

## **What Theories Of Leadership Are Implicit In A Coach Approach?**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to explore what leadership theories are implicit in a coach approach. The authors begin by identifying organizational coaching trends to provide a framework for the exploration of several leadership theories. These leadership theories could inform coaching practice for executive, leadership and business coaches (Grodzki & Allen, 2005). The paper closes with a discussion of what comprises a coach approach.

*Keywords: organizational coaching, leadership coaching, coach approach, executive leadership, organizational coaching trends*

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to explore how leadership theory can be linked with organizational and leadership coaching practice to create and enhance a strong coach approach. Specifically, the paper discusses what comprises a coach approach and closes with a discussion about three leadership theories that could be implicit in a coach approach. These leadership theories could inform coaching practice for organizational and leadership coaches.

### **The approach of coaching**

Just as there are multiple iterations of coaching definitions and outcomes, there is also no single and absolute coach approach or process. However, a general approach can be identified in the literature. Perhaps at the heart of any coach approach is the willingness and readiness of the coachee. Johnson (2007) makes the point that effective coaching is contingent upon coachees identifying their goals, following a meticulous

coach selection process, and having a mindset that is willing and ready to learn and change. Coachee motivation is a related facet to this mindset. Peterson (1996) states, "People are motivated to work on their development when they perceive discrepancies between where they are and where they wish to go" (p. 79). Thus, as a condition that supports successful coaching, Axmith (2004) says that the executive "must be receptive to new ways of looking at problems and solutions" (p. 4).

Weinberger (1995) suggested a focus on specific objectives of a coach approach including: (1) establishing an intervention agreement, (2) building a coaching relationship, (3) creating and maintaining expectations of success, (4) providing experiences of mastery and cognitive control, and (5) evaluating and attributing coaching successes and failures. To flesh out these components further, Kilburg (1996) identifies with the first element by suggesting that a coach establish an agreement and goals for the coaching partnership, secure confidentiality, estimate the time commitment, and articulate fees. In the second element, Kilburg stated the need for building an alliance and gaining commitment. Kilburg does not specifically expand on the third component; however, this may be considered to be straightforward. The fourth component of the organizational and leadership coaching process, according to Kilburg, is mastery and cognitive control. This can be exemplified through using coaching techniques and methods such as flexibility, problem solving, identifying and understanding emotions, employing feedback and disclosure, and being prepared to confront acting out and moral concerns of ethical misjudgments in a diplomatic manner. The fifth component, according to Kilburg, is to check in on the coaching and to assess the relationship to make sure that it is working well.

An additional approach presented by Natale and Diamante (2005) suggests the following stages of coaching: (1) alliance check, (2) credibility assessment, (3) likeability link, (4) dialogue and skill acquisition, and (5) cue-based action plans. For the first step the authors state, "The alliance activates the conversations that will lead to the writing of a roadmap and removal of resistance" (p. 363). They explain that the second stage is "centered on the executive's desire to gain control and determine whether the coach has anything to offer" (p. 36). The third stage occurs as the executive compares his or her style and preferences with that of the coach. The fourth stage, dialogue and skill acquisition, helps prepare the executive for change. The final stage, cue-based action plans, delineates what the executive is to do. This model is based on the premise that the executive is personally accountable for change in that "through self-control (physically,

intellectually, emotionally, and behaviorally) the executive contributes to the nature, meaning, importance, and consequences of the event to which he is ‘responding’” (p. 368). The power of having a process or approach such as that of Natale and Diamante, Johnson and Kilburg is an important aspect of coaching effectiveness.

Two aspects of the coaching engagement that require additional attention are confidentiality and trust. Natale and Diamante (2005) identify confidentiality as a huge issue in the coaching engagement that must be honored consistently. They state, “The coach has the duty to respect the confidentiality of the executive’s information, and must refrain from disclosing it even to the party compensating him, except as otherwise waived or agreed by the executive, or as required by law” (p. 362). Morgan, Harkins and Goldsmith (2005) similarly view confidentiality as important “no matter who is paying the bill” (p. 43). The reason is that to create an effective coaching relationship, the coachee must feel comfortable openly discussing situations, feelings, concerns, and attitudes that may include individuals of all levels that the coachee works with.

Trust is an integral characteristic of a coaching partnership that must be earned so that the coach may provide the right balance of challenge and support to the coachee throughout the engagement (Peterson, 1996). Trust in the coaching relationship is what allows the coachee to truly be open to and influenced by the coaching (Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, & Doyle, 1996). However, building trust is not a cookie-cutter process. As Ting and Scisco (2006) state, “Trust looks differently behaviorally to [different people]” (p. 37). Therefore, the coach must consistently work on building and facilitating trust including “constant awareness and monitoring of [his or her] behaviors and motivations that may bear on how his or her trustworthiness is perceived by others, and an understanding and respect for what trust means to the person being coached” (p. 37). Trust is so crucial to the relationship that little success can be achieved without it. One way to build trust is to honor confidentiality (Morgan, Harkins & Goldsmith, 2005). Candid dialogue can “serve as a powerful relationship-builder and as a model of the kind of frank discussions that forms the foundation of any worthwhile coaching relationship” (p. 5).

### **Leadership theories informing coaching**

Leadership theory can be applied to a coaching framework to enhance coaching effectiveness and contribute to a strong coach approach. This will

be particularly important for coaches whose coaching practice focus is in the arena of organizational and leadership coaching. There are several leadership theories suggested by Northouse (2010) that the authors submit as relevant for coaching.

### *Authentic leadership*

Authentic leadership does not have a “single accepted definition” (Northouse, 2010, p. 206) as it, as a construct, is still developing. However, three viewpoints on a definition have been proposed, including intrapersonal, developmental, and interpersonal. The intrapersonal definition focuses on the leader’s self-knowledge, regulation and concept gained through life experiences. The developmental definition focuses on the “pattern of leader behavior that develops from and is grounded in the leader’s positive psychological qualities and strong ethics” (Northouse, p. 207). Finally, the interpersonal definition focuses on relationships and leadership as a partnership between leaders and followers.

The development of authentic leadership theory has been split between two approaches. The first approach was a practical approach (George, 2003; Terry, 1993) which is prescriptive. This approach provides leaders with tools to determine core issues before taking action. The second approach was theoretical. In this approach, leaders should demonstrate “four components: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency” (Northouse, 2010, p. 217).

Authentic leadership as a construct is still developing. However, the idea of a leader being authentic and “who they really are” is a foundation for leadership credibility (Kouzes & Posner, 1993). Authentic leadership can be leveraged within a coach approach by focusing on the partnership of the relationship, the ability to determine and focus on core issues, and the ability to employ the four components of authentic leadership (self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency). These key aspects of authentic leadership all lend themselves to a successful coaching partnership and coach approach.

### *Transformational leadership*

A second leadership approach that can be connected to coaching is transformational leadership. This approach emphasized the “charismatic and affective elements of leadership” (Northouse, 2010, p. 171) with a focus on

intrinsic motivation and the development of followers. Transformational leadership “is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (Northouse, p. 172). This quote is similar to the ICF Core Competency of ‘Co-Creating the Relationship’ (ICF, 2013) which focuses on establishing trust and providing ongoing support to the client. Other researchers that have provided perspectives on transformational leadership include Kouzes and Posner (1987). Kouzes and Posner suggested that transformational leadership could be developed through behaviors such as modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.

Gavett (2013) suggested that, for CEOs, the correct outside advisor or coach is one who demonstrates a solid understanding of, and models, transformational behavior. Characteristics can include that the coach is “smart, intuitive about business and interpersonal dynamics, neutral in their assessment (i.e., not captured by their client), and can tailor the training to the individual needs (not a canned approach)” (p. 5). Griffiths and Campbell’s (2008) study indicated that coach selection should be based on the ability of the coach to establish trust and intimacy with the client, to actively listen, to employ powerful questioning, to focus on designing actions, and to emphasize managing progress and accountability leading to positive outcomes. de Haan, Culpin & Curd (2011) suggest that common elements in helpful coaching relationships include “relationship, empathic understanding and positive expectations” (p. 24). Simply put, listening, understanding and encouraging are all hallmarks of transformational leaders.

The definition of transformational leadership – “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (Northouse, 2010, p. 172) – can be edited to showcase a strong relationship to an effective coaching relationship and coach approach by replacing the word leader with coachee and replacing the word follower with coach. The application of motivation and morality can both contribute to effective coaching and effective coaching outcomes.

### *Psychodynamic theory*

A third leadership theory that could connect to organizational and leadership coaching is psychodynamic theory. A consistent theme in the psychodynamic theory of leadership is the importance of personality, which

is defined as “a consistent pattern of ways of thinking, feeling, and acting with regard to the environment, including other people” (Northouse, 2010, p. 271). This approach focused on the integration of personality with leadership, and the relationship between leaders and followers. The development of leaders occurred through improving the awareness of leaders and followers of their own personality and the implications of personality in the workplace. Zalesnik (1977) was a leading proponent of this approach. This theory, while complex, holds that leadership can be developed through improved self-awareness which leads to improved self-management and leadership. The creation of self-awareness is prominently addressed in the ICF Core Competency of ‘Creating Awareness’ (ICF, 2013b) which emphasized gaining awareness, identifying major strengths and areas of learning and challenging perception of self.

Psychodynamic theory can be a catalyst for organizational and leadership coaches to leverage various assessments in their coach approach. These assessments can range from personality assessment instruments such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator to multi-rater tools such as 360-degree feedback. The goal of these tools is to provide coachees with greater awareness of their patterns of behavior which can then be leveraged for further development.

## **Conclusion**

There are strong connections between leadership theory, coach approaches and coaching effectiveness. Just as a number of different leadership theories apply to coaching there are a number of different coach approaches. While there is not a single coach methodology or universal approach, through an examination of the literature we can conclude that there are a number of key elements that can be indicators of coaching success and coaching effectiveness when developing a coach approach. As discussed in this paper, one aspect of a coach approach is the application and utilization of leadership theories as a coach which can be especially important for organizational and leadership coaches. Finally, a strong coach approach should encompass assessing the readiness of a coachee, following a coaching process, and focusing on outcomes, trust and confidentiality.

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