

Applying Psychology in Executive Coaching Programmes for organisations

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The paper describes how a framework of coaching psychology can be developed within an organisational context. I shall briefly mention the emerging development of the Coaching Psychology Special Group in the UK as a starting point. I shall then describe how an executive coaching programme can be implemented from an organisational and project management perspectives.

Develop a framework for coaching psychology.

The emerging interest in coaching amongst psychologist in the UK has led to a development of a special group in coaching psychology (Law, 2002). While coaching psychology as a discipline is still under development in UK, it is well established in other countries such as Australia (Grant 2001).

According to Grant (2001), "Psychology is uniquely placed to make a significant contribution" in coaching. In order to "lay sound foundations for the emerging discipline of coaching psychology", the following framework was put forward:

Table 1: Coaching Psychology Framework. ✓ indicate topics that are covered in this paper.

Recommended actions:

- ✓ Apply the psychological techniques to non-clinical populations; and
Research to increase understanding of the process in terms of mediating variables that affect the effectiveness of coaching.
- Recommended techniques:
 - ✓ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) e.g. Beck, et al (1979); Greenberger & Padesky (1995). Neenan M. & Palmer S. (2001)
 - ✓ Trans-theoretical Model of change (TTM) Prochaska, & DiClemente, (1984)
- Future research:
 - ✓ Apply coaching to a group situation.
Evaluate their efficiency and effectiveness in terms of objectives and outcomes using quantifiable measures.

The following sections show:

- How the above framework can be implemented within an organisational context; and
- Explores some of the issues embedded in the implementation process.

How the organisations work

To remain effective and competitive, most organisations are required to manage unprecedented levels of change. Recently, the public sector including central government departments are focusing on change programmes, such as Investors in People (IIP), new human resource strategy, autonomic budget, 360 degree feedback, embedding delivery, and Working in

3D. These programmes emphasise the importance of effectiveness of human elements in organisations.

We spend most of our lives working in organisations. It is better to achieve our aspiration and gain job satisfaction. A key question for a manager is: Why we have some staff who perform incredibly well while some do not? Ideally, we would like to have a team in which all members perform excellently. Numerous psychological studies show the differences in responses and characteristics between productive and less productive organisations (Henry, 2003), which are summarised as follows (Table 2):

Table 2: Characteristics / Approaches of organizations

<u>Problem / situation</u>	<u>Productive</u>	<u>Non-productive</u>
<i>Culture</i> (e.g. Belbin, 1981)	Recognize equality and diversity.	Monolithic, embedded with prejudices.
<i>Conflict</i>	Have a win-win attitude.	I win - you lose attitude.
<i>Training</i>	Attention to individual development needs.	View training as waste of time and resources.
<i>Values</i> (Kanter, 1997; Handy, 1995).	Commitment to common values.	Interwoven with hidden personal agenda.
<i>Approach to management</i>	Staff effectively self-organize	Command-and-control.
<i>Work environment</i> (Ekvail 1997)	Open-ended.	Command-and-control approach to management.
<i>Overall team work</i>	Team members are empowered with responsibility.	Team members lack control over their working lives.
<i>Stress</i> (e.g. Palmer, 2003)	Low	High
<i>Job satisfaction</i>	High	Low
<i>Overall performance</i>	High	Low

While the change programmes emphasise effective management of other staff by senior executive, coaching psychology emphasises effective management of ourselves and our relationship at an individual level. Thus applying psychology of coaching in an organisation is particularly relevant in the above dual context. The aim of an executive coaching programme is to build a creative and highly productive team. The key question is how to introduce it into an organisation.

Most large organisations carry out their business in a project management process. The benefit of adopting a project management approach is that it meets requirements of recognised quality management standards. The principle of the project management can be applied to the organisation of various sizes though usually large organisations tend to adopt the approach.

Projects bring together resources, skills and ideas to achieve business objectives. Many large in particular public organisations adopt a standard practice of good project management. For example, a technique known as PRINCE (Projects In Controlled Environments) is widely practised in public organisations (Office of Government Commerce, 2002). From the PRINCE's

perspective, a project can be performed through the following organisational structure:

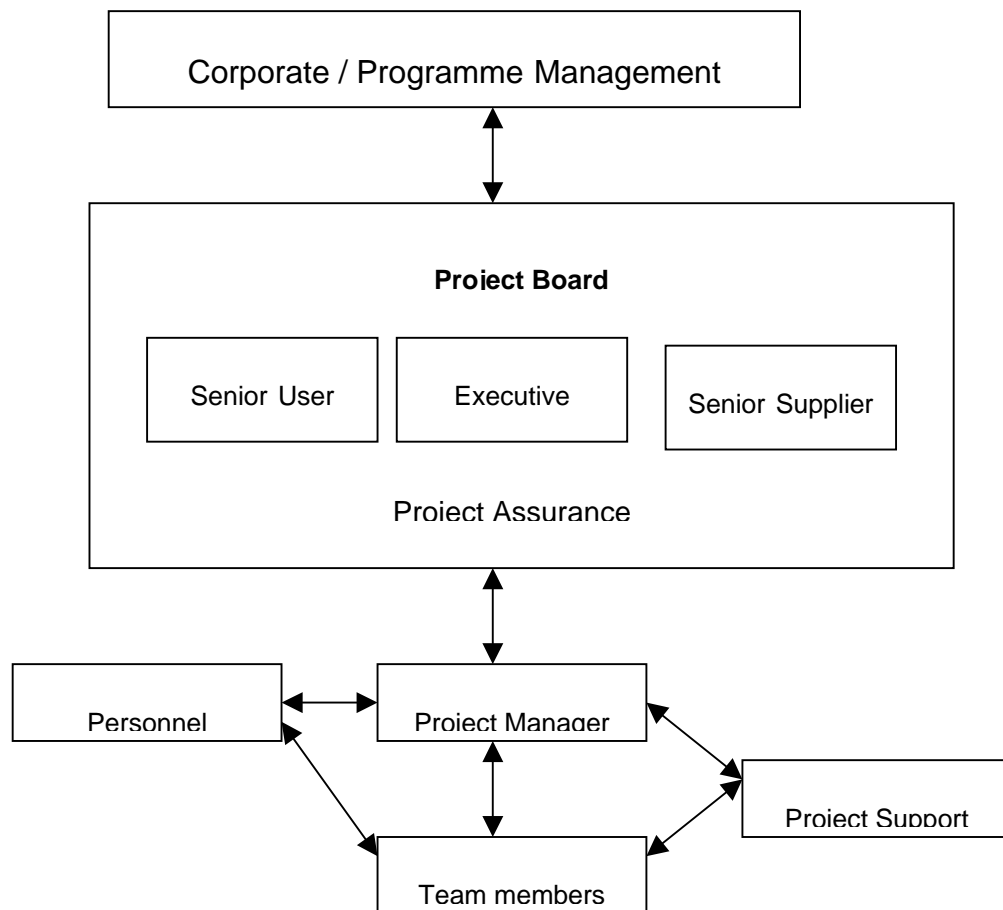


Figure 1: A minimum organisational structure for a project

Coaching an organisation, we need to have agreement on the following questions:

- Who says what is needed?
- Who provides the budget?
- Who provides the resources?
- Who authorises changes?
- Who manages day-to-day work?
- Who defines standards to be met?

It is important to clarify the role of different actors clearly. The *Project Board* consists of three actors:

- *Executive* – system owner with ultimate accountability for the project. Ensure that the project represents value for money.
- *Senior User* – represents the users. Ensure that user requirements are accurately specified and fully met; what is delivered is fit for propose within the constraints of the Business Case. Ensure user needs and expectations are being met and managed effectively.
- *Senior Supplier* – have the authority to commit or acquire the necessary resources.

Project Assurance is the responsibility of each Project Board member though the role can be delegated. However this must be independent of the Project Manager. *Project manager* has the authority to run the project on a day-to-day basis on behalf of the Project Board. Ensure the project delivers the required products to the required standard of quality and within the specified constraints of time and coast. In many organisations the *Personnel manager* carries out the role of personnel functions. But this could be separate as in the matrix management system. *Project Support* covers general support to project manager. *Team members* carry out allocated tasks and report on progress to the Project Manager.

Customer/Supplier and Coachee/Coach relationship

Within any project there are various groups of people with specific interests in the project and its outcome. In an executive coaching programme, it includes: Customers: executive who has commissioned the work and will be benefiting from the end results.

Users: coachees.

Suppliers: coach.

In a counselling situation, the organisational structure is simple. The relationship between counsellor/client is usually 1:1. In an executive coaching programme, the relationship between coach/coachees could be 1:1, 1:many or many: many. This could be in the form of a group or a one-to-one schedule. It forms a matrix that interacts with a more complex organisational structure, which at its simplest form, consists of the following (Table 3):

Table 3: A possible combination between coach and members in the organisation

	Coachee	Coach
Coach		√
Executive	√	√
Senior User	√	√
Senior Supplier	√	√
Project manager	√	√
Personnel manager	√	√
Project Support	√	
Team member	√	

A key question therefore is: at what level is the coaching programme targeted? In other words, who are the coachees? This could be at the most senior level (the Corporate Director or the Programme Manager is a coachee) or at the most junior level (individual team members) depending on the objectives as well as the cost of the project.

Organisational Process

Once the coach and team are established, a number of occupational techniques can be used to facilitate communication between team members, for example Drama (Bryant, 2003), FIRO (Cooper, 2003) or Emotional Intelligence (Chapman, 2003) can be used. Apart from organisational structure, we should also consider how coaching sessions might be fitted into the project management process. According to PRINCE2, a project management process consists of the following key stages (Figure 2):

- A. Planning.
- B. Directing.
- 1. Starting up a project
- 2. Initiating a project.
- 3. Controlling a stage.
- 3.1. Managing product delivery.
- 4. Managing stage boundaries.
- 5. Closing a project.

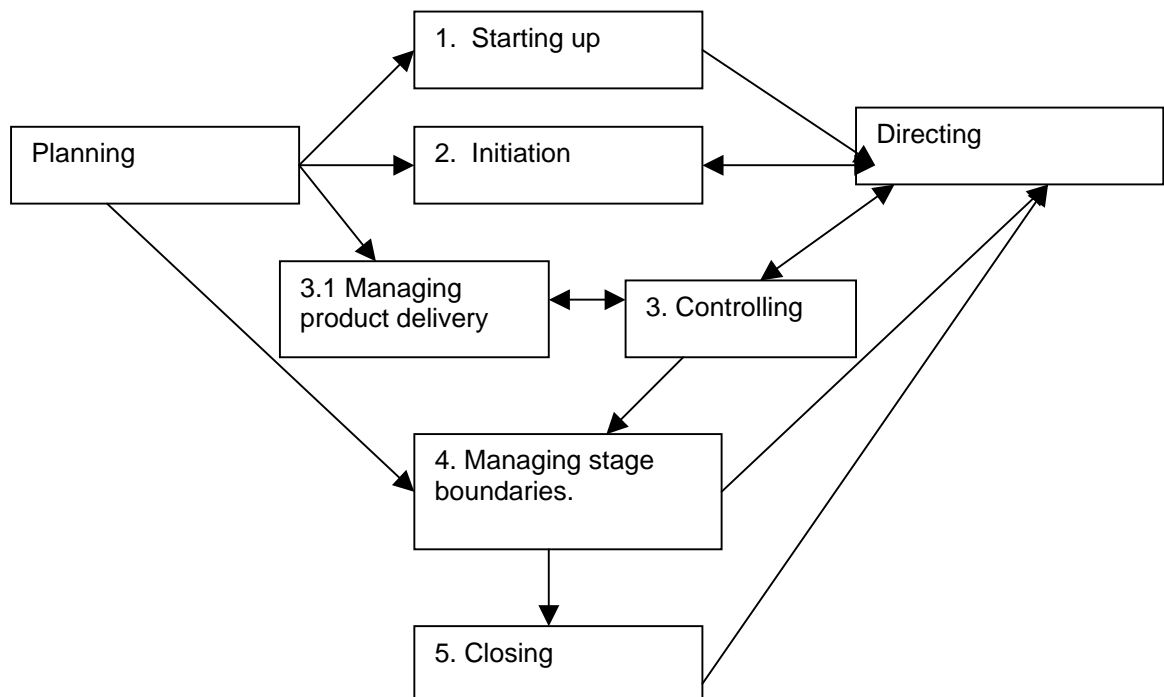


Figure 2: Project flow process

The processes are not sequential; some can be grouped in parallel with others. The above stages can be mapped upon to the TTM as follows:

Table 4: Organisation process mapping between TTM and PRINCE

Relationship	Counseling/Coaching	Executive Coaching Programme
Stage	<u>TTM</u>	<u>PRINCE</u>
0	Pre-contemplation	Start-up 0
1	Contemplation	Start-up 1
2	Preparation	Initiation
3	Action	Controlling a stage & Managing Product Delivery
4	Maintenance	Managing stage boundaries
5	Maintenance (for next project)	Closure

Stage 1 is a pre-project process. There may be no intention to change at an individual level according to TTM. However, at a team level, individual response may vary.

In Stage 2, there is an intention to change gathered momentum across the team. However for the change (project) to start, it would require the commitment from the Project Board to proceed.

Stage 3 involves the implementation of an action plan for change. This is an iterative process. It covers the day-to-day management activities on the project and ensures completed products meet required quality criteria. Defining quality criteria in coaching would be an important issue.

In Stage 4 the project manager is responsible for managing stage boundaries and reporting on the delivery of products. At the individual level, progress on change needs to be maintained.

Stage 5 is a project closure. Unlike TTM, a project has a clear end whether it has a successful completion or early termination. In this stage, the project manager needs to:

- Report on fulfilment of project objectives defined in the Project Initiation Document.
- Recommend required follow-on actions.
- Plan post-project reviews.
- Assess the way the project was managed and report lesson learned.
- Decommission the project.

Two important stages of PRINCE at a meta-level are missing in the TTM. These are: Planning and Directing. Directing a project runs from start-up through to closure of the project and is aimed at the management level above the Project Manager, namely the Project Board. Planning is an iterative process. A number of product-based techniques can be used to ensure plans

are based on required outputs rather than inputs. Planning involves the following steps:

1. Create a Product Breakdown Structure which identifies the products required.
2. Write Product Descriptions which include defining the quality requirements for each product.
3. Draw a Product Flow Diagram which shows the logical order of creation of the products and their interdependencies.
4. Identify activities required to create the products.
5. Estimate duration and effort for each activity.
6. Assess the risks.
7. Calculate the costs and Benefits.
8. Identify management control needed.
9. Document the plan, its assumptions and supporting text.

From economists' perspectives, Step 7 is considered as a classic cost benefit analysis by economists and a large number of econometric techniques can be used. In TTM, an equivalent personal construct is called 'self-efficacy' and 'habit strength'. Self-efficacy (Benefits) usually increases while one's habit strength (Costs) decreases as individuals (or projects) move through the stages of change.

Grant (2001) therefore recommended that the coach should avoid treating all individuals as though they were in the action stage (ready for change) as cognitive costs and benefits are required to be carefully balanced. In an organisational context, a number of team members at the same project stage may have different capacity to implement the organisational objective for business change. Coaches need to identify these and carefully plan out the coaching programme if an all level programme is required. For instance some are good at directing while others are good at implementing (Belbin, 1981).

In the project management process, the Project Plan is mandatory. Most projects will also need Stage Plans as well as Team Plans if more than one team were involved. The Project Plan contains the level of detail needed for day-to-day control by the Project Manager. Each stage will have a Stage Plan which is produced as the current stage approaches completion. Team Plans contain the more detailed activities of each Stage Plan and are usually prepared in parallel with the Stage Plan. An Exception Plan is produced when the Project Manager forecasts in an Exception Report that the project may deviate beyond the tolerance level set by the Project Board. The Project Board may respond by requesting an Exception Plan. The Exception Plan will replace the existing plan. It shows the work and resources necessary to react to the deviation. All plans have the following format:

- Graphical summary (e.g. a Gantt chart).
- Description of the plan.
- Pre-requisites and assumptions.
- External dependencies.
- Risks.
- Tolerances.

Cognitive Behavioural Techniques correspond to the organisational process very well. For instance, SMART / SMARTER objectives are now routinely used in many public organisations. These means that objectives should be specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, time bound, and preferably to be evaluated and reviewed at the end of the implementation. These can also be incorporated in coaching forms as follows:

Table 5: Action Plan adopted from Cognitive Behavioural Techniques

Objective	Start time	When by	Possible problems	Strategies to overcome problems	Progress
Recall your main or primary goal – make it SMARTER. Purpose. Value. Rate attractiveness of goal 1-10 scale Rate confidence of Success. 1-10 scale			Describe the problem. e.g. Performance Interfering Thinking (PITs)	Describe solution. e.g. Performance Enhancing Thinking (PETs)	Describe output. Describe outcome. Rate progress 1-10 scale. Rate confidence of Success. 1-10 scale

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has described how an executive coaching programme can be implemented in an organization within Grant's (2001) framework. Work remains to be done including:

- Further research to increase understanding of the implementation process.
- On completion of the programme, evidence based evaluation should be made in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness.

To clarify roles and manage boundaries, we need to answer the following key questions:

- Who is doing what at each stage?
- At what level is the coaching programme targeted? Who are the coaches?
- How do we define quality criteria in coaching?
- How does 1:1 coaching map onto the organisational project process?

Introducing an executive coaching programme to a large organisation is more likely to be successful if one observes the following guidelines:

- Have a business plan or be part of the organisational business plan.
- Build on an existing delivery of the organisation.
- Embed it within the project management process.
- Incorporate it early, at the objective setting stage.
- Link it to the staff performance appraisals.
- Ensure the individual coachee sees how their work and personal objectives fit into the broader picture of the organisational objective.

For general discussion of the above issues, one can respond to the coaching psychology e-mail group. If you wish to address to me specifically, please e-mail me at ho.law@empsy.com

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