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Raymond L. Forbes
Franklin University, ray.forbes@franklin.edu

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Coaching: What Business and Social Researchers Need To Know About It

Dr. Raymond L. Forbes Jr., Ph.D.[1]

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This paper explores the historical and current world of organizational coaching. Coaching is offered as a means of assistance to aid organizational leaders in effectively responding to the stressful external and internal demands associated with their positions or ones to which they aspire. Coaching is also discussed as a vehicle for improving individual and team performance as well as for actualizing a leader's inherent potential. This work draws heavily upon current literature and practice in both the leadership and coaching fields. It also provides a review of relevant theory, contrasts the roles of leader and manager, defines executive coaching, and surveys its brief history. The paper concludes by noting important areas of linkage between leadership and coaching, specifies the potential benefits from developing a viable connection, and identifies some of the complex issues yet to be resolved.

Introduction to Coaching

The term "coaching" has a long pedigree; it was in common use as early as the 1400's. Coaching originally meant a carriage that transported important people from where they were to where they wanted to go. Through centuries of use the essential denotation of coaching was gradually altered. Coaching came to mean the process of enabling someone to get ready for a special test, achievement or situation. Additionally, specialized professional coaching roles evolved to assist individuals and groups to improve their personal lives and professional performance. Examples of such roles include voice coaches, acting coaches, athletic coaches, and now, organizational coaches.

At least four historical streams contribute to the modern practice of coaching in organizations. One such stream originates in the field of Psychology (Peltier, 2010). A second stream is derived from the fields of athletic and individual performance coaching. The source of the third stream is in business consulting. The fourth Organizational Coaching tributary is found in the discipline of Organization Development (OD). Something of a blending of the four coaching streams has occurred since the late 1980's. This confluence of the coaching waters seems to have been one of the consequences of the major technical and social changes that were occurring during this era.

At the end of the 1980's decade, within the field of Psychology, broader governmental regulations and the growth of managed health care were resulting in significant change in the way mental health assistance was provided. In particular, many clinical psychologists and clinical social workers began to chafe at the restrictions on their professional work imposed by governmental and insurance company regulations. Mental health professionals began to search for alternative sources of revenue, a healthier clientele and less stressful environments in which to operate.

Some of these practitioners had already worked with senior executives in a private-practice therapeutic role or were involved in providing services to corporate Employee Assistance Plans. Yet other clinicians believed that many, if not most, of their hard-earned therapeutic skills were transferable to the coaching field. In keeping with

[1] Master Personal and Executive Coach and Chair, Master of Science Program in Business Psychology, Department of Social and Natural Sciences, Franklin University, United States, Email: forbesr@franklin.edu

the historical meaning of coaching, these practitioners were well prepared to assist important people in getting to where they wanted to go both personally and professionally.

The 1980's also witnessed the work of innovative athletic coaches who were reshaping the ways that they worked with amateur and professional athletes. For example, Eastern European bloc Olympic coaches pioneered the use of guided visualizations and other psychological techniques to enhance athletic performance. In the United States Harvard tennis coach Timothy Gallwey (1986) published his landmark book *The Inner Game of Tennis*. Gallwey's coaching innovation was to deliberately shift his students' focus of attention off themselves, allowing their bodies to respond more naturally, and automatically improving their performance.

Changing the students' situational awareness through asking thoughtful questions rather than giving precise instructions accomplished this attention shift. With this new questioning approach, coaches were now able to open up new opportunities for client self-discovery and the resolution of heretofore vexing issues. Gallwey's inner game approach was subsequently picked up by business consultants (Whitmore, 2002), who adapted his ideas for application within the corporate arena.

The 1980's also saw individual business consultants and consulting organizations attempting to assist their often-overwhelmed clients in coping with rapid advances in information technology, complex electronic forms of communications, rising global markets, increased corporate downsizing, escalating executive salaries, and heightened demands for geographic mobility. The traditional "hard" areas of business consulting such as strategy, structure, and systems began to be supplemented with the softer human issues of skills and culture. In an attempt to better service the human fallout from all the environmental and internal organizational changes, several large consulting firms created their own specialty-coaching groups.

Additionally, throughout the 1980's and 1990's, organization development practitioners worked with many types of organizations to improve their organizational health and vitality. Kilburg (2000) suggests that both organization development and coaching have a common conceptual foundation in general systems theory as it is applied to organizations and individual behavior. Organization development practitioners are typically trained as specialists in planned organizational change that emphasizes the people-side of the change effort. Many of these OD specialists worked at the top levels of organizational structures and were primarily involved in implementing change within the managerial and supervisory ranks. Part of their change work often spilled over into assisting individual executives to cope with the side-effects of the all the change processes that were underway simultaneously in their organizations.

Use of Coaches

Overall, since the 1980's, the use of coaching has been on the rise (Whitworth, 1998). The accelerating rate of organizational change has created a heightened demand for mentally nimble and emotionally intelligent organizational leaders. Such leaders command a high recruiting premium, but also subject to tremendous performance demands from their high stress positions. In the private sector, boards of directors and the financial investment community regularly expect above-average quarterly returns and year-after-year increases in net profits while sustaining long-term organizational viability.

At the top organizational levels the stakes for executives are exceptionally high and the penalty for failure is often very brief job tenure. To cope with all these pressures, senior leaders look for someone they can trust as a sounding board for reflection on sensitive issues. It is important that the selected person is someone with credibility, who is empathetic, provides an objective perspective, and possesses the confidence to challenge the executive's thinking when required.

Additionally, these leaders seek someone who is not bound by the organization's reward and status system and who can provide them with skilled, thoughtful and confidential assistance in coping with the demands of their work and its consequences on their personal lives. Howard Morgan, Phil Harkins, and Marshall Goldsmith (2005), the editors of the book *The Art and Practice of Leadership Coaching* attempted to identify the 50 top executive coaches. Employing a comprehensive interview and referral process, Morgan, Harkins, and Goldsmith

categorized the superior coaches into thought leaders and practitioners. Each of the selected coaches described their principal "secrets" for success.

How Coaching Differs From Therapy, Counseling, Mentoring And Consulting

As a potential new profession, coaching must differentiate itself from other well-established helping roles. Various authors (Williams & Davis, 2002; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002) have addressed this issue. The roles that appear to overlap coaching the most and are the source of the greatest confusion are: psychological counseling (Auerbach, 2001), (Downey, 2003), mentoring (Halliday, 1999) and consulting (Flaherty, 1999). Important differences between the various fields are shown in Figure 1. below.

Figure 1: Comparison of Coaching with Other Helping Roles

	Desired Outcomes	**Relationship**	**Time Orientation**	**Process Focus**
Coaching	Evidence of personal and professional growth	Collegial	Present and future possibilities	Collaborative goal setting and action planning
Psycho logical Counseling	Relief from psychological discomfort. Interpersonal health.	Therapist-patient	Past conflicts and current level of adjustment thoughts and behaviors.	Correcting biological imbalances and maladaptive
Mentoring	Career advancement. Provide a broader and more mature outlook.	Sage – Novice	Past traditions an history. Present and future networking	Instructing and guiding related to structure, politics and personalities
Consulting	Corrected problem or capitalized-on opportunity	Expert Client	Current organization need	Knowledge Application

Links between Leadership and Coaching

The leadership-coaching connection has become more frequently the subject of professional discourse. In *The Heart of Coaching,* Thomas Crane (2002) states "Transformational Coaching and leadership are inextricably linked; 'coach' is one of the key roles a leader must play." In a similar vein, Andrew DuBrin (1998), in a widely used textbook on leadership, asserts that good coaching is the essential feature of effective management. Additionally, successful business consultant and practicing organizational coach, Cork Motsett (1998), describes the need to become a "No Excuses" leader as a prerequisite for an effective coach.

Besides being an important role of the leader, coaching and leadership are connected together in other ways. One way is through the frameworks and tools used by the coach being incorporated into the style the leader uses to engage others in reaching desired organizational outcomes. Another linkage is through the use of a coach to enhance the leader's own professional development. A third link is through insuring that coaching is an essential ingredient in designing and implementing leadership succession and development processes

The conjunction between leadership and coaching was directly explored in a conference jointly sponsored by The National Leadership Institute of the University of Maryland and Personnel Decisions International. The proceedings of the conference entitled, *The Art & Practice of Coaching Leaders,* were published in 1998 (Mobley, 1998). The coaching-leadership link has also been reviewed in such recent books as *Coaching for Leadership* (Goldsmith, 2000), *Coaching Competencies and Corporate Leadership* (Weiss, 2003), *Profiles in Coaching* (Morgan, 2003), and *The Reflecting Glass* (West & Milan, 2001). Perhaps the most powerful argument for coaching leaders that arises from reviewing the essence of these books is that coaching is a more cost-effective way to conduct leadership development than are the more traditional training-based approaches.

Robert Fulmer and Marshall Goldsmith (2001) also make a business case that successful leadership development leads to a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Summarizing their research work, Fulmer and Goldsmith indicate that best-practice organizations such as General Electric, Royal Dutch Shell, and Johnson and Johnson, view the leadership development process as a way to increase their strategic advantages.

A study on coaching use was conducted the Saratoga Institute (1998) for the American Management Association. The study was based on 600 questionnaires sent to Fortune 1000 companies. The research found that for 28% of the respondent organizations, coaching was a major topic included in their leadership development programs. Thus, it might be argued that the establishment of multiple, successful leader-coach relationships can help the organization to better align internal change processes with corporate strategy. Successful coach-leader collaboration is seen as a means of achieving an advantage over competitors without such relationships.

Many current works on leadership also view coaching as a leadership style appropriate to the dynamic, downsized organizational environment of the early 21st century. For example, Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan in their best seller, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* (Bossidy & Charan, 2002), suggest that coaching plays the single most important role in expanding others' capabilities. The relevant skills of the effective coach, such as using gentle probing questions, listening reflectively, and providing supportive feedback, are viewed as practical items to have in the toolkit of the successful leader (Huseman, 2004).

What Leaders Need to Know About Coaching

Historically, coaching was used in corporations as a form of performance remediation for senior executives who had fallen off the fast track. An external coach was brought in to help salvage the career of a failing or under-performing key executive. If coaching worked, all-the-better. If the coaching effort was unsuccessful, the organization could then claim due-diligence prior to terminating the executive. Over time, the primary rationale for the use of organizational coaches has perceptibly shifted emphasis toward enabling organizational high performers.

A principal use of organizational coaching now is to assist the best performers to get even better. Studies conducted by the prominent consulting firm McKinsey (Bacon & Spear, 2003) indicate that coaching, combined with performance feedback, ranks among the most important drivers of talent development. The new organizational logic is that having a coach is a strong sign of the leader's existing competence. In fact, negotiation authorities Roger Fisher and Alan Sharp (Fisher & Sharp, 1998), claim that, "The more ability one has, the more one can benefit from coaching." In a parallel vein, a growing use of coaching is to improve the collective performance of high level executive teams.

The expense of coaching can be significant. Costs include the hiring of coaches as well as the substantial potential for financial loss to executives who choose to employ coaching principles in their work roles. The cost of senior-level executive coaches can rival that of outside legal counsel. According to a recent study (Kauffman & Coutu,.2009) the typical hourly fee is about $600-$726 although the reported range is $200-$3,500.

Many organizations lack a clear financial incentive to support internal coaching efforts by their members. Coaching is seen as an activity a manager should do on his or her own time without any organizational reward. Hitt (1988) writes, "With regard to coaching, the problem is that many managers do not perceive any relation between their efforts in coaching their staff and the size of the monetary reward they receive at the end."

Coaching expert James Flaherty has studied how coaching applies to business. Flaherty (1999) has found that coaching has particular application to commerce because of its ability to deal with the critical issues of endless innovation, relentless downsizing and reengineering, and the need for organizations to work in multicultural environments.

In addition, according to leadership author Gary Yukl (2002), coaching has several advantages over formal training courses. These differential benefits compared to training include convenience, confidentiality, flexibility,

and the availability of an enhanced level of personal attention. Yukl notes the primary downsides of coaching as being related to cost and the shortage of competent coaches. He also indicates that there is little research on coaching's effects but the evidence that is available is favorable.

Since much of the information available about coaching effectiveness is anecdotal, what coaching consumers can get for their money may vary widely, depending on the training and experience level of the coach. Most coaches tend to specialize in a given area such as leadership, performance improvement, work/life balance, job or responsibility transitions, career changes, organizational change or strategy (Fairley & Stout, 2004). The process of working with a coach typically follows a pattern of rapport building, data collection, feedback, goal setting, action planning, action taking and evaluation. An assignment may run from three months to two years in length with periodic progress assessments along the way.

Leadership development expert David Dotlich and executive coach Peter Cairo suggest that the leadership-coaching connection is not an easy relationship. Dotlich and Cairo (2002) note that for the leader acting as a coach, "It's not as simple as offering a direct report some advice occasionally or telling her how to do something; these are natural leadership acts. What is unnatural is to coach and teach continuously, empathetically, and with a given individual's interests at heart."

Alan Downs (2002) also attests to the difficulty of the coaching challenge, "The coach has the job of helping the executive sweep away the layers of denial to rediscover what really turns him on." Since coaching can come in many forms, Figure 2 below should help you to clarify the possible coaching options. The figure compares the focus of a Coaching effort with possible coaching sources suggesting different types of coaching. For different organizational situations.

Figure 2: Coaching Matrix

Coaching Focus

	Individual Level	Group Level
External	*Executive Coaching*	*Team Coaching*
Internal	*Inside Client Coaching*	*Internal Team Coaching*
	Leader as Coach	

Coaching Source

Perspectives on the Future of Coaching Organizational Leaders

Noted organizational author, Karl Weick, has summarized his view of the key elements of the leadership landscape for the twenty-first century. Weick (2001) suggests that some of the most prominent hallmarks for the future will relate to: having insufficient questions, the existence of more novices than experts, greater reliance on action than reflection, more decision making based on expertise and less on rank, higher emphasis on finding the big story and less on having the big picture, more focus on updating than forecasting, greater improvisation and fewer routines, and more humility and less hubris. If these predictions are at all accurate, the implications of Weick's work for leadership coaching are highly significant.

Excellent coaches should be able to assist their leader-clients to address all the issues Weick has identified. Successful organizational coaches tend to: rely more on: asking good questions than providing direct answers, encouraging their clients to act after a period of reflection, recognizing that expertise resides more in the

individual than in the role, and knowing that the ability to communicate ideas is a prerequisite to effectiveness. Coaches are also aware that in a chaotic and non-linear world it is impossible to reliably predict the future. Coaches acknowledge that success in an age of uncertainty will be greatly aided by combining intuition with logic, and they have a real appreciation for the fact that that they are there to serve the clients needs and not their own.

Unresolved Coaching Issues

Coaching is not yet a widely accepted formal discipline. Much of the coaching field lacks: agreed upon professional standards, a well-recognized body of specialized knowledge and practice, well-accepted training and certification processes, and an acknowledged set of ethics. Currently training and certification programs for coaches vary greatly in quality and are wildly proliferating. One well-researched estimate by Peer Resources (2013) puts the present number of such programs at over 600. Although the market for coaching is rapidly expanding, competitive pressures are likely to force consolidations and alliances among the existing players.

Additionally, with the growing numbers of individuals who choose to call themselves coaches, potential clients appear to be becoming more discriminating in their choice of a coach. Prospective coaching clients will want to have ample evidence of the competency of possible coaches. In assessing competency, clients will look at potential coaches in terms of their track record of experience as well as their formal professional qualifications.

With the explosion of organizations entering the coaching training and credentialing arena, the professional training of coaches is likely to called more and more into question. Thus, it appears likely that universities, as a proven source of credible professionals, will be increasingly looked at to provide a reliable and quality-assured source of executive coaches.). However, most universities are currently ill-prepared to offer this service.

Turf battles among coaches are also highly probable. With the increasing number of health care professionals attracted to the coaching field, such as psychologists and social workers, professional certifying bodies, such as the American Psychological Association, will be more fully drawn into the debate around certifying professional coaches   Legal and insurance issues will arise as more poorly trained and less qualified coaches enter practice. Organizations will need to carefully address what type of coaching to provide to their people and where to source it. Regulating and certifying bodies will be required to more completely differentiate coaching from therapy, counseling, mentoring and consulting.

Future Directions

The success stories of senior executives and the improved organizational results attributed to organizational coaching relationships, coupled with a more developmental orientation toward critical organizational talent, will move the access to coaching to ever lower organizational levels. Movement in this direction has already begun with the advent of "Positive Psychology Coaching" (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007).

College and university business schools will increasingly include leadership coaching as a regular part of their curricula. One such early effort was the establishment of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC, 2013).

From all present indications, the hectic pace of change is likely to continue unabated in the future. Work-personal life balance issues are also likely to become prime subject matter for coaching conversations. Eminent social psychologist, Judith Bardwick (2002), suggests that these balance issues will include finding ways to achieve more personal peace, deal with mounting stress, transform anxieties into problems that can be solved, match personal work style with the work style of the organization, reduce unnecessary complexity, and make technology more responsive and less controlling.

Another area of promise relates to the growing interest of coaches in the brain and how brain function affects behavior. Increasingly insights from the neurosciences are being used to inform coaching theories and practices.

Examples include works such as *Coaching with the Brain in Mind* (Rock & Page, 2009), *The Coach's Mind* (Azmatullah, 2013), *Mindful Coaching (*Hall, 2013), and *Your Brain and Business* (Pillay, 2011)..

Looking far into the future, coaching will become a highly accepted way both to lead and to develop leaders. Researchers James Hunt and Joseph Weintraub (2010) imply that the manager as coach is already here now. Additionally, Robert Hargrove (2000) eloquently expresses the intricacies of the leader-coach connection, "That fundamental truth is that leadership is about coaching and teaching. If you are a leader, you are first and foremost a coach and teacher." Organizational performance assessment and reward systems will be also be designed and in place to support the leadership coaching effort. Additionally, coaching will be considered an excellent vehicle for recruiting and retaining highly talented individuals as well as being made available to access the unused potential of average performer

Prognosis: The Immediate Coming Years

In the coming years, leadership coaching will continue its inexorable spread from the for-profit to the not-for-profit and public sectors. Due to the sensitivities involved within all types of organizations, CEO-level coaches are likely to continue to be highly qualified external Executive Coaches. A growing number of external-internal coach partnerships will be employed to develop leadership coaching programs, and more internal coaches will be trained and made available to lower organizational levels. Additionally coaching will have to more effectively work across countries and across cultures (Otazo, 2002).

Although there is some recent evidence of efforts toward cataloging coaching efforts (Hudson, 1999) (Douglas & Morley, 2000), researching and documenting the results of coaching will continue to be problematic (Cavanagh, Grant & Kemp, 2005). Some for-profit firms will continue to use limited research as a means of improving their practice, differentiating their organization from competitors, and as a device for advertising the success of their work. As the demand for more objective evidence of coaching's results increases, it is likely that a small number of university-based institutes or not-for-profit research groups will respond to this pressing need. The products of these research institutions will act to further enhance the credibility and respectability of the organizational coaching field.

The content of leadership coaching may well move in the direction of what psychologist and former CEO Richard Farson calls the "management of the absurd." Dealing with paradox also seems to be an important area for leadership coaching. Based on his work with organizational leaders, Farson (1996) identified a set of perplexing paradoxes that challenge conventional wisdom and require re-examination of basic assumptions. Example paradoxes include: big changes are easier to make than small ones; the more we communicate, the less we communicate; effective managers are not in control; and, organizations that need help the most will benefit least from the help.

In Summary: What It All Means

This paper began by raising questions related to surviving and thriving, to growing and flourishing, and to where can leaders turn when their traditional sources of help don't work anymore. Robert Rosen, in his important book, *Leading People* (Rosen, 1996), suggests that the place for leaders to begin to find the answers is through increasing their own self-awareness. Rosen believes that self-awareness leads to wisdom, and wisdom requires maturity, balance, and the necessity for trade-offs as well as caring, depth of understanding, and commitment. These same characteristics appear to be equally valid for those individuals considering organizational coaching work.

A brief history of coaching illustrated the potential of this new field to help leaders accomplish their visions. Various connections between leadership and coaching were explored to show the strong links between the two fields. A discussion of the future of leadership coaching provided an optimistic growth perspective coupled with a set of perplexing, unresolved issues.

In many ways leadership appears to be something of an enigma that combines enduring elemental features with situational ones. The available research seems to support the notion that some elements of successful leadership stand out as constant over time. For example, leadership writer, Antony Jay (1994) believes that the essence of creative leadership continues to be the successful integration of reflective thinking with action in the world. Other important leadership features seem rooted in a particular environmental context. These features relate to variables found within the leader, the follower, and the surrounding environment – all amenable to work within a coaching context.

In the highly challenging world of 21st century organizations the role of the leader needs to adapt to fit the new circumstances. Utilizing the characteristics and skills of the organizational coach will help with the difficult process of adapting. Perhaps, leaders will be able to reach even higher levels of success, fostered in no small part by the encouragement, challenge, and support of their coaches.

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