

# The Varieties of Professional Coaching

Professional Coaching comes in many forms and is called many names. We propose that three strategies and more than a dozen specific models of professional coaching have been found to be most effective in addressing the challenges of 21st century organizations. Thoughtful discussions about professional coaching and research projects that focus on the outcomes of coaching must begin with clarity regarding terms being used and differing assumptions underlying the use of specific terms.

We wish to contribute to this process of clarification by offering our own taxonomy of professional coaching practices (see Table One). We propose that one of the three strategies and three coaching models relate specifically to a client's performance-engendering behavior. We have labeled this strategy "*Behavioral coaching*" and the three specific models pertaining to this strategy: *engagement*, *empowerment*, and *opportunity coaching*.

A second strategy and three of the models relate specifically to the decision-making processes in which the client engages. We have labeled this strategy "*Decisional coaching*." The three models associated with this strategy are: *reflective*, *instrumented* and *observational coaching*.

A third strategy, "*Aspirational coaching*," relates to the personal values and aspirations that are held by the person being coached. This form of professional coaching is typically engaged through one or more of four models: *philosophical coaching*, *ethics-oriented coaching*, *career coaching*, and *spiritual coaching*.

## Cognition, Affect and Conation

Placed in a psychological context, the three strategies—Behavioral, Decisional, and Aspirational coaching—can be differentiated from one another by the predominance in each strategy of one of psychology's three domains of attention: *cognition* (thinking), *affect* (feeling) and *conation* (behavior). While Behavioral coaching tends to focus on the behavioral (conation) aspects of the client's life and work, Decisional coaching focuses on the decisions (integration of cognition and affect) that underlie this behavior.

Similarly, Aspirational coaching focuses on the relationship between the actions taken (conation) and values (affect) held by the client. Each of these strategies will ultimately generate integrated action

outcomes that serve the organization and the individual learner. This phase of the coaching process will relate the client's explicit goals and objectives (cognition) and the steps to be taken on behalf of these goals and objectives (conation).

We provide a summary of the three professional coaching strategies in Table One, and a brief description of the models associated with each of the three strategies in the following sections of this chapter. While we will refer to "the Behavioral Coach," "the Decisional coach" or "the Aspirational coach" throughout the chapter, the three strategies will, in actuality, weave through a coaching assignment as needed, at different times. A coach, for example, working with an executive for the first 90 days of having taken on a new global function, will wear these different coaching strategy hats along the way.

He might be a Behavioral coach when discussing how to forge key relationships and how to pull together a unified team - and do both while braving the physical distances among his far-flung team members and stakeholders. He will have Decisional coaching sessions when his client evaluates, for example, how to trade off resources between competing interests or make a call on the projects that need to be discontinued in the face of resistance by their owners or re-examine his leadership self-concept when faced with a change management challenge.

Along the way, more profoundly personal lines of Aspirational inquiry may be called for, as when the client encounters a values conflict with or among his peers or team members when he evaluates whether to make a courageous but unpopular ethical stand or when he momentarily doubts his career calling when faced with a seemingly disastrous set-back. It is critical for the coach to be conscious of which "coaching strategy hat" he is wearing at different times, to utilize the full range of methods available to him.

Table One: Professional Coaching Taxonomy

Professional Coaching Strategy	Behavioral Coaching	Decisional Coaching	Aspirational Coaching	
Focus of Coaching	Behavior	Decision-Making: Cognition/Thought and Affect/Feelings	Fundamental Beliefs, Values, Purposes	
Nature of Issue Being Addressed	Puzzle [Uni-dimensional, quantifiable, internal locus of control]	Problem [Multi-dimensional, complex (“messy”), mixture of internal and external locus of control]	Mystery [Unfathomable, unpredictable, external locus of control]	
Examples of Issues Being Addressed	Providing a subordinate with feedback  Building the agenda for a meeting  Preparing presentation for board meeting	Determining when to give specific feedback  Identifying primary purpose for specific group’s existence    Understanding the leadership style appropriate to group  Settings	Determining whether or not to remain employed in an organization that places a low value on human welfare    Identifying the ethical and appropriate action to take in a particular setting Clarifying one’s own values and perspectives with regard to career advancement and personal autonomy	

<p><b>Coaching Models</b></p>	<p><i>Engagement</i> (Preparing for difficult and important interaction with another person)</p> <p><i>Empowerment</i> (Preparing for difficult and important work in a group setting)</p> <p><i>Opportunity</i> (Preparing for major event in one's life)</p>	<p><b>Reflective</b> (<i>Deliberating about options, assumptions, beliefs</i>)</p> <p><b>Instrumental</b> (<i>Gaining clear sense of personal preferences and strengths</i>)</p> <p><i>Observational</i> (Gaining greater insight regarding one's own actions and the impact of these actions)</p>	<p><i>Spiritual</i> (Discerning spiritual directions)</p> <p><i>Philosophical</i> (Critically examining fundamental frames of reference)</p> <p><i>Ethics</i> (Identifying and consistently acting upon one's own values and ethics)</p> <p><i>Life and Career</i> (Identifying and acting upon broad life and career preference patterns)</p>
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## **An Overview of Coaching Strategy I: Behavioral Coaching**

We will begin with the three models that relate specifically to an employee's *behavior*: engagement, empowerment and opportunity coaching.

### **I. a. Engagement Coaching**

This form of Behavioral coaching focuses on the complex and often quite subtle processes involved in any interpersonal relationship. As the name implies, this form of coaching is most useful with issues around *important interpersonal relationships* in which much is at stake. This relationship might involve a subordinate, a superior (boss), a colleague, a board member or a customer. The engagement coach typically works with her client on one or more of three communication approaches: *disclosure, feedback and helping*. First, the coach will ensure an assessment of the client's own preferred modes of interpersonal relationship. Second, the coach will engender introspection and reflection. Third, with the coach's assistance, the client will try out (rehearse) a specific interpersonal engagement. The coach may do some teaching and/or modeling in supporting this performance.

### **I. b. Empowerment Coaching**

While engagement coaching focuses on the one-on-one relationships in a client's work life, empowerment coaching focuses on the *relationships between a client and the groups* in which she participates as a leader, facilitator or member. The term empowerment is employed to emphasize the role of this type of Behavioral coaching in helping both a client and the group of which the client is a member be more effective and more influential in determining their mode of operation and their destination. This second mode of Behavioral coaching often involves reflection with a client about her way of operating in the group and examining how she relates to her own power and voice. The coaching session might also include assessing the client's preferred roles and way of interacting in a group. Occasionally, the coach will observe a client's work in the actual group setting.

### **I. c. Opportunity Coaching**

The third type of Behavioral coaching concerns *preparation for special events in the professional life* of the client. A client may be preparing for a major presentation, interviewing for a new job, or facing a particularly difficult and stressful encounter with a critical stakeholder. The challenge may concern a licensing examination or mounting a major new project. There is an opportunity for success and long-term benefit for the client. There is also the possibility that the outcome will be detrimental or even devastating

for the client. Opportunity coaching typically involves three interrelated elements. First, the coach helps her client prepare substantively for the event. Second, the coach helps the client prepare emotionally for the event. Third, the coach helps her client design or at least influence the design of the setting in which the event will take place—so that this setting will be skilling rather than de-skilling.

## **An Overview of Coaching Strategy II: Decisional Coaching**

We turn now to the three models that relate specifically to the *decision-making* (Decisional) processes in which the client engages. We focus on the decision-making process in a manner that is aligned with the way in which the “executive function” operates in the human brain. This executive function involves not just the so-called rational section of the brain (the prefrontal cortex), but also the so-called emotional section of the brain (the limbic system).

As Johan Lehrer has so persuasively argued, effective decision-making inevitably involves the acknowledgement and integration of these seemingly contradictory and competing sections of the human brain. Given the powerful analyses of cortical and sub-cortical processes being offered by Lehrer and many of his colleagues in the cognitive and neurosciences, we propose that Decisional coaching is effective if it incorporates both the *rational and irrational, the cognitive and affective, the thoughtful and the intuitive*. Keeping this dynamic image of decision-making processes in mind, we turn to a brief description of three models of Decisional coaching that can be effectively used when a professional coach wishes to assist her client in making better decisions within a volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, turbulent and contradictory (VUCA-Plus) environment.

### **II. a. Reflective Coaching**

When engaged in reflective coaching, a Decisional coach “walks” with his colleague through job related dilemmas, helping his client identify and test out basic frames of reference and specific assumptions regarding his or her own ways of working with problems and issues. The reflective coach helps his client reframe, manage, live with or resolve the messes, paradoxes and paradigm shifts that inevitably confront contemporary leaders on a daily basis. When using a reflective coaching model, the Decisional coach also helps his colleague reflect on critical issues in her work life: when it is an appropriate time to disassemble things (chaos) and when it is better to keep things together (order). A Decisional coach assists his client to reflect on and learn about herself—her styles of interpersonal relationships, learning, leading, managing people, making decisions and managing conflict.

One's client is the primary source of information for this model of coaching, so it is the least complex with regard to the need for resources or people other than the coach and client. It is the most demanding of the three models, however, with regard to the complexity of thought that is required for the client to benefit from this reflection.

## **II. b. Instrumented Coaching**

Decisional coaching benefits from a flow of rich and varied sets of information, facilitated by questionnaires, assessments, inventories and interviews – all instruments of data gathering. First, the Decisional coach administers one or more *self-assessments* to a client: questionnaires that help this client identify, learn about, learn through and expand her repertoire of executive behaviors. Moving beyond the information contained in the self-assessment, comparable *assessments are provided by other people* with whom his client works, so that the client may compare and interpret the broader perspectives.

The self-referential perspective is thus expanded by including the expectations of the colleagues (and thus of the organization) and their view of how the person can succeed. Using the instrumented coaching model, the Decisional coach then helps his client assess the interplay between her personal styles, values and attitudes and the *environment and culture* in which she works. With this information in hand, the coach reflects with his client on ways in which her styles, values and attitudes are manifest in the challenges she faces every day in his working environment. Together they discover or invent ways in which to further enhance the use of her strengths and ensure the presence of conditions in the workplace that are conducive to the use of these strengths, for the benefit of the individual and the organization in which she is embedded.

## **II. c. Observational Coaching**

The Decisional coach provides a systematic, reality-based and structured process of self-discovery for his client through the use of observational coaching. This process enables his client to identify her distinctive strengths as observed by the coach under *actual working conditions*. Using the observational coaching model, the Decisional coach collects information from his colleague regarding her own perceptions of personal strengths and then compares this with personal observation and occasionally audio or video recordings of his client's work.

Increasingly, leaders invite coaches to shadow them in real-time, by attending meetings or listening to conference calls, in order for the coach to gain the most unadulterated view of how the person operates in their often stressful, surroundings. The observations are then thoughtfully fed back to the client, allowing the coach and the manager to collaboratively reflect on the meaning and implications of the findings.

### **An Overview of Coaching Strategy III: Aspirational Coaching**

While we firmly believe that Aspirational coaching should be a central component of any masterful and comprehensive professional coaching system, it is a strategy open to a wide range of approaches that may or may not be perceived as fitting certain cultures. This third professional coaching strategy is typically engaged through one of four models that relate specifically to the values and aspirations of the person being coached.

#### **III. a. Philosophical Coaching**

The philosophical coach encourages and assists her coaching client to probe deeply into his *underlying assumptions and beliefs*, and to reflect on how these underlying assumptions and beliefs relate to and impact on his perceptions and actions in all aspects of life. Much like the reflective coach, the Aspirational coach who takes a philosophical stance will inquire into how her client approaches, interprets, and acts on the challenges she faces. The philosophical coach, however, probes at a deeper conceptual level than does the reflective coach—often asking him what specific words mean to him or what meaning resides behind a story that he often recounts to other people inside and outside his organization.

As employees express a growing thirst for meaning, storytelling has become one of the most recognized leadership tools. The client who has had a chance to reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of his beliefs and actions (even if the word philosophy is never used as such in the coaching conversation) will often move hearts and minds with greater ease and be able to point to a “bigger picture.”

#### **III. b. Ethics-Oriented Coaching**

The ethics-oriented coach is in the business of helping her client address fundamental challenges concerning the identification and application of a specific set of values to the decisions being made in and actions being taken by her client’s organization. This type of coaching is likely to become more prevalent as internationally based and internationally oriented organizations confront differing cultures, social norms and value systems, while trying to establish, monitor and reinforce consistent policies and procedures.



Typically, the ethics-oriented coach is involved not only in assisting leaders with the preparation of formal policies and procedures, but also in working with individual clients who must deal on a daily basis with ambiguous and complex situations where there does not appear to be a single “right” or “just” answer. When a certain deterioration of corporate ethics begins to take hold, coaches may be confronted with discussing the personal dilemmas of potential “whistleblowers.”

### **III. c. Career Coaching**

This fourth model of Aspirational coaching overlaps with personal coaching and is probably the most common and diverse of the four. What distinguishes this form of coaching from personal coaching? The key factor concerns the breadth of the life review process. At critical inflection points in a person’s trajectory, career coaching embraces the entire life experience of the colleague. Broad and enduring life and career patterns are examined by the client, with the assistance of his coach. Financial issues might interplay with issues concerned with friendships, the use of leisure time, the identification of alternative career paths, or establishing a legacy.

### **III. d. Spiritual Coaching**

Building on a long tradition in many cultures, spiritual coaching primarily concerns the reflective inquiry into and appreciation of the major transcendent forces that: (1) call on us to improve the quality of our lives, our community and our society, (2) provide meaning and context for our complex and often unfathomable life experiences, and (3) provide an institutional base or set of ceremonial activities that enable us to express our deepest purpose, longings and life-joys. A spiritual purpose that reaches beyond the self is often the most powerful motivator for people to make difficult and lasting changes. Such changes are a common coaching agenda. Progress is often facilitated by this coaching conversation.