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COACHING AS A TOOL OF MANAGERIAL SUPPORT

Summary: The article serves as an introduction to coaching as empirical research. The main subjects of the study are the coaching definition, perfect coaching process, all the procedures and ways of dealing with coaching conversations. Moreover, the paper will present the skills of asking questions in coaching.

Keywords: coaching, communication, process, employee, organization.

1. Introduction

Managers, frequently preoccupied with their immense duties, issues, matters, accept certain information or are satisfied with short replies to their questions. Frequently, however, when a valuable employee, engaged in numerous undertakings, decides to take on a challenge in another company, they put their managers in a very difficult place. How should they cope with such events? What is the way to integrate the team, improve its efficiency and motivation? The purpose of this paper is to present a tool that should be effective in the aforementioned situations.

Moreover, the process of strategic renewal is usually restricted to a part of the company and is carried out sporadically. The process is started in a situation when some forces tending to changes are far weaker than in the case of revitalization or restructuring. Renewal is concentrated on testing whether the organization mastered appropriate skills that should assure the growth of goodwill in the future. This should be the basis for the organization development, particularly its ability to learn so that it can easily adapt itself to new situations on the market. Carrying out the renewal process brings about less reluctance to changes and at the same time reduction of the effect of factors tending to changes. The situation is maintained for some time, its length largely depends on the specific nature of the organization until the need for changes grows again and another renewal is carried out. Coaching is an immensely valuable instrument of supporting such processes. The main aim of the paper is to present the subject of coaching and prepare the background to further empirical research studies.

2. The process of coaching

Coaching may prove to be a tool that serves as the improvement of efficiency and productivity of people or teams through enabling them to learn in a systematic and planned way under the supervision of a coach. The process is intended, most of all, to make it possible to solve problems most efficiently for everyone as well as to improve the productivity of an individual employee or team, mainly in all the points in which a change in task performance is desired. One significant elements of coaching is the analysis of resources, which appears really important in the strategic renewal process.

Skillfully conducted, coaching proves to be right both in individual and team relationships. An interesting thing about it is that the vast majority of people managing the employees shows predispositions to be a coach in their company. What does it mean? They communicate, indicate targets, motivate the employees to act, verify their progress, support, stimulate development. To function as a manager, one should, most of all, see the sense and wish to continue the dialog with the team members. This means active conversation that provides reliable feedback, instead of passive listening or talking in a peremptory way. A well-proven principle says that we can obtain a true reply having asked a question three times, not for public opinion, but to reflect the actual situation.

3. The skill of asking questions

Questions are immensely important in the coaching process; however, not every question appears to be effective or right. This is a real art that a manager can learn. So how should a question be constructed? First of all, it must be short. It cannot contain to many plots that level the definition of what is behind. Thus, the coachee should understand its essence without any difficulties. Secondly, a question must not suggest any solutions. The foundation of coaching is to encourage the coachee to determine the targets individually, to search for the right way. Advising may appear to be risky. On the one hand, because the person might feel that he or she made a decision under someone's influence, not fully identifying with them; and thus not actually getting involved in the resultant actions. On the other hand, in the case in which the decision's results do not converge with the original expectations, the person who advised will be blamed and the coachee will disclaim the whole responsibility [Mnich 2010]. Two cases can be mentioned at this point. A medium level manager was subject to coaching by his direct superior. They worked on the development of his professional career. The coach, basing on his own experience and past events, advised the manager to go abroad for a contract. The manager, however, did not follow the advice. Moreover, the refusal became one of the causes of the manager-superior conflict. It was only after six months that it appeared that the manager's mother was seriously ill and he did not want to go abroad. The lack

of a true, open talk, combined with advising instead of coaching and solving the problem as well as multiplying the coachee's motivation, made things even worse. Another event related to the impossibility to stop indicating the only right way by the coach, concerned a young employee who was to become responsible in the company for the complex process of employee competence development. A person with little experience, without a position consolidated in the company, full of fears of the challenge given to him or her, at the same time, wishing to make the best impression on the bosses and the team, practically relied on the coach's suggestions blindly. He suggested that the best solution would be to contact a company specializing in this scope and ask for a free of charge consultation. The outcome was easily foreseeable: the following week there was an offer to perform the project at a fairly attractive price. In addition to the fact that the new employee could not prove himself, his future in the company became uncertain [Mnich 2010].

What other characteristics should a question have? Certainly, it needs to be clear, understandable for both parties. Therefore, the feedback and paraphrasing are so important. Talking to an employee, we should not let a math-class situations happen, i.e. having written a complicated formula on the board, the teacher was satisfied with a laconic students' answer "yes" to the questions "Do you understand?". Similar situations happen in business. We need to be sure that the employee has understood the task in exactly the same way as the boss, in order to do his work properly, increase the efficiency thanks to our coaching. The question "How do you plan to solve the problem?" is very suitable here.

Moreover, questions must be linguistically clear, which applies in particular to industrial jargons and colloquialisms. We had better avoid them on the one hand, while on the other, in the case of selected professional groups, their use is the only way to bring the desired effect [Rzycka 2010].

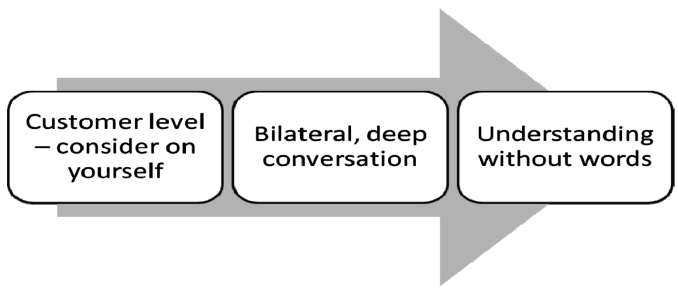
Questions must be motivating, adding confidence to the other party's potential. They should enhance an employee in his taking responsibility for the actions, encourage initiative and independence. An example can be the phrase: "I turn to you because you made a great job at the previous project and acquired rich experience. What actions would you suggest for the current task?" or "The team you work with has a really approving opinion about your co-operating and commitment, thus you have become a candidate for another project manager. What would you choose as the first measures related to it?" [Mnich 2010].

Another very important issue arose here in relation to the business coaching questions – they must be specific. General questions result in short "Yes" or "No" answers that impede the continuation of the dialog. Moreover, a question that we get an explicit answer to blocks our access to certain negotiations. Let us return to the previous question for a while, if we ask it in the following way: "The team you work with has a really approving opinion about your co-operation and commitment, thus you have become a candidate for another project manager. Would you like to take it up? In such a situation, the enhancement and motivation in its first part become totally meaningless.

The questions should be directed to another person, not the one that is asking. We should by all means avoid "I" used too frequently, replacing it with "you". It's better to say "What is YOUR opinion on the subject?", instead of "I want to know another opinion on the subject".

4. Speech is silver, silence is golden

People communicate using three forms of communication. In business coaching, the second one is by far the most effective (see Figure 1). It enables to build a solid partnership between the coachee and the coach.



Comment: Client level – thinks about himself only – Level on which coach and client are preoccupied with a very absorbing conversation – Level of listening in silence.

Fig. 1. Coaching levels

Source: Author's own study, basing on [O'Neil 2005].

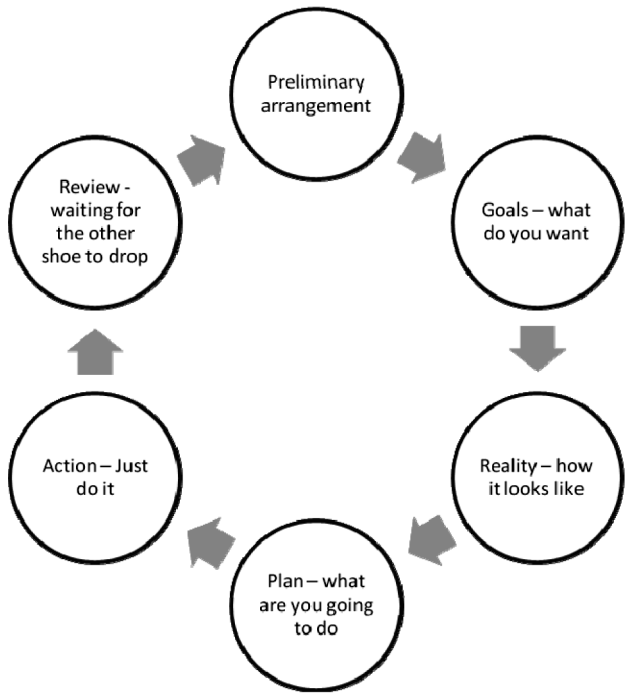
On the first level, the coach evaluates the coachee all the time, regularly considers what question to ask, whether it is correctly built. He controls all his actions, focusing on himself, instead of the person which he talks to. It works just like in the case of a situation on the road, he thinks about changing gear technique, looks for the clutch and accelerator pedals.

The third level is of a very sublime nature. The coach can read the signals transmitted by the coachee. He understands him or her without words and the answers are only the confirmation of the information recognized earlier. This type of communication is effective with outstanding listeners only. Unfortunately, such a form of transmission may often be incorrectly identified, and instead of full understanding, it may result in the wrong reading of messages [Mnich 2010].

5. Coaching procedure

The process of strategic renewal not only allows for getting rid of what is unnecessary, but also represents a guideline and help in the identification of potential valuable

characteristics of the people in the organization. Thanks to the use of coaching in this process, some new potential directions of development can be estimated in an easier way and this applies to the staff, teams and the whole organization [Wolniak 2000].



Comment: Plan – what you will do – Action – do it – Overview – what next – Preliminary agreements – Targets – what you want – Reality – what it is like.

Fig. 2. Coaching procedure

Source: Author's own study.

Caring about proper communication is really significant already at the very first stage of setting the rules. Moreover, it is worth fixing the frequency of coaching meetings. It is assumed that the meetings should not take place too often. A pause lasting a week seems optimal. A shorter period causes that people cannot show their progress, which causes a drop in their interest and motivation. The general principle is that targets must be ambitious, but realistic – attainable. When exaggerated and impossible to reach, they become the source of frustration and aversion. Should the employees feel the need for a random conversation before the regular coaching meeting time, naturally they may count on it. However, it is rather a form of additional monitoring and support than traditional coaching process. In addition, it is extremely important at this stage to fix some impassable boundaries – what we shall not talk

about, taboo topics and the questions that shall be absolutely forbidden. The extent of colloquial "pressure" should also be agreed upon. It is the coached person or team that may decide when they do not want to take any more effort, when they wish to say "stop". Coaching is not only a pleasant conversation, it is often breaking through oneself, becoming aware of what we do not want to admit, taking up difficult attempts, forcing oneself to change, which all lead to real emotions, even tears and slamming doors sometimes. However, at the end of the day the effect is positive – the desired transformation, development, success [Peltier 2005].

The last and perhaps the most important element of this stage is the question of trust, sincerity and openness. Therefore, the persons who are going to function as a coach in the organization must enjoy general acceptance and favor. Normally, people being a kind of informal authorities or trustees of the corporation community prove themselves perfectly in this role.

The second stage concerning the identification of targets, assumes the presentation of an issue, target, important question that the people intend to work on. The expectations, desires, choices, options or visions are presented here. The most important, however, is the self-realization that practically nothing is impossible. One needs to search, check and try. The targets are not accomplished automatically; we need to put a lot of effort in order to attain them. We must not wait for a godsend; instead, we must take our lives in our own hands. To confirm this thesis, let me quote a talk that I have made recently. The person that I talked to dreamed about working for one of Polish TV stations. So I asked her what she did to start such a co-operation. She gave the most common reply, i.e. "Nothing yet". I decided to get into the topic, asking what was the reason, etc. She replied "I have no chance whatsoever", "There are better people than me", "Why would they choose me instead of someone else?". "I must be inexperienced" and a number of other expressions of this kind appeared as answers. The solution is one – just try. Before you have a talk and hear a clear "No", do not stop your way. Create opportunities for yourself. Moreover, even this "No" itself does not have to be ultimate; someone refuses us today, but we must not give up, as they may change their minds in a week's time

At the third stage aimed at defining the reality, it is very important to determine the current status and to diagnose as many resources as possible to be used at the subsequent stages. The resources include:

- Physical: money, time, material;
- Intellectual: knowledge, skills, experience, qualifications;
- Emotional: morale, commitment, feelings;
- Social: friends, support groups, family, colleagues [Rzycka 2010a].

It appears that only after a deeper analysis, do people realize what kind of resources they can have at their disposal. At first, they are not aware of them and after a series of questions asked by the coach, the amount of resources that can be used grows intensely.

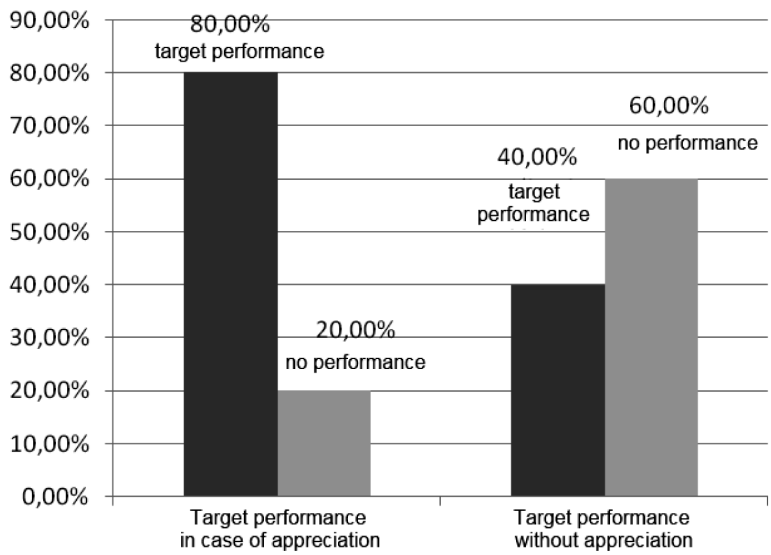
At this point, an example of a young mother who wanted to return to work after her maternity leave. Her professional duties gave her a lot of satisfaction, but the remuneration was so low that hiring a skilled nanny would be pointless. Moreover, all the places in the nurseries nearby were occupied and the spare list was very long. The whole family was working so she could not find their support in childcare. The woman was desperate and could not find any further resources whatsoever. However, after a longer series of questions, it appeared that her neighbor is a retired lady with a family living thousands of kilometers from her, so she cannot feel like a fulfilled grandmother. She would also need help in bigger shopping from time to time, or a small talk. By sheer accident both women started a perfect mutual relationship. The initial lack of resources appeared to be illusionary. Therefore, one must not give up and should search until they reach the effect.

At this stage, we should also determine the restrictions in the performance of the intended targets, hazards, perspective and risk. For example, obtaining the EU co-funding by the team, the perspective and benefit will probably be the additional financial support, project performance possibility, otherwise unattainable. The risk, however, will be the necessity to devote more time for additional duties, expanded bureaucracy or a threat of losing the support in the case of making a formal error. It is significant to inform the team about the advantages and disadvantages of defying the hardships [Dębowski 2010].

Planning represents another phase. After all, it is one of the more pleasant activities. Initially, people participating in coaching imagine a situation when the target has been reached. Then the visualization of events and talking about them take place. This is also a moment of confronting the expectations with reality, searching for multiple alternative solution and determining substantial measures to be taken. Frequently, people become in their expectations millionaires, celebrities, residing on private exotic islands, achieving spectacular professional success. The interesting thing about it is that a longer visualization makes the people more motivated and consistent on their ways to the target. Next, the selection of a specific solution, implementation of the plan and its possible verification takes place. The last stage of verification is the monitoring of assumptions and effects, being the source of improvement in the future [O'Neill 2005].

Support and appreciation represent a very important element at each stage of coaching. It will be illustrated by the results of tests carried out in the first quarter of 2010 on a group of 120 employees. The people were divided into two groups, 60 persons each. Both groups were to perform the professional targets, set by themselves for 30 days. The first group was devoid of regular appreciation. It was fairly sporadic, however, convergent with what was carried out earlier in the organization. The other group was divided into 30 pairs. Each person in the pair was to appreciate the other for minimum 90 seconds twice a week, in the scope of task performance, their approach to colleagues, behaviors and attitudes. Appreciation consisted of specifying the advantages only. Moreover, the characteristics were

just specified without justification. The persons of the appreciated group were interviewed. At first, they were embarrassed when receiving the positive information, then they would listen to the text with little disbelief. The phase of embarrassment was significantly reduced for the second time and the people were much more willing to achieve the targets. The subsequent occasions of appreciation indicated that the persons would take up more ambitious and difficult tasks with more enthusiasm and energy. After one month, it appeared that among the appreciated group, the level of targets achieved and, in consequence, satisfaction was by half higher than in the group without such motivation.



Comment: target performance, non-performance.

Fig. 3. Target performance in the case of appreciation of employees (1) and without appreciation (2)

Source: Author's own study.

The test indicated the fact that appreciation of employees is an immensely important element in coaching. Thus, it is indirectly translated into the organization development. People more motivated in the intangible aspect are more committed, integrated with the organization, more intensively identify themselves with it and strive for the growth of efficiency.

6. Challenges for the manager

There is a statement that a real manager is not the one who is promoted, but the one who changes his attitude.

The priceless role of a good manager, familiar with the coaching principles, is the awareness of certain events and working on them together with their team [Rzycka 2010b]. They include:

- lack of taking full responsibility by co-workers;
- transposing the responsibility for one's own tasks onto others;
- lack of feedback for the manager on the task performed, even after asking a question on the progress of work;
- permanent complaining on the current state of affairs without searching for solutions.

Moreover, the observations and tests made by Mnich [2010] indicate several questions supporting coaching:

- appreciation of colleagues;
- being listened to by the manager;
- respectful treatment by colleagues and boss;
- integration of the team around the common vision of the organization;
- understanding and attempt to satisfy team needs;
- treating one's own tasks as the tasks one always can handle;
- active work instead of monitoring and sitting at the desk;
- focusing on what is the most important for the manager;
- working on the skills of the positive influence on others;
- increasing the efficiency thanks to the team synergy effect;
- creating the commitment and self-motivation of the team;
- facilitating co-operation;
- noticing the change and appreciation [Mnich 2010];
- internal balance and self-possession;
- basing on the existing experience and values followed.

7. Conclusion

Correct communication, care about co-workers, mutual exchange of opinions, standpoints, experiences, proper formulation of effective questions, commitment, creating self-motivation are immensely important and very difficult tasks. However, coaching, its knowledge and appropriate use, become a perfect solution to all the organizational issues, especially in the interpersonal sphere. Coaching is a tool with excellent results both among bosses and managers for whom it is a perfect solution, supporting and contributing to the improvement of the effects of the whole company. Moreover, thanks to the application of coaching, the new actions related to the strategic renewal process shall be faster and more efficient and the management shall be better oriented in the future development directions.

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COACHING JAKO NARZĘDZIE WSPIERANIA KADRY MENEDŻERSKIEJ

Streszczenie: Artykuł stanowi wprowadzenie do badań empirycznych w zakresie coachingu. Zostanie tu zaprezentowana definicja coachingu, profesjonalny proces coachingu, stosowane procedury, jak również sposoby prowadzenie rozmów coachingowych. Ponadto, uwaga zostanie zwrócona na umiejętności związane z budowaniem i zadawaniem pytań w coachingu.