

Chapter 2

The Origins and Development of Coaching

In this chapter I present the origins and development of coaching in order to provide a foundation that offers theoretical evidence for the suggested coaching practice (cf. Stober, Wildflower, & Drake, 2006). The following four perspectives may serve as a framework and a basis for the coaching practitioner and clarify how coaching practice rests on a social science basis. My discussion addresses the following themes:

Societal legitimacy: coaching as the answer to late- and post-modern challenges

With reference to several sociological theories I offer an explanation for the role and proliferation of coaching in today's society. I will argue that coaching can be viewed as an answer to late- and post-modern challenges, which may be part of the reason for the widespread use of coaching in so many areas of society.

Coaching, identity and self-constructions

Coaching as a dialogue form is an offer that lets you reflect on yourself and review certain positions and possible selves. Identity should be understood as a relational process, where coachees are invited to see themselves in a new light. The general understanding that is presented will be based mainly on social constructionist theory, which has as a key tenet that we create our identity in interaction with others.

Coaching and learning – between personal experience and collaboration

Coaching contributes to learning and development. A number of learning theories will be presented in relation to their impact on the shape and format of the coaching dialogue. The main focus will be on theoretical perspectives that take their point of departure either in experiential learning or in learning as a social and collaborative practice.

Coaching in the perspective of organization and leadership theory

Indisputably, coaching has seen its main growth in relation to leadership and organization. This chapter focuses especially on the new challenges that today's leaders are facing, and on the associated consequences for the leader's self-presentation and the action possibilities available in his or her position. In this connection, I discuss the interrelationship between leadership and coaching as a specific challenge; several researchers have criticized the use of coaching as a leadership tool.

2.1 Societal Legitimacy: Coaching as an Answer to Late- and Post-Modern Challenges

A strong argument in favour of the considerable role of coaching in many professions is based on an analysis of societal developmental processes. In the past 20–30 years, Western society, indeed the global society, has undergone fundamental changes with profound effects on all members of society, in both their private and professional lives. In the following, I present sociological and social science theories that highlight these change processes in a variety of ways. The social scientists quoted below do not necessarily have the same point of departure but emphasize different perspectives in the developmental process. Therefore, the following review should be understood as a mosaic that aims to shed light on processes of change and suggest the big picture, outlining how individuals are affected as members of a society. My message is the following: Social changes have helped create the widespread need for coaching and other dialogue tools (e.g. mentoring, counselling, process management etc.) today. In coaching and related fields it is therefore important to include the social perspective and consider the special societal challenges in one's concrete work with the clients.

Here I am thinking especially of the challenges related to three main trends: (1) globalization, (2) hyper-complexity and (3) late-modern reflexivity. Their unique conditions and meaning for the life of individuals will be addressed in the following.

2.1.1 *The Globalized World*

The increasingly global character of our world can be seen as the first aspect influencing the role and development of coaching and coaching psychology today. Globality can be defined as the end-point of the globalization process and may be seen as a condition that frames our mutual interactions. The well-known German sociologist Ulrich Beck (2000) notes, “Globality means that we have been living for a long time in a world society, in that sense that the notion of closed spaces has become illusory. No country or group can shut itself off from others” (p. 10).

The financial crisis that began in 2008 has painted a clear picture of the effect of globality on the life of virtually everyone on this planet – in the form of growing unemployment, falling real estate prices, reductions in aid to developing countries, growing budget deficits etc. Climate changes, migration, global media coverage (e.g. in connection with the Danish Mohammed cartoons in 2005/06 or the Japanese tsunami in 2011) and their related consequences are further examples of how globality invades our lives in the Western world. Beck (2000) highlights the following consequences:

Globality means that from now on nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event; all inventions, victories and catastrophes affect the whole world, and we must reorient and reorganize our lives and actions, our organizations and institutions, along a ‘local-global’ axis (p. 11).

Local and global phenomena are closely interrelated. Some of our everyday challenges, both in our private lives and in our work lives, can be understood in the light of globality – and that is the case also when these challenges are the topic of a coaching conversation. The world view of globality is affected by change processes that are characterized by growing diversity and multiple perspectives with regard to their interpretation and in relation to the development of possible action strategies. Furthermore, it seems that we have to adapt to a reality where we are less able to control certain factors locally. In fact, the very notion of control has been devalued as a result of the impact of globality on individual lives. Based on these reflections, I point to the following consequences and action strategies for the coach's and the coachee's dialogue in relation to specific challenges:

- It is rarely possible to offer or devise simple solutions during the coaching conversation. The complexity of the world does not invite simple answers.
- Focusing on reflection processes in relation to the challenges is a crucial aspect of the dialogue. The parties use reflection to achieve profound and necessary understanding.
- Examining differences and diversity becomes a quality in the format of the dialogue.
- Striving for a more open and non-judging approach to environmental influences is a new form of 'problem-solving' strategy.

2.1.2 The Hyper-Complex Society

In our late- or post-modern society, individuals confront growing diversity in the social world where the organizations, institutions and cultures all have their own autonomous 'developmental logic'. Various social contexts are characterized by specific cultures and organizations, and the members in the specific contexts develop their unique form of communication that matches the local culture, and which is simultaneously shaped by this culture. As a consequence of this development, society is increasingly losing internal coherence and cohesion. The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1998) puts it as follows: "The system tends towards 'hypercomplexity', towards a multitude of opinions and interpretations about its own complexity" (p. 876; own translation). According to this argumentation, it becomes impossible to achieve a uniform and concordant understanding and interpretation of specific societal phenomena or of society at large. Particular observer perspectives determine how the world is perceived. We create our world from the vantage point and the angle from which we view the world. A term that is used about this condition is *contingency*: the notion that everything can always be viewed and interpreted differently. This increased complexity or contingency can lead to stress or to a sense of freedom, implying new possibilities for action. As citizens in society we are therefore increasingly confronted with the question of how to manage differences in perception, and how the various social environments and cultures can communicate, given that each environment and each culture speaks its own language and has its own interpretations of the way things are.

Even within the same context there are different perceptions and different forms of contingency: On the one hand, the individual has to develop his or her competence to adapt and attune with the norms, values and behaviours of the specific culture in order to function as a member of it (e.g. an organization, a workplace). On the other hand, there will also be differences in perception among the parties within the same cultural and social field; for example in the workplace: How does the individual perceive the concrete challenges? Or in a marriage: Do husband and wife have very different perceptions of their involvement in household chores? As long as the parties are not engaged in conflict, the differences are manageable, but as soon as one party attempts to convince the other of the correctness of their particular position, differences and disagreements between the parties will increase.

As a consequence of this growing cultural diversity, the American social psychologist and social constructionist Kenneth Gergen (2009a) says that “the major challenge of the twenty-first century is how we shall manage to *live together* on the globe” (p. 114).

Looking at coaching practice in this light, it becomes essential for the coach to include and examine relevant contexts and positions. The basic position for the coach should be that the concept of ‘truth’ depends on the context and on social agreements in the local culture. Thus, ‘truth’ is an issue of power or social negotiations. Therefore, coaches and consultants should strive to heighten cultural sensitivity in the individual clients as well as among their clients with regard to both organizational and personal aspects, which are often interrelated (e.g. work-life balance). Indeed, one may expect the same from one’s manager. In order to increase understanding and develop good working relations, the coach – or the manager and other people who are responsible for others – should initiate *transformative dialogues* (Isaacs, 1999; Phillips, 2011; Strauss, 2002; Winslade & Monk, 2001). These dialogues, according to Gergen (2009a), should be considered “a joint creation of meaning, one in which the parties draw from tradition, but in which they can create new realities and ways of relating” (s. 118). The strategy in this process will be to focus on the cases and situations where one has had shared successes rather than normatively indicating how things should be. Further, it is helpful to articulate visions and dreams for a possible shared future for the group.

2.1.3 *Reflexivity in Late Modernity*

In this section I want to focus on the understanding of the concept of reflexivity that was put forward by the English sociologist Anthony Giddens to describe the special challenges facing individuals in today’s world. Giddens wonders how the individual is affected by the vast social change processes that are unfolding in this late-modern age. In that connection he introduces the concept of reflexivity, which he describes as the ongoing revision based on new information that is a characteristic of and a necessity in late-modern societies. Giddens (1991) says,

Each of us not only has but *lives* a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional

order, in which the question, ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity (p. 14; italics in original).

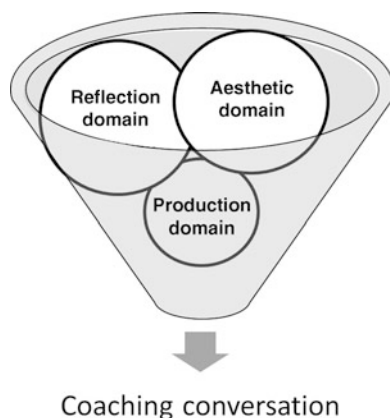
Giddens (1991) sees the development of self-identity on the one hand as the individual’s permanently ongoing reflexive project. He describes self-reflexivity as “the process whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives” (p. 244). On the other hand he speaks of institutional reflexivity: “The reflexivity of modernity, involving the routine incorporation of new knowledge and information into environments of action that are thereby reconstituted or reorganised” (p. 243). Giddens (1991) describes reflexivity as follows:

The reflexivity of modernity extends into the core of the self. Put in another way, in the context of a post-traditional order, the self becomes a *reflexive project*. ... Modernity, it might be said, breaks down the protective framework of the small community and of tradition, replacing these with much larger, impersonal organisations. The individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings (pp. 32–33).

This analysis of society makes it clear that personal development is not merely a requirement from ‘official’ entities, for example one’s employer; it also appears to be a necessary project for the individual today. Strengthening one’s capacity for self-reflexivity has become the key factor for the individual’s ability to find and understand his or her place in the social (dis)order. One result of this requirement of development, which has accelerated in recent decades, is the central and widely accepted position of psychology and coaching in society.

In extension of the social analysis presented above, the following question becomes urgent in relation to the effort to develop the values, objectives and goals attributed to coaching in society: How can this requirement of personal development and self-reflexivity contribute to the ongoing development of coaching and coaching psychology? Until now, one of the key perspectives in coaching has been to focus on results and solutions and to facilitate the coachee’s ability to accomplish his or her goals quickly (see e.g. Jackson & McKergow, 2007; King & Eaton, 1999; Pemberton, 2006). Many coaches – and probably also their customers – labour under the belief that it is possible to achieve change quickly simply by planning out a course: “What are your goals? What results would you like to achieve in the near future? – Once you find out, I’ll help you get there.” But if we incorporate Giddens’ analyses, the matter looks a little more complex and complicated: A coach or a coaching psychologist should not suggest that it is possible to offer a simple path to solutions, a quick fix. Our social world has become so complex that it is more helpful for the coachee if the coach offers a *reflective space*, where both the coach and coachee engage as partners in a dialogue that makes room for self-reflection and in-depth reflection on essential and existentially meaningful topics. With this approach, coaching can provide a forum where there is time to think and room for pause, and which lies outside the *production domain*. In the production domain, the perspective of the conversation remains logical-rational, and the focus is on the objective reality. The linear cause-and-effect mindset prevails, and the goal that frames the process is clarity and a reduction of ambiguity in relation to, for example,

Fig. 2.1 The domains and their relative weight in the coaching conversation



rules, norms, goals and demands. Instead, to a much higher degree, the coaching dialogue should take place in the *reflection domain* and the *aesthetic domain*, which makes it possible to see new ways of acting in specific and sometimes challenging situations in a long-term perspective. The *reflection domain* refers to the explorative angle of the conversation, where the coach and the coachee focus on multiple possible versions of reality. This domain allows for diversity, stories of equal worth and multiple perspectives in order to achieve a nuanced understanding of reality. The *aesthetic domain* allows for the personal and emotional angle, where it is possible to present desires, values, attitudes, experiences and morals and reflect on ethical issues. In the aesthetic domain, we attribute meaning to a given action. The domain theory was originally conceived by Maturana, although he never actually wrote about it himself. The theory was presented by Lang, Little and Cronen (1990) and is particularly widespread among systemic and social constructionist coaches and consultants (Haslebo & Haslebo, 2012; Hornstrup, Loeher-Petersen, Vinther, Madsen, & Johansen, 2012; Stelter, 2002a; Storch & Sørholm, 2005). The role of the domains in the coaching dialogue and their relative weight are illustrated in the following diagram (Fig. 2.1):

In this section, I have attempted to clarify the impact of social and societal changes on organizations, personal interactions and individuals. In the following, I seek to specify the direct impact of these new trends on individual identity development as well as the potential role of coaching and other forms of dialogue in this process.

2.2 Coaching, Identity and Self-constructions: The Self Is at Stake in the Coaching Dialogue

In a conversation of any depth – and thus also in coaching – the conversation partner/the coachee has some desire to challenge his or her own identity and self-concept. In a conversation that revolves around reflection, this is both desirable

and unavoidable. Identity is first of all defined as the individual's self-reflective process in relation to his or her interactions with the environment; in this process the individual attempts to strike a balance between his or her sense of continuity (being and resembling him/herself) and a degree of conformity (being like others versus standing out from others). Markus and Wurf (1987) propose the following definition of self-concept. To them, self-concept is

a dynamic interpretive structure that mediates most significant intrapersonal processes (including information processing, affect, and motivation) and a wide variety of interpersonal processes (including social perception, choice of situation, partner, and interaction strategy, and reaction to feedback) (p.300).

In the late- and post-modern age, the person's search for an identity, however, becomes an increasingly complex process. The term patchwork identity has been proposed (Keupp et al., 1999; Stelter, 1996, 1998), reflecting the notion that, depending on our current context, we create and construct ourselves in a variety of ways. In a sense, we may consist of several individuals in one, depending on the situation and setting that currently frame our behaviour. The individual 'patches' in the quilt describe the multiplicity and variety of possible actions and the many ways of developing an identity, depending on the individual's given contexts – but when the person's identity patchwork is viewed as a whole, a coherent impression nevertheless emerges, despite the diversity of the individual patches – or self-presentations. Identity and self-concept have become key themes in our society; as individuals, we strive for a certain self-presentation and a life-long search for who we want to be, and where we want to go. Kenneth Gergen (1991) describes the post-modern being as a "restless nomad" (p. 173). In Gergen's perspective, the post-modern self is overwhelmed by countless possibilities and possible actions and faces a situation of disorientation in terms of the best way to address the situation. The Norwegian psychiatrist and writer Finn Skårderud (2000, 2001), who has extensive experience with treating patients with anorexia nervosa, and who relates experiences from this field to a social analysis, uses the concept of 'unrest' to characterize the psychological challenges that many people are facing today. He discusses how a growing number of people in our society experiment with themselves in a search for purity, control and meaning. A growing proportion of the population find it difficult to achieve stability, control and direction, and in this search, individuals arrive at extreme techniques and ways of life, either in the form of socially acceptable behaviour, like a multiple ironman challenge or other mad or extreme sports quests, or in the guise of various forms of psychological and psychiatric 'dysfunction' – from stress and depression to eating disorders and self-harming behaviour/cutting.

What conclusions can we draw in relation to coaching practice? In a coaching dialogue, the coach may assume that the coachee has a pronounced desire to explore him/herself in interaction with a specific environmental situation, for example the desire to 'come to terms with' his or her relationship with a co-worker or a manager, to focus on career opportunities or to achieve a healthier lifestyle. The coachee's fundamental interest in change and development is the condition for a successful conversation process. The coaching dialogue can also examine the coachee's

different ways of behaving in different situations and address how and when the coachee feels best about him/herself. Here, the coach or coaching psychologist may draw on his or her theoretical knowledge about the particular psychological challenges faced by individuals in late-/post-modern society. It will also be helpful to apply a more in-depth psychological understanding of the underlying processes in identity and self-development, which I will present in the following in a version that I have previously developed and tested in a number of research projects (see e.g. Stelter, 1996, 1998).

2.2.1 Identity Theory: Between Phenomenology and Social Constructionism

In my theory development I have aimed for a balance between a *phenomenological* and a *social constructionist* understanding of identity and self-concept. This linking of theories is a consistent feature that characterizes my basic position, which is also evident later in the book when I present my practice and intervention theory for coaching (psychology). What is the significance of these two theoretical perspectives for the development of identity and self-concept? The *phenomenological* perspective focuses on *subjective perceptions and experiences and the individual's open-minded approach* to the situation here and now as a basis for the individual's concept of reality and self. The *social constructionist* perspective, on the other hand, addresses the individual's identity development as a result of the relationships that the individual enters into.

This theoretical coupling of an experiential and a relationist perspective is becoming increasingly widespread and appears in works by Crossley (2003), Sampson (1996), Shotter (1993, 2003), Shotter and Lannamann (2002) and Stam (2001, 2002).¹ Crossley (2003) presents her position as follows,

I felt there was a need for a different kind of psychology – one which retained the ability of appreciating the linguistic and discursive structuring of 'self' and 'experience', but one which also maintained a sense of the essentially personal, coherent and 'real' nature of individual subjectivity (p. 289).

In the following, my theoretical approach to the development of self and identity² will be founded on two basic orientations that the self has in interaction with its environment, and which should be seen as inextricably integrated in the specific action context:

¹In August 2009 I was among the presenters at the summer university on coaching organized by the consultancy firm Attractor. Here I was surprised to find that the systemically anchored consultancy firm had invited several speakers who focused on subjective and experiential perspective as a necessary element for developing the systemic/social constructionist position. In addition to myself, this included Helle Alrø, John Shotter, Morten Ziethen, Finn Thorbjørn Hansen and others. Many participants welcomed this perspective. Perhaps we are approaching a new understanding?

²The theory was originally developed in my Ph.D. dissertation (Stelter, 1996) and has undergone continual further development (Stelter, 1998, 2002b, 2006, 2008b).

1. The striving of the self for stability and consistency, where the focus is especially on inner processes. Here I consider *perceptions and experiences* key dimensions of self-development.
2. The striving of the self for an ongoing re-anchoring in varying social contexts and situations, where the individual focuses on the environment and on social relations. Here I consider *self-presentation* as a key aspect of identity development.

In the following, I present these two basic orientations, fully aware that the distinction is an analytical one. The self develops in a dynamic interaction of varying contexts and situations, and both perspectives are in constant interaction.

2.2.1.1 The Striving of the Self for Stability and Consistency

The self is characterized by an inner conservatism that is expressed in its striving for stability and consistency. A person to some degree perceives him/herself as consistent; the same is true of other people's perceptions of the person. (In some identity theories, the characterization of the predominantly stable self is assumed as a central perspective; see e.g. Greenwald, 1980). The theoretical understanding presented here underscores this striving for stability, albeit only as one perspective on the construction of self and identity. (The word 'identity' in fact comes from the Latin word 'idem', which means 'the same'). This perspective should not, however, be perceived as an assumption of a permanently stable personality core, where the individual appears unchanged over time, regardless of social context and situation. I want to address what happens with the individual when he or she 'enters' a particular situation: What is the interaction between the person and the specific situation? And what is the source of this form of stability in the individual's self-concept? To answer these questions, I would point especially to the body as a crucial element in our ability to perceive and sense the environment. The individual's meeting with an environmental situation is always initially corporeal. The body is always a part of the person's action practice. In order to understand individual experience and embodiment, I include phenomenological theory, which views the body as the individual's anchor in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Via the body, the individual is always *intentionally* oriented in relation to his or her environment, and this orientation conditions the individual's ability to perceive him/herself and the situation as meaningful. By virtue of its function as a perceiving organ, the body attributes the external world with meaning that springs from the individual's perspective on the given situation. In this sensory and experiential process, the individual develops his or her *body self*, which is actualized continually via sensations, perceptions and cognitions that emerge from body sensations in the given environmental situation. The body sensations reach our consciousness via sensory organs, proprioceptors, kinetic sensations and the vestibular system. These sensory perceptions of the self are always related to an actual practice – actions that are performed in a specific situation based on the body's intentional orientation in relation to the environment.

The body self is developed through *habits and routines* in the individual's day-to-day practice, whether it is cooking in the kitchen, the performance of particular skills in the workplace or regular jogging after work. As a result of these habits and routines, the individual develops a form of stability and inner consistency in relation to his or her self-perception, which produces a basic sense of safety and security that is an important condition for the individual's self-development. The individual may also achieve this essential sense of security in his or her self-perception, which is so crucial for stable self and identity development (Stelter, 2008b), through *observational learning based on certain models or supportive learning processes with experienced others*, for example in training situations in work or education – also described in the didactic concept of apprenticeship learning (Nielsen, 2006; Nielsen & Kvale, 1997).

The person's self-concept develops via the body self. *Body self* and *self-concept* are inextricably linked. I would define *self-concept* as an affective-cognitive structure that shapes perceptions and experiences via an embodiment of the environment into a subjective environment or individual reality. A person's self-concept reflects his or her understanding of him/herself and the environment that he or she lives in. Through this self-concept, the person presents his or her *subjective reality*.

2.2.1.2 The Striving of the Self for Continual Re-anchoring in Selected Social Contexts

With these individually interlinked constructions, here defined as body self and self-concept, the person steps out 'in front of the public'. (In this presentation of theory we will view the situation as separated in time. In fact, the two aspects of self-construction are temporally integrated, but this quality cannot be captured in words). The subjective reality – which is anchored in the individual's self-concept – encounters other individuals' realities in certain social contexts and situations. This is where the dialogue with the *social* environment begins. Thus, identity is not simply the result of a subjective perception of the environment – it is also to be negotiated in various social environments. Identity is shaped in one way in one environment (for example in the workplace) and in another way in another environment (for example in the family); that is to say, we *negotiate* our identity or present ourselves differently depending on our current social environment. Thus, the self not only has a personal dimension – as described above – it also has a social dimension that is influenced by the social relationships the individual enters into. This concept of the *self as a social construct* is developed in an active dialogue with the social environment. The self as a social construct or the *relational self* (Gergen, 2009a, b) is continually anchored in a variety of social contexts. This understanding clearly shifts the focus away from the individual. The perspective shifts completely, and consciousness, cognition and emotions become anchored in the relationship itself as "the property of ongoing relationships" (Gergen, 2009a, s. 106), not, as assumed in traditional psychological theories, as a strictly personal property.

The theoretical expansion that is presented here, with its emphasis on relational interpersonal dynamics, is an important step in a new direction in relation to the huge impact of societal changes on our self and identity development. To capture the diversification in individual ways of life and the individual's attachment to many different social contexts theoretically, it is helpful to move away from a strictly *egocentric*, individually oriented concept of identity and instead enrich the perspective with an open-minded stance toward theories that are based on *sociocentric* assumptions. The sociocentric, relational and social constructionist orientation seeks to examine the self in a system of multiple social relations and varying social contexts. Already a quarter of a century ago, Sampson (1985) argued that it might even be helpful for the individual to understand the self from a sociocentric point of view, abandoning the traditional personality concept:

Our personhood ideal does not lead toward either individuality or freedom; it only catches us in a contradiction that produces frustration and slides us inevitably toward a socially self-destructive pattern. The freedom that self-organizing systems represent can never be reached from a self-contained stance about personhood. Only a decentralized, non equilibrium conception of personhood that allows our multiplicity and interconnectedness a time to live can possibly encourage the problem solving that is necessary to achieve the utopian dream we share (p. 1210).

Self-development and identity formation in today's world rely mainly on *social processes such as weighing, adapting, changing and selecting social situations and contexts*. These processes highlight the individual's striving for continually anchoring him/herself in a network of social relationships. The self is thus not an autonomous entity, as assumed in the traditional (egocentric) personality psychology, but can be defined as "a node in a chain of social relationships" (Gergen, 1990; translated for this edition). Identity thus becomes a social construction, a "processual event of ongoing day-to-day identity work"³ (Keupp et al., 1999, s. 30; translated for this edition).

According to social constructionism, social self-construction processes are relational in character, as the individual's identity develops through others and in relation to specific social contexts. The following definition describes the self in its network of social relationships: "The self as a social construction is formed by active interchange with the social environment and society in general. In a verbal discourse, the subject is forced to defend his or her personal constructions of the world in relation to (significant) others, and the subject has to adapt this personal perspective according to the power structure of the social group or society in general. Furthermore the subject has the possibility of negotiating his or her identity via different impression-management strategies and via the choice of social setting" (Stelter, 1998, p. 18).

³German original: "*Prozeßgeschehen beständiger 'alltäglicher Identitätsarbeit'*."

2.2.2 *Identity Negotiations in the Coaching Dialogue*

In the following, I seek to strengthen the reader's focus on the impact of the coaching dialogue on self-development. I consider it crucial to link two key identity-forming perspectives, which are reflected in a focus on the individual's *experiences* and *self-presentation*, in order to promote the integration between the coachee's awareness of his or her subjective life world and social relationships. This integration forms the basis of the coaching dialogue, where the dialogue itself can be viewed as a form of identity negotiation that contributes to establishing a holistic perspective on the coachee's life situation. In this perspective, the coaching dialogue is about (a) *describing, reflecting on and speaking about the coachee's own experiences*, (b) *reflecting on the coachee's own self-presentation* in selected social contexts and thus generating development, change, new perspectives and integration in the two previously mentioned areas (c). This process of identity negotiation takes place in the coaching dialogue itself, which may serve as a venue for self-reflection and for testing new forms of self-narratives and self-presentation. In the following, I will elaborate on these three dimensions:

- (a) By *telling the stories of own experiences*, the individual can connect his or her subjective realities to the challenges of the social world. Subjective perceptions, experiences and notions and the resulting personal self-constructs need to be tested, confirmed, defended, replaced or modified in social discourses that are relived in the coaching dialogue. In this conversation, stories take shape (Bruner, 2002; Gergen & Gergen, 2006; Kraus, 2006) in a co-creative process either between the coach and coachee or in a coaching group. Stories are also generated on the basis of interactions between the coachee and certain individuals in the social contexts that the conversation addresses. The coaching conversation pursues a particular perspective, where stories from everyday life, ideally, are developed further to form a progressive, uplifting storyline (see Gergen, 1994). The possible uplifting stories that are generated during the conversation may influence the coachee's self-concept and may also have a positive impact on the social interaction that was the topic of the dialogue. In this way, language and action have a positive mutual effect on one another (Cronen & Lange, 1994) – a perspective that may be considered on the most important hallmarks of the coaching dialogue.
- (b) The *self is presented* in social contexts by means of selected forms of self-presentation strategies and through the choice of particular identity-stabilizing environments and situations that help promote the individual's identity projects and social self-constructions.

First of all, identity negotiations depend on the individual's capacity for predicting expectations in selected social contexts (e.g. a difficult conversation with a co-worker). This 'internal analysis' is a precondition for the individual to develop strategies for his or her self-presentation. According to Goffman (1959), personal aspects such as 'appearance' (the person's social standing), 'manner' (social conventions) and 'setting' (the situation's social, organizational and interactive

circumstances) are all involved in framing the person's self-presentation. The individual ascribes particular meaning to the social signs and codes of the given context. Social signs refer to group affiliation, membership and social positions, such as job titles as an indicator of the person's standing in the organization. Social codes refer to an integrated system of signs, for example etiquette as a reflection of certain social interactions and fashion as the reflection of a particular social identity (Manning, 1987). In life in general and also in the coaching conversation, selected social contexts are ascribed specific meaning and importance through what I call 'internal analysis'; this influences the person's/coachee's way of presenting him/herself with the intention of handling the situation in a more satisfying way.

Secondly, the individual manages his or her self-presentation by *selecting certain contexts or settings*. Seeking out certain environmental situations that promote the person's identity and self-concept is crucial for the person's identity development. With reference to several authors, Swann (1987) points out that people often seek out social contexts that are sure to offer *self-confirmatory feedback*, and which thus support certain preferred modes of self-presentation. These social situations, contexts and settings, which the coachee chooses or prefers, contain social relationships that strengthen or at least do not threaten the individual's existing self-concept. By selecting certain social situations and contexts and rejecting others, the coachee can consolidate certain 'personality characteristics'. The choice of context is thus an effective means of stabilizing one's identity, as the context and the social relationships that exist in the given context determine the scope of the person's behaviour and appearance (Gergen, 2009a).

(c) In the coaching dialogue, the coach and coachee work together to achieve development and integration in relation to these two overall dimensions. The intention is to enable the coachee to develop a deeper understanding of his or her subjective experiences in specific situations and to facilitate insight into his or her interactions with various actors in a variety of social contexts. The dialogue generates new meaning, which is often presented in new stories about certain experiences, tasks, situations or events.

Identity development is thus an integrative process balancing between individually specific, experiential aspects on the one hand and relational interaction aspects on the other. The coach may focus on these dimensions of identity development, and the theoretical considerations that have been outlined here may help heighten the coach's attention of the particular dimensions that are in focus in the given conversation situation.

In the following, I will focus on some considerations in relation to learning theory. Coaching and learning are inextricably linked. Broadly seen, coaching always constitutes a learning situation. On a theoretical level, the concept of learning that is presented here lies in extension of the understanding that was presented in the previous section. In the following I continue to strive to integrate experiential and relational/social perspectives.

2.3 Coaching and Learning: Between Personal Experience and Collaboration

I define learning as a life-long, permanent process as part of individuals' or groups' efforts to meet society's demands for active participation in work and civil life. This concept of learning has become a fundamental condition in the life-long education of modern man and the democratic process in society. During the last decades of the 20th century, a situated and context-dependent concept of learning has largely replaced the former concept of learning, which was often associated with the rote acquisition of simple action patterns or cognition processes. This new concept of learning is one of the causes of the growing popularity of coaching in late-modern society: Life-long learning and development have become fundamental requirements for all members of society, and coaching may be seen as a form of dialogue that is capable of supporting individuals and groups in their efforts to learn and develop.

As it becomes increasingly difficult to establish specific development goals, coaching and learning come to focus on the process and on what might unfold in *personal interactions*. Learning and development often take place in creative practice communities, where the individual works, develops and learns together with others.

Learning can be viewed as a *transformative* process (Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Illeris, 2004) based on reinterpreting one's own experience. The way we learn and develop often involves a reinterpretation of the way in which we have created meaning. This reinterpretation may involve reflection processes, where the individual explores certain perceptions and experiences in an effort to achieve a new understanding and a new assessment. But learning is also a communicative process that aims to understand the meaning of what others communicate. This is often the case, as Mezirow and Associates (1990) put it, in regard to "values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labour, autonomy, commitment and democracy" (s. 8). Certain events may force a *perspective transformation* or a *shift in perspective*, but that may also be triggered by conversations with others. Later (in Chap. 3), I mention a *shift in perspective* as a key objective of coaching. Mezirow and Associates describe *perspective transformation* as

the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (p. 14).

In that sense, *reflection* as a basis for a further development of meaning plays a key role in transformative learning, a circumstance that characterizes coaching in the framework of learning theory.

In the following, I address learning with a focus on two key dimensions, which are also crucial for coaching in practice: (1) Learning through experience and (2) learning as a social and collaborative practice.

2.3.1 Coaching and Experiential Learning

According to the American organizational psychologist Kolb (1984), learning can be defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (p. 41). I thus present learning as an experiential and action-oriented process of cognition and development, where cognition is understood as *enaction*, which Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1993) describe as follows:

We propose as a name the term *enactive* to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs (p. 9).

This understanding suggests that experience, cognition and action are interwoven into one and the same meaning-making process, which I will call *experiential learning*. In the understanding presented here, cognition does not stem from the person’s inner consciousness. Cognition is thus *not* anchored in intrapsychological factors but is the result of a dialogue or an interaction between a person and his or her given environment, where experience and actions are not in a cause-and-effect relationship; instead, they condition each other in a circular process in the sense that experience always contains an action perspective, and action is always based on experiences and perception. The person perceives, discovers and understands his or her environment via action, and action is the precondition for perception and experience. Action can thus be defined as the *realization of certain meaning relations*, and cognition is embedded in the action process itself. In the dialogue between person and situation, the person shapes *his or her own* meaning in relation to the given situation. This dialogical process also forms the theoretical basis of coaching as a process tool; here, one of the objectives is to help the coachee better understand his or her dialogue with specific situations in the environment and to use this understanding to shape cognitions about him/herself and his or her behaviour.

According to Kolb (1984), the course of the learning process is divided into distinct stages (Fig. 2.2), and each stage is associated with different types of knowledge production:

1. Concrete experience
2. Reflective observation
3. Abstract conceptualization
4. Active experimentation (action)

This staged structure should be seen as a purely analytical understanding; in fact the stages transition into each other, seamlessly and continually.

I will present these four stages as a possible orientation framework for the course of a coaching conversation – one possible method that pays particular attention to the sensory and experiential perception of a given challenge:

Stage 1: Learning may spring from the coachee’s *concrete experiences* in relation to a specific situation or event; this situation or event may constitute the point of

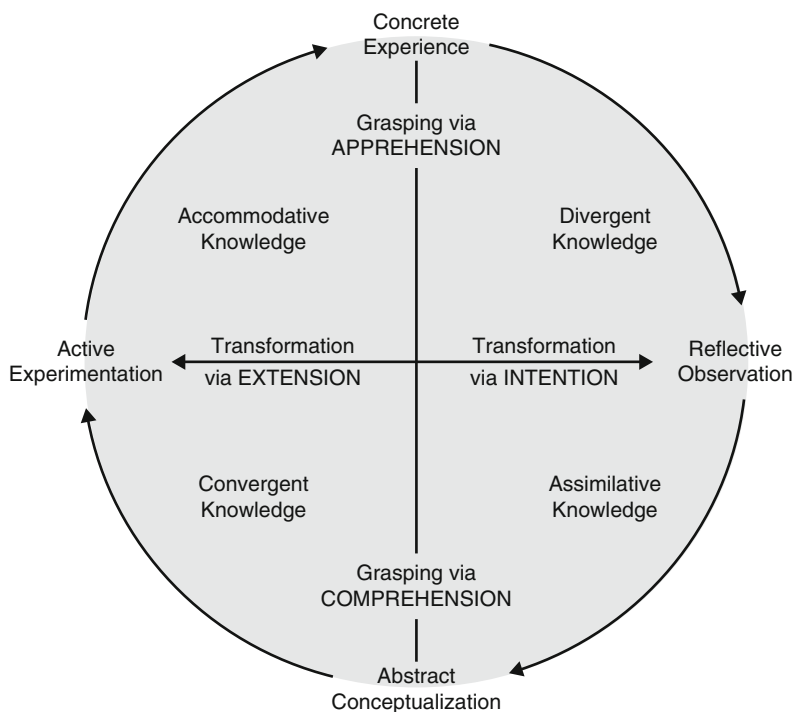


Fig. 2.2 Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Source: Kolb, 1984, p. 42)

departure for the coaching conversation. To develop a sense of the situation, the coach may ask the coachee to focus on the sensory-aesthetic⁴ dimension of the events. The coachee adopts a first-person position (Stelter, 2008a). According to Varela and Shear (1999), first-person events are lived experiences that are linked with cognitive and mental events. This first-person perspective can be considered the sensory and experiential foundation of the self, where self-development rests on the interaction between person and environment in the field of concrete action: The coachee is directly involved in events, and the situation is initially perceived on very sensory terms due to the concrete experiences which the coachee relives. The coachee's focus on concrete experiences is framed by basic attitude perspectives that frame the subsequent reflection process (cf. Stelter, 2008a):

- The coachee always adopts an *intentional perspective* on the situation: The coachee's intentional relationship with the specific practice context is an essential cornerstone for his or her sensory-aesthetic involvement in the situation. This sensory involvement is based on the coachee's situation-specific and embodied experience; this experience is often based on habits and routines and is typically not verbalized.

⁴The term *aesthetics* stems from the Greek word *aisthetikos*, which means *sense perception* (see also Stelter, 2008a).

- Sensory-aesthetic experiences are enabled by the coachee's orientation to the here-and-now situation. In the form of selected *present moments*, the focus is on the immediate experiences related to the situation. Stern (2004) describes these moments as "a subjective, psychological process unit of which one is aware" (p. 25). He emphasizes a number of characteristics that define the present moment more specifically. As a key characteristic, Stern mentions, "The present moment is not the verbal account of an experience" (p. 32). The present moment can be experienced, for example, in the concrete *practice situation*: I am aware of what I am doing, and events unfold in the flow of the action.
- This attention and alertness to the here and now of the situation are based on *epoché*, a Greek word describing a basic stance where the individual avoids and suspends any judgment of the situation or him/herself. The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1931; Zahavi, 2003), describes his understanding of *epoché* as an opportunity to enhance one's self-awareness. The unprejudiced or non-judging attitude that is the central aspect of *epoché* may constitute a fundamental basic stance in certain stages of the coaching dialogue.

Stage 2: Via reflective observation, the coachee can expand on the meaning of the concrete experiences and capture the effect of the situation on him/herself and the environment. The coachee's goal should be to enhance his or her awareness of the situation, of others and of the event and to explore nuances and differences. Through reflective observation the coachee can achieve a deeper understanding of the various facets and vantage points of the situation, and in this reflective process the coachee increasingly perceives his or her interaction with the situation as meaningful. In this stage in particular, knowledge production and learning take a *divergent* and explorative form. The key is to capture and articulate the full diversity of the situation and its many details, which may initially seem surprising. The basic stance in this reflective process of observation can be described with the terms *mindful* and *mindfulness*. Mindfulness is defined as a specific intentional orientation that has to do with paying attention in a certain way, with a specific purpose and without judging, focusing on cultivating a deliberate awareness and alertness from one moment to the next in an open, curious and accepting manner (Germer, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer (1997) speaks of *mindful learning* and describes her approach as follows: "A mindful approach to any activity has three characteristics: the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective" (p. 4). To her, mindfulness expresses a basic awareness to the details of a given context or situation.

Through this reflective observation the coachee puts differences and details into words and is thus able to appreciate the full richness of the situation, which often goes unnoticed in everyday life. It is no *easy task*, however, to have a conversation about these often implicit, i.e. unarticulated experiences. Verbalizing sensory-aesthetic experiences requires a *transformation* (Stelter, 2000): In a process of symbolization, the *felt sense* (Gendlin, 1997) of concrete persons, situations, tasks or events is reformatted to a verbal expression that becomes meaningful in relation to

the often implicit experiences that are embedded in the concrete practice situations. This articulation can best be achieved by means of specific strategies, which are described in detail in Sect. 4.3.1.1.

Stage 3: In the stage of *abstract conceptualization*, the coach directs the coachee's attention toward *grasping* the multitude of reflections on the concrete perceptions and experiences that were prominent in Stage 2. At this stage, the emphasis is on *understanding*. Kolb (1984) describes this as an *assimilative process of learning and cognition*, where reflective observation is, for example, coupled with the coachee's experiences and knowledge from previous situations, and the coachee tries to discern a pattern in his or her way of acting in certain situations. The coachee seeks to find a position that can be compared to the perceived reality that begins to take on prominence. The coachee develops a form of subjective theory⁵ with regard to his or her interactions with the concrete situation in order to create a personal explanation of his or her experiences. Through this process, the coachee develops a basic, generalizing and abstract understanding in relation to the situation. For example, a coachee might arrive at the following statement: 'When I wind up in a conflict situation, I tend to get insecure, but I react somewhat aggressively toward my counterpart.' This stage is dominated by rational considerations, logic and generalizing conceptualization. To incorporate a narrative theoretical position here, it is important to *name* or find a term that best captures the person's generalized experiences in relation to the situation or event. The coachee also compares the current situation with previous situations in order to generalize the experiences and observations from the concrete situation. In the course of the conversation, naming can also cause the coach to focus on what this generalization/naming reveals about the coachee's identity and how it is associated with the coachee's values and aspirations.

Stage 4: This is the *action* stage or, in the context of the coaching process, the stage of *active experimentation* in relation to potential actions that the coachee might initiate in extension of the meeting with the coach. The subjective theories and general reflections (via naming) that were developed in Stage 3 may be viewed as an invitation and a precondition for establishing hypotheses about future action patterns in similar situations. They can be used spontaneously in new situations or in planning a specific future event. In order to concretize this understanding in relation to the coachee's conflict situation, the coachee may for example say, 'When I wind up in a conflict situation I will be aware of my own insecurity, describe it to my counterpart and attempt to suggest a constructive way out of the conflict.' This process of outlining possible solutions or developing concrete hypotheses about ways to handle future situations describes a *convergent process of learning and cognition*. The subjective theories and generalized considerations from Stage 3 provide an orientation framework for the new action situation. The person's actions will then form the basis for initiating a new learning cycle.

⁵See mere in Groeben and Scheele (2000) and Groeben, Wahl, Schlee, and Scheele (1988).

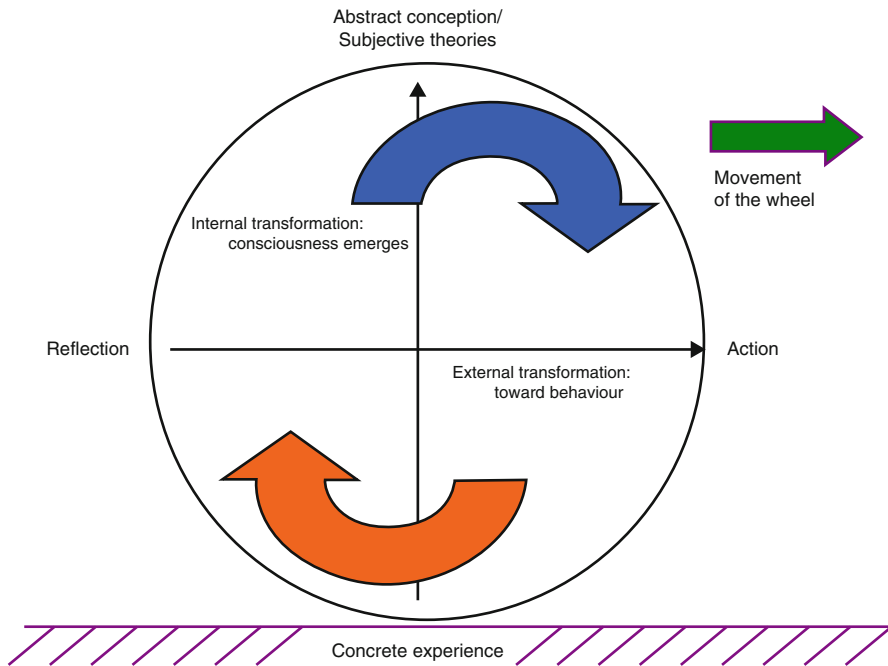


Fig. 2.3 The learning wheel (Source: Law et al., 2007, p. 36; with modifications)

A group of English coaching psychologists (Law, Ireland, & Hussain, 2007) have turned Kolb's learning cycle upside down. Their graphic presentation suggests a stronger dynamic in relation to the coachee's learning progression. Kolb's learning cycle becomes a wheel that rolls forward. Internal and external transformation processes are interwoven (Fig. 2.3).

2.3.2 Coaching and Learning as a Social and Collaborative Practice

With Kolb's learning cycle as my point of departure, I have described how coaching can be viewed as a learning process that revolves around, for example, the coachee's concrete perceptions and experiences. In the following, I will explore the social component of learning. In many contexts, we learn in interaction with others in a classroom, a department, a production team, a sports team or a work or self-help group. The group's learning process can be intensified by means of coaching methods and coaching questions techniques. The group leader may serve as a coach. Here one should be aware of the leader's dual role as both participant and coach. This dual role may pose special challenges, and in work contexts especially, coaching-oriented leaders need to be aware of their power position, which may

make it difficult to be an effective coach.⁶ A group or team coach may also be an outside person engaged by the group or team, for example with view to developing a strategy, resolving a group conflict or facilitating a development task.

The social perspective can also be included in a one-on-one coaching situation. The coach then actively builds on the others' positions, for example by asking the coachee to consider one or several colleagues' reflections in order to develop and create new perspectives in the conversation. In many cases, it is the involvement of these different perspectives that makes a real difference in the coaching situation (Bateson, 1972). This fundamental idea is also present in the model of *double-versus single-loop learning* (Argyris, 1992). Single-loop learning is based on an assumption of certain more or less stable conditions – such as goals, values and presumptions in relation to a given situation. *Double-loop learning*, on the other hand, means rejecting these pre-existing assumptions. Thus, the coach helps to bring the coachee in a position where he or she includes a new perspective on the situation and the coachee's assumptions about the situation.

With regard to coaching as a socially mediated learning process, the basic point of coaching is to '*learn*' in *interaction with others*. The group serves as a community of learning and collaborative practice. To avoid complicating matters in this presentation, I will temporarily suspend the discussion of power in relation to the coach's position. In their social learning theory the American social learning researchers Lave and Wenger (1991) speak about learning in communities of practice. The key point in their understanding is that all the actors are 'legitimate peripheral participants', that is, the participants have an *intentional orientation* toward being part of the community of practice, and every participant is accepted by everyone else as a legitimate participant. The peripheral aspect of this form of learning is explained as follows: The point is not to transfer knowledge from one person to the other; instead, knowledge emerges as a product of the joint practice that all the parties contribute to as best they can. According to Lave and Wenger as well as to social constructionists (Gergen, 2009a, b; Paré & Lerner, 2004),⁷ learning and knowledge production is locally and contextually anchored. Thus, this position corresponds to a learning concept that characterizes late- or post-modern society (Lyotard, 1984), where knowledge production and learning to a high degree rely on their *utility value* for the participants in the process.

The smallest practice community is the dyad, for example that of a coach and a coachee. Ideally, this relationship can be considered an interaction between two

⁶In their book *Ledelsebaseret coaching [Leadership-based coaching]*, Sørholm et al. (2006) have described the manager's possibilities and limitations in the role as coach. Kirkeby (2009) notes, however, that leadership coaching does not adequately ask itself how much leadership power blocks the dialogical potential for symmetry. Therefore, Kirkeby proposes a protreptic form of coaching that focuses especially on reflection on the fundamental values that guide our actions in certain contexts.

⁷I am aware that Lave and Wenger and social constructionist authors do not normally refer to each other or are normally placed in the same category, but their basic ideas about knowledge production and learning appear fairly compatible. Later in this section I offer an overview where I link different approaches.

equals, both striving for new self-insight as well as insight into their own and each other's life worlds. In any practice community there will be differences in 'learning conditions', but none of the parties in the practice community has a monopoly on knowledge, for example in terms of being able to determine the validity of certain world views or solutions. Knowledge will always be a shared product, although the participants may have different shares in its production. Thus, in my opinion, describing the coaching dialogue as either symmetrical or asymmetrical is unhelpful – also when I consider my own previous position (Stelter, 2002a). Describing coaching as an asymmetrical dialogue has been the common assumption in the coaching literature, but here it is being replaced by a more dynamic understanding (see also Hede, 2010). Coaching can be viewed as a co-creative and collaborative process where both parties can be defined as *equal parties and experts* within their respective domains (see also Anderson, 2007a), and where they can enrich each other's self-perception and world views within the framework of the conversation.

I consider the following dimensions crucial to an understanding of theories about situated learning (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and collaborative practice (Anderson & Gehart, 2007; Paré & Larner, 2004) and for the concretization of these theories in the coaching dialogue:

- Knowledge and learning are relational and situative in character; for example, knowledge and learning can emerge in the interaction between the coach and the coachee, where the coachee's life world is included as the special context of the conversation: specific persons, the concrete social and physical environment, structural conditions, different positions, special and possible divergent stories.
- Learning is an inherent part of the social practice that the coach and coachee(s) create together. Thus, learning is not necessarily a planned activity but may be part of many types of collaborations. The dialogue that the parties create forms the basis of developing both their shared and their individual understanding in relation to the topics and situations that are addressed in the dialogue.
- Person, action and context mutually constitute each other in the concrete social practice. The coachee is not perceived as a person with stable characteristics, independent from his or her actions and from the social relationships that the coachee includes in the conversation from particular contexts and situations. The coachee's actions are shaped in relation to the possibilities that the social and physical environment make available and allow. Coach and coachee(s) create their world *together* through the dialogue that unfolds between them. At the same time, other social arenas are also invited into the dialogue as part of the coachee's world.
- Coach and coachee(s) are both *legitimate peripheral participants*⁸ in their community of practice. They have made a mutual contract, where they strive

⁸The concept comes from Lave and Wenger (1991) and describes the situation where none of the participants in the (learning) situation has a knowledge monopoly. Both parties can learn from the situation, regardless of their starting point.

to inspire each other, and where the coachee has a special set of expectations for the direction and purpose of the conversation. Even though the coach may occupy a special role in the dialogue, based on his or her professional expertise in coaching and psychology, neither party can claim a central position with regard to the knowledge and learning that takes shape in the dialogue. The coach or the coaching educator, treatment professional or leader cannot know what the other should learn, as the concrete situation that is discussed in the coaching dialogue will be perceived differently by the different participants. The different positions and perspectives that can be adopted in relation to the situation make it difficult to define a clear objective or goal for the conversation from the outset. It is important to go with the flow of the conversation and to remain attentive to what unfolds through the participants' social practices and dialogues.

- Participation in the social practice of the coaching dialogue thus always implies a reflection process, a 'negotiation' of meanings in relation to the situation that the individual is involved in. Coach and coachee(s) enter into the situation based on their own perceptions and experiences, which influence their personal meanings in relation to the events and situations that are addressed in the conversation (the experiential perspective). These (individual) perspectives on the situation and the events are brought into the dialogue, where meanings are developed further in the dialogue. Coach and coachee(s) become co-learners in a process of expanding their shared understanding in relation to the topics that are addressed in their dialogue.
- The coach acts as a partner in the dialogue, not as an expert on the topic. The coach's expertise lies instead in creating conditions for the coaching conversation that facilitate and promote the development of the collaborative relationship and the emerging learning and knowledge community. This collaborative process requires an ongoing interaction among all the participants in the community of practice. An optimal learning and coaching environment requires that the dialogue partners speak *with* each other rather than *to* each other and *about* something. The English communication researcher John Shotter (2006) speaks of 'witness thinking' instead of 'aboutness thinking'. From a systemic point of view, one would say that the dialogue takes its point of departure in the reflection domain and invites a variety of reflection perspectives in. Coaching focuses on multiversality, i.e. the inclusion of multiple voices and local truths in the dialogue. Thus, coaching becomes a process of shared meaning-making. This perspective becomes even more visible when coaching is a group or a team process.
- This collaborative dialogue not only generates new knowledge; the dialogue also affects the individual participants' identity and self-concept. Shared learning and the collaborative coaching practice facilitate personal and social developmental processes. In this process, the self appears clearly relational, as constituted by the relationships and conversations that have unfolded between the coach and the coachee(s).

2.3.3 *Summary: Coaching and Learning: Between Subjective Experiences and Collaborative Dialogues*

Above, I have outlined two learning approaches where the coach takes his or her point of departure in (1) the *individual's subjective experiences* in relation to specific situations or (2) the *collaborative dialogue* that unfolds between the coaching parties. Previously, these positions were not considered very compatible in an epistemological sense, but that has changed over the past couple of decades. The gap between (1) the phenomenological-experiential practice and (2) the social constructionist collaborative practice appears to be narrowing. A growing number of psychotherapy approaches, from psychodynamic to systemic-relational directions, are developing mixed forms, where different traditions fuse. As a reflective practitioner,⁹ the coach must be aware of the points of departure he or she chooses in the given coaching situation, and how the two perspectives mentioned above can be integrated into the ongoing dialogue between the participants in the coaching process. Learning will always have (1) a sensory-aesthetic dimension, where the coachee is encouraged to focus on specific experiences and situations, and (2) a social dimension, where the coachee learns in interaction with others (Stelter, 2008b). Both learning dimensions rely on dynamic circularity, where the individual interacts actively with both the concrete perceived situation and the significant others who are either present in a concrete, physical sense or in the sense of their influence on the individual's thoughts and actions.

In the following and final section in this chapter, I address coaching in the perspective of organization and leadership theory and thus introduce a specific context where coaching has seen very widespread use. I am aware that this choice narrows the field. I assume, for example, that coaching will see massive growth in relation to treatment, disease prevention and the promotion of healthy living.

2.4 Coaching in the Theoretical Perspective of Organization and Leadership

Coaching has become very widespread in management and organization development. On the one hand there is the *coaching-inspired leadership style*, where the leader – in some form – wants to act as a coach or as a coaching-oriented leader. In a survey headed by the author in 2009 (Wittrock, Didriksen, & Stelter, 2009) 30 % of the surveyed HR-managers state that their managers have received coaching training, and some 20 % state that coaching is part of their company's leadership training.

⁹According to Jarvis (1999) and Lane and Corrie (2006), among others, the reflective practitioner always develops his or her knowledge based on two resources: (1) Research-based evidence and academic theory and (2) his or her own subjective theories that emerge on the basis of reflections on one's own practice. More about that in Chap. 6.

On the other hand, managers also use coaching to *reflect on their own leadership practice*. The reason why coaching has this role in management will be discussed in the following: The practice field of management and leadership has undergone significant changes in the past few decades; leading a company or an organization means leading others to self-management (Helth, 2009a; Ladkin, 2010). Like so many other authority figures, managers/leader have lost their knowledge monopoly, and in many cases the ultimate professional expertise is no longer a part of their leadership role. Where managers/leaders were previously assigned their role and automatically received respect by virtue of their position, which was often due to their expert knowledge, today's managers are faced with the challenge of achieving personal authority and have to manage their role in a new way. Managers need to earn the trust of the people they lead. They have to earn their leadership position. In this sense, management has undergone *a shift from being role-based to being person-based*. Managers/leaders therefore need entirely new competences and action strategies. In the future, the manager's/leaders ability to handle dialogue will be an essential qualification parameter.

2.4.1 Leadership Is Dialogical and Involving

In order to earn the trust of their staff and gain insight into the employees' perspectives on the organization and their work, managers/leaders should be invited to generate dialogue on different levels in the company. Dialogue enhances understanding among the parties and builds a sound foundation for cooperation. There is a need to overcome traditional leadership and control thinking. Managers have to ensure support for the company's basic idea, not by exercising control but by persuading and by building a sound common and collaborative foundation (Hansen, 2009; Helth, 2009b). The manager/leader has to promote a sense of community and support and a shared sense of identity in the organization. The English management researcher Ralph D. Stacey (2007) underscores the ability of narratives – and thus the communicative element – to describe the nature of the organization and to contribute to the organization's ongoing development:

Ask people in an organization what it is all about and how they come to do what they do and they tell you a story. Ask them what the strategy has been and they tell you a story of expansion, acquisition, downsizing, or whatever. In an ordinary, everyday way, therefore, strategy is a narrative of identity co-created by people in an organization (p. 375).

Leadership, organizational development and cooperation are a process of co-creation and coordination around meaning, where all the parties seek to relate to and approach each other. The manager/leader is tasked with making the employees work together and should also strive to become 'part of the team'. The manager/leader should create results through negotiations with all relevant involved parties. In this process, the focus is not only on strategy and concrete tasks; to some extent, the manager's and the employee's person and identity are also up for negotiation – in a

process that integrates leadership and organization development, and where the goal becomes to develop the *relationally created organization* that the Danish leadership research practitioner Poula Helth (Helth, 2009b) speaks about. At the same time, it is essential not to ignore the built-in dilemmas and conflicts of interest in this negotiation process. Management and staff have different agendas: Leading and being led are always framed by a particular power constellation, which the parties have to address, and which also needs to be articulated in concrete negotiation situations. Leadership therefore has to strive for legitimacy. Staff loyalty cannot be taken for granted.

2.4.2 Leadership Means Managing Complexity

Both managers and staff have to deal with the growing degree of complexity that generally characterizes our working life, organizations, companies and societies: The systems theory concept of *contingency* offers a good way of describing this particular challenge. The German systems theorist Niklas Luhmann (1995) describes the concept as follows:

Complexity . . . means being forced to select; being forced to select means *contingency*; and contingency means risk. Every complex state of affairs is based on a selection of relations among its elements, which it uses to constitute and maintain itself. The selection positions and qualifies the elements, although other relations would have been possible. We borrow the tradition-laden term ‘contingency’ to designate this ‘also being possible otherwise’. It alludes, too, to the possibility of failing to achieve the best possible formation (p. 25; my italics).

The concept of contingency describes the impossibility of finding clear-cut solutions. Leadership is about dealing with this contingency and living with the permanent impossibility of achieving clarity, safety and certainty. Today, much more than before, we have to learn to live with the risk of being wrong. One strategy for handling contingency is to be in and appreciate the permanent space of reflection. In this connection, The Danish leadership researcher Bettina Rennison (2009) speaks of *reflexive leadership*, where the goal is to move away from a state of “an operational closed stance to a self-observing reflexivity, where the management system observes its own way of thinking and acting” (p. 123; translated for this edition). One has to be able to adopt a meta-position, *taking a reflexive stance to one’s own self-reflexivity*. In order to achieve depth and new perspectives in relation to developing a greater capacity for self-reflection, it may be helpful for a manager to see a coach or to be part of a coaching-oriented leadership network. Reflexive management is always *second-order management*. Helth (2009b) describes the reflexive leader as someone who can simultaneously adopt a participant’s and an observer’s position while also maintaining an ongoing inner dialogue with him/herself. The special challenge lies in seeing the situation from different angles. The manager has to be able to include the different voices and positions that exist in the organization in relation to any concrete situation, task or event. The manager has

to embrace *polyphonic leadership*, which involves the ability to see and articulate different voices and to shift between different positions and competence profiles. Thus, leadership now has a much less hierarchic orientation than it once did, and the manager has to live up to much higher demands for self-creation, multi-disciplinary approaches, negotiation and responsiveness (Pedersen, 2001). In order to promote success and development for the organization in this hypercomplex situation, good leadership has to promote the employees' capacity for reflection and provide them with optimum conditions for development and learning with regard to their professional as well as their social and personal competences.

At some point, however, handling complexity and contingency requires clear and visible leadership. A permanent openness to the many potential choices is not exactly what is expected of a good leader. A lack of leadership can lead to uncertainty and ultimately produce stress among the employees (Brandt & Hildebrandt, 2008; Hildebrandt, 2003). Offering direction and taking the lead are characteristics of good leadership and personal agency. Kjerulf (2008) defines personal agency in leadership as the ability to translate intentions into action; he adds,

Translating ideas and intentions into action requires . . . five properties in a person. Your self-insight, your individual background and your emotional capacity form the spokes in the wheel of agency, while your ambitions tie the spokes together and set the wheel in motion. The stronger the ring of relations that surround the wheel, the more merrily it spins, and the fewer punctures it has (p. 21; translated for this edition).

2.4.3 *Personal Leadership and Value-Oriented Action*

If leadership is a sea voyage under varying weather conditions, leadership must have certain fixed points to navigate by. The leader must provide direction. A growing number of management theorists are convinced that values can serve as an anchor and a guideline for the individual manager's (and employee's) actions, and thus help keep the organization on course. Values are expressed through the leader's agency (Kirkeby, 2006b, 2007). From an analytical perspective, Knudsen and Thygesen (2009, pp. 77 f.) mention four areas where values can come into play as a form of framing discourse (see also Thyssen, 2009):

1. *Branding the organization*, i.e. creating a credible image with reference to the citizen/customer as someone who has a choice among competing offers.
2. *Controlling the organization* by means of values, so that citizens or customers encounter a uniform stance in their contact with the organization.
3. *Building a community*, where the values serve to create a community with reference to citizens or customers as co-creating stakeholders.
4. *Providing licence to criticism*, where the values help create a developing culture.

In the understanding that has been presented here, values have a meaning that is closely related to thinking and action. Values provide a basic orientation that reflects

our ethical-interpersonal foundation. Values frame the purpose and goal orientation of actions (Stelter, 2009a), thus expressing the intentional orientation of our actions and giving our actions legitimacy. Values provide bearings, generate agency and provide a space to manoeuvre where the actor's personal authority is expressed, and where decisions rest on an ethical and authentic foundation. Values differ from rules and are generally characterized by being categorical, inflexible and often unreflective. Values represent the meaning-making and meaningful in our actions and thus reflect our professional and personal identity. Kirkeby (2000, p. 72) speaks about norms and values as "the explanatory setting of our actions." "Leadership is the name of the movement whose fixed point is the right moment and the right mood (p. 74)," he concludes. Values often reflect the implicit aspects of our actions and are thus not always clearly articulated. Kirkeby (2000) says that leadership as a function approaches our understanding of social competences – competences that concern (1) the organization itself, i.e. the ability to encourage and engage employees, (2) the customers, by creating a coupling between needs and the company's technical reality, and (3) the rest of the network, including suppliers, consultants, trade unions and shareholders. In his understanding (Kirkeby), the leader's value-based actions are rooted in certain virtues; he mentions the following six virtues:

1. *eubolia* = good deliberation skills, the ability to see things in a new light, resourcefulness
2. *euphoria* = expression of unambiguous engagement; sense of reality, the ability to lead
3. *hypomoné* = the capacity for patience, self-restraint, letting things speak
4. *prolépsis* = related to imagination, prediction, the ability to anticipate
5. *maieutics* = midwifery: letting the people under one's leadership find their own motivations for the things they do
6. *epibolé* = a form of embodied intuition

Kirkeby (2000) points out that these virtues are not values in the sense of being 'operationalizable' criteria; they unfold in the individual as a mood or a form of 'attunement' capable of defining the person as an individual who stands for something special.

Acting on the basis of values is thus not the same as value-based leadership. The two Danish organizational consultants Thorkil Olsen and Dorte Lund Jakobsen (2006) express their experience and their critical reflection on value-based leadership in the following comment:

The risk, as viewed from our perspective, is that value-based leadership inadvertently creates a potentially unethical practice and leadership practice where the basis of power and decisions is concealed from the actors in the organization. Oh, yes, and huge amounts of time and money continue to be invested in value activities. In our opinion, most organizations would be better off giving it up. One might even say that values are not something that can be made the topic of decisions. The values we share in some sense or another are embedded in our language as meaningful actions within the framework of a given culture (p. 52; translated for this edition).

Based on this reflection, value activities become more of a personal developmental project for the individual manager than a project for the entire organization.

2.4.4 *Coaching in a Leadership Context*

Based on these reflections and theoretical concepts on leadership, I will now discuss which functions coaching may serve in relation to leadership and organization development. Coaching can be applied either as an approach to a dialogue, where the manager chooses to talk with a coach, or the manager may include inspiration from coaching and its methods in his or her own leadership practice. In the following, I present three different ways of using coaching in a leadership context:

1. *Coaching as a reflective space for the manager:* Since leadership is, in part, about managing complexity and contingency, and since leadership also involves demonstrating value orientation in action and words, it is essential for managers to have an opportunity to engage in conversations where they take the time and the chance to reflect more deeply on their interactions with others and their relationship with the organization's challenges and developmental perspectives without necessarily having to focus on specific tasks and preferable solutions. This form of conversation may, for example, involve an executive or management coach who has no other involvement with the company. Working with an external management coach lets the manager find the time and the space to develop the necessary trust and confidence that is a key condition for conversation and reflections. That gives the manager the freedom to step back from the pressures of day-to-day events and find a calm space to reflect (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010).

As an additional possibility I would like to mention *group coaching for managers*. Here, managers from various organizations and companies meet with a coach with the purpose of creating a shared reflective space in order to develop their personal leadership, focusing on specific organizational and personal challenges in the workplace. Here too, it is crucial that the participants develop mutual trust if group coaching is to serve as a free space for mutual development.¹⁰ The overall ambition in leadership coaching is to promote the manager's capacity for value-oriented agency. Therefore I will focus especially on the development of leadership virtues. Reflecting on one's own virtues continually strengthens the manager's agency. Coaching thus becomes more of a *Bildung* project and less a process of putting out brushfire, where the coach simply helps the manager find answers and solutions to urgent organizational challenges. The management coach should not be reduced to a trouble-shooting consultant but should work as a dialogue partner, engaged in developing the manager's personal leadership. Developing leadership competences means focusing on culture, context and the interpersonal dimension in the coaching

¹⁰The former head of AS3-Work & Care Tina Post Aagaard mentioned to me that many managers have difficulty abandoning their focus on personal self-presentation and the efforts to brand the company and their own leadership skills (personal conversation on 29 June 2010). Therefore it is crucial to create a shared contract where all participants agree to use group coaching as a space for development characterized by maximum openness. Aagaard also mentioned that group coaching can be combined with individual sessions.

conversation. The process should help managers discover what is meaningful in their leadership practice, what they stand for, what they are passionate about and what is helpful for them personally as well as for the organization and the staff. In addition, there should be a focus on the normative aspects of human practice. To quote Ole Fogh Kirkeby, the central maxim and purpose of coaching is “prove oneself worthy for the event,” i.e. for the coach to help the manager/leader “learn from important events” (Kirkeby, 2008, p. 271; translated for this edition). By reflecting on these events, managers can explore the meaningful and value-bearing aspects of their leadership – in light of the organization’s visions and mission, staff well-being and development and the relationship to the environment, customers and business partners.¹¹

2. *Coaching as a tool for staff development:* As discussed in *Coaching Barometret 2009* (Wittrock et al., 2009), a growing number of managers are interested or trained in using coaching as part of their leadership practice. It is also my personal impression that many managers are interested in acting as a coach or a coaching-oriented manager in some form.¹² Further, a survey from Danish consultancy firm *Væksthus for Ledelse* (2005) highlights *relational understanding* as a key dimension of good leadership – a competence that can unfold in the framework of coaching or coaching-inspired leadership practices.

Despite these facts, I want to once again draw attention to the challenges and potentially unfortunate consequences of acting simultaneously as a manager and a coach. Leadership implies a position of power, which should not be allowed to influence or overshadow the coaching relationship. How can this dilemma be resolved or at least be minimized? What opportunities arise when coaching is included in leadership? In an effort to address this dilemma, one might focus on coaching contexts and various forms of coaching activities. I see the following opportunities for the use of coaching:

- One opportunity presents itself when an employee comes to the manager/leader expressing an interest in receiving coaching. This presupposes that coaching is a recognized and widespread dialogue form in the organization. Such a request requires, for example, that the employee trusts the manager and that the employee wants to discuss a topic that he or she feels is ‘suited’ for a coaching conversation with the manager.
- Another potential context for coaching is the annual staff development conversation. The manager should proceed with caution, however, and remember to ask whether the employee finds a coaching approach acceptable in this

¹¹Read more about Kirkeby’s understanding of the event and the concept of influence in regard management and leadership in Kirkeby (2000).

¹²Since 2009 I have been responsible for the module “*Det personlige lederskab and dialogisk coaching*” (Personal leadership and dialogical coaching) in the programme for Master of Public Governance, which is offered in a partnership between Copenhagen Business School and the University of Copenhagen. This module has clearly demonstrated the interest of participating managers in being able to apply coaching in some form.

context. Coaching is appropriate in situations where the employee is open to exploring new developmental opportunities, and where the manager also has a sincere interest in hearing about the perspectives that the employee sees, for example in a particular future context.

- A third opportunity would be when the manager is engaged in a conversation with the employee where the purpose is exclusively to offer value-related coaching – focusing on the meaningful aspects of the job, aspirations, dreams or goals. Kirkeby (2009) speaks of *protreptics* in this context. The manager might ask, for example, “What does your involvement in this task say about what you appreciate, and what you strive for? What do you hope to accomplish? What does this task mean for you and your work?” One should always avoid taking the employee by surprise. The manager is therefore encouraged to invite and propose a contract – in the form of a brief dialogue about the special format and potential of coaching. And the employee must have the inviolable right to reject the offer without fear of negative consequences. Here, again, it is the manager who has to prove him/herself worthy of the coaching occasion.

3. *The coaching-oriented manager as an organizational and team developer:* The manager can also serve as a coach or, more aptly put, as a coaching-oriented manager, in organization development, especially on the micro-level, for example when management and staff have agreed to improve (team) cooperation and well-being, improve working processes or plan future projects. The precondition for engaging in coaching-oriented leadership is that (1) the situation is not conflict-ridden, and (2) the manager has to state explicitly when speaking from a management position whether he or she is speaking as a coaching-oriented manager or from a management position (see Sørholm, Storch, Juhl, Dahl, & Molly, 2006). A good example of the coaching-oriented manager is offered by the Danish consultants Thybring, Sørholm, Juhl, and Storch (2005) in their description of team development conversations; they consider it a very appropriate approach when the team wishes to address special challenges, carry out self-evaluation, plan the goals or tasks for the coming year or perform a *team check-up*, for example within the following six categories: goals, results, management, cooperation, learning culture and relationship with management. As a key condition, the authors highlight the following principle: *Manage the conversation without controlling the content!* In that connection, here are some essential guidelines for the coaching-oriented manager:

- Clearly mark in which capacity you are speaking (manager as process facilitator or as MANAGER).
- Mark the stages in the conversation (for example: ‘I think we have heard all the points of view, the next step now is ...’).
- Summarize during the process in order to develop a clear image of where the team is at.

- Ask bridging questions (for example: ‘What are the common features in what we have talked about so far?’, ‘Which of the things the others have pointed to do you find inspiring?’).

2.5 Closing Remarks

The purpose of Chap. 2 was to offer a general theoretical perspective and some insights into the origins and development of coaching that rise above concrete coaching practice. In my assessment, it is essential to position coaching as a practice field and as part of an abstract-theoretical universe. Under no circumstances should coaching be reduced to a technique. Therefore it was important for me to demonstrate how the coaching dialogue springs from our societal challenges, how coaching forms the basis of an entirely new approach to learning, how coaching can facilitate self-reflection and identity development, and how coaching offers an essential contribution to leadership development and personal leadership. By outlining this general foundation I also hope to contribute to the theoretical evidence of coaching practice. According to Stober et al. (2006) it is crucial for a broad understanding of the concept of evidence to include coaching-specific research and research from related disciplines as well as one’s own expertise and an understanding of the coachee’s characteristics.

Coaching has developed as a research and practice field, and that is an important condition for the development of coaching as a dialogue form and profession. Coaching has become fairly diverse. More and more versions of coaching have emerged and been presented in books and countless courses and education programmes. Differences between coaching approaches are ideally motivated by differences in the theoretical basis of the coaching intervention (psychodynamic, cognitive, philosophical, systemic etc.), but it is not uncommon to highlight differences for branding purposes, where coaching providers attempt to stand out from the competition. A key goal for me in this chapter has been to describe how coaching is anchored in dominant societal phenomena concerning social change, identity, learning and leadership. To some extent, this general social science basis also frames the format of coaching and coaching psychology in theory and practice. The next two chapters offer a basic introduction to approaches that I consider indicative of the future development of the profession.

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