The Art Dialogue in Coaching—Qualifying Conversations through Transformative Exchange

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• Visiting professor at Copenhagen Business School – Master of Public Governance
• TAOS associate
• Honorary vice-president, International Society of Coaching Psychology.
• Member of the Scientific Advisory Council, Institute of Coaching at Harvard Medical School (2009-16)
• Private practice, speaker, workshop leader
• German, living in Denmark since 1984
• Married to Shereen, a psychologist, daughter: Christin
My path towards coaching

- Danish textbook on sport psychology (1999)
- My second book on coaching (Danish 2012; English 2014)

Third book on coaching
(Danish 2016, English 2019)

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Preface
1: Third-generation coaching as sustainable, fruitful dialogue – key navigation points
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Concluding reflections
Third generation coaching

- I struggle with the term “coaching”
- I prefer to talk about “transformational dialogues”
- Focus on self & identity
- Focus on co-reflective practice → being a resonating partner
- Celebrating the art of lingering in dialogue
- Focus on meaning making, on value reflections, on reauthoring narratives

The three generations of coaching – a dialogue with different basic perspectives

1. Problem/goal perspective

2. Solution/future perspective

3. Reflective perspective → being a fellow human companion
Why third generation coaching?

Societal changes

See also Stelter, 2014

- We live in a world of globality (Beck, 2002)
- ... in a hypercomplex society (Luhmann, 1998)
- ... where self-reflexivity is a basic condition (Giddens, 1999)
- ... where identity and self-presentation are a central issue for the individual (Gergen, 1999)

Societal challenges

"The Burnout Society"

Byung-Chul Han, 2015

- 20th century: Immunological age:
  - We could distinguish between inner and outer, friend and enemy, between own and foreign.
- Today: Supremacy of positivity
  - Satiation, overcapacity, communication overload, hyperactivity, multitasking, shallow attention
  - Consequences: Tiredness, exhaustion, stress, depression, ADHD
- Individuals become subjects and victims of their own performance and thereby their own worst enemy
- Power control grows through surveillance of one’s own performance – Motto: Yes, we can!
- Control society: Self-disciplining intensifies, especially through social media and many report systems
Resonance
a central dimension in coaching dialogues

If acceleration is the problem, then resonance might be the solution.

Hartmut Rosa, German sociologist

True resonans unfolds in transformational dialogues

- The old-school (1st generation) coaching as the exclusive approach is outdated
- It not enough to support a person to move from A to B

- We need a form of transformational dialogue that leads us towards a philosophical stance
  - Helping us to find out who we are and
  - whom we want to be – with the important help of another

- Transformational dialogues shall support us in our search for meaning and for a life based on ethical values
In true dialogue, both sides are willing to change

Thich Nhat Hanh
Buddhist monk and peace activist

Counterbalancing tiredness, exhaustion and possible burn-out

➢ *Vita contemplativa*
  • Contemplation, “The art of lingering”
  • Dialogue as an art of lingering
Let us take a closer look at:

**What is a fruitful dialogue about?**

**Exercise in pairs**

- Describe a situation, where you as leader, colleague, dialogue guide, had a conversation that really inspired you, and where you felt satisfied and enlightened afterwards!

- How did you experience the situation?

- What do remember as central in this conversation?

- How would you describe what you – and the other – have done?

- What have been the key principals and values for you in this dialogue?

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**Third Generation Coaching**

**Relationship – moments of symmetry**

- Symmetric relation as the *ideal-typical state*: Both sides are dialogical partners. They co-create reality in collaboration

- Inspiration can go both ways (like a tuning fork)

- The dialogue guide (coach) is *resonating* about what is said by his/her dialogue partner.

- Dialogue as a transformational learning process for all parts

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Coaching as a specific form of dialogue

Normal dialogue

Symmetric relation

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Part 1
Part 2
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do

d

Coaching dialogue

(mostly 1st/2nd generations coaching)

Asymmetric relation

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Coach
Coachee
Self-dialogue
Challenge
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Part 1

Part 2

Dias 15

Third generation coaching

Coach as co-reflecting & resonating partner

Partly asymmetric relation

With moments of symmetry

- The coach/dialogue guide supports coachees in their **reflective process**
- The dialogue guide is a **resonating partner** and sharing witness in the dialogue
- The dialogue guide is a **fellow-human and collaborative partner**

Dias 16
Third Generation Coaching

- Central activities (Stelter, 2014)

1. Invite the coaching partner to a collaborative process of meaning making
   - Meaning is formed collaboratively on the basis of experience, reflection, speech and action
   - Meaning both generated individually (the experiential dimension) and in collaboration with others (the relational dimension)

2. Talk about values and identity issues
   - Integrating a focus on action with a focus on identity
   - Develop leadership, communication and cooperation by reflecting on central values: You prepare yourself to act \( \Rightarrow \) Phronesis (practical wisdom)

3. Give space to the unfolding of narratives
   - Narratives help to structure and restructure events.
   - Telling stories is the “doing” of identity
   - Re-authoring your world
   - Sharing “gifts” – resonating partner – withness thinker outsider witnessing

Withness-thinking

John Shotter (2006)

- Withness (dialogic)-talk/thinking occurs in those reflective interactions that involve our coming into living, interactive contact with an other’s living being, with their utterance, with their bodily expressions, with their words, their ‘works’. It is a meeting of outsides, of surfaces, of two kinds of ‘flesh’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), such that they come into ‘touch’ or ‘contact’ with each other. ...

- In the interplay of living moments intertwining with each other, new possibilities of relation are engendered, new interconnections are made, new ‘shapes’ of experience can emerge. (p. 600)

Coaching \( \Rightarrow \) “Reflecting with the other’s words /world in mind”
Third generation coaching

The dialogical dimension

Developing a culture of dialogue

- Withness thinking / dialogic talk (Shotter, 2006)
- **Relational attunement**: The will to be involved in the other person’s life, to be mindful by constantly trying to tune into each other (Stelter, 2013)
- Kierkegaard (2010, SKS 7) speaks about the **double reflective message**: Both dialogical partners are touched by each other and develop through the other’s words in mind.
- Buber (2002): Through the **Thou** a person becomes **I**. I **require a You to become**; becoming I, I say You. – All actual life is encounter.
- Gergen (2009). The Relational Being

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The dialogical dimension

“**Heteroenticity**” (a self-created word)

old greek: hetero=the other, einai=to be

- Heteroenticity = “to be with the other and on the other’s premise” (own translation based on Kirkeby et al., 2008, s. 133)
- ”To relate to oneself through the other” (Kirkeby, 2009, s. 101)
- To open yourself for the event and to be worthy of what could happen to it (see Kirkeby, 2005, s. 571; Kirkeby, 2009, 129)
- Presupposes becoming, generosity, power, will, we-creation
Third Generation Coaching

Narrative-collaborative dimension: Outsider witness procedures

- **A form of resonating** of what is said by the other (by the coach, even better in group coaching)
- **Hearing the words of another is an encounter**, an interchange of experiences, feelings, thoughts,
  - where we not only respond to the other,
  - but reflect on the basis of our own experiences, feelings and thoughts
- **We shall hear the other’s stories through the lens of our own experiences and sense-making**
- **We reflect about the sense-making and stories of the other** in the light of our own sense-making and stories

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The narrative-collaborative dimension

‘Outsider witness procedure’ → “make a gift”

**Two centrale focus areas:**

- **Witnessing, sharing and make a gift as dialogue guide (coach) & group participants**

**Landscapes of action**
- Effects on own actions
  - (What is the gift for me in what I want to do from what you have said?)
- Expected effects on the coachee’s future actions
  - (What kind of gift can I make as dialogue guide to the coachee?)

**Landscapes of identity**
- Effects on own identity, values, attitudes etc.
  - (Gifts for my identity)
- Expected effects on the coachee’s identity etc.
  - (What kind of gift can I make as dialogue guide to the coachee?)

Effect = gift
The importance of the other

Martin Buber said:
“Der Mensch wird im Du zum ich”
Through the thee you become I

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Kierkegaard
(The very first “third generation coach”) said in “Works of Love” (1847):

“At staa ene – ved den andens hjælp”
To find a stance for yourself – with the help of the other

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To find yourself means being “touched” by the other
... experiencing the other as a fellow-human companion

Let us prevent that this proficy will come true

Byung-Chul Han (2018, 53)
“The Expulsion of the Other”

“Some time in the future, there may be a profession known as ‘listener’.
For a fee, the listener gives an ear to the Other.”

“People go to the listener because there is hardly anyone else left who will listen to the Other.”
Instead:

Let us cultivate the qualities of listening!

(Byung-Chul Han, 2018)

"Listening is **not a passive act**. It is distinguished by a special activity:
first I must **welcome the Other**, which means affirming the Other in their otherness.
...
Then I give them an ear.
**Listening is a bestowal**, a giving, a gift." (p.53)

"The art of listening takes place as an art of **breathing**.
The hospitable welcoming of the Other is an inhalation, yet one that
does not absorb the Other, but instead **harbours and preserves them**." (p.54)

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Thank you for your attention 😊😊
and all the best on your way!

And if you want to read more about my approach ...

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**THE ART of DIALOGUE in COACHING**
Towards Transformative Exchange
REINHARD STELTER

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**A Guide to Third Generation Coaching**
Narrative-Collaborative Theory and Practice

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Coaching Book of the Year