

Analyse diversity implications in coaching

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Diversity and its implications can result in serious challenges for organizations as they work to manage increasingly diverse groups of people (Stout-Rostron, 2017, p. 238). Regardless of the profession there is a rising likelihood that individuals will need to interact with people from different races, genders, cultures, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and ages from their own (Passmore, 2011, p. 1). The use of a coach or coaching techniques is a known and evidence based intervention used to manage differences within teams and support their growth through building awareness and acceptance (Lee and Bush, 2013, p. 43) leading ultimately to a more effective individuals and inclusive organizations.

In an effort to do a topic as vast as diversity justice, gender diversity and its implications in coaching will be explored.

To achieve that goal, one must first make reference to sex as biology and gender as a construct informed by culture and environment (Stout-Rostron, 2017, p. 245) and acknowledge that people of the same gender can experience gender differently based on their social context (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018, p. 2). For the purposes of this paper we will consider gender diversity wearing the lens of a “ western” society with corresponding values, making the assumptions; men and women are equal under the law, recognizing that equality is not equity and that this is not necessarily the gender norm for all people.

Yet all people have a view of the world formed by their own gendered lens and this implies the immediate implication for coaching to be: the

recognition of both the coach's gender experience and that of the coachee's and the resulting co-created reality the two form in the relationship.

In coaching men, particularly alpha males, Eddie Erlandson reveals that there is "potential for significant differences in coaching" between genders (Erlandson, 2013, p. 179). Erlandson recognizes that men are more typically drawn towards competitive working environments valuing positions of dominance where women place greater value on collaboration and networking - facts many studies on gender and leadership echo (Erlandson, 2013, p. 196). He notes that the vast majority of leadership positions held in the private sector in the US and Europe are held by those who identify as alpha males: men who command aggressively in their domains and who are notoriously resistant to coaching. (Erlandson, 2013, p. 181). In his discussion on the topic of working with these types of clients Erlandson fails to mention how the gender of the coach may impact on the co-created reality with an alpha male, rather offers a strategy for coaching them effectively which includes being analytical, direct, bold and courageous (Erlandson, 2013, p. 196).

How does that differ from coaching women?

Whilst discussing the implications of coaching women, Kate Ludeman suggests that not only do women face the same workplace challenges as men but that because of gender they are often forced between becoming more masculine i. e. "analytical, competitive, direct and confrontational" or relying on what she refers to as "soft skills" favouring building alliances (Ludeman, 2013, p. 199). Ludeman identifies "micro-inequities" to how men

and women are treated resulting in unconscious biases, leaving women in what she calls a double bind - where women are penalized for their authentic albeit

“ soft” skills (Ludeman, 2013, p. 204). Ludeman like Erlandson also fails to acknowledge her gendered lens or how gender impacts the co-created reality she shares with her coachees however it is key to note both are discussing coaching their own gender.

As for gender and the co-created reality, there is limited research to draw from. It has been noted, that in the executive branch of coaching that coaches should be made aware of the potential for sexist attitudes and even sexual harassment from male executives (Stout-Rostron, 2017, p. 248), which is a very serious implication for female coaches.

It should be recognized, the assumption that men are not impacted by gender concerns and stereotypes is also false and outdated (Stout-Rostron, 2017, p. 248). With masculinity at times being (positively and negatively) associated with alpha behaviours it is possible for men with different values to also adopt behaviours which are not congruent with who they are. This implies a disconnect between how both male and female coachees believe they should or need to act in the workplace and their values, resulting in potential conflict (Neale et al., 2011, p. 119) which could negatively impact individuals and organizations.

As a result of the growing pressure for diversity in both the political sphere and the workforce more women have been recruited for senior positions

(Athanasopoulou et al., 2018, p. 1) no doubt changing the face of leadership and the working environment. With the as yet unbalanced power structure within many organizations, men still play an important role in the advancement and support of women (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018, p. 9).

Traditionally, it was believed that women required coaching in the work place to learn how to adapt and assimilate into the culture of large organizations (Stout-Rostron, 2017, p. 246) today there is a push toward gynandrous leadership where we move away from stereotypes and embrace both traditionally feminine and masculine behaviours into a style of leadership authenticity for the individual (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018).

To conclude, coaches have a role to play in raising organizational awareness as well as self-awareness in their coachees. How people experience gender and their subsequent realities will inform the coaching process. Likewise, as a coach one should seek their own self-awareness in relation to their gendered lens as a preventative measure to imposing personal values within the coaching relationship (Neale et al., 2011, p. 68).

Explain a purpose and process of raising client awareness through coaching.

In the previous section we discussed the importance of a coach raising awareness in relation to gender diversity and the importance in building understanding and acceptance for those differences through coaching, but what is awareness really, how and why do we raise it?

Whitmore claims: “ I am able to control only that of which I am aware. That of which I am unaware controls me. AWARENESS empowers me.”(Whitmore,

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2009, p. 34) positing that awareness is such vital information that without it, we are powerless to affect change. In an interview, Dorothy Siminovitch Phd MCC stated simply: " Awareness is data. Without awareness there is no choice." (Burrus, n. d.), a statement supported by Peter Bluckert when he discusses awareness as "...going out into the world in search of data, ideas, different ways of thinking..." (Bluckert, 2015, p. 70).

If we apply this to what we learned while analyzing gender diversity, it was clear that collecting the data or raising awareness in the coachee was one aspect, as was the importance of collecting the coach's own data to improve self-awareness in relation to their personal gendered lens. If we are to consider awareness as data then we should make note of the fact that this data is without judgement and leads to informed choice (" The-Power-of-Awareness-and-Choice-in-Effective-Leadership. pdf," n. d., p. 2). Therefore, a relevant purpose of raising client awareness would be to enable a coachee's own informed decision making, empowering them to change.

One process to achieve this data rich (aware) and informed decision-making is through positive psychology coaching, specifically strengths-based coaching. Strength based coaching as the title would suggest, offers a focus on the various strengths of a coachee opposed to their weaknesses - operating under the basic belief that clients are healthy, resourceful, and motivated to grow (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007, p. 11). This is a somewhat counter intuitive practice some might argue, as typically coachees arrive to coaching due to a perceived problem, weakness or subjectively negative experience they are seeking help to unpack.

Strengths although seemingly a positive topic of self-awareness discovery are not always easily owned due to gender, cultural and societal implications such as tall poppy syndrome (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007, p. 137) yet there is growing evidence that becoming consciously aware of ones strengths can amplify growth and development (Toogood, 2012, p. 84). Although Whitmore doesn't refer directly to strength's based coaching, he does seem to agree with the general premise when he states that " Building awareness, responsibility, and self-belief is the goal of a coach" (Whitmore, 2009, p. 18).

Is there such a thing as self-belief without awareness of strengths?

In a recent study of female CEO's for example, three aggregate dimensions of behaviours were identified which women were said to control on their leadership journeys: self-acceptance, self-development and self-management (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018, p. 9). It was noted that women in particular tend to overemphasize their weaknesses and must come to a point of self-acceptance regarding their potential for leadership skills. The researchers note that there was an acceptance not celebration of the women's strengths (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018, p. 15). This study could easily

One tool to aid in raising strengths awareness available to coaches is the Values in Action Institute Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) a detailed self-report questionnaire to assess character strengths (Boniwell et al., 2014, p. 159). Developed by Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman the questionnaire was designed to be cross-cultural and the list of twenty-four character strengths

broadly applicable across a wide range of people (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007, p. 125). Tools like the VIA-IS allow coaches to take approaches like Whitmore's GROW to a new level, applying their new awareness of strengths to the process of "W" and the question of "what will you do?" (Boniwell et al., 2014, p. 160).

If the strengths plot arc begins with the awareness of strengths, the connection of those strengths to the current situation is the climax and the resolution of our story is in the implementation of said strengths to the current reality (Toogood, 2012, p. 80). Viktor Frankl illustrates this arc beautifully when he says: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

This is but one small process of raising awareness and one illustration of the importance of a positive strengths based approach. Tapping in to clients' personal resources through exploring strengths and determining how to apply them to a variety of situations is an evidence based and effective method which will increase self-acceptance, self-belief and ultimately self-actualization.

Critically review a core coaching value.

"Values represent who you are right now. They are principles that you hold to be of worth in your life. People often confuse values with morals, but they are not the same. Values are not chosen. They are intrinsic to you and are as distinctly yours as your thumbprint." (Kimsey-House et al., n. d., p. 178)

If the definition holds true and values represent truly “ who you are right now”, it would only be self-awareness which could lead you to discover your unique coaching values. When a coach is aware of their professional values it allows them to conduct themselves with their coachees from a place of authenticity, staying firmly in line with those intrinsic principles (Neale et al., 2011, p. 125).

In looking more closely at positive psychology and strengths based coaching it follows to look more critically at a core coaching value which embodies these more positive principles: humour.

“ If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they’ll kill you.” ~George Bernard Shaw

Humour has existed throughout history, across cultures – requiring little more than human connection to thrive (Peebles, 2015, p. 21). The VIA classification of strengths and virtues classifies humour as a strength of transcendence and suggests those who value humour use it to build relationships with sensitivity and intuition (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007, p. 125) and yet i

Quite rightly, one might look at employing a sense of humour as a “ soft skill” rather than a way of being and be cautious in employing humour in a coaching context. Certainly this value has potential pit falls – yet the science holds true that humour and laughter have positive effects on health and wellbeing (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007, p. 133) making humour a true benefit for many coaches.

However, if the coach is not emotionally intelligent or has not defined their values, employing humour could have the opposite effect on the coaching relationship. Negative humour, such as inappropriately expressing hostility through quips or jokes at another's expense could not only ruin the coaching relationship but do damage to a coachee (Peebles, 2015). Were a coach to be working without a high level of self-regard, unaware of the origins of the humour they employ there could be catastrophic fallout. Inauthentic or negative humour could be detrimental to the relationship between coach and client.

Psychologists have identified four distinct styles of humour: affiliative humour: using humour to connect with others; self-enhancing humour: using humour to cope; self-defeating (deprecating) humour; and aggressive humour: using humour to wound others (Maiolino and Kuiper, 2014, p. 1). It has been noted that those who utilize affiliative humour and self-enhancing humour have statistically higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression than those who employ self-defeating and aggressive humour (Maiolino and Kuiper, 2014).

For coaches being able to employ humour in an appropriate and adaptive manner could deepen rapport bringing a sense of sameness or comfort to the coaching relationship ("ExpandedReport. pdf," n. d.). Humour, in fact, has been typically noted to have a positive impact for both participants: the deliverer and the receiver (Peebles, 2015, p. 6) adding a new dimension to the co-created reality between coach and coachee.

To value humour could speak to the emotional intelligence of a coach and their ability to access those emotions in the client at the appropriate time. Expressing emotions which have deep and powerful connotations could benefit from humour, giving clients permission to access the dark and unpalatable with greater ease. In short, humour can be a life raft in a stormy sea that the coach who values authentic adaptive humour provides to their coachee (Kimsey-House et al., n. d., p. 150).

Values such as authenticity and humour do not exist in silos, they play a part in conjunction with other values in informing the decisions you make, the questions you ask and the way you interact with coachees (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007, p. 134). Becoming aware of your values increases your regard for others as well as allows you to maintain healthy balance informed by self-awareness and positive self-regard (Neale et al., 2011, p. 122). Humour is therefore a truthful and at times funny way of communicating in which laughter is used to build positive authentic rapport between coach and client.

“ Life would be tragic if it weren’t funny.” ~ Stephen Hawking

Provide a reflective summary of your personal journey into growing awareness.

My personal journey into growing awareness has been amplified through circumstance over the past two years, of which choosing the undergraduate certificate of coaching program at Cambridge is aligned.

Although a reflective summary is not meant to be a memoir, I feel it would be remiss to speak about my personal journey into growing awareness through this program and not acknowledge that the journey began acutely two years prior to that with the abrupt dissolution of my marriage.

That initial event was followed by a number of other unrelated coinciding events which ultimately concluded with the loss of my home and business through expropriation. This time of my life threw me into a period of deep self-reflection, evaluation of my values and ultimately presented me with the opportunity to rebuild a life and career even more fulfilling than the one prior. In fact, I wrote about it often:

“ The me of two years ago is a distant memory - many of the adjectives you would have used to describe her: married, entrepreneur, Islander, home-owner, program manager etc. all vanished in the course of two years. Gone. Forgotten. Today my adjectives are: divorced, traveller, student, unemployed and my address is currently an airport hotel outside of London.” (Jones, 2018)

At the beginning of this unit when we were asked to rate ourselves in terms of self-awareness I rated myself an eight out of ten because of the deep reflection I had been actively engaging with and writing about for two years. Reflective journals and writing are known to enable people to think about attitudes, beliefs and assumptions (Woods, n. d.) and they have helped me develop exponentially through my life and career.

As the unit progressed and we began to discuss our values, I found the discussion on values a surprising challenge. In having had so much of what I valued stripped back in a short time, identifying and re-evaluating values and their placement was particularly difficult.

It was through the reading for this assignment I began to understand why and it all started with a single statement: I am ok because I am me (Neale et al., 2011, p. 52). Much of how I viewed myself two years prior had been a conditional self-regard: I was ok so long as I had my business, I was ok so long as I was living my dream, I was ok so long as I was helping others and so on. Then it all vanished and I had to learn how to be ok as me, just me.

It is not often people get the opportunity to see themselves, stripped back and unencumbered by that with which we identify. Becoming aware of your values as simply you not the business owner, daughter, practitioner. Personally, it has been a remarkable gift to be able to walk this path of not simply self-awareness but self-discovery and acceptance as well.