

Psychological Development in Adulthood and Coaching

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The strength of coaching in comparison to other ways of facilitating learning and change is in providing support in a way that is unique to each client. Therefore understanding the role of individual differences in coaching is important. Theories of psychological development of adults address a significant dimension to the knowledge of individual differences by suggesting that people differ in ways that cannot simply be explained by personality types, learning styles or personal preferences, all of which are usually seen as relatively stable for each individual. These theories propose that people undergo significant changes during their adult life in the way they make meaning of their experiences, reason about their values and act in the world. In addition to identifying certain patterns in the above changes, common to all people, theories of adult development suggest that changes occur in sequential stages through which people progress. Although such development occurs naturally as the result of engagement with life tasks, the pace of changes can be further stimulated and facilitated by appropriate support and challenge within the coaching process. The aim of this chapter is to explore how understanding these developmental trajectories may help coaches to be better equipped to address the diverse needs of their clients.

This chapter will discuss:

- The origin and distinctive features that theories of psychological development of adults share
- The specific ways these theories are applicable to coaching practice
- Evaluation of the issues associated with the use of adult development theories in coaching

Adult development theories are based on the three major areas of research or strands:

1. The first strand began with the important work of Piaget (1976). It emphasizes developmental changes in reasoning and meaning-making which extend, for example, to moral reasoning

(Kohlberg, 1969); intellectual development (Perry, 1970); reflective judgement (King & Kitchener, 1994); and ‘orders of mind’ (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

2. The second strand is ego development, with its origins in the research of Loevinger (1976, 1987). It focuses on the development of self-identity and the maturity of interpersonal relationships and has been further extended to include post-autonomous ego development by Cook-Greuter (1999, 2004) and action logics by Torbert (1991) and Torbert & Associates (2004).
3. The foundation of the third strand is the research of Graves (1970) into levels of existence, which was later extended into ‘worldviews’ and ‘values’ by Beck and Cowan (1996) and is known as ‘Spiral Dynamics’.

There are many other theories proposing variations of sequential stages in the development of further individual characteristics, for example, emotions (Goleman, 1995), needs (Maslow, 1954) and spiritual awareness (Fowler, 1981). Following Wilber (1999) we will call these changing characteristics ‘developmental lines’. It is to Wilber (1999, 2000, 2006) that we also owe a comprehensive overview of developmental theories that explore different developmental lines. Many theories of adult development are conceived, with relevant studies conducted, in the tradition of developmental structuralism, which looks for patterns that connect specific psychological phenomena. There are, of course other opposing philosophical positions and they are adapted to critique developmental theories in terms of their main principles (e.g. Paulson, 2007).

It is important to mention that all these theories were not developed for coaching. Their main purpose was the understanding of human nature and more specifically individual differences. However, practical applications of the above theories were gradually developed, for example, in the work of Kegan and Lahey (2009), Berger and Fitzgerald (2002) and Berger (2006, 2012). In this chapter some theories of adult development and their practical applications will be discussed with focus on one particular theory-based approach to developmental coaching (Bachkirova, 2011). The focus on this position is because this theory is specifically developed for coaching practice with a new conceptualization of the self and a range of specific mechanisms for facilitating change in coaching.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

One of the most important principles of the theories that we focus on in relation to the psychological development in adulthood is ‘*holarchy*’ (Wilber, 2006). One of the examples to understand this is the holarchical relationship between atoms, molecules, cells and whole organisms; this demonstrates how it is not possible to go from atoms to cells by ‘skipping’ molecules. Applied to the stages in adult development it is claimed that adults take a considerable time to develop through each stage and stages cannot be ‘skipped’, because each is built upon the previous one.

Another principle is the independent progression of various developmental aspects or lines (cognitive, emotional, moral, etc.). This means that for each individual, development of a number of aspects could be far from synchronic. Figure 9.1 represents a snapshot in time of how an individual’s development might look if we were able to measure development of each developmental line. This representation, however abstract, could be useful in dispelling the myths of the simplicity of categorizing people and the validity of quick conclusions about their overall development. This may also indicate the futility of attempts to use one line for describing development of another despite the disagreement between some authors. For example, Loevinger believed that ‘If the stages really reflect a common “deep structure”, the stages of those variables should all proceed in tandem’ (1987, p. 242). Similarly, other authors (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wade, 1996, Laske, 2006) argued that it is their theories that describe such a structure. However, Wilber (2000) disputes such claims and the whole idea of overall development:

Although substantial empirical evidence demonstrates that each line develops through these holarchical stages in an invariant sequence, nonetheless, because all two dozen of them develop relatively independently, overall growth and development is a massively complex, overlapping, nonlinear affair, following no set sequence whatsoever. (Wilber, 1999, pp. 291–292)

Insert Figure 9.1

Figure 9.1 Example of a combination of the developmental lines in an individual

It can be noted that different theories of psychological development argue for a different number of stages in the developmental lines they study. This is not problematic: according to Wilber (2006) as in map making, the way to divide and represent the territory is somewhat arbitrary – it is not important ‘how you slice and dice development’. At the same time, some common patterns can be identified suggesting

similarities in 'slicing the developmental pie'. According to one of the patterns, development proceeds from the 'pre-conventional level to the 'conventional' and then to the 'post-conventional level' (Kohlberg, 1969). Similarly to this general pattern, Table 9.1 describes only three stages of development under the names of Unformed, Formed and Reformed Ego, which will be further discussed later in this section (Bachkirova, 2011).

My choice to reduce the number of stages is made for simplicity and because various statistical data suggest that these are the most characteristic for the majority of adults (Beck & Cowan, 1998; Wilber, 2000; Torbert, 1991). It could be argued therefore that these stages will be found to be typical for the clientele of coaches. These stages are described in relation to four major aspects of the individual: cognitive style, interpersonal style, conscious preoccupations and character development, which are identified as being most descriptive according to Loevinger (1976). The main input for each of these aspects is drawn from the theories of Kegan (1982), Graves (1970), Wade (1996), Torbert (1991), Cook-Greuter (1999) and Wilber (2000) with the use of another simplifying meta-perspective on these theories offered by McCauley et al. (2006). An additional aspect 'engagement in action' is proposed by Bachkirova (2011, 2016).

Table 9.1 indicates individual differences in people that cannot be explained by personality theories, but allow instead further understanding of the way that clients may change in the process of development. Acknowledgement of these differences can help to see why some coaching approaches might be better suited than others when working with people at different developmental stages. Appreciation of these differences is important for coaches themselves and the changes they undergo. Bachkirova and Cox (2007) argue that coaches who are aware of their own stages of development might be in a better position to understand their own role in the coaching process and the dynamics of the coaching relationship and thus be able to articulate, influence and change more critical situations in the coaching process. Also, the practical applications of some theories described, for example, by Berger and Fitzgerald (2002), Kegan and Lahey (2009), Berger (2012), Bachkirova (2011), show how useful these theories can be for coaching practice.

Table 9.1 A cumulative description of the three stages in adult psychological development with additions (Bachkirova, 2016, p.302)

Stages	Unformed ego	Formed ego	Reformed ego
Cognitive style (based mostly on Kegan 1982)	Socialised mind <i>Ability for abstract thinking and self-reflection</i>	Self-authoring mind <i>Can see multiplicity and patterns; critical and analytical</i>	Self-transforming mind <i>Systems view; tolerance of ambiguity; change from linear logic to holistic understanding</i>
Interpersonal style (Loevinger 1987; Cook-Greuter 1999)	Dependent Conformist/self-conscious <i>Need for belonging; socially expected behaviour in relationships; peacemakers/keepers</i>	Independent Conscientious/individualist <i>Separate but responsible for their own choices; communication and individual differences are valued</i>	Inter-independent Autonomous/ Integrated <i>Take responsibility for relationship; respect autonomy of others; tolerance of conflicts; non-hostile humour</i>
Conscious preoccupations (Graves 1970)	Multiplistic <i>Social acceptance, reputation, moral 'shoulds and oughts'</i>	Relativistic/ Individualistic <i>Achievement of personal goals according to inner standards.</i>	Systemic/integrated Individuality; self-fulfilment; <i>immediate present; understanding conflicting needs</i>
Character development (Loevinger 1987; Cook-Greuter 1999; Kohlberg 1969)	Rule-bound <i>'Inappropriate' feelings are denied or repressed. Rules of important others are internalised and obeyed.</i>	Conscientious <i>Self-reliant, conscientious; follow self-evaluated rules; judge themselves and critical of others</i>	Self-regulated <i>Behaviour is an expression of own moral principles. Concerned with conflicting roles, duties, value systems.</i>
Engagement in action (Bachkirova 2011)	Unformed ego <i>Reduced sense of control over themselves and environment. Higher dependency on others for action.</i>	Formed ego <i>Capacity to take ownership of the past and act independently. 'Mind over body' control of action.</i>	Reformed ego <i>Harmony between mind and body in action. Appreciation of complexity in the relationship between self and environment.</i>

However, it has to be said that the theories of psychological development in adulthood are also known for their complexity and particularly for their labour-intensive instruments used to identify developmental stages. Lahey and associates (1988) developed the subject-object interview (SOI), which is used for the assessment of 21 gradations within Kegan's orders of mind. It requires 60–90 minutes of recorded interview and a highly skilful scoring of the transcript. Although Berger's recent work (2012) makes the process of identifying developmental stages much clearer and appealing to try, it is still a significant challenge for coaches. There is also the Washington University Sentence Completion Test used to measure Loevinger's

(1976) stages, which has been updated by Cook-Greuter (2004) as the Leadership Development Profile (LDP). Individual assessment with these tools can only be done through relevant organizations and there are many aspects of the measurement process that can potentially interfere with the quality of it such as verbal fluency and educational and social background (McCauley et al., 2006; Manners & Durkin, 2001; Laurence, 2017). Although the commitment of these organizations to improving the quality of these instruments and inter-rater reliability amongst their trained scorers is reassuring, the actual fact that the assessment is done through the third party can deter coaches from using them.

A different approach is developed on the basis of the theory that allows avoiding the issue of measurement by concentrating on the themes that clients are concerned with at the time they come for coaching (Bachkirova, 2011). The argument is that clients' concerns, challenges and goals by themselves show a pattern that indicates development. Therefore, it was proposed that for the purpose of coaching there is no need to assess where each client is according to any scale. Instead coaches can and do work with *developmental themes* that are brought by clients themselves. It is important to note that these themes are not only about goals – they are about the challenges that people face in life, what they find difficult, and what their life circumstances demand from them in terms of engagement with their environment. The pattern in the themes (Table 9.2) indicates the stage of ego development in each client which would help to shape an individual approach to coaching, i.e. offering coaching towards a healthy ego, coaching the ego or coaching beyond the ego (Bachkirova, 2011).

Table 9.2 Three groups of developmental themes with the corresponding approach to coaching

<i>Themes of Unformed ego</i>	<i>Themes of Formed ego</i>	<i>Themes of Reformed ego</i>
Decision-making in difficult situations with a number of stakeholders Taking higher level of responsibility than they feel they can cope with Work–life balance connected to inability to say ‘no’ Performance anxiety	Coping with high amount of self-created work Achievement of recognition, promotion, etc. Interpersonal conflicts Drive for success and underlying fear of failure Problem solving Learning to delegate	Dissatisfaction with life, in spite of achievements Internal conflict Not ‘fitting in’ Search for meaning in life Overcoming life crisis Initiating a significant change Dealing with personal illusions Staying true to themselves in a complex

Issues of self-esteem	Stress management	situation
Coaching towards a healthy ego	Coaching the ego	Coaching beyond the ego

Ego in this theory is a network of mini-selves based upon an understanding of the mind as modular (e.g. Gazzaniga, 1985; Kurzban, 2012). Each mini-self is a combination of brain/mind states and processes that are involved in the organism's engagement with a certain task, or more precisely it is a particular pattern of links between different areas of the brain that become activated or inhibited when the organism is involved in an act. Both the consciousness (*rider*) and the unconscious automatic processes of the whole organism (*elephant*) are involved in the functioning of the ego (Haidt, 2006; Bachkirova, 2011).

The ego could be developed to various degrees and described as unformed, formed or fully formed. When the ego is fully developed the mind/brain can act or refrain from action if necessary in a way that reasonably satisfies the organism as a whole with all the multiplicity of its needs and tasks. With the *unformed ego* there are needs that remain unsatisfied and tasks unfulfilled. The sign of a fully *formed ego* is the capacity of the whole organism to take ownership of the past, withstand anxiety about what the future holds and build relationships with others without losing the sense of who they are. Their choices may be constructive or destructive, but they are made according to their own criteria. At the same time this stage of ego development is associated with other developmental challenges. The sense of control and self-ownership may lead to an overestimation of what is possible and realistic for the organism, which may result in a lack of attention to and even abuse of the body when working to achieve some specific targets. The third category, a *reformed ego*, represents capacities of the ego that go beyond those of the formed ego. There is a much more harmonious relationship between the elephant and the rider, manifested in the ability of the organism to tolerate the ambiguity of some needs and tasks, thus minimizing energy wasted on conflicts between the various mini-selves (Bachkirova, 2011, 2012).

Influencing development in coaching

Although coaching may seem to be a perfect way to influence development as described, the idea of actively influencing development is, itself, contentious. Some authors strongly advocate the need for development

(Laske, 2006) whilst others are more tentative (Kegan, 1982; Berger, 2006; Bachkirova, 2011). For example, Kegan suggests that the quality of psychological support for an individual who is facing transition or a new developmental task will be higher if the coach is 'developmentally-minded'. The main value is for the client to be in the presence of someone 'who can see, recognize and understand who the person is and who he or she is *becoming*' (Kegan, 1982: 260) (emphasis added). However, Kegan also expressed an important concern about overzealous attempts to change someone developmentally: 'amongst the many things from which a practitioner's clients need protection is the practitioner's hopes for the client's future, however benign and sympathetic these hopes may be' (1982: 295).

It is important to emphasize that the nature of development as discussed in this chapter is a complex process that involves a combination of known and unknown, internal and environmental factors. The shift from one stage to another may even take years to be noticed and recognized. However, once understood, these theories may be so attractive that some coaches are seduced into using them inappropriately, designing and suggesting interventions to 'move' clients from one stage to another. The main danger of this approach is that it may create the illusion that significant developmental shifts can be induced by sufficient motivation and effort. It may also distract coaches from attending to the client's other concerns which may actually be more relevant to them and have greater urgency. Berger also warned about hasty judgements of developmental stages, particularly in organizational contexts (2006) and about simplistic interpretations of this theoretical perspective.

At the same time, however, we do see again and again that the coaching process, even if it aims at specific and pragmatic goals, provides important conditions for potential developmental shifts in individuals. By engaging with the presenting task, coaches inevitably evaluate a fit between the existing capabilities of the client and the complexity of a task. This prompts them to create appropriate conditions for a developmental shift if necessary and that shift may well happen. It is interesting to notice at the same time how some traditional coaching approaches could be more suited for coaching clients at specific stages of development. For example, Person-centred coaching and Transactional Analysis (TA) have good methods suitable for coaching towards a healthy ego. Cognitive-behavioural and Solution-focused would resonate well with a Formed Ego. The Existential approach or Gestalt approach, on the other hand, would be

sufficiently challenging for coaching beyond the ego (Bachkirova, 2011).

This means that coaches working in different traditions can work developmentally and be successful in promoting development without focusing on moving the client to the next stage of development. At the same time their knowledge of the theories of development can help them to recognize where the main challenges for the client are and to understand why their usual approach may not work with all clients. In terms of the process, according to the theories of client development in coaching (e.g. Bachkirova, 2011), the developmentally-minded coach would approach a new assignment initially in the same way as any other coach: identifying the clients' needs, exploring their situation fully and clarifying their goals. This task should not be minimized by the focus on the clients' stage of development. However, the developmental coach would gradually gain a sense of the state of the client's ego from taking into account the issues they both identified, the challenges the client faces and the difficulties he/she experiences. The task of the coach is then to engage with whatever issue/goal is presented, but noticing at the same time the patterns arising that suggest a developmental theme. His/her job between the sessions is to explore these patterns and consider relevant coaching strategies through reflection on the previous sessions, preparation for the coming sessions and discussion of these cases in supervision.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

In Kegan's (1982) approach to development, an important mechanism of change is a shift from subject to object which coaching can usefully influence. Things that are Subject in Kegan's theory can prompt us to action but cannot be observed or reflected on. We cannot stand back and take a look at them because we are embedded in them. On the other hand, things that are Object for us are 'those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon' (Kegan, 1994: 32). It has been said that to be Subject is to 'see with' rather than to 'see through' (Drath, 1990). A good example is 'cultural blindness' as described by Drath (1990: 486), who suggests that

we see with our culture-bound norms and expectations, accept them as given, and cannot examine them for what they are – that is, we cannot see through them. Our cultural heritage is something we are, not something we have. The culture holds us; we are embedded in it and cannot rise above it.

It is natural, therefore, that the more individuals can take as Object, the more complex their worldview becomes, because they can examine and act upon more things. The mechanism of the shift from Subject to Object could be considered as an essential element of coaching. It is one of the functions of coaches to watch for the re-absorption of insight in the client and to help build *psychological muscle* in order to hold something out from a person as an Object (Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002). As Berger and Fitzgerald (2002: 31) say: 'one of the most powerful interventions coaches can provide is simply help to keep critical insights alive for their clients'.

Here is an example from the coaching process: In his new role of head of department, a client received feedback suggesting that his way of one-to-one communication with people made some of his staff uncomfortable. He asked his coach to help him to respond to this feedback, which he found puzzling. They explored this feedback together with the coach's own observations of his interactions with her and others. It appeared that the client's style involved unusually long pauses that people perceived as withdrawals. These apparently made those colleagues, who were more self-conscious than others, feel insecure. The client was not aware of this. His style was so much a part of who he was that he could not reflect on the effect of it on other people. As the result of coaching, his style has gradually changed from being Subject into Object, leading to the client's increased ability to notice it and modify it when necessary.

Kegan and Lahey (2009) also proposed the idea of *immunity to change* suggesting that many people who sincerely want to change may not be able to do so because they are directing a lot of productive energy towards a hidden competing commitment. For example, the client may genuinely want to empower others and to delegate, but finds himself regularly sorting the problems by himself. His competing commitment is apparently to be personally useful with a 'big assumption' behind it that he might not be deeply satisfied when he is in a second line of action. Kegan and Lahey (2009) also developed an exercise of four columns to identify a big assumption, to make it 'object' for a person, which may lead to a new, more 'spacious' mental structure, able to accommodate a wider range of links. In this example, the definition of individual hero could expand into someone who is a hero by virtue of empowering others.

In Berger (2012) we can find many overall strategies for working with clients when their stages of development are identified. She suggests various ways of identifying key strengths, blind spots and central

areas of growth for the clients at each stage, and comments on pitfalls that coaches may face with these client groups. For example, coaching the self-authored type of clients (which I referred to above as formed ego), Berger recommends *exploring dichotomies, uncovering assumptions, questioning certainty and seeking wise mentors and thinking partners*. What is particularly important in Berger's position to the developmental perspective on coaching is the emphasis not only on techniques and methods of working with clients but also the attitude and intention of the coach (2012: 93). For example, she argues that simply learning about theories of development is developmental. Engaging with these theories coaches begin to ask themselves the developmental questions the theory asks and begin to listen in a different way to their own answers.

Three further mechanisms for development are proposed in the developmental coaching model by Bachkirova (2011): improving quality of perception, working with the multiplicity of self-models and working with the elephant (unconscious, automatic parts of mind/brain and body). It is postulated that attention to these aspects in developmental coaching will enhance the client's engagement with the change they are aiming at.

Improving the quality of perception

In order to improve the quality of perception both internally and externally, coaches traditionally aim at development of active listening skills, observation skills, attention to body language, etc. However, it is important to know what we are up against when we try to improve it – what it is that prevents us from seeing things as they are. According to Krishnamurti (1996: 54), it is only through understanding the nature of the trap that one can be free of it. Therefore, in coaching, *conditioning and self-deception* could be addressed as two main issues that interfere with the quality of perception.

Conditioning indicates issues of 'second-hand knowledge' absorbed from the culture of organizations, circles of friends, society as a whole, in ways that prevent change and development. Exposing and counteracting these influences is useful in developmental coaching. Another obstacle to perception is *self-deception*. Whilst during conditioning the filters impacting on perception of reality are polished by influential others, in self-deception this job is done internally. There is a significant body of literature (Ames & Dissanayake, 1996; Fingarette, 2000; Goleman, 1997; Gur & Sackheim, 1979; Lewis, 1996; Bachkirova,

2016) that offers useful insights into the psychology of self-deception in individuals, explaining cases based on cognitive incompetence, faulty thinking, irrational beliefs and unconscious psychological mechanisms. Working with the holes in clients' perceptions created by self-deception is another task of developmental coaches.

Working the multiplicity of self-models

Self-models or various stories of the self are put together by the linguistic function of the rider that have evolved with our ability to use language. These are not the same as the mini-selves that constitute the ego. Although these stories help to create a coherent and reasonably consistent image of ourselves, some of them may be less than helpful in the process of change. Coaches can help clients in *accepting the fact of multiplicity*. Seeing the multitude of self-models is helpful for many reasons (Rowan, 2009; Carter, 2008). Research by Linville (1987), for example, found that the more distinct self-descriptions of themselves participants were able to produce, the less they were likely to become depressed and even suffer somatically when under stress. Accepting multiplicity of self-models leads to conscious openness to experimenting with new roles that are often useful in coaching. It would also help if these conscious representations of our engagements with the world corresponded to how we actually act, to our actual mini-selves and this could also be a topic to be explored in the process of developmental coaching (Bachkirova, 2011).

Working with the elephant

The third mechanism of change, *working with the elephant* (the emotional unconscious mind and the body), is about better interaction between the rider and the elephant during the process of change. This is possible through promotion of *soft thinking* (Claxton, 1999: 146), in addition to traditional hard reasoning which tends to involve the inhibition of other parts of the mind. 'Soft thinking' instead implies a softer focus, 'looking at' rather than 'looking for' (Claxton, 1999; Claxton & Lucas, 2007), without forcing out new, unstable and fragile ideas that come from the unconscious. Gentle, rather than 'incisive' questioning, and simply slowing down the process also promote soft thinking.

Another way of working with the elephant is better *communication with the emotional body*, improving two-way traffic between the rider and elephant. The language of the elephant is non-verbal, so the developmental coach promotes attention to emotions and other signs that may not be easy to articulate, such

as physical feelings, images and dreams, guesses, fleeting thoughts, hunches. Gendlin (1962, 2003) for example, suggests a method of ‘focusing’: inviting the messages from the elephant, looking not only for unarticulated, but pre-logical, pre-conceptual, just felt dimensions of experiencing. In communicating messages to the elephant, the use of imagery and metaphors is recommended and awareness of a particular sensitivity of the elephant to both the relationship with the coach and the coach’s attitude towards the client (Bachkirova, 2011).

Although these mechanisms indicate the potential for development in any coaching process, each of these would need to be approached differently when applied to different stages of ego development. For example, in terms of improving the quality of perception, working with the unformed ego needs more attention to conditioning, giving priority to experience and own voice, while the formed ego is more susceptible to self-deception, requiring that priority should be given to external input, feedback and discrepancies (Bachkirova, 2011).

APPLICATION

There is an obvious connection between the approaches to coaching based on theories of psychological development in adulthood and *developmental coaching*, which is concerned with holistic changes in the person. If clients are dealing with important dilemmas or transitions in their lives (a theme that often occurs in developmental coaching) the perspective discussed in this chapter may help coaches and clients to understand that transitions may be not just an adjustment to environmental changes but also an internal process that has specific features of a developmental nature. This can be useful for clients, as it will help them to understand what they are going through and to see the specific landmarks of this process.

In relation to *team coaching*, this approach makes clear why group work is sometimes difficult. For example, when individuals, at different stages of development, are intensely involved in the same process, the chances of serious misunderstandings are numerous. However, opportunities for expected and unexpected growth may also be present. Theories of psychological development may help to explain the reasons for disagreements and conflicts. They may also help coaches to find an overall perspective which allows for the integration of the different needs of individuals into the value system of the team. Useful ideas

about this work are to be found in Laurence (2017).

The coach's own stage of development is also important. To be of most help to the client, the coach should be able to recognize where the client is on the developmental line. As has been said already, people find difficulty in recognizing stages of development that come later than their own and consequently may not be optimally helpful as coaches in such cases. At the same time it could be argued that within certain coaching genres, for example skills coaching, such a discrepancy is less important.

EVALUATION

Application of psychological development theories can be highly valuable for coaching practice as they provide knowledge about an important dimension of clients' individual differences. However, this approach is not without controversy. Sometimes it causes unease in some coaches and for others it can lead to overzealous and uncritical acceptance of its tenets. We also need to acknowledge considerable restrictions in the competent use of the diagnostic instruments preventing wider applications of these theories in coaching practice.

Firstly, it is important to address the concern about this approach expressed by some coaches who believe that theories of psychological development imply a judgement about the level of development. This is seen to be contrary to a general commitment to the idea of coaching as non-judgemental. Without minimizing the significance of this concern, it is important to notice that similar judgements are made on an everyday basis for all sorts of reasons including those that can be reasonably justified. Coaches reflect on such judgements individually and in supervision to evaluate their effect on the coaching process. What usually matters is the purpose of the judgement (or a better term would be assessment) and its validity. The purpose of such an assessment in coaching is to facilitate a better fit between the environment and the client's capacity for dealing with it. In this case assessment is done in the best service of the client. The validity of the assessment depends on the quality of the theory that supports it and the quality of the actual assessment.

This leads us again to issues related to the instruments for assessment of individual development. In order to know the stage of development of the client, coaches seem to have various options. One option is to use independent assessments of the client's stage through specific instruments such as LDP, which are available,

but quite expensive additions to the coaching itself. Another option is to invest into training and to learn to score SOI that is complex, time-consuming, but can be developmental in itself. Yet another option is to learn about developmental themes (Bachkirova, 2011), the approach that is less quantitatively precise than the above instruments but more informative than an ‘educated guess’. It is an option that is available to anyone interested in these theories.

The last two options may sound imperfect but they have certain advantages. First of all, the coaches’ assessment of the client’s stage will be a tentative one and they will remain open to other interpretations of their assessment. (With the use of two previous instruments the temptation to see their results as ‘truth’ is much higher.) Secondly, in my view, coaching is valuable when coaches give respectful attention to the voices of *all* the client’s states and stages and not only to ‘the centre of developmental gravity’. Having a healthy doubt about the client’s stage would help to keep the coach’s attention fresh and open to these voices.

I also would like to express my concern about the over-enthusiastic voices in the coaching field, not only advocating such theories as potentially useful, but claiming a precision of assessment that is impossible to justify and putting pressure on coaches to be assessed and to assess clients as if it were an ‘ethical obligation’. Learning about these theories should be an opportunity rather than a demand. It is better for coaches to learn about adult development not in order to avoid some potential harm that is difficult to identify; a far better motive is to see more dimensions in themselves, their clients and the process of coaching. Realization of this complexity can enrich coaches’ capacities for reflection and effective interaction with others providing more openings to their growth as a person, and it is the coach as a person, rather than the application of particular techniques or methods, that makes a difference in coaching practice.

FURTHER READING

Bachkirova, T. (2011). *Developmental coaching: Working with the self*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. (Describes a theory of adult development that is specifically created for coaching and the practical approach based on this theory.)

Berger, J.G. (2012). *Changing on the job: Developing leaders for a complex world*. Stanford, CA: Stanford

University Press. (A practical and thoughtful adaptation of the original Kegan's theory, particularly valuable in the organizational context.)

Lawrence, P. (2017). Coaching and Adult Development. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence and D. Drake (Eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (pp. 121-138). London: SAGE. (An excellent up-to-date overview of adult development theories in the context of coaching with a balanced level of critique.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what way your approach to coaching is developmental?
- What are the challenges of coaching clients who is fairly satisfied with their stage of development and that stage also seems to be a good fit with the requirement of their job?
- What is your view on potential discrepancies between the levels of development of the coach and client? How could they affect the coaching process?

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