

Fresh perspectives on what developmental coaching means to coaches: *Preliminary Findings.*

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CONTEXT

Adult development theory has a long and rich tradition and recently there has been growing interest in how such theory can be practically applied in the context of *developmental coaching*. Despite interest in developmental coaching, a significant gap exists within the academic literature about what is developmental coaching, the processes involved, and how it affects people (both in the coaching relationship and beyond). This study addresses this gap by exploring the reflected meaning of developmental coaching for seven coaches as part of a major leadership coaching program. The leadership program and research study were informed by theory, research, and practice from subject-object theory, positive psychology, mindfulness, dialogue, and complex adaptive systems thinking.

OUR MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the reflected meaning of developmental coaching for coaches involved in the leadership program?

METHODOLOGY

For the research study we chose narrative inquiry as our research approach. This was because we wanted to explore a rich description of coaches' meaning-making in relation to their coaching practice. We also know that some knowledge can be generated through people's stories and texts that is not easily accessible through quantitative methodologies. As Einstein said: *"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."*

For two years, a team of seven experienced coaches (who participated in about 700 coaching conversations) were involved in group coaching supervision and coaching practice as part of a major leadership development program that took place in the legal and healthcare industries. Coaches were interviewed about their perspectives on developmental coaching, including the characteristics of developmental coaching, developmental coaching processes, and how developmental coaching affects people.

Interviews were conducted where coaches' stories were captured using open-ended questions in individual interviews. These transcribed participant interviews were then analyzed for key themes.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The descriptive statements and preliminary findings below offer perspectives on what developmental coaching looks like, and what impact developmental coaching has on both the coach and person being coached. The nine initial descriptive statements were subsequently formed in to three key themes in response to the main research question.

Initial descriptive statements: Developmental Coaching....

Is hard to define and elusive, but there is something about attending to potential for broader, deeper, less bounded and more holistic change.

Is a way of thinking, a mindset, or a lens that has some paradoxical aspects of it in terms of making theories, frames, lens open to challenge.

Involves new, different and unexpected perspectives and possibilities which may enable transformational change; when a person experiences themselves and the world in a bigger, richer way so that they can reflect back on their different and earlier self.

Can be a more liberating, expansive process of co-creation; where non-expert stance is taken up.

Is holistic; meaning the whole person, and inclusive of the coach bringing more of who they are into the coaching space.

The outcomes are not always towards goals but have an emergent quality, which can be both an exciting and anxiety provoking process.

Is not always what people want or need, but seems to work for people with a readiness for development, as in the case when people are in transition.

Reflective practice, including coaching supervision, is important for deeper awareness and greater intentionality.

Gives us a bigger, broader, and different (albeit partial) perspective on working with context such as culture, historical timelines, multiple realities, assumptions, and perspectives.

A process of working with tension

Tension within the coach
Tension within the system.

"you may develop in coaching and you find more of your own voice and become like more comfortable in your own skin, so that was development but was that good? That might put such strain on your relationship, that might put such strain on you and the organisation where you get marginalized because in the past you were a reliable team member, loyal, kind of 'yes' person and no longer are you that person."

PRELIMINARY THEMES

Enabling the human spirit to see itself

Awareness of both a stable, 'eternal' self,
and an emergent, developing self

The importance of the witnessing of this by another
in a space of 'realistic non-judgment'

"I think the human condition loves to be understood by somebody else, somebody understands me, and that means so much. It means that I'm not weird; it means that I am able to be understood. It may not even mean .. I don't need to be felt that I am okay but, I still love being understood at some basic level because, why? Because it helps me understand my self and I like that."

An expansive process of working in a co-created way

Holding expertise lightly
Companioning for the
journey - cocreation and learning together

"It's very humanistic, person centred, a two-way journey, while the focus is on the client and their needs, goals, intentions, there's a real two-wayness in that bringing your full self, your authenticity, your mindfulness to that coaching session and overall relationship that helps to create that broader frame potentially"

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