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**CREATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE
THINKING IN COACHING
AND MENTORING EDUCATION
IN BOTH CIVIL AND MILITARY
ENVIRONMENT**

ABSTRACT

This article is based on the experience of long-term Coaching courses as a method of management, conducted in the Faculty of Economics and Management of University of Defence. It deals with the different positions of educational methods of coaching and mentoring in managerial practice. Authors used their long experience to show why managers in both civil and military environment fail to implement in their long-term leadership and management of the method of coaching and why they turn so often to the method of mentoring.

Keywords:

coaching, mentoring, experience uncertainty, social maturity, rigidity in thinking, creative thinking, inner modesty, coach, coaching, internal accountability versus responsibility, mentor, mentee.

In the last twenty years, the society has changed significantly its attitude of education, personal development, and the possibility of realization at work. People who become participants in the educational process, emphasize not only on the acquisition of professional knowledge, but also on the soft skills which help them to „sell” the newly acquired information, to work with personal values, to fulfill oneself in the social area, etc. Moreover, this era

puts high demands on the ability to work with large amounts of information to be able to recognize what is important and what is less supporting, what is general and what is specific, what is flexible and what is constant, what is important and what can be omitted. One of the effective methods, which works with different ways of thinking, is coaching. In the military environment, this method is a rarely used form of personal and professional development. However, it is coaching which is the path to combine perfectly the professional and personal education to learn the alternative, creative, strategic and global thinking – while the necessary order and system is still maintained. During the practice we discovered that many managers, commanders were convinced that coaching was used in their work as well. However, in a deeper analysis, it is clear that their managerial approach is far away from coaching.

If somebody wants to know how the educational method called „coaching” is working he does not have to pay a lot of money for overpriced course on which he can learn about the thesis and propositions under the close supervision of an expert and he does not have to spend much time of coaching methods and try to get a certificate.

It is enough to invest time and energy into a focused and conscious observation of aspects which distinguish the behavior of leaders and identifies what is different between the people who need formal power to enforce their interests and those who need an informal authority, a certain type of communication, an ability to see their subordinates as personage, and the arts to motivate their team, so that their team-members were looking forward to solve the problem and they would not get this task as a duty.

One of the authors of this article has a huge experience of coaching, more than 3,500 hours of individual coaching (especially top-managers), and he, as a leader, has a certified course on the method of coaching in both military and civil environment. Those coaching hours were an inexhaustible fount of information for the author to get suggestions for reflection and to be able to make a comparison.

It is surprising how negatively most of the managers with a very successful professional career get coaching at first as a method of management and leadership. We follow our tradition that at the beginning of the coaching process we focus on the goals and expectations of participants, meanwhile we would like to clarify their opinion about the method and their depth of knowledge about this educational approach. Almost all participants are aware of the method, but only a very small fraction

of them has a proper point of view (we never expect an exact definition, therefore it is enough to give us insight and understanding of the principle of the method). Very often, we are told that „every good manager is the coach of his team”, „in coaching it is important to give challenges and to push people to accept it”, and „a good manager keeps an eye on the results and manages it” or „coaching is a method how you can force the people to use their best as much as possible and show them their limits”. (Author's note: All statements are direct quotes from managers with many years of experience.)

By the result of reactions of courses in military environment it is shown that managers-commanders have very similar views: „Coaching is an individual method to motivate subordinates. There is no place in the Army for this; the Army has clearly created rules”. Some opinions are even harder: „It's something from America”, or „Coaching or management is the same – to get the others where needed. I do not use it, it is enough my regular military methods”. Another commander had a bit milder opinion about it: „Coaching is the American method of managing people. Normally I use it to inspire my subordinates”.

What is the reality? These people really are coaching their team? Even though this method currently is very popular and it is trendy having a proper coach just to prove the professional status of a manager by the responses it is clear that many of these successful managers do not realize the difference between the method of coaching and mentoring. If these methods were well used they would take part among the effective management approaches.

However, the following three points are significantly different according to our experience:

- different personal characteristics of individuals entering into the development process;
- different approaches, which lead the participant toward his goal;
- different characteristics which are developed in the process of coaching or mentoring.

All three of these aspects logically arise from the nature of the process during different methods. As we will show, in our opinion, neither method is always suitable for all types of personalities and even more we dare to say that in some cases it must necessarily fail. We know that this view is different from the commonly accepted ideas of supporters and promoters of coaching approaches. However, we believe that it is possible

for this area to call up a controversy and clarify different opinions; we are even convinced that this fact offers the most effective way for the interested individual.

How does coaching differ from mentoring?

In what their ways are different and how it is possible that they can arrive to the same goal?

Coaching is a method of personal, social, professional development. Its mission is to bring the coachee to use more efficiently his potential, to acquire or to develop skills for further personal growth. Coaching is a process in which there is no leader or teacher – the coach has the role of the activator the real forces of coaching people. The coach and the coachee are completely equal in the process, both have the right to request a change in attitudes or terminate the process, and coaching is not a normal access client – service provider. When well managed coaching process find confidential, voluntary and at the same time an equal relationship between the coach and coachee.

A very similar definition was created by other authors. „Coaching helps to teach skills and to solve problems which could not be solved properly by an individual under different circumstances”¹.

Maren Fischer-Epe had more psychologically approach about coaching and she puts the method deeper into the psychological level, but her point of view is also very similar: „Coaching is a combination of individual counseling, personal feedback and practice-oriented training. In the coaching the existing question is concerning to the professional role and roles and the personalities of the client”².

One of the creator and active promoters of the coaching method, John Whitmore, defined coaching process and its essence more pragmatic: „Coaching is a management style which is the opposite poles of ordering and controlling (...). The beauty of coaching is that it penetrates below the surface, goes to the heart; it is extremely effective and can be used without having psychological education”³. Coaching itself is likely to be viewed as a method which does not deal with past failures and its possible causes. It focuses heavily on future possibilities, opportunities and goals of the indi-

¹ I. Fleming, A. Taylor, *Coaching. Pocket Management 2*, Portal, Prague 2005, 8.

² M. Fischer-Epe, *Coaching. Principles and Techniques of Vocational Guidance*, Portal, Prague 2006, 17.

³ Herein, 17.

vidual. However it depends to coachee to choose the goals, and also the path and speed to achieve them. Coachee can even choose to not to go to any objective and remain in place. He can get feedback from his coach if requested, his position can be clarified through suitably selected issues or other methods, but his will is essential for personal development and continuation in the coaching process.

Our experience is that after certain time every manager gets used to method of coaching if once he used to be a coachee.

If managers learn to coach, struggling with decision-making and their habitual patterns of behavior, they go through a high degree of uncertainty. In this character there is no different between manager of the Army and manager of the civilian environment. Very often because of that feeling the managers move from coaching method toward the more acceptable mentoring method.

What kind of facts can cause the most problems for managers? The possible answers are the following:

- necessity of do not ordering and do not using daily control;
- accepting and keeping the volunteering of all process;
- do not giving the goals for coachee, leaving the choice of goals on him, even if he is dissatisfied with it;
- do not dealing with failures and do not punishing for them;
- allowing to make a change in the decision on his way toward the goal;
- do not evaluating, just giving the possibility of another point of view on the situation;
- do not seeking the mistakes in the opinion and activities of the coachee;
- respecting for the coachee's pace;
- underlining the possibilities, but do not calling them, and do not to offering them;
- finding the ways to arise occasion (and not directly identifying or defining);
- working with questions instead of councils;
- do not taking a difficult situation as a competition which is the chase the best solution;
- do not asking from coachee the best solution.

It is obvious that coaching requires a high dose of personal and social maturity from the coach and coachee. In the military environment the situation is even more difficult because of the need to respect the rules, orders and ingrained and „verified” behaviors, respectively different abbreviations of thought like „in the military environment there is no place for democracy” or „when we get in a fight with a soldier we cannot philosophize”.

The coach must learn to be in the background, he must not prefer his knowledge, largest experiences or his higher status. If the coach is also the leader he must leave the learnt style of behavior and decision which results from his obligation of responsibility about his team toward his superiors. The useful thing is in the training of coach-managers is putting inside the development plan which focuses on development of creativity and focuses on alternative thinking. Just rigidity in thinking and decisions of managers is the biggest limit and barrier to effective coaching methods. That is not only our perception of practice, but this looks like wide problem according to Lukas Kovanda, who is moving in the business environment: „Even the iconic innovator Apple returns some part of its share to shareholders instead of investing it in new projects. Probably because there is nothing in to invest and there are not enough creativity and fresh ideas which are extraordinaire, promising and potentially profitable”⁴.

It is logical that today's manager, who is pushed into the highest possible performance to maintain his status by showing his power and who is bombed by huge amount of information, he has a tendency to slip into the „verified” stereotypes which facilitate his work. However, in order to plan his career with a perspective view, he must necessarily reflect on the fact, as far as his approach in today's society, sustainable and long-term effective.

If the manager wants to acquire a coaching method and incorporate it into its management package, concerning to his personal development he must focus on three major issues:

1. Creative and alternative way of thinking.
2. Ability to consciously work with his professional and social status (ego).

⁴L. Kovanda, *Creativity crisis*, Profit, 23 (17), [23. 4. 2012], 3.

3. Increase the inner modesty (which is not presented for modesty around, even it is not linked with an ascetic lifestyle).

The coachee has equivalent status with the coach in the coaching process itself, but his role in the whole process is crucial. It depends on him if and what for he will decide in his further development, which pace he will choose and if he will keep the agreed terms. He will do all of this with the sureness that nobody will check him; no one will criticize or evaluate him. Therefore it is necessary for successful conducted coaching that the coachee has exceptionally developed one important characteristic, which we call internal accountability. From classic responsibility it is different which means that it does not depend on measurable parameters, it does not expect to be controlled and often do not encouraging, it is not dependent on the evaluation of others, based on individual and knowingly received personal values and standards. Coachee, who is perfectly suitable for coaching process, must have socially mature personality, his clear scale of values, high self-control and internalized responsibility.

Mentoring is a method which the managers most often confuse with coaching. If we ask during a coaching course the managers to describe more accurately their activities, which called coaching, we learn that „I give the goals to my team, I explain them, and then I motivate them to achieve its. When they need it, I give them advice, sometimes directly I show them how it is working. Always it depends on the level of coaches”.

Comparing described process, we can see that the result is far away from the real definition of actual coaching. However, we have earned a perfect definition of good mentoring.

Mentoring can be understood as a method which focuses on the individual targeted development of the mentee who has less of experience (e. g. mentee can be graduate) by the experienced professionals on the position of mentor. There is still no common definition of mentoring or too many publications on this topic.

Experience show, however, that pillar of the whole process is a voluntary relationship with a helpful attitude. Although this is a confidential and voluntary relationship, like in coaching, but do not find here equivalence. Mentor logically based on their professional and social experiences and therefore his status is much higher. This allows him to evaluate advice, control, confront and to give orders.

Mentor is also the person who sets the objectives for mentees. This result comes from his knowledge about the situation, from his profession, from the environment, and from the higher social maturity, etc.

What is included in mentoring process?

Here are the following main points:

- determination of the required goals (usually results from needs of the job position or company) regarding the possibilities of mentee;
- clarification of the responsibility for the process, and who is responsible to achieve the planned goals;
- establishing a timetable for the process and control system of each part;
- method of checking achievement of sub-goals;
- the rights and responsibilities of the mentor and mentee (e. g. information from the process may not be used anywhere else, e. g. in a meeting, etc.);
- conditions for leaving the process of mentoring for both parties.

For the **mentor**, it is important to be able getting individual approach for each mentee in order to use their capacity for next development. Instead of creative thinking, mentor must pay attention on the knowledge of developing methods and the ability to know what is best to be used directly in practice.

From the above description it is evident that in military environment mentoring makes much less „revolution” than coaching. By its nature, mentoring is closer to commanders than the free coaching process with emphatic appeal to mutual equality in the relationship.

Mentor must know perfectly the environmental conditions for which mentee is prepared. Based on the input information, mentor selects a goal which is consulted and explained to mentee. He should be a master of giving stimulation and also evaluating feedback and he should conduct his mentee to self-reflection. He must be a model, example and counsel in the professional and social field.

If a manager wants to adopt mentoring skills, he focuses his development on three core areas:

- recognition of individual abilities and capabilities (in talent, motivation, personal and social development);

- knowledge of the method of development (education) and their correct use;
- ability to listening.

As it is seen from the previous list the creative and alternative thinking are not essential, for the manager-mentor like in coaching. If the mentor posses this capacity, it is a big advantage, but comparing with coaching is not an absolute necessity.

Mentee enters mentoring process as a person who is aware of its lower powers and who wants to voluntarily improve it. He is aware of needs of special and experienced advice; he knows that his behavior will be confronted with the required environmental standards. In the process of mentoring it is obvious to do not demanding from the mentee as high requirements in terms of social and personal development, as in the process of coaching. Mentoring process can be understood as a method of personal development, in which a competent person – the mentor gives the professional, social and personal support to less experienced person – mentee. The support is implemented in the form of advice, guidance, patronage, and transfer of knowledge, showing examples, evaluating and providing feedback. The mentee can reach quickly and efficiently complex social, professional and personal development by using mentor.

IN SUMMARY

Comparing information necessary inputs and during both training methods we receive interesting result.

Fig. 1. Comparison of training methods of coaching and mentoring in practice for manager

aspect comparison/method	coaching	mentoring
goal	defined by coachee who may modify it	defined by mentor under the need of environment regarding the possibility of mentee; it can be consulted with mentee
leadership	nil	the mentor posses
responsibility for the success	coach and coachee have the same measure	both have responsibility, however the mentor has higher

status	same for both, but the opinion and thinking of coachee are more important	mentor has higher, it results from his personal and professional maturity
inner responsibility	significantly by the side of coachee	it is an advantage for both side, but it is enough to have external responsibility
control	it is not the priority, it can result the demand of coachee or the situation	clearly given in advance
evaluation	it is not acceptable	it is the part of process
advice, explanations and consultations	it is not suitable	it is the part of process
changing goal	it depends on coachee	only in exceptional case
essential of relation	voluntary, confidential and equal	voluntary, confidential
necessity of knowledge of field-work	it is not necessary	it is necessary
need of creativity	need of open mind of coach	it is an advantage for mentor, but it is not necessary
the possibility of undesirable personal „transfer“	high	Normally it cannot happen, but if it happens is not a problem generally
most common method	correctly formulated question, reshaping reality, pushing to reality, tales, fables, discussions and analytic managerial methods	examples, advices, explanations, demonstration, monitoring, feedback, discussions, confrontations with the required standards

Source: The table was created by the authors.

This comparison shows that the educational method of coaching and development is a prerequisite of an advanced, creative and alternative thinking. It is appropriate to give it systematically into the education of coaches and managers in both military and civilian environment. This gradually will eliminate uncertainty in the use of executives coaching and their subsequent „escape” to the method of mentoring which threatens the managers of the Army. Mentoring is very good and effective method, but for socially and professionally mature individual is not attractive because it does not allow to them to further develop the long term and to show their personality, their value system, self-esteem and self-assertion. During mentoring the mentee can occur up to the professional or personal level of his mentor, but he can hardly „outrun” him. With proper use of the method of coaching the coachee

has unlimited possibilities which depend only on his competences and conditions about the environment; but he is not limited by his coach.

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KREATYWNE I ALTERNATYWNE MYŚLENIE W COACHING'U ORAZ DORADZTWIE NAUKOWYM W ŚRODOWISKU CYWILNYM I WOJSKOWYM

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł opiera się na długoletnich doświadczeniach kursów doradczych jako metody zarządzania przeprowadzonych na Wydziale Ekonomii i Zarządzania Uniwersytetu Obrony w Brnie. Artykuł opisuje różne podejścia do naukowych metod coaching'u i doradztwa w kontekście zarządzania. Autorzy bazują na swoich długoletnich doświadczeniach, aby wykazać dlaczego managerowie w środowiskach zarówno cywilnych, jak i wojskowych nie są w stanie wdrożyć metod coaching'u w długofalowym zarządzaniu oraz dlaczego tak często zwracają się ku metodom doradczym.

Słowa kluczowe:

coaching, doradztwo, doświadczanie niepewności, społeczna dojrzałość, sztywne myślenie, wrodzona skromność, coach, wewnętrzna poczytalność kontra odpowiedzialność, doradca.