

Coaching and training transfer: A phenomenological inquiry into combined training-coaching programmes.

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Abstract

Businesses often turn to coaching to combat under-performance in training transfer, i.e. the translation of learning from training into improved performance in the workplace. This article reports on a phenomenological study of the experiences of seven professional external coaches working on combined training-coaching leadership development or management skills programmes. The findings suggest that coaching supports training transfer, but not necessarily in the ways that established transfer models predict. Synergistic effects emerged from combining training and coaching. The coach's interpretation of their role had a significant influence on transfer effects. The study serves to inform coaches' practice and contribute to more effective programme design.

Key words: coaching, training transfer, phenomenology, training-coaching programme design, coaching skills

Introduction

A perennial concern for businesses is that investment in training may not translate into improved performance in the workplace (Burke and Hutchins, 2008). The concept of training transfer, defined by Baldwin and Ford as "learned behaviour [that] must be generalized to the job context and maintained over a period of time on the job" (1988, p.63), demonstrates that transfer is complex. The training delegate must understand the content of the training with a sufficient degree of abstraction to be able to recognise contexts for application at work (generalized). They must then decide to apply the training, and plan and execute new behaviours successfully and repeatedly (maintained).

Training is widely recognised by employers as being an important tool in raising the capabilities and performance of employees (Cheng and Hampson, 2008) and large sums are invested in programmes. A Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development survey of its members in 2010 indicated that employees receive on average eight days training per year (CIPD, 2010) and the American Society of Training and Development estimated U.S. spending on training in 2008 to be \$56 bn. (Bakir, 2010). However, it is often reported that levels of application are as low as 10% (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004). Although such estimates are difficult to accept at face value, it is generally accepted that training transfer is substantially sub-optimal (Nijman *et al.*, 2006, Holton *et al.*, 2003).

There is some evidence that organizations are turning to external coaching as a method of improving transfer. Fillery-Travis and Lane (2007) cite coaching to support training as one of two tasks for which coaches are recruited. However, there are many definitions of coaching, reflecting the diversity of approaches it encompasses, although most agree that coaching is a one-to-one encounter tailored to the learning needs of the client (Clutterbuck, 1998; Rogers, 2008). Greif's definition includes an indication of how coaching works and neatly brings together the client-centred nature of the encounter with the rigorous nature of the interventions.

Coaching is an intensive and systematic facilitation of result-oriented problem reflection and self-reflectionaimed at the attainment of self-congruent goals and conscious self-change and self-development. (Greif, 2007, p.223).

This study aims to illuminate the phenomenon of training transfer in order to inform coaching practice and support optimised programme design. At its heart is the experience of the employee, who will be the recipient of training and coaching. To avoid possible confusion, I refer to this employee as the *delegate* and the person or persons who call for the employee to be trained is referred to as the *organization*. The training literature refers to delegates' bosses as supervisors, but this is a term that has a special meaning for coaches who use supervisors as a means of evaluating their work (Carroll, 2007). I have substituted *line manager* for this term where possible. The body providing the training, which may be the coach or someone else, is referred to as the *training provider*. The coach (names changed for confidentiality) may also be identified as the *research participant*.

Literature review

The literature review revealed a dearth of scholarly consideration of training and coaching together, but an extensive literature on the concept of training transfer. The Holton *et al.* (2000) Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) is an example of recent attempts by researchers to find an integrative model of training transfer and can be considered one of the dominant models in this field (Cheng and Hampson, 2008). The 16-construct instrument supports a model of four key groupings: trainee characteristics, motivation, ability to apply and environment, shown in Figure 1.

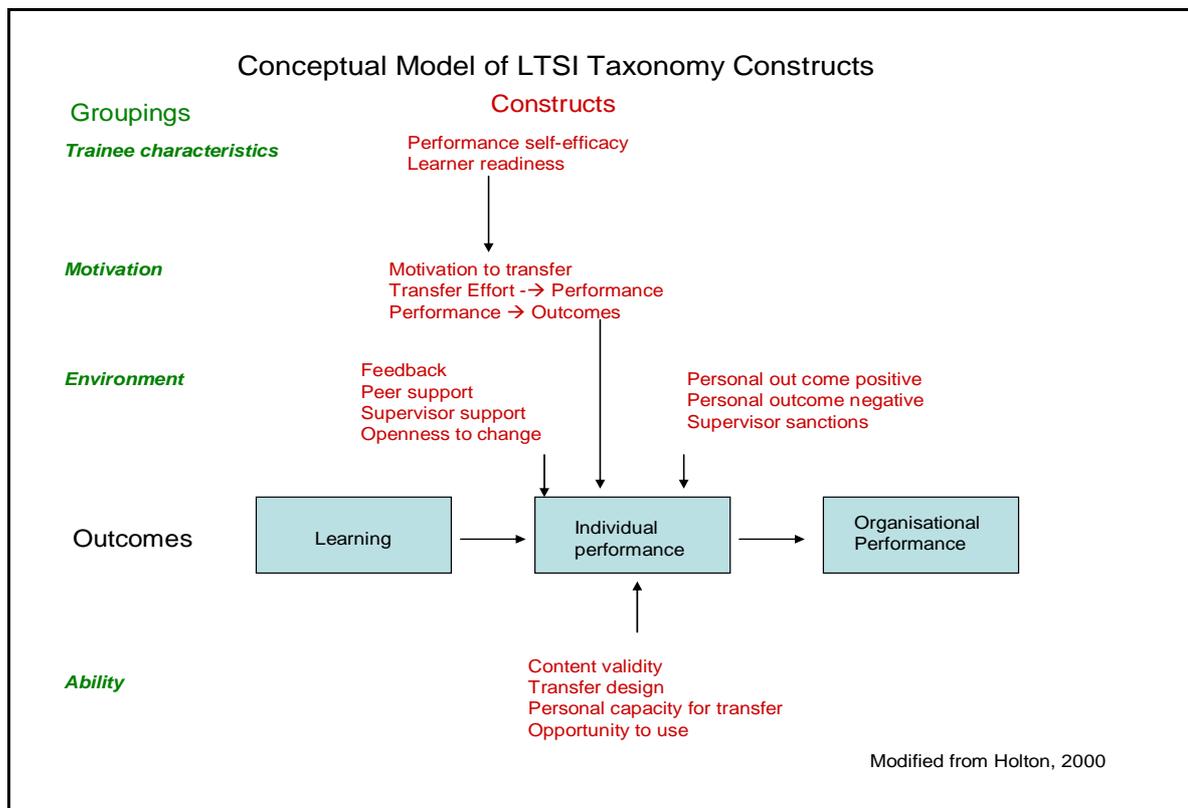


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of LTSI Taxonomy Constructs

There is, however, good reason to doubt this model's suitability for evaluating combined training-coaching programmes, both in and of itself and in relation to coaching. In itself, the survey

method requires readily understood operationalized concepts to generate responses in pre-ordained ways, potentially limiting participants' ability to communicate shades of meaning (Bryman, 2008). The instrument is invariably used directly after training, thus measuring intentions and expectations, not results. As such it can be compared to an assessment at level 2 in the Kirkpatrick (1959) evaluation model, which is some way from the level of behavioural application of learning (level 4), or return on investment (level 5), (Phillips, 1996) that would demonstrate true transfer. The model is generic, limiting the possibility to accommodate differences between types of training. There may be a difference in the requirements to achieve transfer between skill training, 'doing' such as excel database use and leadership training, in which a proportion of the training may be about 'being', including facing philosophical issues such as the nature of leadership.

There is a marked difference in the paradigms of training and coaching scholarship. Most studies on training transfer use quantitative methods, supporting nomothetical predictions about delegates' responses. In contrast, much coaching research is qualitative and ideographic, focussing on individuals' experiences. Lawton-Smith and Cox (2007) argue that training and coaching lie on a continuum between pre-determined 'right answers' (training) and person-centred 'emergent answers' (coaching). Examples of contrasting approaches to two key transfer success factors in the LTSI illustrate this problem.

LTSI measures of motivation stress external indicators of success and extrinsic motivations. This apparent behaviourist approach treats delegates as rational actors, reacting to external stimuli, making judgements about reward and risk in the environment and reaching logical decisions about their level of motivation to transfer. Coaching takes a more client-centred approach and has a strong focus on intrinsic motivation, often in the form of values work (Hudson, 1999, Whitworth *et al.*, 2007, Rogers, 2008) and self-concordance (Sheldon *et al.*, 1999, Grant, 2006, Greif, 2007). The use of the Holton taxonomy survey to measure transfer effects would therefore be likely to miss transfer effects when they relate to enhancing intrinsic motivation.

The LTSI features a number of questions relating to planning, execution and monitoring behaviours, such as, "My supervisor meets with me to discuss ways to apply training on the job" (Bates, 2010, personal correspondence). However, these activities are rigidly allocated to specific actors, particularly the line manager. A coach could perform these tasks, (Rogers, 2008, Whitmore, 2002), but since the Holton survey asks specifically about line manager support, such support would not be captured.

Surprisingly, a search for research studies in which training and coaching are combined programmes yielded only five studies. All were similar in that they dealt with training in the area of leadership or management issues, but displayed great variety in research methodology, type and approach of coach, and focus of application. Three studies used a case study methodology, one used action research and one used an experiment method. Only two studies used professional external coaches whilst the other three used internal coaches with varying levels of coaching and training-content subject expertise. Some studies focussed on directive problem solving support during the post-training application phase (e.g. Olivero *et al.*, 1997) whilst others stressed activating the delegate's own internal resources without reference to any subject expertise by the coach (Behrendt, 2004). In some cases the goals were expressly related to job performance in the trained areas (e.g. Olivero *et al.*, 1997), whilst others permitted wider goal selection, such as quality of life goals (Bowles *et al.* 2007). Two studies prioritised self-discovery goals using psychometric tests to promote self-awareness (Simkins *et al.*, 2006, Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, 2007). All studies reflected only a partial correlation with the expectations of the LTSI. For example, environmental issues relating to planning and executing changed behaviours figured strongly, but the focus on self-awareness demonstrates an interest in general self-efficacy, which the LTSI considers to have only a weak and indirect influence on training transfer.

The literature search revealed a mismatch of focus in the approaches of training and coaching literature that suggested that the LTSI model may be inadequate to consider coaching's contribution to training transfer. Extant research on combined programmes revealed a relative absence of the voice of the professional external coach (Willig, 2008) and no consensus on appropriate goals and techniques. This gap in the literature suggested a research approach that would allow professional external coaches to identify success factors from their own perspective, which could form a basis for analysing those factors in light of the expectations of training transfer researchers. From this two research questions were formulated: "How do coaches experience coaching engagements with clients who are also receiving formal training?" and "What can coaching contribute to the achievement of training transfer?" Answering these questions would provide guidance for coaches operating in this area and could inform improved programme design.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

The study is located in an interpretivist epistemological paradigm (Bryman 2008), reflecting the social and psychological influences affecting both coach and delegate. The post-modern, constructionist ontology reflects the impossibility of those interpretations being definitive (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The design was informed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith *et al.*, 2009) and hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990).

I used an idiographic approach, i.e. one that concentrates on the particular experience of a few participants, producing a rich and detailed exploration of a complex phenomenon (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The conventional double hermeneutic of my interpreting the coach's interpretation of their experience is extended to a triple hermeneutic, since the coach is interpreting the delegate's experience.

This method offered a medium for an encounter between the contrasting perspectives of the training and coaching communities to take place. The literature on training transfer stood as an element of my foreknowledge (Langdridge, 2007). The exploration of coaching experiences in interviews allowed me to place that foreknowledge at risk and generated the conditions for a synthesis to emerge.

The technique of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) facilitates the use of a hermeneutic of empathy along with a hermeneutic of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1965; Langdridge, 2007). The empathetic mode allowed me to enter the coaches' life-worlds' whilst facilitating spiralling encounters with my foreknowledge (beliefs, background and culture, along with the body of knowledge coming from concepts of training transfer and coaching theory) in a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1975). The method is empathetic in that the "dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength" (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.25)

Smith *et al.* (2009) outline three useful devices to get below the data itself using a hermeneutic of suspicion. Firstly, if I detect dissonance between the participants' data and my own models, this is an indication that I should try to understand what underlies the participants' beliefs. Secondly, I am looking for external influences on the participant's interpretation, which according to Schleiermacher could bring new insights to the meaning of the data. Finally, in the existential interpretation of phenomenology of Heidegger and Sartre, absences in the data – what is not being said - may be as important as what is said.

Study design

The combined training-coaching programmes I found in the literature search were all in organizations and involved leadership or related management issues, so I limited my research to these

settings. I used a mixture of opportunistic, criterion and purposive sampling (Langdridge, 2007) to select seven participants from an initial group of fourteen volunteers. I selected them on the criteria of having worked on numerous combined programmes, and identification as independent executive coaches (normally through membership of recognised coaching bodies such as the EMCC or AC).

I used semi-structured interviews in which I introduced topics for discussion, such as “tell me about the kinds of issues that delegates brought up in coaching”. The interviews were transcribed, checked and names changed to protect anonymity. I used the IPA method of transcript analysis, reading and re-reading, making comments and then noting emerging themes. This was an iterative process and terminology developed as I analysed more transcripts. However, I did not feel that the process was delivering sufficiently strong super-ordinate themes, possibly due to the broad research questions.

I decided to add analytical techniques from hermeneutic phenomenology. This enabled me to identify themes by engaging with the transcripts holistically, selectively and in detail (Langdridge, 2007). Van Manen (1990, p. 31) identifies the steps of “describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting” and “maintaining a strong oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.” Langdridge (2007) indicates that the word pedagogical can be replaced by the researcher’s own scholarly interest (in my case, training and coaching theory). I found that as I started to write up findings my reflexive engagement with the text in detail profoundly supported my understanding of the emerging themes. I discussed my interpretations, using references to the literature search or to new literature.

There are three findings sections:

- i) coaching’s contribution to training transfer,
- ii) perspectives on the combination of training and coaching
- iii) the coach’s interpretation of their role.

Findings

Coaching’s contribution to training transfer

I compared the coaches’ rich descriptions of their interventions with the expectations of Baldwin and Ford’s definition of transfer as “learned behaviour [that] must be generalized to the job context and maintained over a period of time on the job” (1988, p.63); focussing on the key phrases of “learned”, “behaviour” and “generalized and maintained”. I evaluated the findings in light of coaching theory and research, and the expectations of the LTSI model of training transfer.

Learning

Coaches used reflection techniques to help delegates review their learning in training as suggested by this comment from Angela:

*I would normally start with what worked for them, how did they find it and how did they feel?
... Then gradually move them to what ... they wanted to develop further (Angela)*

Angela is demonstrating using reflection techniques (e.g. Moon, 1999; Jackson, 2004) to get delegates to remember their experiences and, in a process of metacognition, to reflect upon their cognitive and emotional reactions, before moving on to consider actions. The coaches also introduced new elements of conceptual learning during coaching. Angela gave one example of introducing a new transactional analysis model of parent, adult and child (Berne, 1968) to explore problems that a delegate reported in coaching in dealing with difficult relationships. Cavnah (2006) argues that coaches do sometimes educate their clients, introducing models and theories when it is appropriate to that client’s specific need, so conceptual learning is not solely the currency of training.

Most coaches reported use of psychometrics and/or 360-feedback. The delegates learned about the meaning and derivation of the psychometric or appraisal scales in training and subsequently learned about their own personality in terms of those scales through a debriefing process in coaching. This deepened conceptual learning and enabled delegates to learn about and from themselves. A strong emphasis on self-awareness and reflection is a common theme in much coaching practice (Grant, 2006; Greif, 2007) but this stands in contrast to the low priority ascribed to trainee characteristics in the LTSI.

Behaviour

Behavioural change is an important aim of leadership development training and all coaches cited this as an important goal of the coaching. The coaches did report helping delegates directly with techniques such as rehearsal (Palmer and Dryden, 1995), but there was more evidence of them working with delegates' beliefs and values as antecedents to behaviour as Richard noted: *coaching... is making people want to play. (Richard)*

The coaches helped delegates recognise and deal with encounters with new leadership paradigms that had resulted in cognitive dissonance, leading to resistance and fear of change. These included issues arising from leadership development training stressing personal qualities, e.g. be a role-model (Transformational Leadership, Bass and Riggio, 2006) and maintain personal authenticity (Situational Leadership, Hersey *et al.* 2008).

They acknowledged the delegate's thoughts and emotions, and moved them on to consider what the future might look like, generating motivation to work with new paradigms. There were numerous examples of work on the delegates' beliefs, values and mental schema about how the world works (Kelly, 1955; Mezirow, 1990; Hudson, 1999), reflecting techniques such as transformational coaching, in which disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1990) are explored, facilitating examination and challenge, paving the way for a "shift in the room" (Hawkins and Smith, 2010).

Generalized and maintained

Richard described the experience of training alone as:

...it's almost as if you've given me extra oxygen, and then you put me back in my environment and there is no oxygen.

My analysis of the wide range of post-training support offered by coaches suggested the use of six stages of change, attended throughout by risk of relapse, as found in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska *et al.*, 1995):

Pre-contemplation and contemplation

Some delegates reported difficulty in recognizing the relevance of their training to their work, a problem of *generalizability* (Baldwin and Ford, 1988).

...they sometimes find some of the leadership models that are discussed on the programme somewhat abstract.... And my particular director was saying, like, she struggled to get the connection across. (Nina)

Whilst trainers strive to flex their delivery methods to fit all delegates' various learning styles (Smith and Kolb, 1996), the coaches could focus on one person's preferences. This enabled delegates to contemplate areas for change, correlating closely to the LTSI activities in ability to apply of content validity and transfer design.

Preparation

All of the coaches reported helping delegates through the process of detailed action planning, including setting goals, deciding between alternative options, considering possible outcomes and identifying actions. For example, Angela reported an example of helping a delegate overcome her perceived lack of skill by identifying her own resources; an approach also reflected in the study by Behrendt (2004).

...there were a number of situations where she was highly skilled. So what was difficult about transferring that to the situation she was anxious about? And we actually started to look at ways... And I saw her sit up and the confidence grow. (Angela)

Various items within the environment category of the LTSI recognise the importance of the planning stage, but allocate them to line managers.

Action and Maintenance

Many coaches felt that support during delegates' attempts at implementing change were important to prevent relapse. Techniques included post-session summaries and reminders; Nina called this "touch".

Other coaches invited delegates to articulate and evaluate their progress against plan. Len considered it important to normalise the experience of awkward or unsuccessful attempts at change. In contrast to the coaches' direction towards self-evaluation, the LTSI stresses the availability of external feedback from the delegate's environment, particularly line managers and peers.

Evidence from neuroscience indicates that new activities require large amounts of cerebral energy in the form of attention, generating error signals that trigger automatic avoidance behaviours. Repeated focus on an issue stabilises the neural circuits that support the activity, increasing the likelihood of new behaviours becoming habitual (Rock and Schwartz, 2006). Relapse prevention activities during training have not been found to be effective (e.g. Gaudine and Saks, 2004), indicating that this may be more successful when temporally proximate to the transfer attempt, rather than the training.

Termination

Richard stressed the importance of controlled withdrawal by building self-reliance and self-efficacy in the delegate, developing skills to evaluate experiences and recognise success.

Summary

The data revealed work on the key transfer success factors identified in training research, but with a different emphasis from the LTSI, for example, in promoting motivation through reconciling dissonances in personal world views and values.

Perspectives on combined training-coaching leadership development programmes

A number of themes concerned the implications of combining training and coaching. These are considered from the perspectives of the organization, the delegate, the coach and a more abstract perspective of learning.

The organization's perspective

Organizations' strong desire to educate sometimes led to a problem of overload:

I think people always try and put too much into [training] programmes and there's always a feeling at some point by everyone... that they're overwhelmed. (Nina).

This finding echoes Gosling's critique of leadership courses, recognising the difficulty of allowing enough reflective space for delegates to "absorb and digest the benefits" (2005, p.17). Coaching supported delegates by creating space for individual meta-cognition and reflection.

A number of coaches recognised organizations' desires to use coaching to transmit cultural or strategic messages. Gosling argued that leadership courses offer a vehicle to "promulgate shared models that promote a common conceptual 'language'" (2005, p.16). Kissack and Callahan (2010) argue that reciprocity exists in culturally driven training: The organisation hopes that a significant body of convinced delegates will act towards delivering cultural change in the organization. There was evidence from the coaches that they worked with clients to interpret such messages received in training as in Eric's comment:

Sometimes there's an element of trying to help the coaching client understand what the organization is actually wanting when they talk about transformational leadership or creativity or empowerment. (Eric)

Participants reported cases in which the coaching led to delegates espousing or challenging cultural or strategic messages, but in either case, the coaching had helped delegates encounter and think through the issues in question.

The conversion of learning to action in the workplace was a central concern for organisations. Coaching supported goal selection and planning, reduced relapse risks and compensated for transfer system weaknesses, particularly lack of line manager support.

The delegate's perspective

In the semi-public sphere of training, delegates valued the opportunity to benchmark themselves against peers. Olivia encouraged her delegates to establish credibility with peers and form networking groups that could later provide support and concrete assistance. However, pursuing these aims could hamper delegates' learning since they might not be willing to expose weaknesses or lack of understanding in front of peers.

In a training course environment.., you get a couple of inches of depth, occasionally you've got a little flash of insight and then you see somebody going, I've said too much, I'm closing down. (Richard)

The private sphere of coaching offered a safe place for delegates to talk about weaknesses and vent frustrations, as the coaches offered containment (O'Broin and Palmer, 2007).

Delegates also appreciated the ability to focus on their own issues.

But training never will address the real specifics of your situation in your context.... 'So now I've started to think differently, what I'm going to do with that? Thank goodness I've got some coaching to help me take that forward.'(Angela)

The abstraction of learning, such that the delegate recognises contexts for application at work, is a key element of training transfer, identified by Baldwin and Ford (1988) as generalization. The coaching conversation offers an opportunity to explore theory through the delegate's own experience, and so arrive at that generalization.

The coach's perspective

The participants argued that the training freed them somewhat from having to educate during their coaching. All of the coaches demonstrated familiarity with the topics covered in training (as far as these were known), such as situational leadership, transformational leadership, and performance feedback processes. Leadership development has been described as a specific genre of coaching in its own right (e.g. Lee, 2003, Stokes and Jolly, 2010). Lee (2003) argues that leadership coaches need to be skilled in the areas of psychological, coaching and business models and the coaches demonstrated knowledge in all three areas. Cavanagh argues that expert knowledge helps the coach facilitate the emergence of solutions from the client by the use of questions informed by “their hypotheses about what is going on for the client... built on the foundation of the coaches’ understandings.... Their domain-specific knowledge is constantly in play” (2006, p.337).

Learning perspectives

The data revealed repeated cycles of thinking and doing in combined programmes, reminiscent of Kolb’s (1984) description of experiential learning. Kolb argued that adult learning requires a cycle that passes through the phases of concrete experience, observational reflection, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Both training and coaching reflect this cycle, and the combination (particularly when the coaching expressly builds on training) provides an opportunity for repeated turns of this cycle to produce a learning spiral.

Coaches who had also provided training described the use of lectures about concepts and models, facilitated discussions, case studies and role-play, demonstrating both conceptual and experiential learning (see Figure 2).

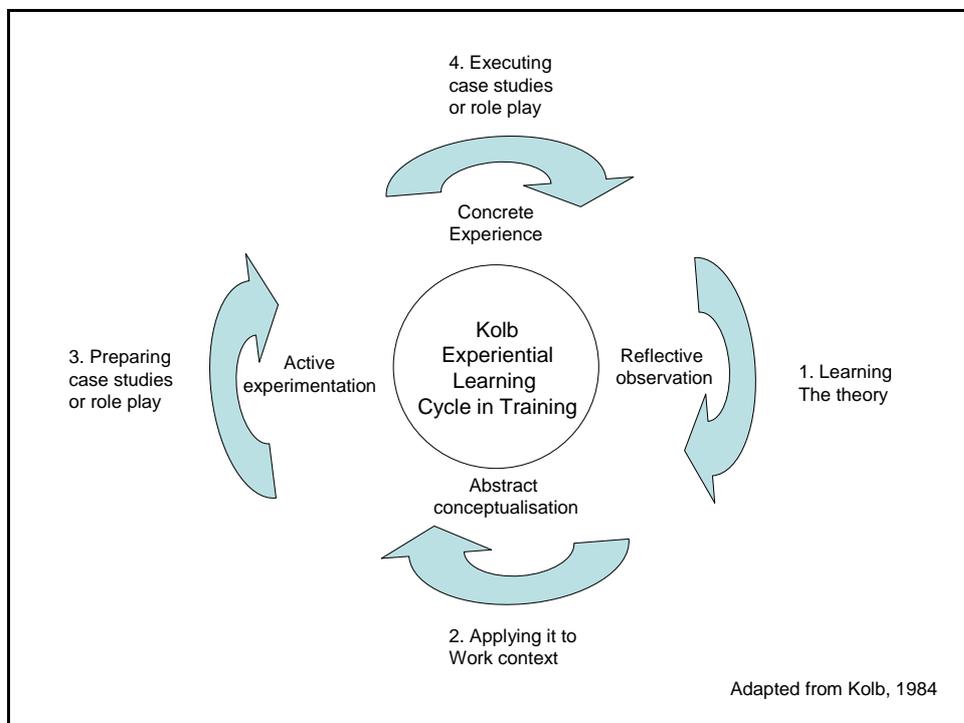


Figure 2: Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle in Training

The data on coaching indicates that this phase contributes to learning by supporting a second turn of the cycle. In this case the learning is ‘on-line’, personalised to the individual and their work context. (See figure 3).

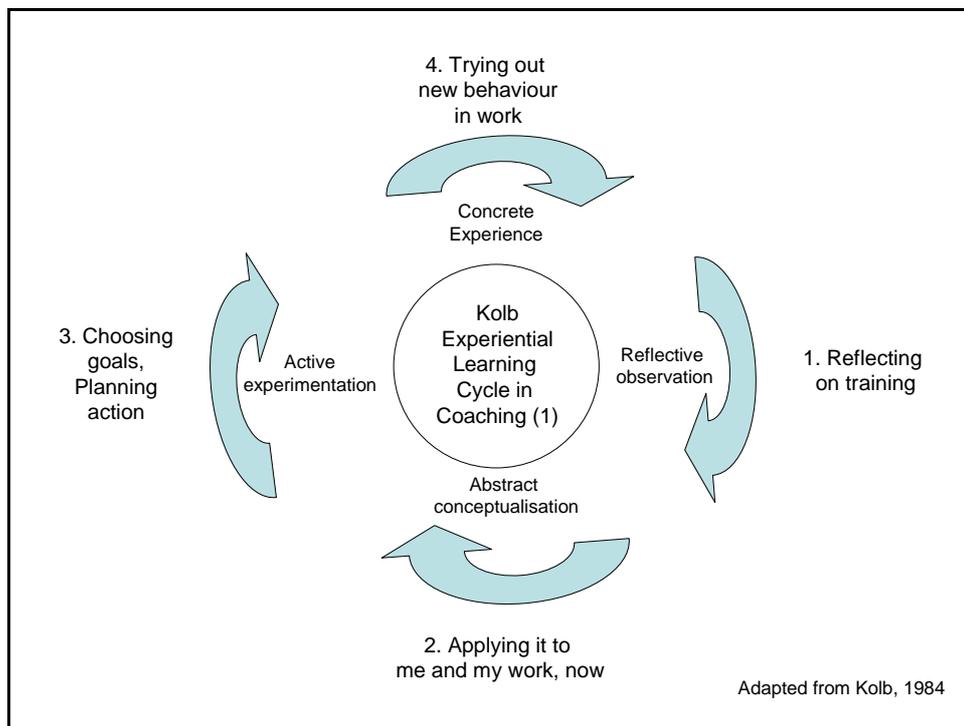


Figure 3: Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle in Coaching (1)

With extended coaching, there was evidence of a third turn of the cycle. The formal arrangement of coaching and the emotional connection of the coach and delegate helped to keep delegates on task. Len described this continued support as generating 'discretion' in delegates, a form of judgement that goes beyond the application of rules or theory, drawing upon the delegate's experiences and values. (See figure 4).

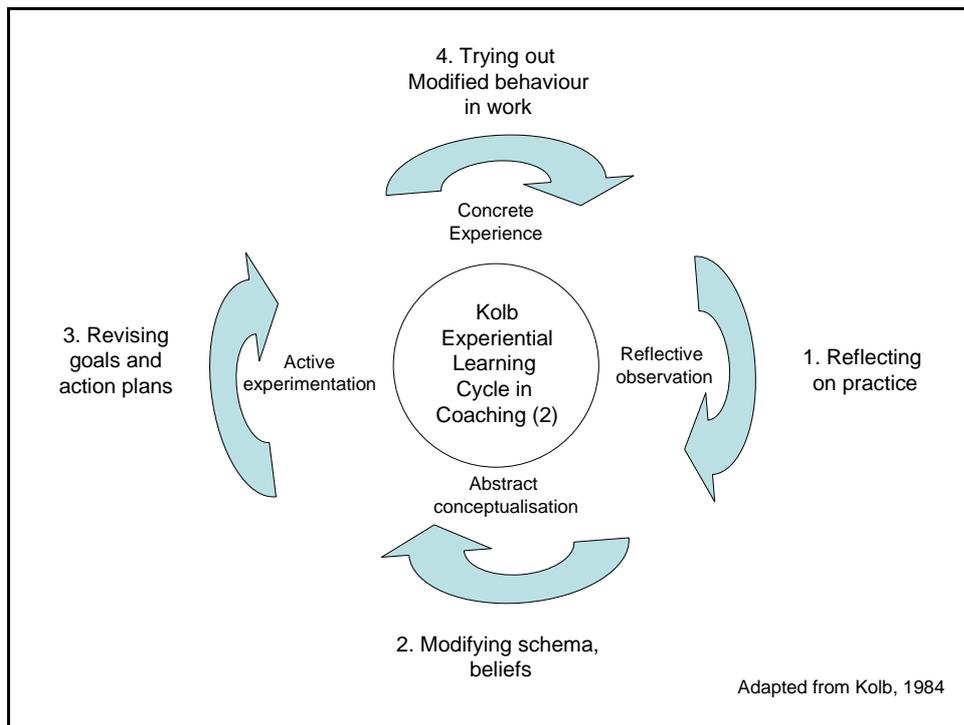


Figure 4: Kolb Experiential Cycle in Coaching (2)

Summary

The data revealed significant synergies in the combination of training and coaching, which provided benefits for the organization, coach and delegate and promoted learning.

The coach's interpretation of their role

The research participants experienced a wide range of programme designs, indicating that none is dominant. The comparative relationship of the coach with the commissioning organization, the training provider and the delegate appeared to be key. Hay (2007, p. 118) refers to this as psychological distance, the “felt or fantasised distance between parties”. I identified three role-clusters: the trainer-coach, the independent coach and the integrated coach.

The trainer-coach: in service of the training content

Most participants had delivered training and coaching on the same programme. 57 % of coaches in a recent AC/EMCC/ICF survey reported providing training in addition to coaching (Slingsby, 2010), suggesting that many coaches could perform both roles.

Trainer-coaches saw their primary role as embedding the learning from training in behaviours in the workplace. They felt well qualified to help delegates in the coaching phase to understand the detail of the training and interpret the organization's culture and intentions, due to their direct relationship to the programme design. Trainer-coaches exercised considerable influence in setting the agenda and were more likely to restrict the agenda to training related issues as Richard suggests:

You've said it's about taking somebody from the course, changing a behaviour, you're bound professionally to deliver that... and it seems to me to be a cheat to go in on the coaching bit and go, let's go and talk about anything because that's not what you sold this on. (Richard)

The implications of this type of role understanding are that the delegates get a very 'joined-up' experience of training and coaching. Conceptual and skills learning were reinforced by revisiting the same issues in coaching: - a narrow but deep experience.

However, the restrictions on agenda could result in delegates' pressing development needs being unmet, a clear limitation of this design. Hay (2007, p.19) identifies the danger of a close psychological distance between the trainer-coach and the organization as having the quality of "sorting out" the delegate and this could threaten the coach-delegate working alliance. The coach needs considerable flexibility to move between the role-requirements of trainer and coach, reflecting the dichotomy or "right" and "emergent" answers (Lawton-Smith and Cox, 2007). A further challenge is the protection of private coaching confidences in public training scenarios. This configuration might be particularly useful where training needs analysis points to a clearly defined shared need, e.g. to develop the abilities of leaders to work cross-culturally during an international merger.

The independent coach: in service of the delegate's development

Olivia described an engagement in which training and coaching were purchased separately, with nearly no contact between them. She recognised a close psychological distance to the delegate, but a "disconnect" from the other parties to the programme. She did not feel that she had an explicit definition of the purpose of her coaching and very limited information about the content of the training programme.

The independent coaches saw their role in supporting the delegate's development. They saw training and coaching as two parallel development activities and did not identify transfer of learning from the training as a goal. Independent coaches were less likely to exclude topics from coaching and the agenda was more delegate-led.

The implication of this type of role understanding is that the training and coaching are perceived "as a different form of support" (Olivia). Indeed, it might be possible to imagine training acting as a support to leadership coaching (Peltier, 2001; Lee, 2003; Stokes and Jolly, 2010) in a reversal of my research question. The agenda is set to the delegate's most pressing needs, potentially improving motivation since the learning is more self-directed (Knowles, 1978). The wide range of potential topics give this format the potential of offering a broad but less deep experience.

The lack of alignment of the coaching to the training, potentially reducing the opportunity to leverage learning from training is a possible limitation. Olivia described the absence of detailed information about the content of the training as "not 100% satisfactory", but felt that understanding the content in more detail would be a significant burden for the limited number of coaching sessions involved. This arrangement may be appropriate where the training needs analysis suggests disparate needs.

The integrated coach: in service of the programme

Nina described her coaching on a programme where an organization had commissioned a consultancy to develop a leadership programme. The consultancy worked with two training providers and a coaching company. She felt a close psychological contract with her delegates, but in contrast to the independent coaches also felt close to the other parties, due to monthly group coaching supervision meetings and significant information from the programme designer and training companies. Nina perceived her role as supporting the programme.

*I'm actually taking it up a level and saying what's the purpose of the leadership programme?
... It was designed ...to raise their performance (Nina)*

Nina rejected the idea of directing the coaching agenda towards the training content as “manufactured”. However, she felt that her understanding of the training content enabled her to address any delegate questions credibly. The delegates were largely free to set the agenda of coaching. This programme has the benefits of both previous examples. The programme therefore had the potential to be both deep and broad.

The considerable overhead in co-ordinating information about the programme is a significant limitation. The use of this arrangement has wide applications, but may be suited to programmes where the training needs analysis recognises a wide range of needs, but wishes to maximise some common elements among its delegates.

The Line Manager.

The coaches tended not to meet line managers, as often happens in conventional coaching, where a three-way meeting sets the coaching agenda (Rogers, 2008). Even when coaches made efforts to engage them, as Angela did by sending information with suggested actions, few delegates reported having discussions with their line managers. Studies have indicated that although line manager support is a significant aid to training transfer (Scaduto *et al.*, 2008; Abdulkarim *et al.*, 2009), it is not always forthcoming (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Santos and Stuart, 2003). However, since coaches reported working on the application issues allocated in the LTSI environment grouping to line managers, part of their role may have been supplementing or replacing the line manager in transfer enhancing activities.

Summary

The variety of role-types indicates significant flexibility in programme design, which can be used to accommodate a wide variety of organization needs.

Limitations

This was an exploratory study and the use of phenomenological methods provided rich data from experienced and credible coaches working in this area. The search for dissonance and absence within the hermeneutic of suspicion revealed significant dissonances with existing models of training transfer. There was an interesting absence of explicit references to adult development theories by the coaches, although these were central to my interpretations.

The participants and researcher are professional coaches. It is therefore not possible to rule out the possibility of a conscious or unconscious partiality in favour of coaching. Unconscious introjections of the language and norms of ‘the professional coach’ may also have limited participants’ ability to express their experiences.

The study was limited to the use of largely UK-based coaches and a focus on programmes concerned with leadership development issues. In line with all qualitative methods, there can be no claim of generalizability of the results to a wider population. However, using an interpretation of weak holism (Schwandt, 2000), readers may find resonance through “defensible reasoning” (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.178).

This study has focussed on the coach’s interpretation of their role. It would now be instructive to follow the design and implementation of a combined programme with a case study methodology to see how the perspective of the coach compares to the perspective of other stakeholders and how these change over the life of a programme from design to completion. Alternatively, it would be possible to take the findings of this study forward as a basis for developing a grounded theory study to form models of coaching in combined training-coaching programmes.

Conclusion

The literature review demonstrated the challenges in creating effective combined training-coaching programmes. Training and coaching have differing approaches and there is no consensus on the best way to design or evaluate programmes.

The findings of my research suggest that coaching can deliver the success factors in training transfer but not always in ways that training researchers might expect. A clear theme running through the findings is the ability of coaching to address individual needs; personal weaknesses, additional learning needs, challenges to existing paradigms and mental schema, performance challenges and revising and maintaining changed behaviours. The coaches believed that the balance of work on beliefs and actions over extended time made a powerful contribution to sustained change. The different approaches of training and coaching appeared to have synergistic effects when used in combination, from the perspectives of the organization, delegate and coach and in respect of learning.

The diversity of the coaches' role interpretation illustrated the challenges they face in this work. The data suggests that significant reflexivity is required if the coach takes on the role of trainer and coach, because of the marked differences in the two approaches. An understanding of leadership development theories and concepts seemed to be prevalent in the coaches' work and this suggests that competence in this area, as proposed by leadership coaching writers (e.g. Lee, 2003; Stokes and Jolly, 2010) may be particularly useful. I was particularly struck by the centrality of adult learning and development theory in my interpretation of the data, yet the coaches rarely referred to these theories themselves. A possible explanation for this absence is that adult learning and development theories, whilst increasingly seen as a fundamental underpinning of coaching (Cox *et al.*, 2010), are only implicit in many coaching training methods and models. My findings suggest that a more explicit connection could usefully inform practice in training-coaching combinations. The results of this study may assist coaches in tailoring their offerings to organizations and assisting them in designing programmes.

This study serves to illustrate the ways that coaching can contribute in combined programmes and thus may help organizations to design better programmes. There is potential to increase effectiveness if an organization can be explicit about the purpose of coaching in the combined programme, including identifying their requirements for a trainer-coach, independent or integrated coach. The data suggests that the problem of engaging line managers, identified in training transfer research, may be mitigated by the use of a coach to supplement or compensate for the lack of line manager support in training transfer.

The research has suggested that the combination of training and coaching has significant potential. At heart, I believe, both disciplines want to help people learn and change and the different approaches, tools and values of both can work synergistically. I hope that this study contributes to improving the collaboration between training and coaching communities.

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