

“When does an OD practitioner move from advising and facilitating an organization intervention to a process of inquiry and self-awareness? Is this process the movement from instrumental consulting to relational coaching, from a focus on the rational and linear to the intuitive, from yang to yin energy or from backhand to forehand?”

Is Coaching OD?

By Beverly Scott, Lisa Murrell,
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Andrea is involved in a large scale change intervention. Max, the senior leader in charge of the organization, asks her to work closely with members of his management team to insure that there is alignment on the change effort. One of the five managers, Barry, is resisting the change and is putting up barriers at every turn. This change requires Barry to stand out more as a leader and hold others accountable for results – a weakness in Barry’s leadership and his preferred operating style. Andrea works more closely with Barry and coaches him on his leadership style. As a consultant and OD practitioner Andrea is fulfilling two roles: one of large systems change consultant, and another as an individual leadership coach. This is all part of the role of OD practitioner, isn’t it? Or is it?

For many of us who have been involved in major change interventions, meeting with our clients one-on-one to provide support and guidance on his/her leadership role is part of our consulting responsibilities. For those of us who have been involved in team and leadership development, seeking client perspectives, assessing competencies, personal style, and providing feedback is included in our consulting function. Increasingly, these roles have been considered coaching. One of the authors describes her experience in this emerging movement.

“About five years ago, someone asked me if I did any ‘coaching’. I said yes, working one-on-one with the leader is always part of the intervention. “No,

they clarified, did I do work only with the leader on his development – not as part of the intervention”. This was the first time I experienced the concept of ‘coaching’ as separate from what I had been doing for 12 years as part of my OD consulting work. As I began to research the whole coaching movement, I found that this particular intervention and what I considered ‘consulting’ was now called ‘coaching’. That was fine, if that was what the market wanted. I could provide, ‘coaching’. Then a couple of years ago, I was asked if I was ‘certified’. What was that? I now needed to be certified to do what I already had a degree to do, just because it was now called by a different name? So, now I am ‘certified’ by the ICF to do the consulting that I have an advanced degree to do, for what is now called ‘coaching’!

Over the last decade, a whole industry has arisen to train coaches to provide these coaching services separate from any organization change or team development intervention. Today it is trendy in many corporations to have a coach. There are many coach training organizations and a few universities conferring coaching certificates. The International Coaching Federation, ICF has established ethical standards and identified required competencies. Their website (www.coachfederation.com) reports a mushrooming membership of 10,000 in 70 countries! What does this increasingly popular practice mean for the field of OD?

At the ODN Conference in November,

a small group participating in the Action Learning Conference within a Conference explored the questions: *What is the role of “coaching” in OD? How integral to the basic practice of OD is it? If you are limiting your work to coaching in an organization, are you doing OD?* Our dialogue was stimulating, engaging, and raised many more questions for us than when we began. This article is an attempt to share our exploration, raise our questions and encourage more dialogue within the OD community.

Similarities

We found many connections between OD and coaching: They both have to do with change; OD focuses on the larger system and coaching focuses on the individual (although there is a small group of OD professionals who do ‘team coaching’). The ICF defines coaching as:

“An ongoing relationship which focuses on clients taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client’s level of awareness and responsibility and provides the client with structure, support and feedback. The coaching process helps clients both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise.”

In consulting to organizations on change initiatives, most of us accept the premise that organization change requires individual change. Hence we often consult with change leaders on the importance of their role in leading others through the change process. We may even use a “process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client’s level of awareness and responsibility” as a leader of the change process. When does an OD practitioner move from advising and facilitating an organization intervention to a process of inquiry and self-awareness? Is this process the movement from instrumental consulting to relational coaching, from a focus on the rational and linear to the intuitive, from yang to yin energy or from backhand to forehand? When an OD

consultant makes this switch as a part of an OD intervention, is it coaching or a continuation of consulting?

Different Skill Sets?

“John is a SVP at a global Pharma. Lisa has been consulting to him and his team for several years. During various interventions and off-sites, John and Lisa take time away from his team to gain a different perspective, one that gives him information about the system in which he operates as well as how he, as a leader, is affecting that system. Sometimes they talk about the rest of his life and how that influences both his leadership and the system. Then they return to the team with new information ready to move the team or organization to action. Was this time away coaching, or consulting? What skills were used? What made this interaction valuable for John? Is it important to John that he know if this was coaching or consulting?”

Are there different skills and competencies required to be effective as an OD practitioner or as a coach? There are varied opinions of what defines the core competencies of effective OD practitioners. However, we propose the following as generally accepted: knowledge of management and organization theory, open and effective communication, teamwork and collaboration, facilitation, process consultation, client relationship building, and self awareness, drawn from the OD Network website (www.odnetwork.org).

The ICF offers four coaching competencies which are: setting the

foundation, co-creating relationships, communicating effectively, and facilitating learning. There are some strong similarities such as communication and client relationship building. Some might even argue that the OD competency of facilitation and process consultation is a process that facilitates learning in group settings in a similar way that coaching facilitates individual learning.

There seem to be key differences also. Several of the OD competencies are critical because the practice of OD is group and organization focused with an emphasis on the whole system. Others suggest that OD requires more conceptual and theoretical knowledge, which encourages obtaining advanced degrees as a credential to practice in the field. Coaching, with its focus on the individual, emphasizes establishing the interpersonal relationship with the ability to create trust, communicate, listen and utilize powerful questions. These competencies are also important for the OD practitioner. However, coaching doesn’t require the conceptual and theoretical organizational knowledge or the competencies required for the more complex dynamics of group and organization behavior that are required for OD. For some time, OD has grappled with the challenge of being a Western value-based discipline that doesn’t always translate to other cultures and countries. Perhaps coaching can be more flexible in making cross-cultural translation because it is individually rather than organizationally focused.

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might seem to be a critical oversight in the coaching competencies. Although a degree of self-awareness is implied in the relationship, communication and learning competencies, it is not specifically addressed. There may be reasons why self-awareness receives less emphasis for the ICF coach than the OD practitioner.

Coaching is not just limited to helping leaders achieve results in their organizations. In fact, coaching is often more related to personal development rather than specific business outcomes and can include coaching in such areas as spiritual, cooking, health, music, writing, and many more. This could also explain ICF's blossoming membership!

The coach is not expected to maintain a neutral, balanced perspective regarding organization issues or to maintain detachment and objectivity in working with differing opinions or conflicts among team members. Indeed, in many cases, the coach does not have the broader organization perspective. The expectation of the OD practitioner's ability to hold neutrality and detachment requires a depth of self knowledge and recognition of one's "hot button's or triggers" that might produce emotional reactions. The coach must do this as well for him/herself. Hence the importance of self awareness for the practice of OD is critical in order to maintain this detached neutrality.

Many coaches would argue that it is just as important for the coach. The coach, who focuses on the individual client, must also have a depth of self knowledge in order to separate their own issues from those of the client. Despite the lack of emphasis in the ICF competencies, we suggest self knowledge and awareness is a critical competency for both the practice of effective coaching and OD.

We also explored the paradox that coaching is a sub-set of the broader field of OD when it is used to guide the leader of a change effort or the leader of a team. At the same time, from an ICF perspective, organization coaching is viewed as a sub-set of the larger field of coaching. Coaching

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blossoming membership! This inclusion of so many areas of personal development for practicing coaches also highlights the potential difference in skill sets between coaching and OD. Does a certification from the broader coaching field represented by ICF qualify coaches to work in organization development without any other experience or degree? Are organizations that 'require' or prefer ICF certification for their coaches aware of these differences between coaching and OD? Should they be?

Inquiry vs. Directive

Since we suggested above that the OD practitioner commonly switches from advising on an organization change intervention to a process of inquiry and awareness, we also questioned whether OD practitioners today have the relational skills for "coaching" a client when the need is to facilitate a leader's learning and awareness. Do we too often emphasize systems thinking, intervention methodologies, change strategies, action research or organization theory? Can we use coaching to more effectively sustain organization change outcomes? Does OD focus enough on the individual leader? Indeed at the last two annual OD Network Conferences, we have heard keynotes from Warner Burke and Margaret Wheatley exhorting us to use our OD competencies to develop leaders

prepared to address the critical challenges of our future. How does coaching support the organization's implementation of leadership development and succession planning processes? As OD practitioners, how can we take on the advocacy position through coaching to support new leaders blazing trails and creating more humane, adaptable, learning organizations?

Returning to Barry, the member of Max's management team who is resisting the change effort: Andrea has done a good job of inquiry with Barry to uncover his resistance, lack of comfort with the demands the change places upon him as a leader, and his personal concerns about rising to Max's expectations and those of his peers. But this requires Andrea to identify those aspects of Barry's style that trigger her own impatience and impulse to instruct him. She feels the urge to let Barry know what she sees as the requirements of him as a leader and give him the direction he is seeking from her as an expert. Is this the best tactic to take as a coach? How would you handle these urges if you were taking on this coaching role? It seems to require a different set of skills and pacing than facilitating the large scale change intervention

The difference in approach from advising change interventions as a consultant and using inquiry in personal coaching may be a key distinction between coaching within a larger OD intervention and coaching not associated with OD. OD coaching is about getting results – it is in a business context. Coaching on its own can be directed at personal development that may or may not result in a successful business objective, but when tied to a specific measurable business result, it can move a system-level goal forward. Coaching only one person in an organization is unlikely to have any system influence; the best organization coaching occurs as part of a system-wide change effort.

The Bottom Line

As we explored the discipline of coaching, we also raised serious questions. Can

coaching support systems change and help individuals understand their role in it, when there is so little emphasis on the larger organization context? Often clients need to be able to see their own behavior in the context of the bigger picture. How can a coach who is meeting the ICF competencies, make the distinctions that will provide that perspective and support the client in achieving broader scale organizational results?

One of the authors who is ICF-certified and an OD consultant has found that once she adopted 'coaching' as a specific offering in her consulting, most of the executives wanted and needed some personal development and transformation work to become the leaders they needed to be. Therefore, even though the work is results-based in a business context, it also takes into account the client's whole system, life, and profession. Sometimes, the work addresses how the client's professional life affects his or her personal life or how personal life affects his or her work. In either case, skills from both 'coaching' and OD are applied and add value. There are differences in the approach, however, their application is similar. Can OD professionals apply both? Can professional coaches do the same?

With the proliferation of coaches and the demand in organizations to provide coaches, many OD practitioners have turned to coaching for their full time practice. Clearly the OD trained coach brings a broader organizational perspective with many of the competencies we listed above. From our own perspective, we see that as an advantage that adds value for the client. We also asked another question: Is the OD practitioner who limits his or her practice to coaching still doing OD?

In our dialogue we produced more questions than answers. More exploration is needed. For our field of OD to thrive and grow, do we need to intentionally legitimize coaching within our practice? Should we adopt the ICF standards or guidelines for the practice of coaching, as some organizations are already considering? What is the role of coaching in our OD practice and in the field? To not have this conversation is a risk for the future of OD.

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We hope the conversation will continue through on-line chats, electronic and print articles or columns, in OD Network groups in dialogue with ICF chapters and in sessions at our next annual conference in San Francisco.

References

The International Coaching Federation, ICF, www.coachfederation.com, OD Network, ODN, www.odnetwork.org.