently, evidence that executive coaching could transform individual performance at work was quite insufficient for such claims (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). More empirical research needs to be conducted (Grant, 2006). Like most new disciplines, there are discussions regarding what coaching is and is not. According to Downey (1999), it is not strange that this is the case, as many of those who are involved in the coaching field in one way or another do not agree on what coaching is.

Considerable confusion and mystery clouds what actually happens behind closed doors when coachees engage with a coach (Hall, *et al.*,1999). We want to lift that cloud somewhat by clarifying executive coaching, through a description of the coaching process based on relevant theory. Hence, the question to be answered is: *What communications or relational factors characterize the method, skills and techniques of executive coaching?*

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Coach is a term often used as a metaphor for someone who takes people to a desired place (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002; Gjerde, 2003). Coaching is therefore about establishing a helping

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relationship between the coach and the person with whom the coach is engaged. We have defined this person as the coachee in this article. The quality of this helping relationship is the key to an optimal coaching process (Whitmore, 2002). In general one can divide relationships into three major categories: (1) dependent relationships, (2) independent relationships, and (3) relationships based on mutuality (Kvalsund, 2005). Dependent relationships are characterized by reliance on another person, such as a parent or teacher. Such relationships are positive when the dependent person thinks or feels the assistance is necessary and desirable, however, they can also become negative if either the dependent person or the person giving the assistance thinks that it is no longer necessary. A positive independent relationship occurs when a person acknowledges his or her independence and the other person in the relationship also acknowledges that there is no need for him or her any more. Positive independent relationships are characterized by a mutual acknowledgment of the independence. The ultimate aim in coaching should be to develop a positive independent relationship, one that encourages the coach's and the coachee's independence without provoking dependence. Mutuality seems to describe the relationship between the coach and the coachee more accurately. Coaching is all about helping the coachee perform better. In that way the coach already confirms the independent level of performance. To obtain the extraordinary performance there must be recognition that there exists some dependency between the coach and coachee. This acknowledgment however is reciprocal, given the fact that both sides of the relationship play different, independent and complimentary roles. Mutuality throughout the interaction between coach and coachee is therefore described as the normal attitude, in which the endeavour is directed at improvement. The coach and the coachee are in a helping relationship in which the interaction between them will change both of them. As the coach becomes affirmed and empowered through the interaction with the coachee, the coachee will be in a positive, growth enhancing relationship with the coach. Both of them end up benefiting from the relationship which is created.

The true nature of a coaching relationship is therefore based on mutuality, in which both parties are equal in the relationship and promote each other's independence while working and learning together (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002; Gjerde, 2003; Kvalsund, 2005). Therefore, the coach's most important task is to facilitate the coachee's independence. This is done through the discovery and awareness of the focal coaching issue(s), the coach's and coachee's personal strengths and potential, and solutions resulting in growth and development. When the coachee's awareness increases in relation to his or her own strengths and possible successful actions, his or her independence will be influenced. At the same time, the coach will probably recognize that there

is a decreasing need for him or her and will act to encourage independent values and responsibility through sharing his or her own experience and learning within the mutual endeavor. The relationship is built on the premise that both parties establish awareness of, and respect for, the other's independence, while recognizing and protecting their own independence. All of this occurs within the bounds of mutual understanding (Kvalsund, 2005).

Coaching definitions

Theorists tend to describe coaching as a new route to growth and development. This means that at least some people agree that coaching is different from counseling, consultation, teaching, mentoring and other helping relationship roles (Downey, 1999; Whitmore, 2002; Flaherty, 1999). In general, the field can be divided into two different schools of thought: those who claim that coaching is everything an executive consultant or coach does to realize the coachee's potential (Kinlaw, 1989; Schein, 2006; Hargrove, 2003), and those who claim that coaching is a specific method to realize that potential (Downey, 1999; Whitmore, 2002; Flaherty, 1999). The first group places less emphasis on the importance of active participation and responsibility by the coachee, and claims that coaching is everything that is done which results in growth and development. The second group argues that coaching is about one particular method and focuses on active participation and responsibility from the coachee in the coaching process.

Both groups agree that the overall goal of coaching is to achieve growth and development. The process of striving to actualize one's potential capacity, abilities and talent can be defined as self-actualization (Bar-On, 2001). Humanistic psychologists like Maslow (1954) and Rogers (1959) argue that humans have an inherent drive, or need, to move towards self-actualization. Maslow's approach to self-actualization is based on self-actualization as a need, whereas Rogers' person-centered approach approaches self-actualization through a helping relationship.

Today, companies spend millions of dollars annually developing teams and individuals in order to drive growth and deliver appropriate results, and the marketplace is still growing: in 2006 it was estimated to be at a global $2 billion per annum (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). Successful organizations in today's emerging knowledge economy have to innovate continually to maintain their place in the dynamic marketplace. Employees are expected to (and expect to) constantly upgrade their technical and leadership skills (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). In this very practical sense, self-actualization is at the heart of organizational success as it is the process of being true to oneself and fully committed to developing one's competence defined as "the total

knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes enabling [one] to perform particular tasks and functions according to defined goals" (Lai, 2004, p. 48). Based on this, we offer the following definition: Coaching is a method which aims to achieve self actualization by facilitating learning and development processes to promote the resource base of another person. The method is characterized by its active involvement of the coachee through powerful questioning and active listening.

We therefore claim that the overarching goal of coaching is to actualize the coachee's potential capacities, abilities and talents, defined as self-actualization (VandenBos, 2006) through the help of the coach. The basic means for achieving this is through the coachee's active involvement and participation in his or her learning process as facilitated by the coach, using open ended questioning and active listening. Throughout the relationship, the coach's goal is to increase the coachee's self-awareness related to his or her own potential and to the actions necessary for improvement. Thus, both the coach's and coachee's responsibilities in the process are clear and the relationship between the coach and the coachee is therefore a central element in coaching. Building awareness and responsibility are therefore two key principles of coaching (Whitmore, 2002; Gallwey, 1997). We will offer support for this assertion throughout this article.

Executive coaching

In business, executive coaching should contribute to raised awareness related to one's own potential within the context of the executive role in the specific company. (this paragraph would benefit from a transition between the prior topic and this current one). Thus, executive coaching is recognized as a way for organizations and individuals to improve executives' performance (Morgan, Harkins & Marshall, 2005). It can be understood as a sub-category of a generic business coaching term which is primarily concerned with improving performance at work and facilitating professional development (Zeus & Skiffington, 2002). In business, coaching is usually delivered by two different types of people (Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999); those who are internal to the organization and those who are external consultants. This review will focus on external coaching of executives in business.

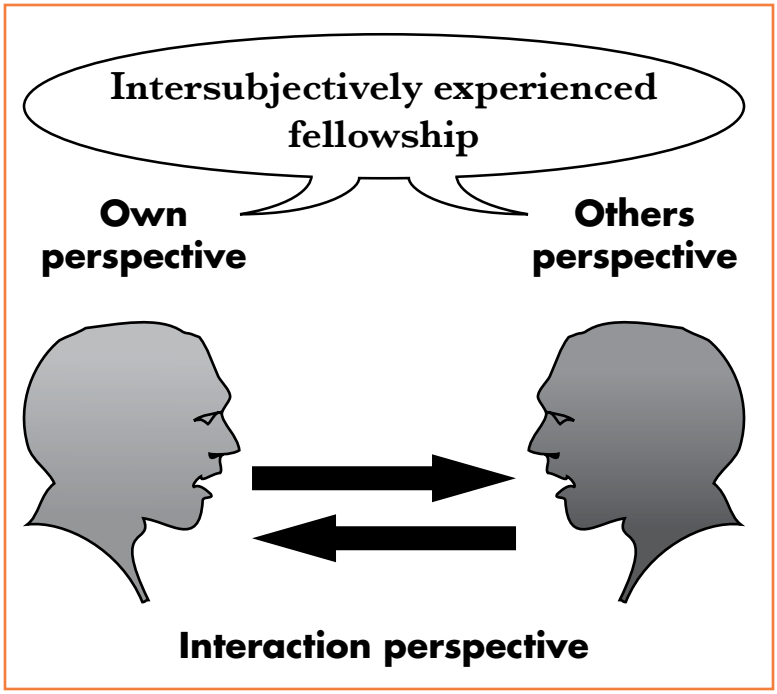
The process

The coaching process is the mechanism that influences the outcome of the helping relationship between a coach and a coachee. In general, the process that occurs defines the coachee's experience and knowledge related to the case in focus (Kvalsund, 2005). To acquire and reveal necessary and important information, communication is fundamental; the conversation is

[1] *Translated from Norwegian by the authors.*

therefore at the heart of the coaching process (Hargrove, 2003). Successful communication is achieved when there is concordance between the message sent and its perception by the receiver (Røkenes & Hanssen, 2002). Four possible perspectives exist in communication.

Figure 1: The different perspectives in communication



The self perspective (a) is the coachee's own world, as he or she experiences it based on his or her own experiences, personality, attitudes and knowledge, while the receiver's perspective (b) is the coach's internal world. The communication process results in an intersubjectively experienced fellowship (c), which implies a mutual understanding of one another's different worlds. Then there is the interaction perspective (d), which is about understanding the interaction process and relationship between the communicators (Røkenes & Hanssen, 2002).

Since coaching is about helping the coachee to learn, rather than teaching the coachee (Flaherty, 1999;Downey, 1999), attention to the coachee's world is important (Ivey & Ivey, 2006; Kvalsund, 2005). Our assumption is that a coach is dealing with different aspects of the self during the process (Rogers, 2004)--also called self-belief by Whitmore (2002, p. 18), who argues that the underlying intent of every coaching interaction is to build the coachee's self-belief. Whitmore (2002) and Gallwey (1997) argue that the lack of self-belief is a universal internal factor that obstructs the manifestation of people's potential, and that self-beliefs are inextricably connected to self-awareness and responsibility. Two aspects of self-beliefs are self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-esteem,

which generally refers to how we feel about, or how we value ourselves (Rosenberg, 1968), is the affective or emotional aspect of the self. Thus self-esteem includes the coachee's subjective appraisal of himself or herself as intrinsically positive or negative to some degree. Self-esteem is therefore about the *being self*; the core values, who the coachee is, rather than what he can do. It is important because of its relation to mental health and personality (Paradise & Kernis, 2002). The lower the coachee's self esteem, the worse is his or her mental health. The better the coachee's self esteem, the better his or her mental health (Kaplan, 1980; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2005). Whitmore (2002, p. 114) argues that self-esteem is the lifeblood of performance at work.

The more specific aspect of the self, concerned with what the coachee can do with the skills and capabilities he or she possesses, is self-efficacy. According to Bandura, "self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995 p.2). Self-efficacy is the *doing self* and is therefore a judgment of how well the individual is going to perform specific tasks in specific situations. The main focus for this aspect of self is cognitive. Research indicates a close relationship between self-efficacy and achieved performances within specific areas and with specific tasks (Marsh, 1993; Bandura, 1986). Working with the whole (being and doing) self is therefore a critical element of executive coaching (Rogers, 2004). Ivey and Ivey (2006) are clear about the importance of paying attention to the *being* self, in the helping process, before focusing on mastery and performance connected to the *doing* self.

Coaching represents an opportunity for the coachee to learn more about his or her whole self, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of his or her own potential, thoughts, feelings and actions. Thus, the coachee is given the opportunity by the help of the coach, to be in contact with his or her own subjectivity based on his or her own experiences. The coaching process defines the coachee's experience and knowledge with the case in focus. Information related to both the being aspect of self (self-esteem) and the doing aspect of self (self-efficacy) is important. The coach should therefore direct attention towards all aspects of the case in focus, including both factual information and emotional information, and the coachee's experience with it (Kvalsund, 2005). One important skill for the coach is to be fully aware of the different perspectives in communication. Thus, the coach has a responsibility to ensure that both he or she and the coachee understand each other as exactly as possible.

The following three activities are thereby important in the coaching process: (1) Utilizing the information which emerges from the whole self during the process. (2) Increasing awareness

of oneself and one's own relationship to what's being investigated. (3) Exploring and developing the potential for growth which the investigation reveals (Kvalsund, 2005). The hope is that the coachee recognizes his or her potential and responsibility in the learning process through these three activities. Powerful questioning and active listening are required if the coach is to promote and understand these different communication perspectives and activities. The coach's ability to ask probing questions that will be of maximum benefit to the coachee within a coaching relationship defined by mutuality is therefore the key to an optimal process.

Powerful questioning and active listening

Questioning can be either open or closed (Ivey & Ivey, 2006; Kvalsund, 2006). An open question starts with an interrogative: who, what, how, where and when. The advantage of such questions is that they encourage descriptive and detailed answers (Røkenes & Hanssen, 2002; Ivey & Ivey, 2006). This gives the coachee the power to generate rich descriptions with regards to his or her own experiences, feelings and interpretations. In this way, the coach is given the opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of the coachee's world. Questions which start with the interrogative 'why', are often looking for reasons and explanations of the causes underlying the coachee's behavior, and are not as useful as the others because of the danger of being seen as confrontational or judgmental by the coachee (Berg & Szabo, 2005; Ivey & Ivey, 2006). Closed questions are specific and are directed at confirming or disproving information (Røkenes & Hanssen, 2002; Ivey & Ivey, 2006). For example, if the topic of the conversation is the coachee's future goals the coach can ask; "Do you believe that you can do it?" (Ivey & Ivey, 2006, p.27) Such a closed question can set the stage for more open questions about the topic contained in the closed question. When the coach uses power questioning the coachee is invited to enter into a mental exercise, establishing awareness, reflecting, considering, evaluating and making decisions related to what is being discussed.

When coaches attend to their coachee they both throw light on the case in focus and its complexities in order to achieve a deep understanding of it. Listening is a fundamental part of attending skills and can be passive, active, focused or all encompassing (Kvalsund, 2006; Ivey & Ivey, 2006). Active listening is the most important attending skill in coaching. The coachee needs to know that the coach has heard and understood what he or she has been saying, seen his or her point of view, and understood the coachee's world as he or she experiences it. This is what active listening is about. Once the coachees' stories have been truly heard, the coachees will be much more open and ready for change (Ivey & Ivey, 2006). The coach's listening skills are

fundamental in order to understand the different perspectives of communication and the complexity of the focal coaching issue(s). This must not and should not be a passive process (Ivey & Ivey, 2006): the coach must be actively involved, participating fully in helping the coachee to clarify, enlarge and enrich information related to the focal coaching issue(s). This will be elaborated on later in this article when we identify important techniques and skills required by the coach.

THE EXECUTIVE COACHING METHOD

The coachees often provide the ground rules in the helping relationship. Thus, the coachee is being invited to be active, participate and take responsibility for their own learning. It is natural that the coaching method consists of different stages which are used as and when the situation calls for them. In our opinion, the coaching method has to be dynamic, as the coach has to work with the inputs provided by the coachee and take necessary actions based on these inputs. Self-actualization implies growth and development: "the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially" (Maslow, 1943, p. 383). Learning is therefore an implicit part of coaching. According to the American psychologist, David Kolb (1984, p. 41) "…learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it." Kolb and Fry (1975) created a model of experiential learning for adults based on the learning theories of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget. The learning cycle consists of four continuous steps: (1) Specific experience, (2) Observation and reflection, (3) Formation of abstract concepts, and (4) Testing out concepts in new situations. Kolb and Fry (1975) argue that the learning cycle should be approached as a continuous spiral. Thus, for example, testing out in new situations gives conditions for new experiences and new reflections. The spiral then continues, hopefully leading to deeper understanding.

The first step is gaining experience in a specific situation. In executive coaching we assume that the experience is from situations that impact executive behavior and performance. The next phase is observation and reflection, where the experience is explored and reflections are made from as many perspectives as possible. In coaching this should be generated with the help of powerful questioning and active listening by the coach. Schön's (1987) three levels of reflection are central to this stage. According to Schön, reflection happens at different levels. For a person to really understand the nature of a task, one must enter all three levels of reflection. The three levels are: (1) Learning in action, (2) Reflection on learning in action, and (3) Reflection on reflection on learning in action (Schön, 1987). Learning in action is the ability to be self aware as one performs a task.

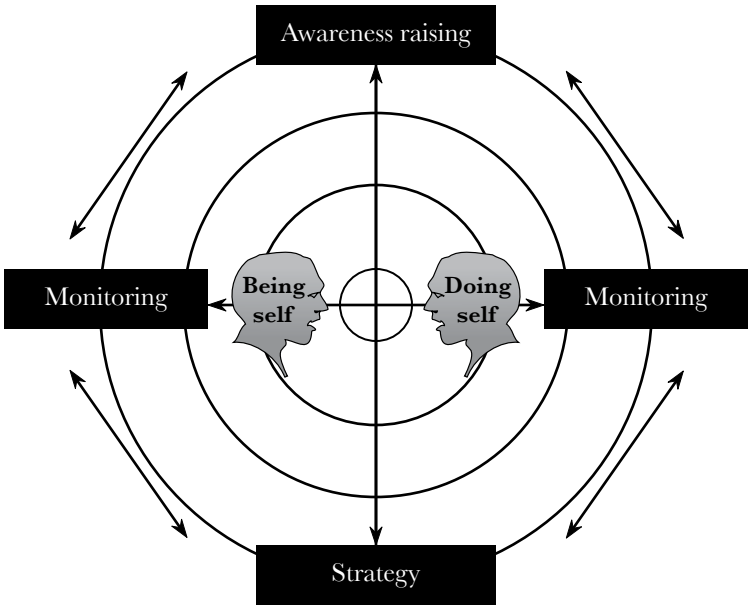
This implies being aware of potential obstacles and challenges in the situation, and being able to deal with them. Reflection on learning in action is awareness of the ways an approach to a task could be modified as the task is being performed. Reflection on reflection on learning in action is awareness of the multiple levels of complexity in the situation and an ability to review the initial conditions, environmental variables, personal responses, strategies, tactics and behaviors that were used and their outcomes. The aim is to improve learning and raise awareness about how to perform better in similar circumstances in the future. Hargrove (2003) described this process of reflection as triple loop learning, a slight modification of Argyris' (1993) double loop learning. Kilburg (2000) argues that the creation and use of reflection is an essential element of coaching and that reflections are necessary at all levels.

According to Moon (2004), experiential learning usually involves reflective learning and reflective learning usually plays an important role in experiential learning. The two theory constructs (experiential learning and reflective learning), therefore share important similarities. Moon (2004, p. 80) identifies reflective learning as a term which simply emphasizes the intention to learn as a result of reflection. The importance of the thought dimension leads one to think about metacognition. Metacognitive skills include taking conscious control of learning, planning and selecting strategies, monitoring the progress of learning, correcting errors, analyzing the effectiveness of learning strategies, and changing learning behaviors and strategies when necessary (Ridley, Schutz, Glanz & Weinstein, 1992). Metacognition therefore includes two related cognitive dimensions: (1) knowledge of cognition, and (2) regulation of cognition (Brown, 1987). These two dimensions are invariably linked in the sense that to know something means to know how to use it. Knowledge of cognition is assumed to include three components: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge (Brown, 1987; Jacobs & Paris, 1987). Declarative knowledge is awareness about oneself as learner and what factors influence one's performance. Procedural knowledge refers to knowledge about strategies, and conditional knowledge refers to knowing when or why to use a strategy. Regulation of cognition also includes three components: planning, regulation and evaluation (Jacobs & Paris, 1987). Planning includes setting goals, activating relevant background knowledge and budgeting time. Regulation involves monitoring and self-testing skills necessary to control learning. Evaluation involves appraising the products and regulatory processes of own learning. The impact of coaching on metacognitive processes is considered to be positive (Grant, 2001), thus impact on the coachee's metacognition should be an important element of coaching.

The third phase of the learning cycle is when the information generated through reflection provides a basis for forming abstract concepts, structuring meaning, and generalizing the experiences and applying them to new theories and hypotheses. This implies gaining an understanding of the general principles involved in improving the performance and seeing how this insight can be usefully applied to new situations. The last phase in the cycle is its application to behavior in a new situation. It is during this phase that the coachee uses what he or she has learnt to make new decisions and take actions, which will be tested out in new situations. Then new experiences will be made and the learning cycle starts again as a continuous spiral.

Since learning is an important and explicit part of coaching we suggest the overall structure of this executive coaching model consists of four stages as seen in Figure 2. The stages we suggest are: awareness raising, direction, strategy and monitoring. A spiral is a suitable metaphor because the coaching journey may be thought of as a progressive exploration of different levels of meaning (Webb, 2006). Early in the spiral there are visible elements of the executive's domain of experience; then the coachee is guided into a progressively deeper exploration of meaning, where the deepest levels constitute the coachee's defenses and unconscious beliefs, developed over his or her life history, and the most intimate development of the person, the essential nature of the coachee's consciousness.

Figure 2: The overall structure of the executive coaching model



The arrows in figure 2 illustrate the interaction and dynamics between the stages. The coaching process depends on the information revealed by the coachee based on the questions asked by the coach. Movement between the different stages whenever the situation calls for it illustrates the dynamic of the process. By listening to the answer from the coachee, the coach's task is to formulate and ask another question (Ivey & Ivey, 2006). Both aspects of the self are important (the being self and the doing self), since both can have an impact on organizational behavior and performance.

Awareness-raising

We suggest that at this stage the coach and coachee aim to reveal all the information necessary for good coaching. Building awareness is the essence of good coaching: "I'm able to control only that of which I am aware. That of which I am unaware controls me. Awareness empowers me" (Whitmore, 2002, p. 33). The coachee brings the case in focus to the helping relationship by defining why he or she seeks coaching. It is vital that the coach and coachee gain a common understanding of each other's worlds concerning the focused case. At this phase we suggest it is important to identify the right path for the conversation. It is essential that the coach pay attention to the coachee's total experience of a situation (Ivey & Ivey, 2006). At the same time, executive coaching should lead to change related to increased leadership effectiveness and behavior (Goldsmith, 2005). Based on this, awareness of key performance in the coachee's leadership roles is an important area for the coach to explore. This includes information about discontent, possible undiscovered opportunities (Grant & Greene, 2001) and the coachee's own strengths related to the focused case (Berg & Szabo, 2005).

Powerful questioning seeks to increase awareness and build a foundation for optimal coaching (Whitmore, 2002). A useful technique for developing such awareness is the scale question (De Jong & Berg, 2001). During scale questioning the coachee evaluates the quality of his or her own skills and behavior on a scale, for example, of one to ten. This information gives the coach an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to further develop awareness of the situation, such as by asking why the coachee didn't evaluate his or her skills as being lower. The coachee then has to reflect about what currently works and his or her own strengths in the situation. This approach, called solution focused coaching, is based on a simple philosophy: 1) If something works, do more of that, 2) If something doesn't work, do something else. By focusing on and strengthening the things which work, it is easier to find solutions and success, than by focusing on undesirable behavior and how to end it (Berg & Szabo, 2005). This approach leads to solution-focused conversations instead of problem-focused ones (Furman & Ahola, 1992). Information about what needs to be done to improve is revealed

when using scale questioning: what needs to be done to improve the coachee's scale evaluation by one or more. Table 1 below shows typical questions that can help the coachee to develop his or her own awareness.

Table 1. Helpful Questions At This Stage

- How can I be useful to you? (De Jong & Berg, 2002, p. 17)
- What do you passionately care about? (Hargrove, 2003, p. 114)
- What do you want to achieve from today's coaching? (Espedal et al., 2006, p. 41)
- What should we have discussed for this conversation to have been a success? (Espedal et al., 2006, p. 103)
- How will you profit from discussing this topic with me? (Espedal et al., 2006, p. 99)
- Could you give me a specific example? (Ivey & Ivey, 2007, p. 103)
- Could you tell me more about that? (Ivey & Ivey, 2007, p. 103)
- On a scale from 1 to 10, one being the worst and ten being the ultimate goal:
    - Where would you say things are right now?
    - What would you be doing differently at 10? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 163)

The goal at this stage is to raise awareness and understand the totality of the case related to why the coachee seeks coaching. The process, focusing on gathering information from the coachee, establishes a solid foundation for understanding the current case and the coachee's experience related to it (De Jong & Berg, 2001). The two first steps in Kolb's learning cycle are essential at this stage and we suggest that the coachee's cognitive knowledge is impacted (Kolb & Fry, 1975). Cognitive knowledge consists of the three components mentioned earlier: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge. At this stage especially, the coachee's declarative knowledge is impacted—including the coachee's awareness of himself or herself as a learner and of his or her own strengths and weaknesses in the learning situation (Brown, 1987; Jacobs & Paris, 1987). We presuppose that there will be a continuous need to step back to this stage during coaching, to explore different levels of meaning, thus establishing a deeper understanding of the focused case resulting in raised awareness (Webb, 2006). This is important regardless of whether or not the focus of the conversation is future goals, particular strategies for achieving these goals, or consideration of particular techniques for monitoring personal work and progress.

Direction

At this stage the coachee determines the direction in which he or she will move: "Bring the end into view" (Lang & McAdam, 1997). The work to discover, clarify and align with what the coachee hopes to achieve is central at this stage. To start a journey on a path it is necessary to point out and decide the direction. The direction can be defined in specific terms or can have a broader character. The process of establishing specific

behaviors or performance targets is defined as goal setting. Broader mental images produced by imagination are defined as visions (VandenBos, 2006). In coaching it is common and useful to use quite broad visions for the future to develop more specific goals (Grant & Greene, 2001). Research points especially to factors which are fundamental for goals to be effective (Locke & Latham, 2002). First, the goal has to be specific. The more specific or explicit the goal is, the more precisely the performance is regulated. Second, the more difficult the goal is, the greater the achievement. Goals that are both specific and difficult but achievable lead to the highest performance. Accordingly, the degree of commitment and the degree of feedback showing progress in relation to the goal, have an influence on the goal setting process. The goal also stimulates planning, thus the strategic choice to reach goal attainment is affected. This effect has a cognitive character. To set SMART goals should therefore be important (Grant & Greene, 2001), meaning that they should be specific, measurable, attractive, realistic and time-framed. The coach's focus during this stage can be categorized as follows: 1) Find the coachee's dream. What does the coachee hope will be different? 2) Find occasions when the situation is better, or when the problem is diminished or nonexistent (exceptions). 3) Find occasions which demonstrate positive behaviors exhibited by the coachee (Berg & Szabo, 2005). Table 2 below, shows typical questions which can help the coachee to raise awareness of what he or she wants to achieve in the future.

Table 2. Helpful Questions At This Stage

- What do you want instead? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 63)
- If a miracle happened over night, what would be different for you then? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 60)
- What is your greatest personal (organizational) ambition? (Hargrove, 2003, p. 114)
- Declare an impossible future possible and take a stand to make it a reality. (Hargrove, 2003, p. 114)
- What needs to happen in this coaching session today that will tell you it was worth involving me as a coach? (Berg & Szabo, 2005)
- On a scale from 1 to 10, one being the worst and ten being the ultimate goal:
    - How far do you want to get? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 163)

We suggest the coaching process will be efficient if the end is kept in sight at an early stage (Berg & Szabo, 2005). It might be easier to find solutions using such an approach (Berg & Szabo, 2005; De Jong & Berg, 2001), meaning that it might be easier to focus on the present and thereby accept the past, when there is a clear mental image of the end in sight. We suggest that, at this stage, establishing the direction of coaching is essential. This includes building awareness of how the future may look-- this illustrating the dynamics and interaction between the different stages of the

model (awareness raising and direction). The second and third steps in Kolb's learning cycle are essential at this stage (Kolb & Fry, 1975). We presuppose that the coachee has to reflect on what he or she wants to achieve based on experiences from similar situations. The coachee's regulation of cognition is influenced--including the awareness of his or her own goals and objectives (planning) so that the direction and focus are clear (Jacobs & Paris, 1987). In executive coaching this focus should be related to the coaching organization (Effron, 2005).

Strategy

A strategy is a plan of action set by the coachee in order to achieve his or her goals and objectives. During this stage we suggest that the coach helps the coachee to draw up the specific actions to be implemented to achieve these goals and objectives. By exploring the exceptions that went well, the coachee clarifies behaviors which worked well. A solution focused coach will explore the skills, strengths and resources that led to the coachee's positive performance (Berg & Szabo, 2005). It is important to clarify the strategy as much as possible so that it represents a clear commitment by the coachee. The coachee develops his or her own strategy to achieve his or her goals with the help of the coach. The strategy that is adopted by the coachee should be of his or her own choosing and within his or her control; the responsibility should therefore lie with the coachee. As Whitmore (2002) suggests responsibility and awareness are the key goals of coaching. Development and progress depends on the coachee's ability to take responsibility for his or her own learning and execute the necessary actions (strategy) decided upon during coaching (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Exploring the "miracle" question could be a useful technique at this stage (De Jong & Berg, 2001). The miracle question invites the coachee to think about and create scenarios of an unlimited range of possibilities: "Supposed a miracle happened over night, and all your problems are solved. What would be different?" (De Jong & Berg, 2001, p. 84) Many details of the ideal solution can emerge, including concrete actions required to achieve the goals set (Berg & Szabo, 2005). Table 3 below, shows helpful questions which can help the coachee to raise awareness of the actions needed to achieve desired goals.

By making the coachee aware of his or her successful experiences, a strategy will emerge. By using the "miracle" question, if something didn't work, a different strategy will emerge (Berg & Szabo, 2005). By asking questions which stimulate the coachee to reflect on what works and what needs to be changed, we presuppose that both the coachee's regulation and knowledge of his or her cognition are influenced. At this stage we find raised awareness of one's own planning, strategic thinking and when to use different strategies (Jacobs & Paris, 1987). This is also an

example of the dynamic operating between stages in the model (awareness raising, direction and strategy). We suggest that the result at this stage is a strategy which, in theory, will improve the coachee's behavior and performance in future situations. Therefore, the third phase in Kolb's learning cycle should be central to this stage (Kolb & Fry, 1975). The strategy to improve future behavior and performance can be thought of as a theory or a hypothesis, because of the presumption that it will influence future behavior and performance. Thus, the strategy which emerges is based on reflection about experiences, which leads to the establishment of new theories and hypotheses regarding what will work in future situations.

Table 3. Helpful Questions At This Stage

- On a scale from 1 to 10, one being the worst and ten being the ultimate goal:
  - What would you be doing if you were one point higher on the scale? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 163)
  - Suppose you move one point higher. What would your best friend and colleagues see you do then? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 124)
- What will be the first small sign to tell you that it's time to continue on your own? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 53)
- If a miracle happened, what would you be doing differently then? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 106)
- What were you doing differently then (when things were working well)? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 131)
- How would your best friend describe you during those days? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 131)
- What did you do to make the improvement? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 121)
- What do you suppose you did to help make that moment happen? (Berg & Szabo, 2005, p. 120)

Monitoring

During this stage the coach and the coachee agree on actions that should help the coachee to monitor his or her own progress, and clarify that the coachee is responsible and accountable for the process. At this stage it may be necessary to adjust or modify the original strategy in order to achieve desired outcomes and to ensure the quality of the process. If the coachee during the monitoring stage concludes that the previous strategy didn't work as planned, the process moves to the next stage. The coachee and coach evaluate why it didn't work and establish a new direction and/or new and improved strategy. Again, this is an example of the dynamic between the stages (awareness-raising, direction, strategy and monitoring). In order to improve performance, change in behavior, actions or attitude is inevitable (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). How will the coachee know when he or she is making progress? The only way of assessing this is to continually monitor one's own progress. Coaching is supposed to influence the coachee's skills to monitor his or her own progress and

change direction when necessary (Grant & Greene, 2001). Table 4 provides questions which can help the coachee raise awareness of the actions and techniques required to monitor his or her own learning process.

Table 4. Helpful Questions At This Stage

- What has to happen if you are to repeat the performance? [1]
- What do you need to do to remember what has resulted in smart actions? [2]
- What has become different or better? [3]
- What will be the signs indicating that you're starting to regress? [4]
- What will be the first sign that you're moving in a positive direction? [5]
- How can you establish routines that help you to focus on quality? [6]
  (Espedal et al., 2006, pp. 103, 163, 221, 223)
- What are the accomplishments? (Hargrove, 2003, p. 121)
- What's not worked? Or has worked? (Hargrove, 2003, p. 121)
- What's missing that, if it were provided, would make a critical difference? (Hargrove, 2003, p. 121)

One important goal in coaching is that the coachee becomes aware of his or her own potential and takes control of his or her own learning (Flaherty, 1999; Whitmore, 2002; Downey, 1999). We assume that an influence on the coachee's metacognition is critical at this stage. We therefore suggest that successful improvement depends on the coachee's ability to monitor his or her own progress and make suitable changes when needed. Regulation of cognition is presumed to be essential at this stage, including monitoring and self-testing skills, such that the coachee's learning is controlled (Brown, 1987). The three levels of reflection, described by Schön (1987), together with the last phases of the learning cycle help one to investigate and monitor one's own learning (Kolb & Fry, 1975), and should therefore be essential at this stage. Research has shown that self-monitoring can be a powerful technique for change in almost any area of life (Fabbraro & Clum, 1998; Johnston-O'Connor & Kirschenbaum, 1986; St. Lawrence, McGrath, Oakley & Sult, 1983).

TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

We suggest that coaching is based on being aware of and understanding the present situation as well as being aware of future directions, also described as visions and goals. This in turn requires the development of specific actions for improvement, and knowing how to monitor oneself during implementation, which implies being aware of personal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and possible threats. Two sets of skills in particular are required of the coach during this process: attending skills and influencing skills.

[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6] *Translated from Norwegian by the authors.*

Attending skills

The coach's ability to listen to the coachee is critical as it enables the coachee to continue to talk and explore (Ivey & Ivey, 2006). The passive listener doesn't provide as many obvious and visible responses as the active listener (Kvalsund, 2006). In passive listening the use of verbal interaction is minimal. Instead, the coach signals his or her listening through body language, such as eye contact, smiling, nodding and short affirmative messages, such as: "Yes, I understand, hmm, etc." However, it is also important to be aware of the coachee's need for feedback from the coach every now and then. Research has indicated that speakers feel a need for clear responses from listeners (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). Another important element of passive listening is to pay attention to possible discrepancies between the verbal messages and non-verbal signals. These divergencies could contain important information for the coach to explore in more detail.

Active listening is more visible and goal-oriented than passive listening. It encompasses several different techniques: paraphrasing, reframing, paralanguage, reflecting body language, emotional responses and creating rapport (Heron, 2004; Greene & Grant, 2003; Kvalsund, 2006; Kagan, 1976; Reber, 1985). These techniques communicate a message to the coachee both verbally and nonverbally (Kagan, 1976). Paraphrasing is a technique used to reflect the coachee's comments back to him or her. The words are different, but the meaning remains the same. This gives the coachee an opportunity to evaluate whether the message got through correctly. The coachee can then modify or expand the message if the paraphrasing wasn't correct (Heron, 2004). The technique's main goal is to give a coachee the impression that his or her coach is paying attention and understands what is being communicated. However, there is a risk that the coach ascribes his or her own meaning to the coachee's comments (Schwartz, 2002).

Another technique is reframing. The goal of reframing is to help the coachee view his or her situation differently. It is sometimes essential to establish a new understanding and raised awareness of the current situation. This is not the same as changing the meaning of an event. Rather, reframing is changing the meaning the coachee assigns to the event (Greene & Grant, 2003). When the coachee views an event differently, he or she has an opportunity to gain new understanding of the situation and change his or her attitude towards it. Paralanguage concerns the way the message is communicated, such as voice quality and volume. Paralanguage is therefore a technique used to understand the depth of a message (Kvalsund, 2006). We suggest it is important that the coach pays attention to his or her own paralanguage due to the impact it has on the message being communicated. Body language represents an added dimension of language

during communication. This could be a smile, a nod, or facial expressions. They are all visible non-verbal signals containing important information related to the verbal message. By using body language, we believe the coach can more easily give the impression that he or she is paying attention to the coachee.

Emotional responses are an important reflection skill in coaching (Kagan, 1976). The concept of emotional intelligence, in particular, has contributed to this recognition. Emotional intelligence focuses on awareness of the emotional dimension in oneself, one's organization and one's society (Kvalsund & Meyer, 2005). This implies that emotions attached to thoughts and body language expressed by the coachee can increase the coach's awareness and understanding of the situation. We suggest it is important for the coach to call attention to emotions and to improve the coachee's awareness of the role emotions can play in a situation. By focusing on the emotions in the situation, there could be an opportunity to explore the case further, by creating raised awareness and understanding. We assume this could also be done by paying attention to the emotions expressed through language. Rapport is established in coaching when the coach responds to the coachee to ensure that the understanding is mutual (Reber, 1985). We think it's important to create rapport, so that the coach can explain his or her understanding of the situation, such that the coachee can adjust or correct it if necessary. The coach creates rapport to ensure mutual understanding of the situation and the focused case.

Influencing skills

Coaching is about growth and development (Downey, 1999; Whitmore, 2002; Flaherty, 1999). One cannot ignore the fact that the coach might have to influence the coachee's motivation and behavior in order to help the coachee achieve changes. Influencing skills can contribute to change occurring, using techniques such as interpretation, confrontation, direct advice, recommendations and instruction (Kvalsund, 2006; Ivey & Ivey, 2006).

Interpretation happens when the coach makes assessments based on the information provided by the coachee. For example: "From your information this is how I imagine that you have developed a pattern; you appear to have a pattern of difficulty with authority. Does that make sense?" (Ivey & Ivey, 2006, p. 364) This is the coach's interpretation of the information given by the coachee. We believe it's important that the coach is aware of the influence that interpretation can have on the coachee. The coach understands that it is subjective and therefore needs confirmation.

A confrontation is defined as a statement or question calculated to motivate the client to make a decision or face the reality of a situation (VandenBos, 2006). Thus, confrontations can often

involve conflict and differences of opinion. We suggest it is the coach's responsibility to confront the coachee when necessary to achieve raised awareness. To achieve a positive outcome, it is necessary to confront with care, respect and empathy (Kvalsund, 2006), otherwise the challenge can result in defensiveness and counterattack. There are several different ways to confront a coachee: confronting interpretation, objective confrontation and subjective confrontation (Heron, 2004). Confronting interpretation occurs when the interpretation is the confrontation. For example: "In my experience you prioritize external work too much". This is an opportunity to explore the topic, instead of the coachee feeling a need to defend him or herself. Objective confrontation occurs when something is said that doesn't correspond with the coachee's body language. For example if the coachee talks about a serious and sad experience and laughs at the same time. Subjective confrontation occurs when the coach is unsure of the interpretation and says something based on an impression or intuition he or she has. Confrontation can be powerful and positive (Patcher, 2000).

The goal of confrontation is to make the coachee aware of a negative aspect of his or her behavior, or of incongruence between what he or she says and does. A confrontation will probably create cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) for the coachee, because of an expressed attitude concerning the case. In order to improve, the coachee must receive feedback that his or her actions don't conform to his or her attitudes and face the reality of the situation. "Without feedback we are flying blind" (Folkman, 2006, p. xv). To avoid cognitive dissonance he or she will have to change his or her actions or attitudes. Direct advice, recommendations and instructions play only a small role in the overall coaching conversation—yet they are important (Kvalsund, 2006). These techniques give the coach an opportunity to keep the conversation within the company's working context. They keep both the being self and doing self in mind. However, we believe it is essential for the coach to be aware that an overly directive approach can destroy a relationship which is to be based on mutuality.

Working context cycle

When coaching is used in a working context, as with executive coaching, it is important that the executives acknowledge that they are unavoidably influenced by the workplace (Søholm et al., 2006). Influences emerging from the working context include the organization's specific visions, goals, norms, values and strategies (Moen & Kvalsund, 2007). We therefore suggest that the coach should take the working context into account, without letting it dominate the content or affect the relationship based on mutuality. This is an ongoing challenge when coaching executives. There is a need for the coach to be aware of the

working context as the organization should benefit as a result of executive coaching. This must be achieved within the boundaries of mutual understanding. This means that the coachee is both independent and a part of the organizational context he or she is in. The goal for the coach is to facilitate the coachee's development of independent competency within the organization. We suggest an executive coach could end up in a difficult situation if the agenda for the coachee had no relevance to the working context. Therefore we think that the coach should aim for the best possible progress, within the boundaries of the company and within the boundaries of coaching principles, as described in this article. As noted previously and as Whitmore (2002) argues, building the coachee's self-belief is the underlying intent of every coaching interaction, which implies working with both the being self (self-esteem) and the doing self (self-efficacy). We suggest that the coach's continuous challenge is to judge the relevance of the information provided by the coachee regarding the different aspects of his or her self and its impact on organizational behavior and performance.

This model of executive coaching shares important features with principles embedded in the coaching models developed by pioneers in the field of coaching, John Whitmore and Timothy Gallwey. Whitmore (2002) and Gallwey (1997) built their model of coaching on three important principles: (1) Awareness, (2) Responsibility and (3) Building self-beliefs. According to Whitmore (2002) and Gallwey (1997) these three principles are the foundation for learning and successful achievement, regardless of the activity. Accordingly, the GROW model (Downey, 1999), which is developed based on observations of efficient and successful coaching conversations, is similar in its structure to the model presented in this article. The structure of the GROW model is based on the idea that powerful questioning encourages the coachee to be self-aware related regarding Goals, Reality, Options and Will (Downey, 1999). Goals refer to the coachee's goal setting, Reality refers to the coachee's present situation, Options refer to the coachee's possible actions in order to achieve his or her goals, and Will refers to the plan of action which the coachee chooses in order to achieve his or her goals.

SUMMARY

Executive coaching aims to actualize the coachee's potential capacities, abilities and talents within the boundaries of the organization (Effron, 2005; Morgan et al., 2005). We suggest that executive coaching is a method in its own right which facilitates growth and development of the coachee. The method is characterized by the helping relationship between the coach and the coachee based on mutuality. The coachee's learning, based on reflection of his or her own experiences, is the central element of the process, and the coachee is supposed to be aware of, take

control of and responsibility for the learning process, with help from the coach. We therefore use experiential learning theory and theory about metacognition to argue for four stages in an executive coaching model. We suggest that the coaching process is a journey through the four stages (figure 2) where the coach has to use techniques and skills to assist the coachee's learning process. Growth and development presuppose change in thought, feeling and behavior (Grant & Greene, 2001). Four factors are of particular importance when creating positive change: (1) A sense of discontent with the present. Why change if everything is good? (Awareness) (2) An inspirational vision for the future (Direction). (3) Skills in reaching goals. Skills are defined as both skills and knowledge about knowing how to change (Strategy). (4) Continuous and deliberate action (Monitoring). We argue that the four stages presented in the executive coaching model (Figure 2) will establish a good foundation for successful change.

Asking the right questions and use of active listening are key techniques in this process. The process is considered to be dynamic since it depends on information revealed by the coachee when answering powerful questions asked by the coach. This dynamic arises both as a result of the interaction between the four stages—for example when the coachee recognizes a goal for the future (direction), which also influences awareness raising—and as a result of the examination of different levels of meaning, thereby leading to deeper understanding (Webb, 2006). We suggest that the coach has to work with both the being aspect and the doing aspect of the coachee's self. Thus both aspects can influence organizational behavior and performance.

There is confusion in the field of coaching with regard to what coaching is and is not (Downey, 1999). This is also evident after reading many books and discussing coaching with a variety of coaches. This article is a description of the independent variable (executive coaching) in an experiment related to one of the author's Ph.D. programme. It is difficult to investigate executive coaching when it is not properly defined. Thus it is hoped that this article is a positive contribution to discourse in the field of coaching.

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