An Integrated Model of Developmental Coaching™: Researching New Ways of Coaching and Coach Education

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In this paper, I report research on a novel coaching model, that of Developmental Coaching™. The model is based on 50 years of research in adult development over the lifespan, specifically the work of Jean Piaget, Robert Kegan, Michael Basseches, Elliott Jaques, and Otto Laske (see www.cdremsite.com). Overall, I conclude that coaching narrowly focused on performance rather than mental growth misconstrues the human potential as well as the potential of coaching practice and education. I conclude, in addition, that the outcome of coaching strongly depends on the coach’s own developmental level.

The paper comprises four parts, A to D. In A, I outline the raison d’etre of a coaching model focused on developmental potential rather than mere performance, and introduce the research questions. In B, I describe the research set-up including subject acquisition, data gathering, and data analysis methodology employed. In C, I report and discuss the findings of the research, while in D, I draw conclusions for the application of Developmental Coaching™ to coaching practice and coach training.

A. Introduction

1. Purpose of the Research

Before attending to the research questions, the findings, and their interpretation, it is important to understand the PURPOSE of the research. Five primary purposes stand out:

- First, to broaden the foundations of present coaching practice and coach education from an adult-developmental perspective, in terms of which coaching is an intervention in clients’ adult development over the lifespan.
- Second, to develop new resources for educating coaches based on validated public-domain theories of adult development.
- Third, to understand in greater depth how clients experience coaching based on their present developmental level.
- Fourth, to make coaches more effective by making them more knowledgeable about their clients’ Structure of Interpretation (that is, the way the world ‘shows up’ for their clients).
- Fifth, to foster coaching tools helping clients attain a higher level of self generation and self correction.

2. Focus of Developmental Coaching

It is my persistent finding in practicing developmental coaching that coaches can be effective only to the extent that they know their material. In this regard, coaching is like sculpting or music composition: one has to know one's material. In this study, I show that ‘material’ equates to the way ‘the world shows up for the client,’ or Structure of Interpretation (Flaherty, 1999). In 1998, I began to study executive coaching, intent on
finding and spelling out the few developmental variables that determine clients’ Structure of Interpretation. The purpose was to strengthen clients’ long-term competence. In this short informal summary of my findings, I address the four developmental variables I have found to be of crucial importance for achieving coaching goals. Since these four variables are interrelated and regard the way people make meaning of experiences in life and at work, they are said to make up clients’ Structure of Interpretation. I call these variables developmental in the sense of developmental science, of capabilities developing predictably and step-wise over an individual's adult life span, between 25 and 100 years of age.

This paper explains briefly how a Structure of Interpretation is defined, how it is determined for a sample of six executives, and what follows from developmental findings for giving feedback, enrolling clients, engaging in coaching conversations, and determining the outcome of coaching. I conclude with suggestions for coaching practice and opportunities for developmental coach education.

3. Distinction of Behavioral vs. Developmental Variables of Coaching

Behavioral variables of coaching spell out what an individual does, while developmental variables describe what an individual is, or his/her present state of being. Evidently, the two classes of variables are interrelated, namely in such a way that being determines doing. Developmental variables thus describe what an individual can potentially do, and what is presently “over their head.” As a consequence, we can speak of the Structure of Interpretation as determining an individual’s capability ceiling. This ceiling is in constant evolution which is referred to as “adult development over the life span.” Adult development leads to a point where the person’s unique developmental potential has been fully realized (except for cases where the potential is so huge that the person cannot realize it during his/her life time).

4. Two Aspects of an Individual’s Capability Ceiling

In developmental coaching it is evidently of primary interest to know what an individual’s present capability ceiling is, and how and in what direction that ceiling is likely to be 'raised' as the individual continues living and working. Technically, this is determined by the CDREM™ methodology (Corporate Development Readiness and Effectiveness Measure, see www.cdremsite.com). CDREM™ addresses both the behavioral and developmental aspects of an individual’s capability. This research is restricted to the developmental aspects assessed by CDREM™.

The research addresses two crucial dimensions of adult development over the life span: resources for self generation and self correction. By ‘self generation’ is meant the ability to renew oneself by developing a new self image, finding new inner resources within oneself, letting go of assumptions and values no longer appropriate or useful, and being aware of one’s developmental potential and risk. By ‘self correction’ is meant the ability to conceptualize and scan the environment in an increasingly systemic manner, flexibly alter one’s courses of action, analyze one’s own habits and limits, and become a continuous learner. Clearly, these two aspects of the individual’s capability ceiling are interrelated: you need to have certain cognitive resources to self generate, and you need
to have certain resources of self awareness to make use of the cognitive resources you possess.

5. Form of the Structure of Interpretation

‘Structure of Interpretation’ is nothing mysterious. It is a system of interrelated developmental and behavioral variables that determine “how the world shows up for the client.” Since how the world shows up for somebody constrains his/her options, I also refer to Structure of Interpretation as clients’ present capability ceiling. The Structure of Interpretation has the following form:

Insert Table 1 here.

As shown, Structure of Interpretation is composed of:
- A Self Awareness Profile (SAP), including developmental level and risk-clarity-potential index (RCP) that determine resources for self generation.
- A Complexity Awareness Profile (CAP), comprising cognitive level and systemic thinking index (STI) that determine resources for self correction.
- A Behavioral Profile (consisting of three indexes) that explains why an individual’s performance presently is what it is.

All research questions of this study refer to the first two profiles. We say that the developmental profiles (BEING) determine an individual’s presently applied capability (behavioral profile or DOING).

6. Three Research Questions

In this study, three main research questions were asked:
- What is the Structure of Interpretation of the six executives involved in the study?
- In what way is the executives’ “change story” (story of how coaching has “changed’ them) a reflection of their Structure of Interpretation?
- What prediction can be made regarding benefit of coaching due to executives’ Structure of Interpretation and change story?

The first question, regarding Structure of Interpretation, can be spelled out in four subquestions, one each for the four developmental variables measured through CDREM™ (Corporate Development Readiness and Effectiveness Measure):
1.1 What is the executives’ level of mental growth?
1.2 What is the executives’ developmental risk and potential?
1.3 What is the executives’ index of ‘systemic thinking’
1.4 What is the executives’ balance of critical vs. constructive thinking?

The second question, regarding executives’ change story, is focused on the difference between behavioral change and developmental advance (or regression):
2.1 In what way is behavioral change through coaching determined by executives’ developmental level and potential?
2.2 Is there congruence between executives’ Structure of Interpretation and the type of behavioral change they are reporting?
2.3 Is the experience of developmental advance typical for higher, rather than lower, developmental levels?

The third question, regarding developmental predictions of coaching outcome, deals with the benefits of developmental intake as a basis of coaching practice:

3.1 What prediction(s) regarding the client’s coaching experience and coaching outcome can be made, given a particular Structure of Interpretation?
3.2 What coaching plan can be systematically derived from the developmental findings?
3.3 How can the executive best be enrolled in the coaching, based on his/her Structure of Interpretation?
3.4 How may developmentally provocative coaching conversations be conducted, to help the client realize his/her developmental potential.

B. Research Setup and Methodology

1. General Notions

This study investigates the change story of six high-level executives, named by their coach as experiencing developmental advance, not just behavioral change. Coaches act as informants regarding their client and his/her host organization. Executives included in the study have been in coaching for 6 months to 3 years. All executives voiced that coaching had helped them “reframe” their self-image and function in the organization. Two interviews were administered to the participants: first, Laske’s Professional Agenda Interview and, second (one week later) Lahey et al.’s Subject Object Interview (both of which are part of CDREM™). Both of these are tools for developmental ‘intake;’ they have been validated in developmental research.

2. Complexity Awareness Interview

In terms of content, the first one-hour interview is focused on the way in which executives function in the organization, both in terms of self and role. The interview focuses on executives’ cognitive profile, more specifically, their capability of thinking systemically (which in CDREM™ indicates their current potential capability). The interview reveals the executive’s complexity awareness profile (CAP). It is based on three guide questions addressing changes in three domains or “Houses:” the Task House, the Self House, and the Organizational House (in this order), as shown below:

Insert Table 2 here.

Interviewing starts in the Task House, and proceeds to the Self and Organizational Houses (Laske, 1999b).

3. Self Awareness Interview

The second one-hour interview is focused on self awareness. In terms of content, the second interview makes use of ten projective verbal “prompts” written on index cards, from which executives select whatever topic is most salient for them, in an order that suits their interview agenda.

Insert Table 3 here.
By conversing about 3-4 of these topics, executives reveal their Self Awareness Profile (SAP). The interview focuses on executives’ way of constructing the world for themselves (their meaning making), which in CDREM™ indicates their future potential capability.

Both interviews are confidential, and are recorded for the purpose of evaluation (“scoring”) according to CDREM™ criteria. These criteria are focused on developmental potential. In terms of developmental coaching, assessing behavioral profile (present performance) without also assessing potential capability is counterproductive. After all, a client’s state of BEING determines his or her DOING.

C. Discussion of Research Outcomes
Research Question #1: Structure of Interpretation
1. Findings of the Study Contextualized

Developmental variables describe a non-linear stepwise progression from adolescent to mature adult levels. Between age 25 and 100, adults pass through up to 16 levels of self awareness, and a large number of system thinking configurations. In order to appreciate the findings of this study, the following sobering statistics regarding adult-developmental attainment is of interest:

Insert Table 4 here.

As shown, only 25% of adults reach self awareness level 4 (self authoring), while less than 10% reach self awareness level 5 whose hallmark is leadership capability.

2. Group Findings

In order to convey the meaning of the findings, I comment on the group as a whole. In compact form, the executive group scored as follows:

Insert Table 5 here.

3. Study Outcomes Seen From A Coaching Perspective

- Developmental level: Since all participants reach level 4, of self authoring, a primary coaching task is to increase self generative capacity by assisting clients in standing back from their own value system, emotions, and assumptions, to increase self awareness.

- Developmental potential: 4 out of 6 executives show a developmental potential larger than risk of ‘regressing’ to a lower developmental level (under conditions of stress or toxic organizational climate). Since purely behavioral coaching remains unaware of developmental potential, it is likely to waste it.

- Systemic Grasp: Only 2 out of 6 executives show a complexity awareness profile commensurate with their developmental level (S5 & S6). As a consequence, a majority of clients is less accomplished in their interpersonal (SAP) than their task competences (CAP).

- Critical vs. constructive thinking: Executives show a wide range of complexity awareness. All of them show “cognitive imbalance” that leads to overemphasizing
either change or stability, with an attendant lack of ability to think systematically and take multiple viewpoints.

Research Question 2: “Change Story”

4. Influence of Structure of Interpretation on Change Story

- Executives’ change story (their experience of changes through coaching) tended to reflect their differing Structure of Interpretation, indicating that coaching is experienced differently depending on the client’s developmental level.
- Executives with a higher developmental level (S5) and systemic grasp (S4-S6) used coaching as a medium for self development, not simply skills development. However, executives did not truly “own” their developmental potential, due to the behavioral coaching they were engaged in.

D. Conclusions from Findings (Answers to Research Question #3)

1. Conclusions for Coaching Practice

1. On the basis of additional, behavioral data, a precise and realistic coaching plan can be formulated.
2. Since the benefit of coaching is a function of developmental potential (readiness), lack of insight into clients’ Structure of Interpretation reduces coaching effectiveness.
3. Since a client’s Structure of Interpretation is prognostic, developmental intake enhances the ability to formulate realistic coaching plans and lead coaching conversations commensurate with clients’ developmental level.
4. Enrolling clients and giving feedback are potentiated when carried out on the basis of their specific Structure of Interpretation (as material of the coaching).
5. The Structure of Interpretation clarifies what areas of developmental deficit can most supportively be addressed by introducing behavioral stretch goals.
6. Combining developmental with behavioral assessment (as done in CDREM™) facilitates pinpointing areas of behavioral functioning where developmental potential can most supportively be promoted.
7. The process and flow of developmental coaching differs from established coaching practice in that it begins with a developmental intake and ends with a developmental assessment, as shown below.

   Insert Figure 1 here.

2. Consequences for Coach Training

Consequences for coach training straightforwardly follow from the findings. The five most important are:
1. Coach Training focused on bringing about behavioral change rather than also mental growth (developmental advance) misconstrues the human potential as well as the potential of coaching practice and education.
2. Since coaching outcome strongly depends on the coach’s developmental level, instruction in developmental coaching is a must for coaches, especially master coaches.
3. Instruction in developmental intake, listening, feedback, enrollment and coaching proper enhances coaching effectiveness as well as the professional status of coaches.
References
Tables and Figures.

Table 1. Dimensions of the Structure of Interpretation.
Table 2. Domains of Complexity Awareness.
Table 3. Self Awareness Prompts, Second Interview.
Table 4. Statistics of Adult Developmental Attainment.
Table 5. Study Outcomes.

Figure 1. Process and Flow of Developmental Coaching.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future potential capability</th>
<th>Behavioral Correlates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self awareness profile (SAP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Developmental level</td>
<td>Positioning of self in relation to others; degree of self-centeredness of value system and emotional reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Risk-clarity-potential index {RCP}</td>
<td>Degree of self confidence; predictability; ability to take risks; ability to take responsibility for own situation and decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current potential capability</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complexity awareness profile (CAP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Systemic grasp [STI]</td>
<td>Cogency of observations and judgments; ability to reflect on own assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cognitive balance</td>
<td>Ability to suspend judgment, take multiple perspectives, and form a rounded systemic picture of what is going on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applied capability</th>
<th>Not assessed in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral profile (NPP)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Energy sink</td>
<td>Index measuring gaps between subjective need and organizational pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Frustration index</td>
<td>Index measuring frustration on the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Effectiveness index</td>
<td>An index of performance ability at a particular level of organizational accountability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The three profiles correspond to three aspects of human capability: future potential capability (SAP), current potential capability (CAP), and applied capability (present performance).
** Behavioral indexes are determined based on questions regarding Self Conduct, Task Focus, and Emotional Intelligence.
Table 2. Domains of Complexity Awareness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self House</th>
<th>Task House</th>
<th>Organizational House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self and Other Awareness</td>
<td>Integration of role and self</td>
<td>Leadership in organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Self Awareness Prompts, Second Interview.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Accomplishment/success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Outside of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Important to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Strong stand, conviction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Taking risks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Statistics of Adult-Developmental Attainment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Developmental Levels*</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>% Attained**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Self aware (‘leader’)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Self authoring (‘manager’)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other dependent (‘contributor’)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In Kegan’s nomenclature (1982), there are four intermediate levels between subsequent main levels.
** About 1% reach levels higher than level 5.
Table 5. Study Outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Developmental level* ['Level 4' = 'self-authoring']</th>
<th>Developmental Risk vs. Potential**</th>
<th>Critical vs. Constructive Thinking (Cr:CO)**</th>
<th>Systemic Grasp****</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>R &gt; P</td>
<td>Cr &gt; Co</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>R &lt; P</td>
<td>Cr &gt; Co</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>R &gt; P</td>
<td>Cr &gt; Co</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>R &lt; P</td>
<td>Cr &lt; Co</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>1 step beyond level 4</td>
<td>R &lt; P</td>
<td>Cr &gt; Co</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>R &lt; P</td>
<td>Cr &lt; Co</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*’Level 4’ indicates the developmental position of self authoring which requires an integrated value system defining the individual’s integrity.

**’Risk’ means risk of falling back to the lower adjacent level, while ‘Potential’ is the likelihood of reaching the subsequent developmental level.

*** Gaps between critical and constructive thinking characterize “challenged” systems thinking.

**** ‘Systemic grasp’ indicates ability to think holistically and systemically, and take multiple perspectives.
Commentary:
As shown, in developmental coaching:
- The Structure of Interpretation is the focal material of developmental coaching, in giving feedback, enrollment, leading coaching conversations, and final assessment.
- Coaching is terminated by an assessment that determines whether a developmental advance has or has not occurred, and in what form.
- In this assessment, the initial Structure of Interpretation serves as a base line.
- *If this procedure is followed for every coaching contract, entire corporate coaching programs can be precisely assessed in terms of effectiveness.*