

INDIVIDUAL COACHES AND MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS
EMCC Conference – March 1-3 2017

Recent research (Turner & Hawkins 2016) indicates that increasingly coaching assignments involve more than the contract between just the coach and the coachee. At the same time there is consistent agreement in the literature that business and executive coaching is not only for the benefit of the individual employee but also for the organization (Kilburg 2000).

Likewise, there is growing evidence that involving line management in the coaching outcomes can play a significant part in the results of the coaching (Ridler Report 2016).

So, how does the coach manage the demands and expectations of multiple stakeholders while at the same time hold the needs of their coachee? At the same time, with multiple stakeholders, what is realistic in terms of the individual's goals? Indeed, how do we address the question: "Who is the client?"

This can be particularly challenging in some contexts where the organization may have little understanding of how coaching works, what the coach actually does, and what part line management can play in supporting both the intervention and the coachee. However, involvement of key stakeholders can be crucial so that they understand what coaching may contribute to the changes the coachee may be seeking or needing to make to succeed both for themselves and to meet any organizational goals and purpose.

This is all very well in theory, but how does the coach engage all relevant stakeholders and manage the boundaries in their coaching assignments? What knowledge of organizational systems enable the coach to meet these needs while at the same time creating the safety and clarity with the coachee for a confidential learning process and experience?

In my view, it not only requires knowledge of organizational systems but also takes courage on the part of the coach. It requires that they are clear about what coaching can and can't deliver and how this informs the coaching approach, the number of sessions and the duration of the assignment. Then it involves the coach being able to articulate this clearly and transparently to the multiple relevant stakeholders in the system, especially the line manager and the coachee. The coach needs to be able to explain to the line manager how coaching works (especially if the manager has no experience of being coached themselves). They also need to engage the manager and help them to identify the part that they will play between coaching sessions to support the changes being sought that will inevitably impact on all those who work in close contact with the coachee- so, the manager themselves, the team of the coachee, possibly clients and/or suppliers.

Likewise, in these circumstances, the coach needs to establish the organisation's objectives and purpose and seek to explore how the coachee's goals may align with these rather than the coachee having complete freedom in choosing their coaching agenda.

This is all very well when the coaching intervention emanates from a developmental intention and agenda. There are however difficulties when coaching may be advocated or "recommended" by a line manager who is either unable or unwilling to deal with an employee's performance. This inevitably sets up a tension in the multi-stakeholder contract as there are likely to be unspoken agenda that may be at odds with the declared intentions.

This raises different challenges for the coach and once again, with their contracting hat on, are they willing to probe to establish the true purpose of the coaching? Are they able to coach the manager in how to deal with the performance issue? Are they willing to walk away from an assignment where there are multiple, unshared agenda?

There is not necessarily a “right” answer to these questions but it’s more a case of being aware of the complexity of the contracting process and developing the confidence and skills to facilitate these dialogues. We need to develop our capacity to negotiate these diverse connections to ensure that we manage the expectations of everyone as transparently and ethically as possible. In addition to the business contract that needs to be agreed, we also need to manage the professional and psychological contracts (Hay 2007) to ensure our work is effective for our client/s.

Needless to say, supervision also provides an invaluable opportunity that enables coaches to explore the complexity of working in organizational systems with multiple stakeholders involved.

For the purpose of the conference workshop, we will create a case study situation that helps the participants to identify a range of stakeholders and consider how best to attend to their various needs. So often, many of these stakeholders are neither mentioned nor even considered when establishing what appears to be a straightforward coaching assignment. Here are some of the stakeholders who are likely to have a direct or indirect interest in the outcomes of the coaching:

- The Coachee: their Line Manager, HR/L & D, CEO, the coachee’s team, their customer, their suppliers, the coachee’s family
- The Coach: the consultancy they work for, their supervisor, their experience of the organizational system

REFERENCES

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Dr Alison Hodge – Profile

Alison is an accredited Executive Coach at Master Practitioner level with EMCC and an accredited Executive Coaching Supervisor with APECS. Working globally as a coaching supervisor with individuals and groups of both internal and external executive coaches, she co-creates working agreements to explore their practice, their client work and their ongoing professional wellbeing. Alison teaches on the MSc in Coaching & Mentoring at Sheffield Hallam University and supervises supervisors-in-training at CSA (Coaching Supervision Academy). She completed her DProf in Coaching Supervision at Middlesex University in 2014. She is particularly interested in the relational phenomena that arise in supervision and how this can inform the supervisee about their own process with their client relationships as well as what may be occurring in their individual and organizational client systems.