A new purpose for Socratic questioning in coaching

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Abstract

Socratic questioning in coaching is a dialectic method, whose object is to bring to light the objective 'truth' behind a given matter, using questions that unveil what is implicitly known or disentangle the contradictions of a person's beliefs. This method is central in cognitive-behavioral coaching, and is used effectively in therapeutic, educational, and leadership settings. Given its pragmatic focus, Socratic questioning has been applied on individuals' specific challenges, goals, and behaviors. However, reflecting on the Socrates persona and the individual and societal challenges of the post-modern society, we suggest that this method could be re-interpreted to serve a twofold, hierarchical purpose in coaching. At the lower-level, and in the short-term, Socratic questioning's goal is to unfold objective truths over given matters and to guide discovery in the interlocutors, as it helps coachees to overcome specific challenges. However, drawing upon a Third Generation Coaching perspective, we suggest a higher-order, long-term purpose of Socratic questioning. Third Generation Coaching claims that meaningful dialogues are collaborative and co-creative in nature and emerge when the dialogue partners experience moments of symmetry and resonance. Notably, Socrates practiced boêtheia (partnership) and maieutikós (midwifery) in his dialogues, clearly denoting his ethics' collaborative and co-creative orientation. Accordingly, the high-order purpose of Socratic questioning is to create partnership, moments of symmetry, and resonance in the dialogue partners, which allows for meaning-making, self-reflection, shared-reflection, and shift in narrators' perspectives. In this light, Socratic questioning helps foster long-lasting, value-based personal growth in all dialogue partners.

Keywords: Socratic questioning, Socrates, meaning-making dialogues, partnership, values, third generation coaching.

Introduction

Modern societal changes have increased the demand for coaching and other forms of dialogue-based services (Passmore, 2021). Specifically for coaching, it becomes relevant to reflect upon such societal changes and adapt accordingly. From a rationalist standpoint, it is critical to reflect upon which individual and social processes are inherent in those changes, and therefore critically update coaching assumptions and pre-suppositions. From an empirical perspective, the coaching practice, and the attitude used, should be constantly informed by these changes, and therefore revisited and adapted to better serve the coaching purpose.

The expulsion of the other in the hypercomplex late-modern society

On the one hand, it appears that our society tends towards hyper-complexity, or, in other words, towards a multitude of interpretations, opinions, and points of view about its own complexity (Luhmann, 1998; Qvortrup, 2003). As a consequence, it becomes more and more difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to achieve a uniform and concordant understanding and interpretation over a specific matter, challenge, or societal phenomena

(Stelter, 2014). The multitude, and complexity, of the possible points of view creates a society in which our own view of the world is the only 'safe boat' through which to navigate the tumultuous waters of life. The implications of such increased complexity or contingency can lead to stress, insecurity, and anxiety. Within such a scenario, the other become the enemy, someone that provokes suspiciousness and is naturally expelled from the self (Han, 2018b).

On the other hand, different ideas, opinions, experiences, cultural values, and contexts are seen as possible threats to one's own self-esteem (De Dominicis & Molinario, 2022; Leary & Baumeister, 2000) and identity (Baumeister et al., 2003). Self-discipline intensifies, especially through the internet and social media: through globalization and the speed of information acquisition and exchange, everything becomes interchangeable and comparable, and therefore everything becomes the 'same' (Han, 2018a). A fear provoking 'same':

> "The terror of the Same affects all areas of life today. One travels everywhere, yet *does not experience* anything. One catches sight of everything, yet *reaches no insight*. One accumulates information and data, yet *does not attain knowledge*. One lusts after adventures and stimulation, but *always remains the same*. One accumulates online 'friends' and 'followers', yet *never encounters* another person. Social media constitutes an absolute zero grade of the social." (Han, 2018b, p.8 [emphasis added]).

And yet, one of the fundamental psychological needs necessary for optimal functioning and thriving is the need of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000): it is in fact through cooperation that individuals experience optimal psychological wellbeing, self-development, and fulfilling and meaningful lives (Liotti & Gilbert, 2011).

The need of self-development through the other: finding meaning in moments of symmetry and resonance

As such, a new psychological process has emerged naturally as an individual and social response to the vast individual, group and societal challenges related to globalization and hyper-complexification processes unfolding in the late-modern age. That is, our daily lives and behaviors must be constantly negotiated and construed, as well as interpreted, within the temporal unfolding of self-identity—a process called self-reflexivity (Giddens, 2013). What follows, is that coaching psychology theories and practices need to reflect and adapt to such changes and processes and understand how they can contribute to fulfill these emerged needs of personal development and self-reflexivity (Stelter, 2014).

Thus, modern approaches to coaching should offer a more articulated method than merely laying a strategic pathway toward solving specific challenges or achieving given goals. Classic perspectives in coaching developed solution-focused approaches to overcome the limitations of the once dominant diagnostic medical model through a focus shift on results and solutions (Grant, 2012; Jackson & McKergow, 2007). For example, the GROW model was developed to facilitate the coachee's ability to accomplish his or her goals quickly and effectively (Whitmore, 2009, 2017). Yet, in the present post-modern global and hypercomplex social world—where reflexivity is a rare yet fundamental state of being in the dialogue—coaching should provide a reflective space where all the involved actors (both the coach and coachee) engage as equal partners and fellow human companions in meaningful dialogues (Stelter, 2016, 2019): dialogues whose goal is to promote self-reflection, shared reflection and a shift in the narrators' perspectives, thanks to an in-depth contemplation on essential and existentially-meaningful topics such as values and identity (Stelter, 2014).

As such, coaching becomes a process that should lie outside the production domain. Instead, it should unfold within the reflection and the aesthetic domains. In the production domain, a supply-demand law determines the coaching process: the coach helps produce a solution (supply) to the coachee's problem (demand). The dialogue is logical, the focus is on objective reality, and self-development occurs through a linear cause-and-effect mindset (Stelter, 2014): arguably not the most functional approach to find new perspectives of action in a hypercomplex reality where goals change quickly, and identity is threatened constantly. Instead, a more fitting approach to coaching should pertains the domains of reflection and aesthetics (Stelter, 2014). In these domains, the dialogue is creative, explorative, emotional, value-based, and ethical. The focus is broad, and the dialogue partners are open to multiple versions of reality, which in turn allow for self-insight. The intention is to find meaning through *moments of symmetry* and resonance thanks to the connection with the other and the attribution of meaning associated with different (and similar) actions, experiences, ideas, and worldviews.

But how can coaches apply this approach in practice? Meaningful dialogues, that create moments of symmetry and resonance among the dialogue partners, are the cornerstone of promoting self-insight through the other (Stelter, 2019). In such a framework, and within a coaching psychology perspective, we argue that Socratic questioning could be reframed as a coaching tool that can create meaningful dialogues via a shift in the understating of Socratic questioning itself: from a tool aimed at finding the objective solution of, or truth in, a given situation, challenge, or problem, to a tool that can create moments of symmetry, resonance, trust, respect, and support between the dialogue partners. Thus, as presented in the following sections, Socratic questioning should be revisited and adapted to this modern understating of coaching.

Socratic questioning

Simply put, Socratic questioning is a dialectic method whose goal is to unveil the objective truth of a given matter (Neenan, 2021). This goal is achieved by uncovering what is implicitly known, or by exposing and disentangling the contradictions of a person's position or idea (Blackburn, 2016). Socratic questioning has been applied to, and has become a fundamental approach of, both Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Cognitive-Behavioral Coaching (CBC; Beck & Beck, 2011; Clark & Egan, 2015; Neenan, 2018, 2021; Padesky & Beck, 2003). Given its practical effectiveness, it has been also successfully applied in many other domains, such as education, leadership, business, political science, and sport (Friesen & Stephen, 2016; Katsara & De Witte, 2019; Meckstroth, 2012; Morrell, 2004; Roberts & Ryrie, 2014).

Socratic questioning in first (goal-focused) and second (system-focused) generation coaching

To understand the role and meaning of Socratic questioning in coaching, it is useful to consider that its application in coaching was inspired by its earlier application to CBT. In CBT, Socratic questioning is:

> "a method of guided discovery in which the therapist asks a series of carefully sequenced questions to help define problems, assist in the identification of thoughts and beliefs, examine the meaning of events, or assess the ramifications of particular thoughts or behaviors" (Beck & Dozois, 2011, p.401).

This definition, from a clinical psychology perspective, highlights that Socratic questioning is essentially a guiding tool that the therapist and client apply to identify and ultimately change the client's self-limiting and goal-blocking beliefs, and which is embedded in a genuine curiosity about where the questioning will lead. Similarly, in coaching the dialogue partners engage in guided discovery, and the coach takes the role of a 'thought partner' who clarifies and enhances the coachee's goal-directed thinking and behaviors (Stober & Grant, 2006). The coach uses Socratic questioning to encourage the coachee to step back from their problematic (or biased) thinking. Hence the coachee rethink their situation in a more detached, objective, accurate and useful perspective: this detachment and new perspective help them to develop new and more helpful attitudes, ideas and actions to solve the problem and achieve the desired goal (Neenan, 2021).

In practice, Socratic questioning in coaching consists of four phases (Greenberger & Padesky, 2016; Neenan, 2021) that, although thought as sequential, often occur in a non-linear way. In phase one, the coach asks informational questions: he gathers information by focusing on the key features of the target issue. Phase two entails active listening and shared reflection. Here the dialogue partners develop a phenomenological understanding of the issue at stake by reflecting upon why and how the coachee sees the reality in that specific way. Phase three concerns developing new information, perspectives, and possibilities of action in relation to the coachee's original problem or thought: through collaborative curiosity, the goal is to help the coachee embracing new understandings of reality. Phase four concerns summarizing and integrating newly acquired information: the emphasis of this stage is to help the coachee reconcile new and initial beliefs and assumptions so that they will be more likely to internalize the newly developed perspectives and worldviews. Within this structure, an effective application of Socratic questioning is based on the use of questions entailing specific characteristics (Neenan, 2021): questions that are concise, clear, purposeful, constructive, focused, tentative, and neutral are more likely to help the dialogue partners shed light on the matter at stake.

In this conceptualization, Socratic questioning is a useful tool in coaching, and has been applied consistently and effectively within first- and second-generation coaching approaches. Examples of first generation coaching are the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009) and CBC (Neenan, 2018; Palmer & Whybrow, 2019). In first generation coaching, the standpoint is 'problem and goal' (Stelter, 2014): the goal of the coaching intervention is to help the coachee clarify, understand, and overcome a given problem, thanks to the definition and achievement of a goal which is deemed to be problem-solving. The standpoint of the conversation is the *past*: everything stems from previously experienced challenges and problems. Within this framework, the relationship between the dialogue partners is unbalanced, asymmetric: the coach is the expert that helps the coachee finding a solution to their problems. Here, Socratic questioning can be applied effectively as a tool to disentangle a given problem, and therefore can help find possible solutions to it.

Instead, second generation coaching's standpoint is the *future*. The goal of the coaching process is to generate desirable future scenarios in which the coachee can exert their existing resources and strengths. Examples of such orientation are systemic (Whittington, 2020), solution-focused (Berg & Szabó, 2005; Jackson & McKergow, 2007) and positive psychology coaching (Biswas-Diener, 2010). The approach is systemic, thus the different levels of analysis in which the coachee operates—individual, family, group, organizational, community, social-cultural, etc.—become the focus of the coaching process. The coach's role is to work with the solutions and possible future scenarios depicted by the coachee, and to

focus on the coachee's strengths and virtues (of which the coachee might be aware or unaware of) and how they can be leveraged effectively within the coachee's systems. In this framework, the relationship between the dialogue partners is still unbalanced and asymmetric: in fact, now the coachee is the expert—of the issue at stake and of the systems they operate in—while the coach is a facilitator and helps the coachee moving toward the most desirable scenario. Socratic questioning fits well also in this systemic approach to coaching, as it can be used effectively to investigate how realistic future scenarios and the plans delineated to reach them might be.

However, although Socratic questioning fits well the goals and processes of first- and second-generation coaching, how could it be used effectively in the post-modern era where both goals and systems are constantly negotiated and in rapid development? Given the problem arising in the global hypercomplex society, such as lack of clarity on individual and shared identity (Han, 2018b), and lack of reflexivity (Giddens, 2013), an answer might be to look for what is somewhat stable in guiding our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. That is, our values (Stelter, 2017).

Beyond goals and systems: a valued-based, collaborative and co-creative orientation to coaching

In the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2022), a value is defined as "a moral, social, or aesthetic principle accepted by an individual or society as a guide to what is good, desirable, or important". In other words, values refer to the worth, usefulness, or importance attached to our actions and their consequences, and therefore they frame the purpose of our behaviors (Stelter, 2017). Values connect our experience, knowledge, beliefs, and actions. As such, values reflect both the explicit and implicit meaning of our actions: values might be or not (and often are not) clearly articulated, and they are central components of our identity. Because of their relevance and role in human behavior and identity, values have been highlighted as a central factor in the coaching process (Palmer & Whybrow, 2019). When the coaching process is focused on the exploration of values, coachees naturally move toward making sense of their life as a consequence of the unfolding of narratives of their identity that occurs in the coaching process itself (Stelter, 2014). In this self-reflexivity process, meaningful dialogues revolve around values (and all related convictions, ambitions, dreams, desires and fears) and create awareness about one's own firm personal foundations and driving forces for action.

Along these lines, Third Generation Coaching approaches—which includes for example narrative-collaborative coaching (Stelter, 2014; Stelter & Law, 2010) and philosophically inspired forms of coaching (Kirkeby, 2009; Sieler, 2014; Spinelli, 2014)—involve a shift in the balance between coach and coachee, and in their reciprocal role within the coaching process: the dialogue partners are 'balanced' and thereby momentarily symmetrical. Coaching becomes embedded in a reflexivity perspective: the emphasis of the coach is on being a fellow human being (Stelter, 2016). Within such approach, and focusing on values and meaning-making, the coaching conversation unfolds as a genuine dialogue (Buber, 1999) between the involved actors. The coaching process is co-creative and collaborative, and both the coach and coachee are experts in their respective domains. Coach and coachee are collaborative partners in the dialogue as it naturally unfolds, and share their experiences, considerations, and reflections in a symmetrical and resonating partnership. In fact, through moments of symmetry and resonance the coaching process can foster true cooperation between the dialogue partners, and cooperation, one of the fundamental interpersonal motivational systems (Liotti & Gilbert, 2011; Liotti & Monticelli, 2014), is at

the basis of the coaching relationship (Bachkirova et al., 2016). Therefore, through cooperation, the dialogue partners engage in self-reflection and shared reflection generating new knowledge and meaning, which in turn leads to a shift in the narrators perspectives (Stelter, 2019).

As such, the coaching dialogue revolves around the meaning of various life experiences, and therefore around the values embedded in them. The standpoint of the coaching process is not the past, nor the future: it is the *present*. The coaching dialogue becomes a reflective process on the identity and self-concept that are experienced in the *hic et nunc* (here and now) and that are negotiated by the dialogue partners who explore key human issues and new interpretations of reality, perspectives on existence, and possibilities of action. This approach to coaching, that moves above and beyond the coachee's specific problems and roles in their systems, ultimately also produces new understanding to problems and challenges that are experienced in the *ibi et tunc* (there and then) by the coachee. Reflecting upon one's own values, beliefs, key aspirations, and the meaning associated to significant experiences, provides a compass—and therefore direction—for one's decisions and behaviors in the everyday life (Stelter, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019; Stelter & Law, 2010). Accordingly, the coaching dialogue should:

a) aim at providing possibilities for meaning making;
b) focus on values as a fundamental condition and quality in human existence that provide a sense of direction in relation to specific goals;
c) create a space for unfolding narratives, as narratives structure an individual's identity and serve as the source of meaning-making by shaping our own perception and understanding of events, actions, other people and ourselves (Stelter, 2014; Stelter & Law, 2010).

In this realm, in coaching psychology Socratic questioning could be reframed as a tool that should foster reflexivity, moments of symmetry, and human companionship among the dialogue partners.

Socrates as a narrative-collaborative dialogue partner/modern coach

Socrates persona

From a classical perspective, Socrates' philosophical method, applied in dialectical processes as the Socratic questioning technique, consisted in the so-called *elenchus*, that is, the critical cross-examination of Socrates' dialogue partner (Vlastos, 1982). In this perspective, Socrates can be understood either: a) as being not committed to any views himself, with his logical and distanced analysis of his partner's view as key (Vlastos, 1982); or b) as committed to his own views and beliefs, with influence or persuasion over his interlocutor(s) as key (Scott, 2002). In this understanding of the Socrates persona, on the one hand, we find a detached and impartial interlocutor focused on the objective analysis of facts, a position that is consistent with first- and second-generation coaching approaches, which are focused mainly on problem solving. On the other hand though, we find no partnership or empathy, and even partiality, a position that is in contrast with any coaching approach (including first- and second-generation approaches), in which the coaching relationship plays an central role, and impartiality of the coach is a cornerstone of the coaching process (Bachkirova et al., 2016; Henderson & Palmer, 2021; Palmer & Whybrow, 2019).

However, this is only a partial understanding of the Socrates persona. As clearly reflected in his ethics described in both Plato's *Apology* (West & Plato, 1979) and *Gorgias*

(Hardwick & Emlyn-Jones, 1984), Socrates himself often proactively fostered reflexivity, moments of symmetry, and human companionship in his dialogues (for an overview of Plato's interpretation of Socrates, see Fine, 2019). In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates portrays himself as a friend of the Athenians, whom he has always striven to assist through 'moral education' (West & Plato, 1979). Also, Socrates calls his interlocutor 'friend' repeatedly in many dialogues. Furthermore, Socrates was often fostering an actual 'partnership' with his interlocutors, as he was seriously engaged in supporting them: in fact, as expressed by Socrates himself in the following except from *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Burnyeat et al., 1990), Socrates regards even his critical cross-examination a partnership process, called 'midwifery' (Grimes & Uliana, 1998), a process that aims to benefit his interlocutors through helping them to bring to light admirable truths discovered by themselves from within:

> "The only difference [between my trade and that of midwives] is that my patients are men, not women, and my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is experiencing birth pangs. (…) I am like the midwife, in that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom. The common reproach is true, that, though I question others, I can myself bring nothing to light because there is no wisdom in me...Of myself I have no sort of wisdom, nor has any discovery ever been born to me as the child of my soul. (…) The many admirable truths which they [Those who frequent my company at first appear] bring to birth have been discovered by themselves from within. (*The Theaetetus of Plato, [148e])*

This idea of Socrates' partnership with the other could be found also in the work of the Danish existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who was inspired by Socrates' term *maieutikós* (midwifery) in describing his own authorship as an attempt to meet his readers as a servant and partner (Kierkegaard, 1848). With this understanding in mind, Kierkegaard can be understood as the first *third generation coach*.

Socrates boêtheia and partnership in his dialogues: collaborative and co-creative orientation of Socrates' ethics

This viewpoint of Socrates as a dialogue partner is further supported by a key concept only recently discussed in Plato's *Gorgias*: the concept of *boêtheia*, which means 'protection', 'help', 'assistance', and which clearly denotes the other-oriented ethics of Socrates. In this conceptualization, Socrates aimed at indirectly 'protecting' his interlocutors through his life-long attempt to serve (*boêthein*) Apollo—or, in other words, through is rationalism (Catana, 2018, 2022). From a coaching psychology perspective, this means that unveiling the truths already existing within his dialogue partners was achieved via his questioning method, which was in turn only possible thanks to the partnership Socrates was creating with his interlocutors through the questioning itself. As such, unfolding the truth through questioning was the practical goal, which was nested however within a meta-goal: to create partnership with the dialogue partner, so that two fellow human beings would help each other to unfold truths they already had within themselves, which in turn would allow them and to grow as human beings:

> "Socratic self-care also involves a more positive moral dimension: to make one's soul as good as possible (Apology [30b])" (Kahn, 1997)

In practice, the one-to-one dialogue, which Socrates insisted upon, was fitted uniquely to unfold affects and empathy. His dialogue was not reducible to a mere logical challenge: rather, as recognized by many scholars such as the Greek historian Diogenes Laertius and the Italian Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino, it was a dialogue that took the character of Socrates' interlocutor (Diogenes Laertius & Mensch, 2018) and the personal relationship between them (Ficin & Farndell, 2016) as main points of departure.

Therefore, according to the abovementioned line of reasoning, Socrates can be considered a precursor of modern coaching, as he partnered with others through meaningful dialogues into self-insights and into the unfolding of values and identity. Essentially, thanks to his focus on disentangling problem-specific truths, his helping and partnership approach, his attention on the character of his interlocutors, and his interest in virtues and values, Socrates fostered a context in which an ancient version of the coaching relationship would naturally unfold. In turn, the dialectic space he created allowed for self-reflection, shared reflection and shift in narrators' perspectives, which in turn generated the unfolding of the dialogue partners' values and identities. In this respect, Socrates can be considered a precursor of modern coaching.

Socratic questioning for meaningful dialogues

According to this holistic understanding of the Socrates persona and of the use of his method, Socratic questioning can be re-interpreted within a Third Generation Coaching framework, and therefore aligned to a post-modern perspective. The main re-interpretation pertains to the goal of Socratic questioning, which can be further developed into a specific goal (lower order) and a meta-goal or purpose (higher order). The specific goal of Socratic questioning is unchanged and pertains to finding solutions to problems and to provide goals to be achieved, through the objective discernment of a given issue. Through Socratic questioning, coachees detach from specific challenges and problems and develop a different, more objective understanding over a given matter so that, in turn, they can overcome it (Kennerley et al., 2016).

However, exactly because of this epistemological standpoint, Socratic questioning can be embedded in a narrative-collaborative coaching practice as it can create the pre-conditions that allow for the process of meaning-making to occur. First, meaning is created through the sharing of (implicit and explicit) experiences and perspectives of the dialogue partners about a given matter—lower order goal. Second, meaning is shaped in the co-creative and collaborative process occurring in the here and now between the dialogue partners (Stelter, 2014, 2019)—meta-goal. Socrates itself used questioning to help people arrive at universal truths behind their arguments *and* to co-create new knowledge and new meaning, and to reflect upon values in partnership with the other (Catana, 2018, 2022). This occurred first through the combination of analysis of issues and related knowledge, and subsequently through the synthesis and internalization of the new understandings into the dialogue partners' identities. From a coaching psychology perspective, this means first to analyze specific challenges and problems, and then synthetizing them by exploring the values and meaning that they bear *through* the relationship and the experiences with the other unfolding in the here and now of the coaching process.

Hence, the meta-goal (higher order) or true purpose of Socratic questioning can be defined as to create moments of symmetry and resonance among the dialogue partners by revealing the values and meanings hidden behind life experiences via the investigation of the various subject matters conducted in partnership with the other. The coaching actors, through Socratic questioning, can disentangle the value-based contradictions, idiosyncrasies, and dispositions of the involved dialogue partners. In turn, when specific challenges and problems are unraveled repeatedly, the questioning will naturally shifts toward more abstract levels of analysis, where meaning and values behind specific behaviors and experiences of the dialogue partners are explored: in fact, behind explicit problems and challenges, and the related lower-level solutions and goals, implicit values and meaning systems are systematically enacted (David et al., 2013; Grant, 2012; Stelter, 2017). Therefore, through

disentangling specific challenges and issues (lower order goal), it is possible to reflect upon their meaning and unveil one's own values and identity (higher order goal). In this conceptualization, Socratic questioning creates the reflective space through which values are explored and, in turn, dialogue partners' identities are unfolded. As such, Socratic questioning can be used as an effective tool within a Third Generation Coaching perspective, and therefore can be leveraged to create a profound coaching relationship, and in turn foster true, long-lasting change and growth in the actors involved in the coaching process.

Conclusion

The present contribution aim was twofold: a) to help coaching psychology scholars and practitioner alike to reflect upon the challenges and issues arising in the present post-modern society, and how these challenges might affect the coaching practice; and b) to reflect upon how known coaching practices could be implemented to meet these challenges. We believe that many societal processes, such as the narrowing focus on the self and on similar others (Han, 2018b) and the lack of self- and shared-reflexivity (Giddens, 2013), are pushing more and more toward self-isolation and lack of encounter of diversity. These psychological and social processes must be taken into account within the coaching practice, and Third Generation Coaching approaches (Stelter, 2014, 2016, 2019; Stelter & Law, 2010) could provide a philosophical and theoretical foundation for this process to occur. The next step would be to re-frame and update sound methodological approaches and techniques in order to apply effectively these theories in the coaching practices.

Therefore, drawing upon a Third Generation Coaching perspective, we reflected upon the present understating and application of Socratic questioning, suggesting a higher-order, long-term purpose for it. Because meaningful dialogues are collaborative and co-creative in nature and emerge when moments of symmetry and resonance are experienced by the dialogue partners, we investigated the meaning and goals of Socratic questioning from a novel perspective: namely, the Socrates partnership (*boêtheia*; Catana, 2018, 2022; Hardwick & Emlyn-Jones, 1984; West & Plato, 1979) and focus on helping his dialogue partners to find truths from within (Burnyeat et al., 1990; Grimes & Uliana, 1998; Kahn, 1997; West & Plato, 1979). Accordingly, we suggest that the high-order purpose of Socratic questioning is to create partnership, moments of symmetry, and resonance in the dialogue partners, which allows for meaning-making, self-reflection, shared-reflection, and shift in narrators' perspectives. In this light, Socratic questioning will help fostering long-lasting, value-based personal growth in all dialogue partners, and will therefore be an effective coaching tool embedded in a coaching proactive more aligned to meet the present societal challenges faced by coachees and coaches alike.

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