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Topic of the paper: **Coaching As A Tool Supporting Teamwork In Organizations, Including Virtual Ones**

**Keywords:** coaching, teamwork, employees, virtual organization

**Abstract:** the paper presents coaching as a tool that supports the activity and development of teams. The terminology and genesis of the notion have been presented herein. The characteristic outline of a coach and the necessity to transform the role of a manager into that of a coach were also highlighted. It presents the building up of coaching strategy in traditional and virtual organizations and creating of the coaching culture.

Some more and more complicated organizational structures occur on the market nowadays, companies link their cultures, merge frequently. However, there are also some hostile takeovers. Some more virtual forms of cooperation, such as virtual organizations have become more significant. Thus, the traditional tools supporting staff management and their development are not always effective. Coaching appears to be a good solution, adequate to the present times.

#### Genesis and definition of coaching

The word „coach” origins from French „coche” and this in turn originates from Kocs, a town in Hungary. As the days went by, „coach” meant a teacher preparing children and youths for their exams. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a coach meant a trainer preparing students at American universities for sport achievements. The current notion of coaching was outlined by Tim Gallwey who showed that a sportsmen would succeed when being asked a series of well formulated questions, while John Whitmore, a businessman, sport psychologist and a rally driver, was first to use coaching in business.

Coaching became a recognized method only after the first school of coaching was established in 1992 - Coach University, founded by Thomas Leonard.

At present coaching enjoys immense popularity because it allows people to achieve excellent results in their private, but most of all professional lives. It proves to be perfect at improving the efficiency, better management of group, more efficient achievement of goals and increasing the motivation of people. It is a perfect tool in case of virtual organizations characterized with delocalization of their jobs, no personal contacts with the bosses and colleagues or “jellyfish-like” structure of the entity. It is coaching that supports the necessity to assume high responsibility, independence of work, keeping deadlines, self-motivation are supported and coaching may be applied through tele-computer media.

It is worth to mention selected definitions of coaching that appear in literature. Eric Parsloe thinks that coaching „is a process enabling teaching and development and thus improvement of operation, requiring

knowledge and understanding the size of styles, skills and techniques adequate to the context in which the process takes place<sup>1</sup>”

Antony Grant defines coaching as „Cooperating, individualized, goal and effect oriented process facilitating change through supporting self-directed learning and personal development based on the evidence and through inclusion of ethical practice”<sup>2</sup>

Michael Armstrong states that „coaching is a one-to-one technique, aimed at developing skills, knowledge and attitudes. It is most effective when carried out informally as part of normal management or leadership process”<sup>3</sup>

The definitions suggest that coaching activity include the work of a coach – a person who is to help the coachee with enhancing and improvement of his/her characteristics, knowledge, competence aimed at continuous development.

The coaching process is based on the commitment of two parties: the coach and the client – i.e. the coachee or the coach and a team of coaches. <sup>4</sup>.

Summarizing the terminology, we may state that basically coaching may assume 2 forms:

- Improvement of skills and transfer of knowledge through the individual work of a coach with his client, the goal thereof being the achievement of better results,
- Discovering and release of unused potential of the client, his/her hidden skills and potentials.

Coaching at work is beneficial to individual employees and their manager, whole teams and, in effect – to the whole organization. An employee who has a coach or whose manager applies this method in everyday work, in the first place has the possibility to work and learn with his/her own pace. They use the help of a person they know and trust. This may affect what they learn. The important thing is that they may use the experience of people who learned some skills earlier and simply – to avoid the mistakes they made.<sup>5</sup>

Coaching is not training, this is a work most frequently characterized by accurate questions directed by the Coach to the employee, often in order to highlight the elements that are unnoticed at present and are to release the personal potential, develop competence and improve the activity.

Coaching is a continuous process, i.e. consisting in the continuous work of the instructor (coach) and the employee. This should be a planned process, possibly divided into particular stages precisely defining the scope of work at a given stage.

The Coach supports the other party thanks to asking him/her appropriate questions that enable putting his/her internal chaos in some kind of order and find the proper way to the target.

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<sup>1</sup>Parsloe E.: The Manager as Coach and Mentor, CIPD, 1999

<sup>2</sup>Sidor-Rządowska M., Coaching Teoria, praktyka, studia przypadków, Wolters Kluwer Polska - OFICYNA 2009

<sup>3</sup> Armstrong M.: Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Warszawa, 2007

<sup>4</sup>Sidor-Rządowska M., Coaching Teoria, praktyka, studia przypadków, Wolters Kluwer Polska - OFICYNA 2009

<sup>5</sup> Szulc W., Coaching – Misja życia, Internetowe Wydawnictwo Złote Myśli sp. z o.o., 2008

It is the skill of asking adequate questions that forms the basic operating tool of a coach<sup>6</sup>. The commitment in the process and the belief that the goal can be achieved are priceless. The coach is convinced that his/her client holds the potential necessary for answering his/her own questions, solve their problems and reach the point they aim at. Such conviction enables the person to abandon the role of a mentor or advisor towards being a coach.<sup>7</sup>

The task of a coach consists in drawing out such skills, resources and responses that the client already holds. The role of the coach consists in creating a new, more impartial perspective related to the issue and in sparing the feedback, while the responsibility for decisions and taking appropriate measures lies on the part of the client. Coaching does not focus directly on reducing the mental pain or assistance at mental or emotional problems.<sup>8</sup>

#### The role of coaching and coach within the organization

International Coach Federation and Metrix Global, while testing the effect of coaching on business organizations determined that investing in coaching brings 529% return on investment [ROI]. Furthermore, including the financial benefits resulting from limitation of HR fluctuation elevates the ROI to the level of 788%. Additionally, the self-awareness of staff grows by as many as 67 percentage points, planning improves by 62% , while the level of stress is restricted by 57%<sup>9</sup>. The figures are the best evidence confirming the rightness of applying coaching in organizations or teams.

Coaching at work is beneficial both to individual employees and their manager, whole teams and, in effect, to the whole organization. The employee who has a coach or whose manager applies the method in his/her everyday work, has most of all the possibility to work and learn at their own, individual pace. They use the help of a person they know and trust. The employee may influence what he/she learns. He/she develops skills necessary to perform present or future work. He/she may use the experience of people who learn some skill before and avoid their mistakes.

The coaching process helps the employee learn and develop. This is also the case with teams of employees that may gain immense benefits when subjected to coaching. Thanks to the process the team will have a clear vision of where they are heading, what their goals are and, at the same time – the most motivating aspect of teamwork – he/she would continue to rise the “jumping-bar” in relation to his/her achievements.<sup>10</sup> The manager is responsible for the actions of his subordinates. He/she is their direct boss, gives them long-term developmental targets, updates then tasks to be performed and controls the progress, clearing the effects. The organization conditions bring a new challenge to the manager, i.e. to become a coach. Rarely,

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<sup>6</sup> Nalepa T, Rodzaje coachingu; [www.nf.pl](http://www.nf.pl);

<sup>7</sup> Szulc W., Coaching – Misja życia, Internetowe Wydawnictwo Złote Myśli sp. z o.o., 2008.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.coachfederatio.org/ICF>, 2009-05-22

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.coachfederatio.org/ICF/> 2009-06.12

<sup>10</sup> Szulc W., Coaching - Korzyści z coachingu, Internetowe Wydawnictwo Złote Myśli sp. z o.o., 2008

especially on the medium level of management, an external coach is introduced into the individual work with the clients, so such function is taken over by the hierarchical manager, directly responsible for his/her subordinates. Frequently, combining the said functions appears problematic because not every manager can become a good coach. A coach is required to have skills that condition success in this role. These are most of all soft skills, such as: building relationships, high level of communicativeness, asking questions, providing feedback, openness to receiving feedback, active listening, influencing and motivating others. Empathy and facilitation or assertiveness are also important<sup>11</sup>. One of the most important tools at the disposal of a coach at his work are questions – so formulated that the client could disclose his/her internal anxiety, understand the essence of the matter and start the process of changing his/her attitude. They allow for the identification of all that we can change, revise our internal expectations. An important skill of a coach is also the observation and analytic thinking. Those two features allow for the correct interpretation of the occurring situations. The coach must gather all the signals coming from the client throughout the entire work with him/her and trust his own intuition mentioned before, that will lead to finished conclusions. At this stage, however, the coach should be able to involve the client in the process of analysis – i.e. encourage to thinking over every result and discuss them. Such approach again carries the responsibility onto the client and teaches him/her self-diagnosis and analysis. The process should go on according to the standard of making the analysis:

- Acquisition of data based on observations,
- Filing according to the criteria assumed for coaching,
- Formulating and checking the developed theories, conclusions, submittals,
- Making hypotheses and their application<sup>12</sup>.

Permanent self-education is the necessary condition for sharing the knowledge and experience acquired with further persons.

Highly gentle manners that help to come out of difficult situations tactfully is very important.<sup>13</sup>

All the characteristics and skills must be held by the manager if he/she wants to be a coach at the same time – a good coach supportive to every team member and one they could rely on wanting to be guided towards the right way<sup>14</sup>. In some organizational departments where the direct contact with the client is significant and the effects of the actions are relatively quickly noticeable, the role of the coach may be the key factor of maintaining such department on the top level of creating the atmosphere affecting strong motivation or, finally limitation of rotation and costs.

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<sup>11</sup> Adams M., *Myślenie pytaniami*, Wydawnictwo Studio Emka, Warszawa 2007

<sup>12</sup> Thorpe S., Clifford J., *Podręcznik coachingu*, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2007

<sup>13</sup> Szulc W., *Coaching - Korzyści z coachingu*, Internetowe Wydawnictwo Złote Myśli sp. z o.o., 2008

<sup>14</sup> Berłowski P.: *Handlowiec przed lustrem: podwójny coaching metodą rozwoju przełożonych i podwładnych w firmie CJ International – studium przypadku*, „Personel i Zarządzanie” 2007, nr 7

An error committed by the organization may be requirement to perform coaching without prior making sure whether the managers fully understanding the coaching concept, believe in the strength of its effects and implement it with full responsibility.

Thus, we may differentiate FIDE classic stages within coaching, thanks to which all the process participants will be fully able to control it and modify if necessary:

- Concluding contracts, data collection and providing feedback,
- Activity planning,
- Starting and conducting activity,
- Assessment leading to contract finalization or reassumption of the same cycle of activity<sup>15</sup>.

#### Coaching strategy withing the organization

More and more frequently is gains the strategic significance within the organization, directly influencing its shape and culture.

The strategic coaching process must determine the targets the organization wishes to achieve and what methods should be used in achieving the targets.

The strategy building scheme, adequate to coaching strategy creation, suggested by D. Ulrich could be used here<sup>16</sup>

The basic elements of building the coaching strategies include:

1. Determination of the subject and main assumptions of the strategy
2. The analysis and characteristics of action
3. Determination of persons within the strategy
4. The expectations towards the persons
5. Determination of the role of particular persons
6. Matching the actions to the timeframes.
7. Determination of the achievement measures.

The purpose of the „strategic coaching” is to become certain that the persons responsible [appointed within the strategy concept] find the targets given to them clear and know how to use the means to accomplish such targets<sup>17</sup>. It is particularly important to provide accurate definition of the platform, environment, the object of activity as the success of the whole undertaking may depend on the full understanding of the concept assumptions. While planning the coaching strategy, another important element is the analysis of advantages and disadvantages, style of action of individuals [managers} responsible for fulfillment of the concept’s assumptions: this is the foundation for development of directions and methods of modification for particular

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<sup>15</sup> O’Neill M. B., Coaching dla kadry menedżerskiej, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2005.

<sup>16</sup> O’Neill M. B., Coaching dla kadry menedżerskiej, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Garski K., Coach – człowiek, który pyta, Manager Magazin, 2006, nr 6

individuals. In addition, the manager should accurately set within a hierarchy the people, divisions, organizational units, etc. with whom he/she will cooperate while accomplishing the targets set in the concept. It is important to know their possible responses, needs and expectations, because such approach, commitment will affect the method of task fulfillment by the manager. Within the coaching concept the manager should define the expectations he/she has towards particular individuals with whom he/she will work. In such case he/she should be aware of the variety and diversification of particular persons' goals throughout the process. Another important element in the concept planning cycle is the question of correct establishment of optimum sequence of the particular events and use of the time earlier planned for unforeseen current events. It is the question of improper time planning that decides on the proper performance of particular stages – phases of the concept. The improper determination of the same may even affect the fact that they will not be accomplished due to the time shortage. The strategic coaching assumptions should make the manager aware of the necessity to determine the measures of success of the programs performed and taking up corrective measures in case any deviations occur.<sup>18</sup>

While implementing strategic coaching the inseparable element is to build up a so-called „Coaching culture” within the organization. It particularly recommended in virtual organizations that are characterized with high independence of their partners' actions.

The coaching culture model was developed by P. Hopkins (2008) who presented ten stages composing the creation of the “coaching culture”<sup>19</sup>

1. The analysis and determination of coaching culture implementation – the role of coaching in the performance of business strategy in a traditional and virtual organization.
2. Creating links between the coaching culture building strategy, the general strategy and HR management strategy.
3. The analysis of present and target culture of the company.
4. Involvement of all subdivisions in the organization in the coaching culture creation process.
5. Selection and development of external coach group.
6. Involving people, teams organizational units in coaching.
7. Building the company's own coaching potential – in case of long-term action related to building the coaching structure, it is necessary to build one's own coaching potential composed of coaches originating from the organizational structure.
8. Training courses on coaching elements for the managerial staff<sup>20</sup>.
9. Correlating the coaching processes with all the HR management processes in the organization.
10. The coaching process assessment – the system must bring about the possibility to assess the coach and the coachee, verify and implement the possible corrections in the coaching program. .

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<sup>18</sup> O'Neill M. B., *Coaching dla kadry menedżerskiej*, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Sidor-Rządkowska M., *Coaching Teoria, praktyka, studia przypadków*, Wolters Kluwer Polska - OFICYNA 2009

<sup>20</sup> Hargrove R., *Mistrzowski coaching*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2006

Summarizing, coaching is a tool used to support the organization and its partners' development. It proves well in traditional and virtual enterprises. Companies more and more frequently realize how important coaching is, building the organization strategies based on it and, in consequence, implementing the coaching culture. It means that the tool earlier used in sport only, now becomes well rooted in business.

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