

A Self-Generative Process for Building Vibrant Coaching Culture



Background

I'm Katherine Long and I've been involved in the coaching profession for almost ten years, with extensive experience in supervising candidates on EMCC and academically accredited coaching qualifications, via The OCM and CIPD. Regarding my own practice, I hold the European Mentoring and Coaching Council's European Independent Accreditation award at Master Practitioner level, and have completed an Advanced Certificate in Coach-Mentoring Supervision accredited by Oxford Brookes University.

Many of the internal coaches I have worked with have gone on to develop coaching cultures within their own organisations and as a result, I have developed a keen interest in understanding which approaches are most effective in achieving sustainable results. Based on these observations, and as a result of questioning the value of some of the more traditional methods of developing manager-coaches, I am planning to pilot an innovative, cost-effective approach with up to three different organisations in 2011.

Why another approach?

Enrolling managers on more extensive (and expensive) professional coaching qualifications would be an unrealistic option for most organisations, so a more typical option is the 'manager-as-coach' or 'coaching skills for managers' programme. Whilst these may add value in introducing some key coaching concepts and skills, they tend to be less effective in *embedding* those behaviours in the longer term, for a number of reasons:

- 'Cookie-cutter' / 'one size fits all' approaches cannot equip manager-coaches across a range of contexts or eventualities. This leads individuals to question the validity of coaching per se (exacerbating its undeserved reputation as the latest management fad), and furthermore creating insecurity regarding a manager's own ability to coach effectively when they inevitably encounter the limitations of the methods taught.

- These kinds of programmes tend to focus heavily on teaching specific tools and processes to coaching, rather than building deeper level awareness regarding how managers access their own resourcefulness and enhance existing coaching-related skills and attributes.
- The prevailing methodology taught on such programmes inevitably excludes individuals who do not feel they can embrace it as part of their management style; no-one likes to feel they are being *made* to coach or manage in a certain way!
- They tend not to build awareness of how to coach safely, ethically and appropriately within the organisational context – they attempt to deliver a certain brand of coaching, but have not equipped individuals to embed coaching *culture*.
- They tend to operate on very short time-scales and overlook the fact that coaching behaviours need longer to embed, in part because they challenge ingrained patterns of management and organisational culture.
- The programmes have not instilled self-generative practices, so for many manager-coaches it is either ‘sink or swim’ after the programme is completed.

An alternative to these more traditional / typical methods is a process which focuses on *instilling coaching culture / coaching thinking* rather than teaching coaching per se, i.e. building ‘*coaching philosophy / intelligence*’ rather than simply advocating formulaic tools or techniques. Another distinctive of this alternative approach would be a focus on *nurturing the existing skills and attributes of participants*, thus replicating / modelling coaching and person-centred values rather than working against them (i.e. working with the individual’s resources and potential vs telling how to do things differently).

The following principles and values would be part and parcel of such an approach:

- Self-generative
- Self sustaining / self-replicating
- Iterative
- Organic
- Cumulative
- Resourcing
- Process rather than programme
- Flexible and context friendly
- Ethically aware / conscious
- Building reflective practices and mindfulness
- Inclusive
- Cost-effective

Process Description

So what might this look like in practice?

The proposal is to pilot a process which begins with a small group (max. 8) of individuals who are motivated and committed to developing their ability to support the growth of the individuals or teams they work with, and who have bought into the idea that *they are not going to be taught how to coach*, but that they are going to uncover that for themselves, and as a group. There are close parallels with action learning methodology.

I will work with the group as a facilitator and coach, and my primary role will be to support them in becoming self-managed in terms of how they:

- decide the learning and development objectives for themselves as individuals and as a group
- discover how they can best learn together
- reflect effectively, build (self) awareness and find their own answers
- share learning to leverage group intelligence, and pass it on to others
- resource themselves
- become self-generative in their development as coaches
- achieve the above safely, ethically and with respect for diversity

In addition, I will signpost relevant information where necessary, and offer supervision in the form of ad hoc e-mail and telephone support.

As the group evolves, I will start to encourage them to think about how they support their colleagues and team members in developing *their* coaching skills / intelligence. By the end of the process:

- I expect the group will have achieved or exceeded most of their development goals,
- there will be potential candidates for a new group who may have been coached by the first,
- I will then co-facilitate/coach the new group with a member(s) from the original starter group,
- with the aim that *they* will take ownership for supporting the next round after that, with ad hoc support from myself or other experienced internal coaches / facilitators as required.

See Appendix A for more in-depth examples of how the sessions might be run.

Design factors

- **Tailoring to organisational objectives**

What is described above is a generic process which can be adapted to suit organisational requirements. For example, the primary goal may be to develop manager-coaches, or individuals across a whole range of levels. Or to develop coaching skills to meet particular needs, such as coaching people through change, coaching teams, for succession planning, for creativity and innovation, enhanced communication across functions etc. The way the process is promoted and the participants selected will naturally shape the outcomes. My aim would be for a consultative approach so that the process is shaped in way which clearly maps against organisational needs.

- **Flexible timescales, structure and delivery**

In line with modelling coaching principles throughout the whole process, the timescales, structure and delivery need to be agreed with the sponsoring organisation, so that there is as good a fit as possible with their objectives, parameters and culture. My expectation would be that, depending on the level of experience of the group, and depending on the learning objectives identified, that 6 – 8 sessions with the facilitator-coach would normally be sufficient. The aim would be that the group would learn to manage their own action learning effectively and have the capability to continue on their own, involving the learning facilitator for ad hoc support as necessary.

Depending on the geography of the group, it may be preferable for some sessions to be run via webinar, but the preference would be for mainly face to face, especially at the start of the process.

- **Make use of existing resources, including other internal coaches**

Wherever possible, the sponsoring organisation should make learning resources available to the process, e.g. enlist the support of experienced internal coaches to facilitate or share best practice, develop a coaching library, online / web-based resources, career development tools, and allow participants access to any workshops / webinars etc which may be of interest. This supports the self-directed and self-sustaining nature of the process, enabling participants to pick from a wide range of coaching resources which could be made available, and make choices about what adds most value to their own practice.

Measures

The process should have inbuilt measures, dependent on organisation and context. These could include:

- Before and after rating based on the individual's own objectives for the process (build into 360 feedback from team, manager etc)
- Self-rating and/or 360 feedback on more generic coaching competences
- Levels of morale, performance indicators etc in team
- Measures based around overall objective for the process, e.g. change management

as well as

- metrics regarding how many individuals went through the process
- how they would rate the process as a learning experience
- longer term impact on sustained changes to behaviour etc
- replicability of process with decreased external support

Risk management

Some key challenges which might diminish the effectiveness of the process include:

- maintaining the cohesion and commitment of the group
- co-ordinating and linking process to organisational objectives for coaching
- keeping momentum
- clarity about an end point to the process

I believe the following would provide effective safeguards.

There needs to be clear information made available to individuals wanting to apply to join a pilot group. There should be limited spaces so that only those who feel they would really benefit and commit to the process can join. In the longer term, if the pilot is successful, this should encourage further engagement to the process as it is based on individuals clearly choosing to opt in, rather being coerced! Participants should ideally have clear objectives for their learning which are linked to the wider objectives agreed for the process. There could be scope to link the process with existing management / leadership development programmes. The process needs an appropriate name which fits the organisation's culture.

There needs to be some internal leadership within the organisation to manage the information and co-ordination around the process and to promote it effectively. The process needs to be based around clear agreements about how it will work, what the overall objectives are, the timescales, contingencies, and end points. There also need to be regular reviews, and clear measures for outcomes which can be evaluated.

Summary of Outcomes

- A group of individuals who are much more confident and effective in developing others through their day to day interactions,
- who through the process have learnt to be self-generative in their own development,
- and can 'supervise' / offer learning support to each other,
- and have also understood how to apply skills within their own context – i.e. embedded coaching culture thinking in themselves and in their context,
- and who have the potential to help replicate the process with others.

Costs

Given this is a pilot process, I am willing to invest as much time as required into any consulting or planning required to support the process. This would include consulting regarding development of additional resources which would enhance this or any future initiative to grow coaching capability within the organisation.

The basic costs would be £675.00 per individual, which includes a maximum of eight 2-3 hrs group sessions, *plus* up to 4 hrs of coaching support per individual via e-mail and telephone as required.

The costs are based on a minimum participant number of 6. Maximum group size is 8, and additional groups can be created as required.

I am happy to review these rates for not-for-profit organisations if they are in excess of what would normally be invested in coach development pro rata.

Please contact me, Katherine Long (01789 762562, or mail@katherinelong.co.uk) if you have any questions you would like to discuss, or if your organisation would be interested in piloting this process.

APPENDIX A

How might this look in reality?

Below are more detailed example scenarios describing what this process might look like in reality, and the potential outcomes.

Example of a first session (2-3 hrs)	Outcomes
<p>Group A is made up of 6 members, across a mix of departments and levels. Each has been briefed about the process they are joining, and at the first meeting are encouraged to share their personal goals for developing their coaching skills – what changes would they like to see? And how will they know when they've achieved them?</p>	<p><i>Opportunities for group members to learn from different contexts and expand horizons regarding diverse opportunities and challenges regarding coaching, also understand the variety of concerns / considerations and approaches relating to coaching.</i></p> <p><i>Experience of goal setting.</i></p>
<p>Learning facilitator (LF) invites group to consider what skills / attributes / knowledge / experience they already have to build on, and how they might be able to use these to resource the development of others in the group.</p>	<p><i>Group members understand that developing coaching skills is about accessing and developing what they already have, that different coaches bring different skills and approaches, and that there is potential to develop and learn from each other.</i></p>
<p>Discussion about what options the group has to achieve their aims, and agreement regarding any group goals which may have emerged.</p>	<p><i>Widening awareness of how to support and resource each other both in group sessions and in the interim (starting to build peer coaching / supervision skills), about sharing and learning from experience 'in the field', awareness of other resources such as online, library, intranet, discussion groups etc</i></p>
<p>Review of initial session, and discussion of any ground rules which may be important going forward. Discussion regarding the extent to which these also apply in coaching.</p>	<p><i>Building awareness of need for confidentiality, respect, openness etc. Building awareness of ethical considerations in coaching.</i></p>
<p>Discussion about how participants will journal / capture their own reflections during the process, how they will 'notice what they notice', and the added value of these practices to the overall learning experience.</p>	<p><i>Importance of reflection / developing a mindful attitude when seeking to change behaviours. Relevance to coaching others.</i></p>
<p>Agree when to next meet, and what would be useful to discuss / review.</p>	<p><i>Starting to embed behaviours which may be replicated within their own coaching</i></p>

	<i>conversations, negotiating content, approach etc.</i>
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Example of a second session (2-3 hrs)	Outcomes
<p>Group reconvenes and looks to LF to 'start the session'. LF gently pushes back and invites group to take responsibility. Discussion about what the critical added value of the LF is, and what their role can / should be for the group to be successful with its objectives. Reflection on the discussion and draw out any parallels to coaching.</p>	<p><i>Encourage individual and group ownership for outcomes from the beginning, modelling good coaching practice. Awareness of challenge – support continuum, different roles the coach can play.</i></p> <p><i>Start to gain ease and confidence to discuss what's happening in the moment, and develop awareness of shifts in the discussion / in the relationship.</i></p>
<p>Group decide to update on experiences since last session. Some successes, but a common challenge emerges relating to finding the time to engage with others in a meaningful way, or for discussions not to just become chat or advice giving. LF invites group to consider if this is a useful area for further exploration, and if so, how they would like to approach it. Group decides on general discussion (which surfaces how they as individuals manage themselves and their own time), and someone suggests some peer coaching. Peer coaching followed by feedback / general discussion / sharing insights.</p>	<p><i>Awareness of common challenges / barriers to coaching.</i></p> <p><i>Opportunity to explore different solutions and broaden awareness of different strategies. Awareness of the need to develop self in the face of these challenges. Building awareness of when it may be more appropriate to ask, and when to tell.</i></p> <p><i>Opportunity to start practicing coaching together, experience different approaches, give and receive feedback, gain insights into what strategies and approaches may be effective 'in the field'.</i></p>
<p>LF asks who would like to lead the session next time, what theme (if any) would be useful to follow up with. Pair of individuals volunteer, and group agrees to follow up on the theme relating to creating time for coaching, and also to look at ways of asking questions which help the person being coached find their own solutions.</p>	<p><i>Ownership for developing own learning, and being willing to share with others.</i></p> <p><i>Building awareness of the kinds of areas the group might explore together – what is going to add value in helping them achieve their objectives.</i></p>
<p>Finally, what are the ways the group might share learning / questions with each other in the interim. Agreement to start own discussion forum, and potential for tele-coaching each other.</p>	<p><i>Taking ownership for keeping learning 'live'.</i></p>

Example of a fifth session (2-3 hrs)	Outcomes
<p>At the previous session the group decided they wanted to look at how they could incorporate coaching behaviours within different contexts, e.g. 121s, performance management, team updates, inductions and training etc, and would each prepare something to share to the group. It became apparent from the start that hardly anyone had 'done their homework'.</p> <p>In the discussion about how to proceed it emerged that one of the barriers to achieving the task was that few in the group could really say they had seen coaching behaviours modelled well in those contexts, and still lacked confidence in terms of how they themselves might coach in those situations.</p>	<p><i>Sharing and openness.</i></p> <p><i>Awareness that introducing coaching is challenged by powerful patterns and habits that are already set down.</i></p> <p><i>Awareness of the need for new behaviours to be modelled well.</i></p>
<p>One individual asked if the others would like to take turns at sharing their own challenges, and for the group to coach them. Group opted instead for a lively debate about 'what's wrong' with the current organisational culture and how top leadership should be role-modelling coaching behaviours much better. LF asks group to pause for a moment to reflect on the value of their conversation vis a vis their learning objectives. And note any parallels between what's happened here and what can happen in coaching conversations.</p>	<p><i>Being honest about frustrations.</i></p> <p><i>Importance of being able to surface what you are really thinking and feeling.</i></p> <p><i>Awareness of the need to focus on own spheres of influence, and take ownership for what is within one's control.</i></p>
<p>LF suggests an appreciative approach – 'What behaviours / examples can you see that <i>do</i> demonstrate effective coaching in action?'. After an initial pause, group members start to share more and more examples, and chart up a longer list than initially expected. In doing so it's clear that there are some</p>	<p><i>Building appreciative awareness, and how this line of questioning might be useful in coaching.</i></p> <p><i>Building awareness of what 'good' might look like in practice / role models.</i></p>

<p>good role-models across the organisation, at all different levels, 'even though they wouldn't necessarily call it coaching'.</p> <p>Again, LF asks group to pause for a moment to reflect on the value of their conversation vis a vis their learning objectives. And note any parallels between what's happened here and what can happen in coaching conversations.</p>	
<p>Group becomes more quiet and reflective, and there is some personal sharing about the kinds of changes they want to see within themselves, a sense of starting to see new ways forward, grasping a bigger picture of what commitment to their own changes might mean.</p>	<p><i>Deeper level shifts in awareness.</i></p> <p><i>Heightened consciousness of own role to play within organisation, and impact in the wider scheme of things.</i></p> <p><i>Deepening commitment not just to act differently but to be different (movement from single and double loop to triple loop learning)</i></p>