



Coaching for Social Change

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INTRODUCTION

Much of the coaching literature has focused on its application in organizational settings, mostly in Western countries, and within an individualistic self-improvement paradigm. This chapter explores coaching as a human development approach that can foster social change. It proposes that, besides the organizational and individual domains, coaching can play an important role in the social domain, and that all three domains are closely interconnected.

Coaching theorists are starting to argue that we should understand how world needs and individual needs are connected, and use coaching as one of the most powerful means of meeting both needs (Outhwaite & Bettridge, 2009). There are several critiques, such as Du Toit (2014) and Western (2012), of how coaching could be used to maintain oppression, and research, such as Shoukry (2014), into how coaching can become emancipatory. However, coaching for social

change is still under-researched and under-theorized. Hence, this chapter is an attempt to lay a foundation for this emerging field, drawing on critical theory and postmodernism, sociology, psychology, and pedagogy.

Different sociological theories define social change in different ways. For example, social change may be defined as any alteration in the social system, that may involve a change in the social structure, processes, relations or any other aspects of the society (Sztompka, 1993). Such definition has the risk of being overly neutral, as opposed to other definitions that consider social change as development or progress, with the equally problematic nature of such terms. For the purpose of this chapter, social change is defined as 'change that makes society or workplaces more humanizing, in terms of fostering human rights, and thriving towards what would seem more just, ecologically sustainable, inclusive, empowering and peaceful', while appreciating that all of these normative ideals can be defined in different ways within

different cultures and ideologies, and can be sought via different social and economic models.

The chapter starts by discussing the interrelation between individual development and social change; and exploring how this relation inspired the emergence of critical pedagogies and approaches within many disciplines. Coaching is then critically analysed as a potential approach for social change. Next, the different contexts and models of coaching for social change are presented, followed by a discussion of the implications of the social change aspect on the coaching process and the development of coaches. I conclude with a discussion of how the social agenda may impact coaching body politic, coaching theory, and future research.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

What does social change mean in today's world? And how does it relate to an approach for individual development such as coaching? To answer these questions, we need to understand how the boundaries and interactions between individual and society are changing.

It was not until the 1970s that the significant impact of culture and social systems on adult development began to be adequately discussed (Naumann & Hüfner, 2013). As Lerner (2013) notes: 'Interest emerged in the bidirectional relations between developing people and the multilevel, interrelated settings within which they live their lives (e.g., the family, the community, the physical environment, and the culture, including its system of symbols and values)' (p. 155). A proper understanding of what it means to develop individually needs to incorporate an understanding of the context where this development takes place.

It is not hard to see why coaching has gained such a warm reception in the context of present times. The demands of modern

life on individuals' cognitive and emotional development have significantly increased (Kegan, 1994). At a macro level, we are enduring a sustained period of psychosocial fragmentation, where the self has become severed from its traditional points of anchorage. Globalization, new technologies, and transnational corporations have created an environment where the individual is the basic unit for social reproduction, and where socially prescribed biographies are being replaced with self-produced ones (Adams, 2007). A fixed cohesive identity has become a burden, as new careers are emerging, social networks are breaking the barriers of distance and time, and relocation across the globe is becoming more frequent (Bauman, 2004).

Is this rise of individualization emancipatory? Does it signify the triumph of human agency over social structures? Adams (2007) argues that the same inequalities still exist, but are more individualized. The first implication of this is that simple class or race categories are no longer representative of the individual's identity, which makes solidarity over a social cause, and collaboration for social change, more problematic (Putnam, 2001).

The second implication has to do with how oppression works. Oppression defines the experience of significant numbers of people around the world. It acts as a complete system of structural elements that reproduce inequality in everyday practices (Dominelli, 2002). It gets embedded in the unconscious assumptions of people and the normal processes of everyday life (Young, 2000). The most powerful tool for maintaining oppression is its internalization, when oppressive ideologies become embedded in personal beliefs, and socially prescribed roles become part of people's identities. The internalization of oppression means that even when external oppressive conditions change, people aim to recreate them, because they have in them the image of their oppressor (Freire, 1970). Internalized oppression affects individuals with self-hatred, fear, feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, and powerlessness

(Pheterson, 1986). Even being a bystander in an oppressive environment results in a long list of psychic wounds (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

Oppression is therefore experienced at a deeply personal level, with collective political action becoming more challenging. This is where coaching becomes critically relevant for social change. Resisting oppression needs to take place from the inside out. Social change starts by internal steps such as empowerment of the self, dismantling dysfunctional beliefs, and gaining inspiration and authenticity (Harro, 2000). Emancipation becomes a personal project that involves a transformation within the individual that results in social change. Coaching interventions can play a role at the heart of the tension between individual agency and social structure. Coaching can act as an enabler for personal transformation and action, supporting individuals in understanding how society is shaping their experience and their beliefs, and in acting to change their immediate and wider social conditions.

LOCATING COACHING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The Critical Pedagogical Tradition

A useful way to locate coaching for social change is to compare it against different

pedagogical traditions. I use here the taxonomy suggested by Boud (1989), and discussed in Chappell et al. (2003) and Usher et al. (2004). There are four pedagogical traditions, compared in Table 10.1: (1) The training tradition, focusing on efficient learning to acquire predefined skills and knowledge, assuming that the learner, content and learning process are neutral; (2) The andragogy tradition, focusing on learning from experience, assuming that the learner is self-directed and resourceful, and that subjective experience is the source of real knowledge; (3) The humanistic tradition, focusing on realising an authentic self, assuming that the self possesses innate knowledge and tendencies; and (4) The critical tradition: focusing on emancipation and social change, assuming that knowledge is socially constructed and should be critiqued.

In the first three traditions, objective knowledge, subjective experience and self, respectively, are considered authentic, rather than socially constructed. These traditions have been criticized as being overly individualistic. They portray social problems as largely individual problems with individual solutions, while implicitly accepting the social world as given. On the other hand, the critical tradition acknowledges the social realm, perhaps as the only reality, focusing on liberating individuals from oppression through ideology critique, and social action.

The mainstream of coaching has evolved primarily within the andragogy and humanistic

Table 10.1 Four traditions of pedagogies of change

	<i>Training</i>	<i>Andragogy</i>	<i>Humanistic</i>	<i>Critical</i>
Learner is	Neutral	Unique, Rational meaning-maker	Holistic, Self-knowing consciousness	Social actor, Socially-formed consciousness
Success depends on	Learning efficiency	Self-direction, Reflectiveness	Learner-centricity, Authenticity	Ideology critique, Social action
Knowledge is	Objective, Pre-defined	Subjective, Experiential	Subjective, Innate	Socially constructed
Seeks to	Acquisition of skills and knowledge	Learn from experience	Realise authentic self	Liberate from oppression, Change society

traditions (Western, 2012). Coaching celebrates the self, it assumes a resourceful and self-directed individual, and relies on reflecting on experience and relationships (Rogers, 2008). Some coaching models have common elements with the training tradition, focusing on changing behaviours and acquiring skills. On the other hand, coaching for social change originates within a critical worldview that sees experiences and meanings as socially constructed, and proposes that individual transformation must be linked to social change.

The Rise of Critical Approaches

Another way to understand coaching for social change is to compare it to critical approaches within other disciplines. Many human development and helping disciplines have started to develop critical genres within their practices, even before the early rise of coaching. For example, in education, critical pedagogy has led the way, based on the seminal work of Paulo Freire. Critical pedagogy practitioners try to balance a belief in human agency, and an awareness of social structure. They aim to provide learners with the tools that would allow them to challenge inequalities and injustices, and to collectively change society if they choose to do so (Usher et al., 2004). Other critical approaches within education include the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), and feminist pedagogy (MacDonald, 2002).

In the fields of psychiatry and psychotherapy, there have been multiple critiques to how traditional approaches may form part of the oppressive structure. Fanon (1967) called for a new practice that would aim to liberate the oppressed rather than contribute to their oppression. A similar call came from the work of Martín-Baró in Latin America, leading to the creation of liberation psychology (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Psychologies of liberation give primacy to the attainment of collective liberty, as opposed to the focus on individual narratives, that is, balancing the attention given

to alleviating the symptoms of the individual's suffering with the aim to change pathogenic social conditions (Bulhan, 2004). Another approach in that domain is feminist therapy, which is based on the premise that personal problems are created and intensified by structural inequality and societal power imbalances (Magnet & Diamond, 2010).

More recently, a similar trend could be seen in person-centred therapy (PCT). This is particularly relevant, as PCT has been a key inspiration to coaching (Palmer & Whybrow, 2007). In 2005, a network called 'Person-Centred Practitioners for Social Change' was formed, with the following mission: 'We want to voice our opposition to inequalities and oppression in the world. We celebrate diversity and commit ourselves to working towards social justice. We aim to raise public awareness about the political, social and economic causes of distress in society. We aim to promote relationships where people listen to each other and each person has a voice. We believe in acting with honesty, integrity and transparency, whilst aiming to value and understand all others' (Proctor, 2006, p. 2).

It could be argued that coaching for social change is to mainstream coaching what critical approaches in education and psychotherapy are to traditional approaches within those disciplines. It aims to fill the gap in the current coaching theory, while leveraging the potential of coaching as an enabler for change. Like these approaches, coaching for social change emerges from a critique of disconnecting individual development from social change, and an appreciation of the power of coaching in connecting these two domains.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF COACHING AS A SOCIAL APPROACH

There is a growing critique to current coaching approaches, theories and culture, in terms of how coaching is too individual, instrumental,

and culturally-biased. Meanwhile, there is also a growing hope that coaching can become a social enabler, because it is empowering, reflective and flexible. This section explores both sides of the arguments; the gap in current coaching culture, and the potential of coaching as an approach for social change.

Wildflower (2013) suggests that coaching has roots in the growth of the self-help tradition in the United States in the 1930s and the human potential movement in the 1960s. She argues that the focus on the potential of individuals came partially as a response to a general disbelief in the socioeconomic systems. The growth of coaching is often linked to a growth in individualism (Whitmore, 2007). The individualistic focus has been a key theme for the critique of coaching and the general therapeutic culture of the last few decades (Swan, 2010). Individualizing problems limits the possibility of critically challenging the social beliefs and structures that created these problems in the first place (Du Toit, 2014). Many writers argue that coaching may act as a deflector for organizational tension by individualizing conflicts, so that structural problems are interpreted and narrated as being individual issues (Kühl, 2008; Schultz, 2010; Fatien Diochon and Lovelace, 2015).

Coaching has emerged primarily as a performance improvement approach used in business environments. Coaching theories and research have mainly focused on that context, which have resulted in two issues: First, most coachees are managers at medium to big organizations, a population that is primarily composed of alpha males (Erlandson, 2009). This bias in the experience of coaches may result in a falsely optimistic understanding of how power dynamics, social structures, and organizational culture affect individuals (Lasley et al., 2011). Second, the performance improvement mentality makes coaching less critical. Western (2012) criticizes a domination of the coaching space by 'technocratic functionalist coaches', who apply tools and techniques with instrumental mindsets. Brockbank and McGill (2012)

argue that the focus on performance coaching leads to maintaining the status quo, by suppressing challenge and questioning to the existing system. In their view, performance coaching tends to reinforce existing power relations and reproduce social inequalities.

Another critique of coaching is that it stems from a dominant western cultural view (Western, 2012). Within this cultural view there are embedded assumptions about the coachees and their world, such as the belief that coachees are resourceful, and the principles of free will, choice and self-responsibility (Rogers, 2008). These assumptions are questionable in many places in the world, as well as in many communities within western developed countries. Wherever oppressive social structures are present, free will and choice may be prohibited by social coercion, or internally relinquished because of dysfunctional beliefs. In many cases, coachees are bound by socially acquired frames of reference that hinder their resourcefulness.

Some studies respond to the cultural bias in the literature by focusing on coaching in other cultural contexts (For example: Nangalia & Nangalia, 2010; Passmore, 2009). However, a common critique of many of these studies is that they tend to focus on adapting to the local culture and work within its boundaries. The underlying assumption is that the coach needs to accept the social order as a given, regardless of its implications on the individual. Another assumption is that all coachees living within a certain cultural context will prefer to abide by it, thus implicitly denying them the right to resist such an identity and to define their own. Most accounts seem to be missing a critical stance, whereby cultural traits are also questioned and challenged where necessary.

Despite the limitations highlighted above, coaching has a number of strengths that would allow it to be an effective approach for social change. First, coaching is participatory in nature; equality between coach and client is a core principle (Rogers, 2008), coaches are not expected to be more experienced

than their coachees (CIPD, 2004), and there is a general consensus that coaching is non-directive (Ives, 2008). Hence, coaching can be seen as a collaborative and facilitative relationship (Grant, 2003). A participatory ethic does not mean that power is not problematic (Welman & Bachkirova, 2010), but it provides an enabling environment for fostering empowerment.

Another important strength of coaching is its capacity to support critical reflection. Cox (2012) argues that ‘one of the fundamental, but usually unspoken, aims of coaching is to facilitate clients to become critical’ (p. 91). Kristal (2009) suggests that the change happening in coaching is often the result of the process of critical reflection, that may result in either action or a new frame of reference. Critical reflection in coaching helps to transform the client by exposing power relations, challenging what is deemed natural, accepting the reality of conflict, and appreciating the power of language and the prevailing discourse (Brockbank & McGill, 2006). Moreover, coaching provides an environment where such challenge to the coachee’s beliefs could be balanced with the needed support and appreciation (Du Toit, 2014).

A third aspect of coaching is flexibility. Coaching is often critiqued for being unregulated and unstandardized, but it is also this fact that makes it open and adaptable to serve different purposes. Western (2012) describes coaching as ‘a vital and dynamic space that enables creativity to emerge, whereas other “helping relationships” are often saddled with more restrictive cultures’ (p.10). Within this dynamic space, some practitioners have started to explore coaching as an approach for social change, which is the focus of the next section.

CONTEXTS AND MODELS OF COACHING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Coaching for social change can take place in various settings; in terms of whether it is

supporting leaders, activists or victims; is part of institutional or grassroots efforts, is occurring in culturally-diverse or culturally-specific environments, and is dealing with specific social issues or holistic experiences. Reported studies generally fall into three groups: (1) Coaching business executives to be socially responsible, (2) Coaching leaders and practitioners in the social sector, and (3) Coaching individuals and groups affected by adverse social conditions, to transform their internal and external realities.

Social Change in the Work Domain

Work is identified as a domain for social change from two perspectives: First, corporate executives may be major influencers of the lives of millions of people; through the way they direct their companies in the market. Second, work constitutes a significant part of the individual’s experience and identity, organizational systems are similar to public political and social systems, and they have similar tensions between agency and structure. There is also a mutual impact between what happens in an organization, and what happens in the society or societies where this organization exists, so changing the organization becomes a form of social change.

The first group of studies argues that coaching can play a role in making executives act responsibly in their companies and in the world. Eyre (2012), in an interview with Sir John Whitmore, quotes him saying that coaching can save the world, arguing that coaching can help leaders of organizations appreciate the need for a more inclusive and caring capitalism, that balances profit and people. Along the same lines, Outhwaite and Bettridge (2009), and Stern (2011) argue that coaching can help executives to link the social perspective with their organizational and personal goals. Dyer (2002) argues that coaching can help restructure the belief systems of executives to prevent destructive

behaviours driven by arrogance and power. This belief is shared by Du Toit and Sim (2010), who argue that critical coaching can help leaders understand their role in establishing corporate social responsibility.

The above accounts do not offer enough detail on how coaches could support leaders to act differently. Meanwhile, Du Toit (2013, 2014) argues that scepticism is one of the key aspects of a coaching approach that would challenge groupthink and the status quo within organizations. The sceptical or critical mindset, associated with critical theory, would enable the coach to challenge the taken for granted values and beliefs in the organization, and help the coachee to act independently, questioning the organizational metanarrative and welcoming new interpretations. Another consideration, by Reissner and Du Toit (2011), is the importance of reflexivity while using narratives, so that stories are not used as tools to influence and distort how reality is perceived within the organization, for example, by reframing unethical market behaviours as bold and daring, or by positioning work overload as a personal achievement.

Focusing on how coaching can help create a reflective learning organization, one that exposes control, inequality and biases rather than perpetuating them, Askew and Carnell (2011) propose a view for transformative coaching, grounded in the theory of transformative learning. They suggest that issues to do with self-identity and power relationships are at the root of many of the concerns that coachees bring to coaching, and argue that a coaching approach that fosters critical consciousness through reflective learning is capable of helping individuals to think differently about themselves, their organization, and their society, as well as empowering them to act as agents of change.

A more detailed coaching approach is provided by Western (2012), who proposes the Analytic-Network coaching process (A-NcP) as a conceptual framework for helping individuals to strive for a collective endeavour to improve workplaces and society. A-NcP

includes five frames: (1) Depth analysis, where coachees identify their values, desire, and purpose, (2) Relational analysis, where they understand the dynamics between them and others, (3) Leadership analysis, where they develop their leadership roles, (4) Network analysis, where they understand and build their networks of power and resources, and (5) Strategic analysis, to consolidate the outcomes of the other frames. Western suggests that A-NcP needs to be underpinned by emancipatory ethics: to value the individual, strive for more humane organizations, act responsibly towards the environment, challenge power and injustice, help individuals discover their creativity and autonomy, and to act in good faith to help create the good society.

Coaching in the Social Domain

The second group of studies focuses on a new role for coaching in supporting social entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, activists, and social workers. Coaching in the social sector initially focused on leadership development and organizational capacity building, in ways similar to coaching in a business context (Lasley et al., 2011). A good example is the Coaching and Philanthropy project (CAP) in the United States, which provides coaching for nonprofit leaders and teams (Howard, Gislason, & Kellogg, 2010). The CAP project has done surveys and interviews to understand how coaching works in nonprofits. Asking coachees what they hope to get from coaching, 67% chose 'to develop leadership skills/confidence' as a high priority, they also prioritized enhancing management skills, balancing the personal and professional in their lives, and managing organizational change. The CAP project guide lists three key competences for coaches to perform in the nonprofit environment: (1) Understanding of nonprofits, this includes governance structures, fundraising, volunteering, mission, unique nonprofit human

resource challenges, cultures and needs across the sector, and the scarcity mindset; (2) Core coaching skills; and (3) Cultural awareness, which transpires in the ability to use coaching in addressing different forms of oppression, and that the coach's work reflects a critical analysis of how power, privilege and difference play out in society.

Coaching is also used to support the implementation of specific social endeavours. For example, de Jager (2011) reports on a programme where 150 executives selected from government, NGOs, business donors and the private sector were offered executive coaching, while working together to develop innovations and change in the sector of orphaned and vulnerable children in South Africa. Similarly, Ngwenya and Hagmann (2007) report on the use of mentoring and coaching to support team leaders in implementing a participatory change programme within a South African community.

More recently, coaching skills started to be used by direct service providers (Lasley et al., 2011). Applications emerged in relation to supporting healthy lifestyle after recovery from substance dependence (LePage & Garcia-Rea, 2012), managing change in gender transition (Grajfoner, 2009), and coaching for wellness and HIV/AIDS awareness (Maitland & Anderson, 2011). The process of coaching and mentoring has also moved into schools, youth and community settings, working with children and adolescents (Qing & Millward, 2014).

Meanwhile, Caspi (2005) examines with some concern the growth of coaching as a mode of practice for social workers. He cites studies on the use of coaching to help people with biopsychosocial challenges, such as eating disorders, grief, family communications, marriages, ADHD, and assisting people with life-threatening illnesses, and comments:

Because there is no control over who can serve as a coach, how it is practiced, and for what situations, the idea that coaching is being offered for issues that typically fall under the jurisdiction of mental health practitioners should be of great

concern. At the same time, coaching may have a lot to offer social work. Currently, we do not know. Empirical examination and discussion about coaching's relationship to social work is needed for the protection of clients and for the benefit of the social work profession. (p. 361)

Coaching research remains somewhat limited in answering those concerns.

Coaching in Oppressive Contexts

The third category for the application of coaching for social change is to coach individuals living in challenging social conditions. For example, the Solidarity Coaching programme offers coaching to individuals with very low income. The programme has been active in France since 2005, and is starting to develop in a number of European countries, under the sponsorship of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC, 2015).

Another example is Beyond Emancipation (2015), a programme offering coaching to youths with experience in foster care or probation placements in the United States. It uses a coaching approach called 'CCRW – Creative, Connected, Resourceful and Whole'. The approach is tailored from theories of coaching, permanency, youth development and crisis management, and progresses through six steps: (1) Establishing safety, (2) Getting curious, (3) Supporting awareness, (4) Encouraging exploration, (5) Discovering next steps, and (6) Creating accountability. Similar types of coaching support are provided, through the Coach Network (2015) in the UK, to vulnerable young people, including single parents, ex-offenders and young people disengaged from education.

McGregor (2015) reports on the Coaching Inside and Out (CIAO) programme, supporting women in UK prisons. She describes a model that focuses on visioning and empowerment, by asking coachees what they want to change, and facilitating the process of achieving that change. The coaching process

involves the use of a tool to measure improvement across multiple categories. Significant improvement has been reported across all categories, especially in self-reliance and ‘social capital’ (i.e. supportive networks and relationships).

Beyond these specific communities, there are countless situations where coaching can become either a tool for maintaining the status quo, or an enabler for social change. Consider what is at stake when coaching women in a patriarchal society, working with ethnic or religious minorities, coaching in countries with a history of dictatorship or war, or coaching the poor, illiterate or disabled. In every situation where coachees are part of an oppressive social structure, coaching becomes a political process, even when it takes place under the banners of life, career, or developmental coaching. Acknowledging the significance of the social structure, without denying the coachee’s agency, embeds coaching as part of the daily micro-battles of emancipation and social change.

Shoukry (2014, 2016) proposes the Coaching For Emancipation (CFE) framework, as a research-based theoretical and practical framework for the use of coaching in oppressive environments. The CFE framework provides a detailed understanding of how living in oppressive environments affects coaches, coachees, and the coaching process. It suggests that oppression is experienced as a complex web of daily interactions that affects the entire social and psychological experience of the individual, depriving him/her from the concept of choice, and fostering senses of helplessness, unworthiness, self-blame, and grief. When moving through emancipatory journeys, coachees often go through similar cycles: naming oppression, building hope and self-belief, developing critical awareness, facing social resistance, failing and losing hope, finding alternatives, breaking the cycle of oppression through actions of resistance, and transforming their narratives into ones of liberation. The research through which the CFE framework was developed

suggests that emotional processes are critical to the emancipatory journey. The framework also points to the negative impact of oppression on the cognitive and emotional development of the coachee.

According to Shoukry (2014), Coaching for emancipation involves a number of processes:

- 1 **Empowering Dialogue:** A dialogue that balances empathy and appreciation from one side, and confrontation and criticality from the other, with interventions to support the development of self-efficacy, agency, and meaning making, as well as the coachees’ emotional fitness and resilience, by dealing with feelings of fear, self-blame, and self-victimisation.
- 2 **Retelling Narratives:** A process whereby coachees use stories to understand, externalize and re-author their lives, starting from naming oppression in the lived experience, to authoring a narrative of liberation. Narratives help coachees make sense of their fragmented experiences. They provide possibilities for transforming stories of oppression into ones of liberation. As the heroes of their stories, coachees explore how their stories are filled with aspects of resistance, and moments of victory that they can celebrate.
- 3 **Renewing Beliefs:** A process where coachees understand and challenge the structures leading to their experiences of oppression, be it social structures or deeply held beliefs. Interventions of social analysis and self-reflection are used, allowing the personal and political to re-interpret each other.
- 4 **Fighting Back:** A process that supports action in three domains; breaking from the reality of daily oppression, experimenting with new ideas and behaviours, and engaging in reflective actions of resistance and change. Given that oppressive environments are often unyielding, supporting action involves careful planning and understanding the implications of social conflict, as well as dealing with the emotional barriers of change.

IMPLICATIONS OF COACHING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

It is evident from the frameworks presented in the previous section that the use of

coaching as a social approach – especially with socially vulnerable individuals – has several implications: The foundation upon which the coaching contract is agreed has to be reviewed, the coaching process needs to incorporate elements to deal with issues of power, internalized oppression and social action, and the development of coaches needs to prepare them to face the unique challenges of that context.

Coaching Contract

In mainstream individual coaching, it is assumed that the coachee owns the agenda, and coaches can claim neutrality, on the basis that coachees have full responsibility for their lives. When coaching takes place within an organizational context, there might be a conflict that has to be negotiated between what the organization and the individual are seeking from coaching. In coaching for social change, the coachee may be a leader or an organization who wants to think differently, a social worker or activist, or an individual affected by social oppression, who either independently seeks coaching or is offered coaching as part of a social initiative. In all of these cases, the first question to ask is who gets to decide what is meant by social change.

There are some naturally unavoidable tensions, between individuals and the organizations they work in, or social initiatives and the individuals they serve. But even if we assume – for simplicity – that the coachee is free to decide the purpose of coaching, the goal of social change is likely to affect many people who are not part of the coaching contract. By supporting the coachee in defining and implementing a social agenda, the coachee is acknowledged as a legitimately subjective narrator and co-creator of the social world. This acknowledgment cannot be value neutral.

A coach, who is choosing to support a social endeavour, is thus acting politically. Whether supporting coachees to find their voice and

fight oppression, or challenging leaders to think critically and responsibly, the coach's choices are founded on a specific value-driven worldview; one that includes images of the human being, and the good society. As a result, the social change coach is no longer a neutral technical expert, but an active agent who contributes, implicitly or explicitly, to the definition of what coaching is trying to achieve. Coaches may have to disclose their ethical frameworks and social biases, they may choose proactively which social issues they want to work with, or they may have different models of providing their services (for example, paid or pro bono) based on the client and social issue. The issue of neutrality needs to be considered across the field, as many coaches outside the context of social change may be acting politically, even without being fully aware of it.

Coaching Process

A coaching process that supports social change would need to consider several aspects. First to consider is power, an area where coaching research is still very limited. Socially vulnerable coachees are likely to be more susceptible to the effect of power dynamics. Differences between coach and coachee, in terms of gender, race, class, and other factors may significantly add to the complexity of power in the coaching relationship. Power flows in both directions, as coachees contribute through active consent or resistance (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002). Proctor (2008) suggests that it may be helpful for practitioners to have a checklist of considerations for the dynamics of power. Welman and Bachkirova (2010) argue that power can be used with or without awareness, as a mean of domination or empowerment. Even while aspiring to empower, coaches may end up imposing their own 'liberating' ideas on their coachees, or – on the other extreme – withdrawing from playing their role in guiding the process, for fear of overusing their power. Empowerment is

hence a complicated process. For example, Heron (1999) argues that a process that supports empowerment should not avoid the use of power, but needs to manage it, Shoukry (2014) suggests that empowerment in the coaching relationship may detract from focusing on empowerment in the coachee's social context, while Inglis (1997) warns that a focus on empowerment may become part of making people act successfully within the existing system and structures of power, instead of critically analysing, resisting and challenging them.

A second process consideration is the criticality needed to validate the competing worldviews; the subjective reality of the coachee, ideologies and grand narratives used as reference, and the cultural reality of the context where coaching is taking place. There is a danger if any of these realities is uncritically legitimized. The coachee's subjectivity may be reflective of misinterpretation, self-victimization, or internalized oppression, grand narratives are susceptible to become hegemonic, and cultural norms – while important to understand – can often act as ideological devices that validate oppression and injustice. Failing to be critical may mean that coaching becomes part of maintaining the status quo. Meanwhile, the degree of criticality required to analysing these realities is not a small burden on a coaching process that also needs to be emotionally empowering, and practically efficient.

The third consideration in the coaching process is around its scope. From one side, working with social issues requires a holistic approach, where the coachee's experiences are connected across multiple domains (work, family ... etc.), the experience of one individual is linked to bigger social structures on many layers (culture, law ... etc.), and specific beliefs are linked to broader ideologies. From the other side, coachees are much more engaged when the coaching process is directly linked to their immediate lived experience (Shoukry, 2014). So there is a tension between broadening the scope to help the

coachee understand and change the bigger social picture, while keeping it personal and relevant.

Another consideration is about the complexity of social action. Taking action is perhaps the most important and most challenging part of the coaching process. Through action and reflection as praxis, coachees learn about the world they are trying to change, and develop new skills to deal with the challenges of their change projects. Social action is, however, different from actions discussed in other forms of coaching, because social action often takes place in an unwelcoming environment, it challenges the status quo of a system that may have existed for years, it may generate negative reactions even from the coachees' closest circles, it requires lobbying and collaboration with other supporters of the cause, it requires careful planning and assessment of risks, and it may take a very long time before generating outcome. These differences have many implications on the coaching process and the needed skillset of coaches.

Development of Coaches

A change in the coaching context, contract, and process will no doubt require a change in coaches' training and development. Most of current training programmes prepare coaches to work with individuals, to achieve personal goals or improve performance, within a certain cultural and organizational context. Training coaches for social change would involve new requirements in the following areas:

- ***Social, cultural and political awareness:*** Coaches need to understand the bigger context they are working within, and learn how to help coachees become aware of how social structures and cultural norms affect the way they think and behave. Coaches need to learn about concepts like ideology and social roles, and about mechanisms like socialization and power. Lasley et al. (2011) call this set of skills cultural competence, and argue that coach training programmes

should draw on the vast resources in this area, and should incorporate issues of power, institutional and social inequities, and cultural diversity into coach training curricula.

- **Psychology of the oppressed:** Coaching for social change would often take place in environments that are oppressive in nature, and with people who are often adversely affected by the social system. Because living in these environments affects people deeply, coaches need to use psychological models that incorporate the possible implications of oppression on processes like coachees' self and identity development, motivation, and learning. Coaches also need to consider how internalized oppression may act as an internal barrier to change.
- **Empowerment:** Coaches need to learn how to support the empowerment of their coachees inside and outside the coaching session, how to deal with feelings of powerlessness and self-victimization, and how to prepare their coachees emotionally to face the challenge of personal and social change.
- **Critical thinking:** Coaches need to improve their critical thinking skills, and more importantly, their ability to facilitate a critical dialogue, where coachees are supported in critically reflecting on their system of assumptions and beliefs, and in understanding how social structures have been shaping their experiences.
- **Facilitating action:** Taking action in the context of social change may be very different from the types of actions that coaches are used to support. Social action may involve working collaboratively with local or diverse communities, defying power structures, facing social norms and taking risks. Helping coachees to plan, implement and learn from social action is another area that coach training needs to cover.
- **Self-reflectiveness:** Regardless of the context or genre of coaching, coaches are expected to reflect critically on their practice. In the context of social change, this requirement needs to be further emphasized, because the context implies more significant challenges. First to consider is the fact that coaches are often as affected by the social system or oppression as their coachees, sharing some of their struggles, and identifying with their stories. Hence, coaches need to develop awareness of how the social context has affected them, how they are reacting to the coachees' stories, and whether their own

doubts and emotions are affecting the coaching process. A second consideration is the importance of reflecting on the impact of power on the coaching relationship, and the awareness of how coaches may be perceived, or may perceive themselves as saviours or defenders of a certain cause, and the impact of such perceptions on their ability to coach.

CONCLUSION

Coaching for social change is a new and growing field that holds a lot of potential. It is increasingly acknowledged that coaching cannot occur in isolation from its social context. Coaching theorists are beginning to argue that coaching has the potential to enable social change, though its current practices are sometimes used in ways that may obstruct change and serve to maintain dysfunctional social and organizational structures.

Social change may take place as part of coaching at work, coaching in the social domain, or coaching individuals living in oppressive environments. In all cases, social change coaches are required to face challenges that are specific to their role: They need to contribute to the coaching agenda rather than act as technical experts; develop cultural competences and critical self-reflectiveness, and support empowerment, criticality, and social action. These challenges are mostly new to the coaching culture. Hence, it is important to consider how the coaching community can support and integrate this new practice, and how coaching theories, and future research, may provide a better foundation for its growth.

Similar to other disciplines, practitioners of coaching do not act independently from the overall culture of their practice. Coaches are socialized into behaving in certain styles, though they retain the ability either to conform or resist such pressures (Jones et al., 2002), both agency and structure shape their experience like they shape the experience of their coachees. Coaches are often under

pressure to produce performances that are congruent with the role expectations held by their clients and peers. Using Foucault's concept of governmentality, Usher et al. (2004) argue that practices are governed from within, and maintained through the compliance of practitioners to an identity that is neither their own, nor dictated from above, an ever-moving agenda to which they contribute but do not control. If the fraternity of coaching, as Western (2012) argues, is inclined to a positivistic and individualistic discourse, where critical approaches are not welcomed, then this may create difficulties for the integration of social change into the coaching culture.

It is also important to consider the role of educational institutions, and accrediting professional bodies, in terms of how they could support the growth of a social practice of coaching. Educational and professional bodies often try to be apolitical, but it is through the inclusion of a social perspective into their curriculums, ethical frameworks, initiatives and publications that the language of social change would start to penetrate the coaching discourse. There may also be a need for new models of accreditation and educational funding, in order to make the practice more inclusive for potential coaches who are approaching it as an enabler for social change.

Another dimension is to consider how research institutions encourage the development of coaching theories that study social change. Helping theories include assumptions about the nature of humanness, location of the problem (individual or society), nature of possible solutions (emancipation, change, or adjustment), and the role of the helper (Sanders, 2006). New coaching theories and research needs to examine these assumptions critically, and explore whether they are inadvertently limiting the scope of how coaching can help create a better world. Research methodologies for coaching for social change may also need to reflect a critical, participatory, and emancipatory stance; empowering coachees to impact the way coaching theories are developed.

As a new genre within coaching, there are many aspects of coaching for social change that require further research. I have already discussed some of the key themes for such research, including issues related to the coaching contract, coaching process, coaches' development and overall coaching culture. Other areas for future research may include peer coaching, group coaching, and community coaching, as possible forms of coaching for social change. Most importantly, coaching for social change needs praxis; in the words of Freire (1970), 'reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed' (p.126). What is needed is research that originates from the true needs and challenges of those whose world is being transformed, one that takes place while being involved in supporting change, as this will expose the real struggles, gaps, and opportunities that coaches need to address.

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