

Coaching Style

Background

The term coach is often used as a metaphor for someone who takes people to a desired place. Therefore, coaching is concerned primarily with establishing a helping relationship between the coach and the person with whom the coach is engaged, a coachee (or client). Theorists tend to describe coaching as a new route to growth and development. This indicates that coaching is different from counselling, consultation, teaching, mentoring, and other helping relationship roles. Coaching emphasizes the power of the individual as capable of finding solutions to his or her problems facilitated by a coach. This approach to the field is a client-centred one, influenced by humanistic psychology, which emphasizes the importance of listening to the subjective beliefs of the client'.¹

Coaching is a broad range activity involving a large variety of techniques and styles. There is no universally accepted way of describing coaching styles. The Life Coach Directory² identifies Autocratic coaching - that takes a 'telling' rather than asking approach; Democratic coaching – inviting the client to adopt a 'self coaching' attitude; Holistic coaching – looking at the client as a whole, including physical fitness and social life; 3D Coaching – focussing on the 3 Ds of debugging, direction and development; Vision coaching – a style that visualises future gains; Solution-focussed coaching – based on client's goals; Zen coaching – using meditation techniques to improve self awareness and peace of mind; and Mindfulness coaching – to generated a heightened awareness of 'the self and the world surrounding the self'. The Autocratic coaching style may be subdivided into 'telling' – in which the coach decides and tells the client; and 'selling' - in which the coach decides what is best but then tries to persuade the client, and the Democratic style may be further subdivided into 'sharing' – in which the coach makes decisions based on the clients suggestions and 'allowing' – in which the client makes the decision.³ Other ways of classifying and describing coaching styles are 'telling', 'showing' and 'involving' and 'command style', 'reciprocal style', 'problem solving style' and 'guided discovery'. The 'democratic' style is sometime referred to as 'participative'.⁴

A typology of coaching based on social learning theory, gives four approaches: functionalist, engagement, revolutionary and evolutionary. Each approach adopts a view of reality, which is either subjective or objective, and each approach seeks a learning outcome that is typified by transformation or equilibrium.⁵ 'Authentic leadership' encompasses four dimensions crucial for the success of leadership: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and

¹ Moen and Federici (2012) *Perceived Leadership Self-Efficacy and Coach Competence*

² <http://www.lifecoach-directory.org.uk/content/coaching-styles.html>

³ Callej (2001) *Coaching Styles*: <http://www.brianmac.co.uk/styles.htm>

⁴ Castillo et al (2014) *Autocratic and participative coaching styles and its effects on students' dance performance*

⁵ Brockbank A (2008) *Is the coaching fit for purpose? A typology of coaching and learning approaches*.

internalised moral perspective.⁶

It is argued that goal-oriented approaches to coaching generally have a different perspective than therapeutic or personal-development approaches on the role of the coach and on the objective of coaching⁷ while a ‘Servant-Leadership’ coaching model incorporates elements such as trust, inclusion, humility and service.⁸

Despite the popularity of coaching there has been little rigorous research into its effectiveness or outcomes.⁹

Summary and key findings

This review has found no studies that reach the standard of randomised control trials and that also clearly identify the style of coaching in use. One study¹⁰ found the autocratic coaching style to be effective but there was no comparative control group while a small survey¹¹ also found that perceived autocratic and democratic behaviours had a significant indirect effect on intrinsic motivation. A meta-analysis of the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context¹² found coaching overall to be effective but did not distinguish coaching styles, while a systematic review of health coaching for lower back pain found that ‘variability in health coaching interventions’, a ‘lack of assessment of treatment fidelity’ and the ‘very low rating of the overall body of evidence identified’ rendered any estimates of the effect of health coaching uncertain¹³.

Our previous review ‘Health Coaches – do they work and what for?’ found mixed results overall for the effectiveness of health coaching but that it could be effective in managing diabetes, heart conditions, lifestyle choices, mental health conditions and obesity. The studies within that review did not generally distinguish different styles of health coaching.

⁶ Gatling et al (2013) *Authentic Leadership: The Role of Self-Awareness in Promoting Coaching Effectiveness*

⁷ Ives (2008) *What is ‘Coaching’? An Exploration of Conflicting Paradigms*

⁸ Rieke et al (2008) *Servant Leadership in Sport*

⁹ Bora et al (2010) *Life coaching for mental health recovery: the emerging practice*

¹⁰ Castillo et al (2014) *Autocratic and participative coaching styles and its effects on students’ dance performance*

¹¹ Hollembeak and Amorose (2005) *Perceived Coaching Behaviors and College Athletes’ Intrinsic Motivation*

¹² Theeboom et al (2014) *Does coaching work?*

¹³ Holden et al (2014) *Health coaching for low back pain: a systematic review of the literature*

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