27.1 INTRODUCTION

Coaching and counselling are both forms of expertise offered to individuals in work situations. In coaching, executives or entrepreneurs seek a second opinion, devil’s advocate or sounding board. The subject matter is their personal effectiveness in a broad sense, and so their strategies, policies and interventions are scrutinized. In counselling, the focus is on coping strategies, career development, relations, competencies and well-being at work. Curative interventions can be indicated by definite complaints, whereas preventive interventions are more general and directed at the future.

In practice, the person in his or her work context is central. Both coaching and counselling can include catharsis, redefining situations, behavioural training and change, learning, coping and prevention. As far as the counsellor or coach is concerned, boundaries can be fluid, though limiting conditions vary.

Clients use a different perspective: an individual seeks counselling because the organization has become a source of stress, whereas in coaching the client defines problems in terms of choices and options. The client for counselling tends to define his or her role as reactive, whereas the client for coaching claims a proactive stance. In counselling the client feels relatively powerless vis-à-vis the organization and perceives the relation with the change agent as one of receiving help. The client for coaching tends to feel more powerful towards the organization, and perceives the relation with the change agent as one of purchasing additional know-how.

Whatever the starting position, the relationship with the consultant evolves in interaction with the client’s dealings with the organization(s). Depending on developments, interpretations can be redefined, and emphasis can shift from stress reduction and coping to the exploration and defining of choices, and to the building of desired future states.

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1 It should be made clear from the beginning what will be part of the coaching relation and what will be the policy if other professionals need to be consulted, for instance if therapy is indicated.

27.2 THEORETICAL CONTEXT

27.2.1 Dynamics of Problem Solving in Organizations

Organizations can be conceived as dynamic systems involved in processes of individual and collective problem solving. Some of these problems are seen as inherent in the normal functioning of the organization. Other problems are taken as signals that something is amiss. Two dimensions are important for this framework in organizations. The first is the responsibility taken for problems; the second is the responsibility taken for solutions (Brickman et al., 1985). Together, these dimensions define four models of helping and coping, each with their own consequences for the pattern of relationships that ensues (Figure 27.1).

- In the **moral model**, responsibility on both dimensions is high. This model does not completely rule out the influence of external circumstances or preclude receiving help, but it does underline the basic responsibility of the individual for both problems and solutions.
- In the **compensation model**, the individual is not held accountable for problems. Problems can be the result of social, economic or technological developments outside the individual’s range of influence. However, in order to work out solutions, the individual needs to stop deploring these circumstances and start taking responsibility for improvement.
- In the **enlightment model**, the basic assumption is that the individual is to blame for problems, but is unable to take responsibility for solutions. A leader, doctrine or other “higher” agency is needed to find a way out.
- In the **medical model**, the individual is not held responsible for problems or solutions. Problems are blamed on others and solutions are expected from others. In the medical model the person is defined as weak and helpless; in consequence, he or she is expected to act in a docile way and take the “medicine” prescribed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution of responsibility for problems</th>
<th>Attribution of responsibility for solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral model</td>
<td>Enlightenment model</td>
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<td>LOW</td>
<td>LOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compensatory model</td>
<td>Medical model</td>
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Figure 27.1 Four models of helping and coping
Psychological Context

In regular organizational functioning, these dimensions and models can be used to describe and understand the psychological context in which people do their work. For instance, someone who occupies a low position on both dimensions (assigns himself or herself to the medical mode), does not feel very responsible for either problems or solutions in the organization. Other people cause the problems, other people (the mysterious “they”) must see to it that problems are solved. The person feels that he or she has little power in the organization, or is justified in not becoming too involved in the organization’s concerns. In the long term, this psychological state can lead to dependency, discontent and revolt or to “letting go internally”: although the person may still be present in the organization, he or she is only going through the motions of fulfilling their obligations. Another risk, if this position is adopted for a longer time, is that energy gets turned away from creating desired changes, and goes instead into the legitimizing of inaction.

We can contrast the previous position with the situation in which a person feels highly responsible for both problems and solutions (assigns himself or herself to the moral mode). People who tend towards this position quite often develop into valued leaders or employees in key positions, but also run fairly high risks regarding stress and burnout. Because they feel responsible, others in the organization find it relatively easy to burden them with extra assignments, which they find hard to refuse or defuse. In the long run, people in this position run the risk of the “Atlas syndrome”: feeling disillusioned because they have been burdened with the world’s troubles while others are having an easy time. Taking blame for what one really could not have prevented can also lead to depression, a feeling of being trapped or other destructive consequences. For instance, think of the situation where people tell a patient with a terrible disease that “deep down” he must have had a desire for this to happen. People who assign themselves to the enlightenment mode usually have high guilt feelings. They blame themselves for problems, but at the same time they feel relatively powerless to find solutions. For the individual this is an uncomfortable position. The search for the right leader or agent who can show the way can lead to new disillusionments. Long-term dependency and intensified self-blame are the risks in this position. These pose a threat to effective functioning.

Finally, people who take the compensation position recognize the various external sources which generate problems. At the same time they take responsibility for working at solutions. This psychological state allows people to tackle complicated social and organizational problems and sustain long-term efforts for change. There is a slight risk of carrying the position to extremes, i.e. creating insider–outsider patterns where all the problems are blamed on others while the self or insider group takes credit for “progress”. However, this risk applies only to extreme situations.

Reactions

It is important to realize that the pattern of influence in interaction moves diagonally across the model. In other words, in a relation between A and B, if A occupies a particular position in the model, B is pushed to react in the mode diagonally opposed to A’s position. So, for instance, if a leader takes the psychological position that is described as the moral mode
followers are pushed to react according to the medical mode. To a certain extent, desired
behaviour can be elicited by choosing the corresponding mode (diagonally opposite) in the
model.

Organizational Structure

A second way in which the model can be applied is for the diagnosis of organizational
structure. What is the pattern of formally assigned responsibilities to individuals and groups?

Is this pattern the optimal choice\(^2\) in regard to the relationships and interpretations it will
generate? What will be the long-term effects for morale, motivation and initiative in the
organization if this pattern is left unchanged?

Next, one can determine whether the parties concerned actually have the means (such as
discretionary power, resources, personnel, know-how) to fulfill the responsibilities assigned
to them. Many tensions in organizations spring from paradoxical or double-bind situations,
where people are held accountable (or made to feel responsible) for results which they can
only marginally affect.

For instance, it is well recognized that responsibility tends to be unevenly distributed in
organizations, with high concentrations at the top. Top-level executives and management
are usually held accountable for both problems and solutions regarding the whole firm. But
the problem of global market failure, for instance, can hardly be laid at the door of the top
management of a single firm. Organization members will indeed rarely blame management
in such cases, but they will look to them for solutions and expect them to take responsibility
and “do the best they can”, given the crisis situation.

In the face of discrepancies between accountability and actual influence, the area of
(potential) effectiveness needs to be defined, at the individual, team and organizational levels.
Situational givens need to be recognized, or new venues for influence found. The result of
such an operation is not just separating ideology from fact, or better organizational results
or less guilty and stressed-out employees. By pinpointing the exact locations of influence
and non-influence, the firm gains accurate leverage where it is possible and necessary.

Balancing Responsibility

Analysis of various situations and relations can be helpful in arriving at a better balance
between groups and concerns in an organization. For instance, analysis might reveal that
a leader held subordinates responsible for problems, while taking all responsibility for
solutions on himself. In this way, he is putting himself in the position of “rescuer” while
reducing his staff to “helpless followers” (enlightenment model). Subordinates might feel
that the only way they can clear themselves from blame is by following their leader un-
questioningly. At first, this may appear gratifying to the leader, but the precedent is set for a
future where leadership is expected to provide all solutions and is deprived of much-needed
critical feedback.

\(^2\) The formal responsibilities are usually assigned from the need to get certain tasks done or goals achieved. They seldom get
scrutinized from the viewpoint of relationships generated. However, since they do influence these relations, long-term effects
will ensue and can be quite different from what was intended.
Research brings to light another imbalance sometimes found in organizations where leaders and top management, although formally accountable for problems and solutions, feel that rules and social norms are for the others (they are “above” the law) and actually behave irresponsibly or violate general codes of conduct. These effects are attributed to the “metamorphic aspects of power” (Kipnis, 1976; Mitchell, 1994), the phenomenon that people in power positions tend to believe in their own superiority and to devalue subordinates. Such attitudes can become permanent strategies for the individuals concerned, and cause much harm to people and relations both in the firms and outside.

To summarize, the simple two-dimensional model presented here can be used in a number of ways:

1. To understand and describe the psychological context in which the individual at work is functioning.
2. To chart the system of formally assigned responsibilities, or the structure of a group or organization. The structure can be analysed according to the correspondence of responsibilities and means, leading to greater leverage and effectiveness.
3. To check whether individuals and groups actually feel responsible for the problems or solutions formally assigned to them.
4. The model can also be used to analyse the extent to which individuals and groups hold each other accountable for problems and solutions, and so point up discrepancies in expectations, or between expectations and formal positions.
5. Finally, the model can of course be applied to the relation between the client and the consultant in coaching or counselling. To what extent is the client held responsible for the problems described? To what extent is the client stimulated to take responsibility for solutions? Which interpretational mould offers the best perspective for the coaching relation and the client’s future development in a work context? It is important for the coach to keep in mind that there are no absolutes in “good” or “evil” involved in these models. Which model is an appropriate choice depends on the psychological situation of the client at the time of intervention. A coach or consultant needs to take into account how a person interprets his own situation—refusing to do this can mean losing the client altogether, since he will feel he is not being taken seriously or that he is “misunderstood”. The same goes for organizational change operations. If they are to be effective, they need to take account of the psychological “reality” adopted by their clients and tailor their approach to fit their actual current interpretation. Once they have entered into a relation with the client, of course, they can start to plot the desired and desirable development with the client.

To summarize, positions in organizations differ according to the responsibility assigned for problems and for solutions. Individuals differ in the ways in which they interpret their own and other people’s functioning in terms of these dimensions. In the course of time, people can change or adapt their interpretations, for instance as a result of specific events, role transitions or critical events. The coach or counsellor can assist in analysing positions and interpretations, and help find limiting elements. As the client starts to realize how these limiting elements influence both actual options and concrete behaviour, the motivation to find more promising ways of interpreting the situation and to explore new alternatives can take hold.

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3 For instance, the success of organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous or WeightWatchers is that they take account of the interpretations favoured by their (prospective) clients and incorporate them into their operations.
27.3 THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The topic of culture has been covered from a broad range of disciplines and perspectives. However, the most influential theorist on organizational culture is Schein (1985), who in his turn, based much of his work on Parsons. Schein holds a broad view of organizational culture, encompassing multiple phenomena. These phenomena range from fairly superficial, highly visible aspects of culture to the more central and harder to determine characteristics. Visible signs of organizational culture such as behavioural codes and style of presentation form the outer layer of culture. More centrally, we find the organizational “folklore” (who were/are the heroes, who were/are the villains, which major feats are important in its history), followed by explicit norms and values. The core of culture is formed by the “taken-for-granted assumptions” which give meaning and guide action. These basic assumptions deal with the dual problem of adapting to the environment and at the same time preserving internal integration. Together, they provide the organization’s unique answer to the question of organizational identity and continuity. Basic assumptions are usually heavily influenced by the organization’s founding entrepreneurs. The rules of the game they set store by are incorporated into its basic code, and faithfully observed by second- and third-generation personnel. Through behavioural “modelling”, culture is perpetuated. As in the general culture, organizational culture in due course comes to involve a person’s emotions, feelings and habits. Because of this, culture change is a painful and intrusive process.

27.4 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND STRESS

On the one hand, the coach needs to be able to empathize with the socially constructed reality of a client’s organization. On the other hand, the coach needs to be able to take a critical view of this same culture. There are a number of ways in which a culture can become stressful to members of an organization. Five of these are discussed here:

- The content of the culture can be stress-inducing in and of itself.
- Inconsistencies and internal discrepancies can lead to stress.
- The temporal lag between developments in the organization and its environment, and the culture can be stressful.
- There can be friction between the individual’s values and the culture.
- Leaders can influence culture in unintended ways.

27.4.1 The Content of the Organization’s Culture

The basic assumptions of an organization sometimes carry the seeds of stress in them. For example, if an organization is committed to a strategy of concealing mistakes and covering up errors, this strategy can become a taken-for-granted way of dealing with issues at work. Trying to maintain a positive image for customers can lead to this behaviour. The storefront of perfection creates stresses and strains in the backroom. People strive to maintain “faultless” images. Newcomers quickly learn to avoid asking for advice or admitting to mistakes. The result of this pattern is that large areas of behaviour become undiscussable, thus creating new strains. Since the opportunity to correct errors and to learn
from failures is minimalized, it is only a matter of time before the organization starts to
dysfunction, thereby contributing to more stress for everyone concerned.

A similar example would be an organization where there is a culture of repression and
control, combined with a bureaucratic way of thinking. By laying a heavy emphasis on
accounting for past procedure, members of such an organization become caught up in a
culture of legitimization. In the struggle for “clean bills of health” the actual goals and
results move out of focus. As in the previous example, in due course, errors and failures
will add their momentum to the stress that has already built up over time.

In the coaching situation it is important to provide a “safe” climate, in which the client
can take a new look at the culture where he or she is trying to function. Questions can be
raised and alternatives explored.

27.4.2 Discrepancies and Inconsistencies in the Culture

Every organizational culture has its inconsistencies. In a changing world, new problems must
be confronted and new ways of dealing with them need to be worked out. Implicit, value-
laden systems are tied to feelings and habitual behaviour. They do not change in the same
way or at the same pace as rational and cognitive systems. The fact that people are usually
not conscious of their basic assumptions makes it hard to evaluate them in a rational way.4

As a multi-layered phenomenon, inconsistencies are inherent in culture. There are incon-
sistencies between the conscious ideals (“espoused theory”; see Argyris & Schöon, 1985),
and the shared norms to which we pay lip service, the ancient “dos and don’ts” programmed
into our system, and the way we actually behave. Paradoxes abound: work should be cre-
ative and predictable, co-workers should compete and cooperate, decision making should
be swift, democratic and clear-cut, and so forth.

In the coaching relation, such paradoxes can be located and exposed. The question of
which function they fulfill in the greater scheme of things can be explored. The dynamics
created by the tension of conflicting ideals can be understood and put to work, opening
up new possibilities, first of all for the client himself, and secondly for his staff, workers,
clients and relations.

27.4.3 Failure of the Culture to Keep Pace with Organizational
Developments

Culture is the binding element and plays an important role in the organization’s survival.
Culture is not invariable, but change does not automatically follow structural changes or
new developments. Upholding the same core values can demand quite different measures
in the course of the organization’s life cycle.

For instance, a group of pioneers who know each other and work together on the basis of
mutual trust and commitment can be successful and evolve into a much larger organization.
In the larger organization, more formalized systems of selection, organization and control
will be needed due to the larger scale of operations. Accordingly, new ways of communi-
cating and interacting will need to be learned. What has been taken for granted in the past

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4 Since these are taken for granted, people do not realize how their behaviour is influenced by them.
now leads to friction and misunderstanding. To preserve the valued trust and commitment, new behaviour needs ultimately to become habitual and taken for granted.

Other major changes in organizational development, such as the transition from a functional to a more organic structure, or a decentralization process towards smaller, cost-effective business units, or privatization, can also mean that the original culture becomes in part counterproductive. When management recognizes the problem but lacks (or fails to supplement) expertise as to how cultural change processes are set in motion, this can lead to treating personnel as “disposables”. A large number of employees are laid off and culture change is sought through the selection of new personnel who will (hopefully) fit the new model. For the remaining employees this strategy can be extremely threatening and may disrupt feelings of trust and loyalty towards the firm. Although it is hard to specify the exact cost of such choices, executives tend to agree that the chopping block is “penny-wise, pound-foolish”, when all is taken into account.

In the coaching relation the existing organizational culture is placed in the perspective of desired developments. How does the client see his own desirable future in ten years time? And how does the client see the organization’s desirable future over the same period? What is the ideal scenario, and how realistic is it? In this way a yardstick is provided to evaluate the way in which the culture is developing. If desired, expert guidance can be sought from specialists in culture change.

27.4.4 Friction Between Organizational Culture and Individual Values

Most organizations try to make sure that new personnel will fit in with the desired or existing culture. To this end, they tailor selection procedures and advertising campaigns, and make use of internal training procedures. In spite of these efforts people can and do obtain jobs in firms where the culture diverges from their personal value systems.

Discrepancies can arise through diverging views on how best to realize the organization’s goals, and take the form of a conflict about means. Or people project assumed characteristics on an individual as a result of some external characteristic (for instance, a homosexual “can’t possibly belong in the rugged old boy’s culture”) leading to conflicts about discrimination. Dealing with this type of conflict can take different forms, depending on the power position and the resources the person is able to mobilize. If conditions are favourable, and a person has a strong reason to remain with the firm, the coach can help him to change the culture. On the other hand, a new career move may be a simpler solution.

27.4.5 Unintended Influence by Leaders

Although there are still some CEOs who are firm believers in structure, most people in top management are aware that culture is a major influence on organizational functioning, from which success or failure may depend. Therefore, many leaders use sanctions to reward or discourage certain attitudes, interpretations and behaviour. In this way, they hope to achieve the kind of culture most conducive to their vision of the future. However, the effect leaders have is only partly the result of their conscious efforts. Being a leader entails high visibility.
for subordinates. Employees listen to what their superiors say, and watch what they do and make others do.

They also hear what is left unsaid and notice what is left undone. The conclusions they draw from this total pattern are not always the conclusions their superiors would have them draw. Let us take an example: a chairperson strives to make a committee meeting go forward, paying attention to both content and process. However, his energetic behaviour in taking the lead seems to communicate to others his sense of responsibility for and control over the issues discussed. They react by leaving more responsibility to him. Though the meeting seems efficient and effective, some central issues remain undiscussed and creative content is a great deal less than it could have been.

Often, ideals start out by being explicitly formulated and discussed. Over time, they evolve into shared values, become part of the culture. Finally, they get taken for granted. In the course of time values tend not to come under scrutiny anymore. However, this can mean that counterproductive effects are not recognized.

For instance, the explicit norms that work should be done accurately, and that due procedure should be followed, can lead over time to processes of bureaucratisation where obsolete procedures are followed meticulously to the detriment of all else. Or the espoused value of client-centred behaviour can threaten integration, leading to unintended divergence between teams, and between teams and the organization as a whole (Van Oosterhout, 1990).

Unintended influence by leaders can be explored in the coaching situation. Many clients are leaders, and it is important to check their awareness of these processes. Most people are very aware of the ways in which they are being influenced, but much slower to realize their own impact on others. Role-playing offers the opportunity to bring non-verbal and symbolic behaviours into view and explore whether they enhance what the client is trying to communicate.

27.4.6 Being Nice: Defensive Routines and Paradoxical Communication

A special instance of unintended influence is that of paradoxical communication. The forms discussed here are especially likely to crop up in firms where people try to keep interpersonal relations as pleasant as possible. Paradoxically, these people are creating unpleasantness by trying to avoid it—the aim of their actions is to circumvent painful communications. On an organizational level paradoxical communications evolve into defensive strategies or routines. They have the following characteristics:

1. They are learned through socialization processes in the organization itself.
2. The strategies serve to avoid threatening situations or to save face.
3. Defensive routines are supported by the organizational culture.
4. Defensive routines remain in place despite the turnover of individual personnel.

As a result of defensive routines, the causes of threat or loss of face cannot be dealt with. The threatening condition is obscured from view by the defensive behaviour. The underlying problems cannot be solved. The defensive routines seem to offer protection from threat, but actually serve to maintain it.
Paradoxical communication can be recognized in mixed messages delivered by superiors, for instance: “I have complete confidence in your judgement, but be sure to report to...” (followed by an instruction of control).

The defensive strategy consists of delivering an inconsistent message, either verbally or through inconsistencies between the content and relational level. In this way, the sender pretends that no inconsistency exists. Both the inconsistency in the message and the ignoring of the inconsistency are undiscussable (Argyris, 1991; Argyris & Schön, 1996).

In the coaching situation, the existence of defensive routines in an organization can come to light. A manager wanting to break the pattern of defensive routines in his organization will need help from external advisers. Defensive routines have sprung into being because people felt safer avoiding certain issues. A process of consciousness raising, reframing, training and change, with or without conflict mediation, will be needed to effect real change in this situation.5

### 27.5 COACHING KEY FIGURES IN ORGANIZATIONS

Management coaching of key figures takes place in a one-to-one situation, but is ultimately directed at behaviour in the organization, such as communication, human resource management, functional changes etc. The focus can even be on external relations of the organization. For instance: what should the long-range policy look like? Which agents or firms should be part of the external network? What kind of relations should be formed? What future aims are desirable? Critical transitions in the life cycle of the organization (transition from “entrepreneurial” to growth and consolidation, major market shifts, mergers, acquisitions or joint ventures) can be the occasion for top management to seek guidance or a sounding board.

The whole gamut of problems that form the area of organizational change and the expertise of change agents can also be the subject matter in individual coaching, provided one accepts that the scope of influence is limited. However, there is another crucial difference. The change agent operates in the actual organization and has at his disposal explicit information from many sources. He is able to take direct action and implement change. The coach, on the other hand, deals only with one key figure and “sees” the situation through this person’s eyes. Any action taken in the organization is taken by the client, not by the coach. For the coach it is hard to perform crosschecks, although of course the fact that the client is under intensive (joint) scrutiny means that person’s bias will usually show up during the coaching. There are a number of reasons why key figures in an organization prefer coaching either as an alternative or in addition to change agents or consultants. These will be treated in the next Section.

#### 27.5.1 Occasions for Coaching

A manager or key figure in an organization can decide to consult an expert on a one-to-one basis for a number of reasons. First, the position of the manager can be the reason to choose this option rather than calling in a firm of consultants. Specifically, top managers who have only recently started working in a firm or position, or who have been given an assignment to

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5 Such extensive change efforts are beyond the scope of coaching and counselling.
6 This goes for both the diagnosis as the change process and implementation.
effect certain changes, tend to choose coaches rather than change agents. Their main concern is to have a sounding board or sparring partner, with whom they can explore alternatives, and take a critical look at their planned policies and spontaneous judgements.

Second, lack of consensus between a key manager and his surroundings can be the occasion for coaching. To find out how views or values came to clash and to determine the meaning of these differences, the support of a coach outside the organization can be essential.

A third occasion is if the key figure discovers that change operations seem repeatedly to flounder and lead to nothing. This could be the case in an organizational culture rife with defensive routines and undiscussables. Here deeper analysis is needed to uncover the underlying resistance to change. For the client, what is at issue is the situation in the organization, and at the same time a personal choice, whether to remain and try to effect change, or decide to move elsewhere.

A fourth indication for coaching is where the organization is still in the aftermath of major change operations, mergers, privatization or other upheavals. In such times, the main issue for the firm is to find a new stable equilibrium. For the key manager, it is important not to rock the boat. Coaching is less obtrusive and therefore preferred.

Fifth, the position of the leader is lonely. On the one hand, leaders are held responsible for processes and outcomes, both good and bad. On the other hand, subordinates streamline information towards their superiors in order to make a good impression or to reap desired benefits. Subordinates expect leaders to react adequately, to alleviate their doubts and insecurities, to take decisions and to show them the way. They also expect leaders to maintain “face”. In the relation between superior and subordinate there is very little room for the leader’s own doubts and insecurities. Moreover, venting these too freely might lead others inside or outside the firm to exploit that information. So, the confidentiality of the coaching situation has its advantages. A trustworthy coach can deal with questions that demand time, thorough analysis, and organizational, strategic or psychological expertise.

Finally, a coach can be chosen for more personal reasons. In the course of their active lives, people meet with many problematic situations. Not all of these are solely due to situations at work. Each individual has his or her unique experiences, and has been programmed by parents and parent figures in a different way. Situations at work can evoke ancient patterns that the person thought he had left behind long ago. Especially for leadership, such personal factors are important to recognize and deal with, since a leader’s behaviour can influence the lives of many people. Counterproductive forces can be recognized and dealt with in the coaching situation, leaving the key figure free to deal with real-world issues in an effective, unbiased way.

### 27.6 THE MAIN APPROACH IN COACHING AND COUNSELLING

The core of the method of coaching and counselling described here is built on the concept of empowerment. This approach can be traced to political views of power (Hardy, 1989; Lukes, 1974) and generative theory-building (Gergen, 1982) in social science, and to rational emotive therapy and neurolinguistic programming in psychotherapy. In individual counselling these approaches have proved effective. In regard to organizational functioning, the evidence is less clear-cut (Geuzinge, 1995; Meyer, 1994). The ideal of the empowered organization
is to utilize resources optimally, and to effect more choices and better outcomes through better processes. However, research supporting these claims is scarce (Thomas et al., 1993; Veenkamp, 1995).

In the approach described here, empowerment is a perspective from which the client’s interpretations are analysed. Together, coach and client review the concepts, images and relations which make up the client’s everyday working life. The question is to what extent these are “generative”, in the sense that promising new avenues are opened up for feeling, thinking and acting. To broaden the range of influence for the client, “inevitables”, paradoxical elements and bias in his interpretations are tracked down. “Inevitables” often take the form of the quasi-choice, as in “Your money or your life”.

Clients unintentionally formulate “alternatives” that are unacceptable and that function as threats. The result is that they feel cornered, have their back to the wall, and cannot seem to get out of the deadlock. The narrowing of vision described here is dangerous to both the clients and their environment. When a person is convinced that there is only one (undesirable) way in which a situation can evolve, he more often than not through his own behaviour contributes to the bringing about of that situation (“self-fulfilling prophecy”).

In the process of tracking down and exposing “inevitables”, it slowly becomes clear how many blind alleys and mazes have unintentionally been created or have just come into being in the conceptual world that has formed. When coaching takes hold, clients get actively involved in this process. For client and coach it becomes like a game to explore the alternative interpretations, and find among them building blocks for the new desirable future. The broadening of the range of options can take many different forms:

- One method we have already seen is the separation of responsibility for problems from the responsibility for solutions.
- A second way we have described is by locating and pointing out the “inevitables” due to organizational culture, which block effective functioning.
- A third way in which interpretations can be opened up is by tracing their origins. This method is especially useful when dealing with personal doctrine and dogmas which hamper the client’s functioning and cramp his personal or business style. Many times one finds that the doctrines were useful at their point of origin, but have outlived their usefulness due to new developments, a broader range of application for which they are not suited (briefly, what made good sense in the nursery does not necessarily do the same in the boardroom) or the fact that the client, having lived a full life, now has much more sophisticated strategies at his disposal with which to tackle similar problems.

Since the client is usually the only source of information in coaching and counselling, special attention is paid to non-verbal behaviour. Body language, intonation, but also the images used by the client, the special ways in which seemingly mundane statements are formulated—all are important sources of information both regarding the problems involved and the client’s progress towards solutions.

The fourth element in this approach is the systematic analysis of situations and events from a meta-level of communication (Meyer & Schabracq, 1990; Watzlawick et al., 1970). In business-as-usual, there is little time to deploy this viewpoint, but the coaching situation offers a unique opportunity to develop this perspective. Improvements and changes in strategy, policy or facilities of organizations are good focal points since they are especially prone to become the source of unintentional slights and friction. People are so concentrated
on the content of their assignments that they either forget to communicate to certain groups and individuals, or fail to realize how their lack of communication impacts others. As in everyday life, one cannot not communicate. For instance the financial manager may think that he is taking a decision which is only about rewards and compensations. He may have no intention whatsoever of stirring up interpersonal relations in the firm. However, when he changes rewards and compensations, in one and the same gesture he is telling people what he thinks of their importance to the firm, to each other and to the future. If he deals with this aspect unintentionally, (social) accidents are bound to happen.

To take another example, imagine that a redistribution of offices and furniture is taking place in a firm. Imagine endless meetings between a small group, deciding on the new layout and furnishing. And imagine what will happen if the new plans become action while many people have not been told when, how or where they are going to be moved. Such Kafkaesque situations happen all too often in business life.

In coaching, such situations are explored by letting people “sit in the chair” of others impacted by their policy or decisions. Through role-playing and the active use of imagination, people learn to anticipate communication problems and to handle multiple perspectives and viewpoints, and to do so before toes have been trodden on or relationships have been damaged.

The fifth element in this approach is the use of metaphor. By skilful use of metaphor the coach can achieve a fairly exact definition of feelings and experience. Metaphor serves to focus the client on the emotional undertones of incidents and situations. No matter that there is no exact fit between the descriptions and the described—sometimes the very exaggeration of a well-chosen metaphor can trigger the client into awareness. Coach and client together bandy about the various metaphors in order to arrive at an interpretation of what incident actually means to the client—with the client in the role of the expert. In the course of the coaching relation, a special language is developed in which various elements are described in the personal “short-hand” developed in the relation and involving metaphor.

As regards process, change is sought through the cycle: analysis, awareness, reflection, exploration and choice.

Interventions can take the well-known forms of accepting, catalysis and, confrontation (although the emphasis is on catalytic interventions). Confrontation is used sparingly and reserved for situations in which it is absolutely necessary, since it is intrusive to the relation between coach and client. Moreover, interventions are usually more effective if the client discovers his or her own answers, instead of being given the coach’s version of the world to replace his own.

27.7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main goal in coaching and counselling is defined as “Optimal and effective functioning of the individual in the organization”, where the functioning of the individual is taken to include the individual’s range of influence. In other words, depending on the individual’s position, many people in or around the organization can have an interest in the successful implementation of coaching. On the one hand, this is good news, since it is easier to free

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7 In the ideal situation leaders would enquire after people’s wishes and needs, before making and implementing plans.
8 The person is the ultimate expert on his or her own feelings.
funds for coaching. On the other hand, it places a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of the coach—not only does he or she have a responsibility towards the client, but also towards the organizational environment of the client in so far as this is impacted. Because of this aspect, it is essential that a coach is an expert in the field of organizational change. Viewpoints put forward by the client need to be reviewed from a position of expertise not only in the coaching process per se, but also from theoretical knowledge and practical know-how on organizations and change. Particular attention needs to be paid to processes of power and the dynamics of power struggle—these add their own flavour to relations at work and can be hard to grasp for the individuals involved.9

For analyses and interventions in coaching executives and key figures, and for counselling, the primary aim is the effective functioning of the individual in the organization. A number of conditions needs to be kept in mind to ensure sound process and quality. First, a good consultant is aware of his or her limitations. The method described here constitutes an interface of psychological counselling on the one hand, and organizational change and development on the other. Expertise in these fields enables the consultant to recognize obstructions to effectiveness on a general level and to show or open up possible directions and avenues for change. Sometimes it is advisable to point the client to specialists in the respective areas. The consultant thus needs to have an overview of consultant firms and to be familiar with their methods. The method of coaching described here is not a form of therapy. Should the need for therapy become clear in the coaching situation, the client can be referred.

The second condition is absolute confidentiality. To meet this condition, it is not sufficient that the consultant be independent of the organization employing the client. After all, higher level managers and key figures operate within larger networks in the political and economic environment of the organization. Moreover, they have access to classified information and their actions have far-reaching consequences. The consultant for coaching must ensure the independence of his or her position and guard against the merest suspicion of interest linkage.10 If there is a possibility of overlapping networks the client must be referred to another consultant.

For coaching and counselling the primary aim is development of the client in his or her work situation, with the secondary aim of ultimate effects in and for the organization. This approach fits in with contemporary aims of management to move from a traditional paradigm of control/order/prescription to a more action-oriented paradigm designed for acknowledging and empowering people (Evered & Selman, 1989). At the same time, coaching of leaders puts to use the classic strategy advocated by Ignatius Loyola, of influencing the “head” in order to change the entire body.

REFERENCES


9 Many people in organizations tend to take power relations at face, i.e. formal, value.
10 Obviously, this means that the phenomenon of so-called “coaching leaders”, where managers claim to be their subordinate’s coach, is not a possibility in the method described here.