

Building reflective capability to enhance coaching practice (Louise Kovacs & Sarah Corrie)

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Aim of study

An ability to reflect on one's practice has never been more important for coaches working with clients in a complex and ever-changing terrain. This study aims to help coaches enhance their reflective ability by offering an insight into the benefits of a reflective practice, and suggesting practical methods that new and experienced coaches can employ with the view of becoming reflective practitioners

Background

What is a reflective practitioner?

- Donald Schon (1983) who originally came up with the term argues that a reflective practice begins with ***an intentional pause that allows practitioners to examine their beliefs, assumptions, goals and methods to enable for higher learning***
- Other theorists like Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) suggest that ***reflection raises practitioners' awareness to discrepancies between the value systems and theories they embrace, and how these actually manifest in their practice and actions***

How do we, as coaches, grow through reflection?

Schon (1983) eloquently captures how learning is achieved through experience, and his model has a direct application to coaching practice

Reflection in-action

- Thinking on one's feet
- Being present and therefore open to surprises
- Going beyond specific coaching models and techniques to respond to client needs "in the moment"

Reflection on –action

- A deliberate effort to review and consolidate learning acquired through reflection in-action
- A process of reconstructing events in one's mind, reviewing what went well, what might be more effective and then acting accordingly

Research design

Reflective practice is explored here in the form of a **case study**, which became part of one of the authors' doctoral research project. In order for her to understand and record her own professional development as a coach she employed several methods of reflection including: reflective questions, a written learning journal, as well as reflection in-action and reflection on-action

Key recommendations

How to promote reflective practice in coaching?

Sustained effort	Coaches can benefit from a reflective practice when they set clear goals about what they want to achieve. Some typical examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeking insight into a specific coaching session• Developing greater understanding of work with a specific client• Looking to expand use of general reflective skills• Embedding a learning process to support coaching work over time
Tools	Coaches can benefit from using an array of methods and approaches to enhance their reflective practice. Some of these include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer supervision/ Peer practice groups• Reflective diaries (written or spoken or video)• Recording of coaching sessions for personal review, or to be shared in supervision• Mind-maps
Incisive questions	Coaches can benefit from using critical reflection questions to support their reflective practice. Kovacs and Corrie (2017) include an extensive list of question in page 10; some examples are listed below: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was not as effective? What does effective mean in this context?• What hypotheses was I holding in mind about the client and how did I go about testing these?• What could I have done differently and in what way might that have changed the conversation• What does this situation or case tell me about my values and assumptions?• Am I applying the theories in which I am trained or just going with the flow and my gut feel? What are the implications of this?

Comments

- Even though reflection has been shown to be an essential component of effective practice for helping professionals, it is still a concept that has proved difficult to define, and therefore remains largely under searched. Further evidence based research is required to fully understand the benefits of a reflective practice
- As the coaching professional grows, it would be interested to investigate how incorporating reflection in training and practice has positive outcomes for both coaches and their clients