

A COMPETENCE EXECUTIVE COACHING MODEL

PROF PIETER KOORTZEN
Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management
University of Johannesburg

PROF RUDOLF M. OOSTHUIZEN
Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology
University of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Psychologists in industry are increasingly required to provide executive coaching services in their organisations or as part of their consulting services. An evaluation of coaching models and the development needs of individuals being trained as coaches, locally and internationally, has led the authors to believe that there is a need for a competence executive coaching model. The objective is to address the training and development needs of these consulting psychologists by presenting a competence executive coaching model for the planning, implementation and evaluation of executive coaching interventions. The study was conducted while one of the authors was involved in teaching doctoral students in consulting psychology and executive coaching, specifically in the USA. The approach involved a literature review of executive coaching models and a qualitative study using focus groups to develop and evaluate the competence executive coaching model. The literature review provided scant evidence of competence executive coaching models and there seems to be a specific need for this in the training of coaches in South Africa. Hence the model that was developed is an attempt to provide trainers with a structured model for the training of coaches. The uniqueness of this competence model is described in terms of not only the six distinct coaching intervention phases, but also the competencies required in each.



BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Numerous publications on the concepts of coaching and executive coaching have been published in the last ten years (Killburg & Diedrich, 2007; Levinson, 2009; Palmer & Whybrow, 2007). Although a great deal has been written on this topic, the body of knowledge still seems to be unintegrated, with the result that some psychologists enter the field somewhat unsure and confused about the unique nature of executive coaching. The fact that many different coaching models are presented in the literature, may exacerbate the confusion. An evaluation of coaching models and the development needs of individuals being trained as coaches, locally and internationally, has led the authors to believe that there is a need for a competence executive coaching model. A review of current models reveals that they focus mostly on the tasks involved in a coaching process without describing the competences (outcomes) and the assessment criteria (criteria of success) in each phase. A competence model, in contrast, can be used to describe the coaching process, the various competences and the assessment criteria that enable trainers to determine the effectiveness of an executive coaching training programme. Coaches could use a competence model to evaluate their own performance.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

- The procedure in this study first involved a literature study of available coaching and executive coaching models in order to determine whether any competence models exist in the literature. The models were evaluated in terms of how clearly the competences, competencies and coaching process were described in each of the models. The models were also evaluated on the basis of the way in which the assessment criteria were described. This resulted in a better understanding of the most common, prominent and important competences and competencies in executive coaching models. It also enabled us to identify some of the shortcomings in the competence approach. With this theoretical knowledge as a background, we held interviews with the first focus group.
- Participants in the first focus group were asked the following question during a two-and-a-half-hour session: "What are the most important competences in an executive coaching model?" While the participants generated ideas on the most important tasks involved in executive coaching interventions, the researcher categorised the tasks in clusters for subsequent review and analysis. The participants were also asked to provide an indication of the assessment criteria. The following question was posed: "When would you know that these competences or outcomes have been successfully met?" The researcher adopted an active facilitation role during the discussion to ensure that all participants participated actively and that all the inputs were clarified and captured. The participants' contributions were captured on flip chart paper so that everyone could see the contributions and review them at the end of the focus group session.
- The second focus group session was conducted after the competence executive coaching model had been conceptualised and designed. The participants were asked to evaluate the functionality and uniqueness of the model. The model was sent to the participants beforehand and they were given the opportunity to review it before the focus group session. The following question was posed during the focus group session: "How can this competence model assist coaches and students in coaching and how is it different from other coaching models?" The group's initial reactions were probed and further explored and the researcher made notes on the group's comments, which were subsequently analysed.

EXECUTIVE COACHING

Whitherspoon (2000) describes executive coaching as an action-learning process to enhance effective action and learning agility, a professional relationship and a deliberate, personalised process, to provide an executive with valid information, free and informed choices, based on that information, and internal commitment to those choices. Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002) conceptualise executive coaching as a formal, ongoing relationship between an individual or team with managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation, and a consultant who possesses knowledge of behaviour change and organisational functioning. The goal of this relationship is to create measurable behaviour change in the individual or collection of individuals (the team), which results in increased individual and organisational performance, and where the relationship between individual or team and consultant facilitates this change by or through giving direct behaviourally based feedback, creating opportunities for change and demanding accountability (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2007; Killburg, 2007a).



RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- Two groups of participants took part in this study. The first group consisted of 25 doctoral students in consulting psychology enrolled in a six-month programme in executive coaching in the USA. The focus group session with these students were conducted six months after completion of the programme. The students included in this sample were between the ages of 25 and 45, and 63 percent of them were females. They were in the second, third and fourth years of their doctoral training and had chosen a course in coaching on the strength of their keen interest in the field. Some of the students were already providing coaching services as part of their practices. At the time the focus group sessions were conducted they had already completed the six-month programme in coaching and had been exposed to intensive theoretical and practical training in the field. The information gathered from this group was used to design the competence executive coaching model.
- The second group of participants consisted of eight South African executive coaches working in industry. This group of participants consisted of six males and two females and were chosen on the basis of their knowledge and experience in the field of executive coaching. The candidates had a minimum of five years coaching experience and a formal qualification in the field. These people were part of a focus group that evaluated the competence executive coaching model.

DATA ANALYSIS

- The data obtained from the first focus group were analysed using competence or outcomes-based and content analysis methodology. The different tasks generated by the focus group participants were grouped and analysed on the basis of themes, and the central competence or outcome in each category was identified. These broad categories or competences were integrated into a process model, which represents a logical and workable model for the training of executive coaches. Each of the competences in the model was rewritten in outcomes-based or competence format and the appropriate assessment criteria were identified from the data provided by the first focus group. This allowed the authors to construct a coaching model, that described the coaching process, the different competences and the assessment criteria by means of which trainers can determine the effectiveness of an executive coaching training programme and coaches can evaluate their own performance.
- The data from the second focus group were analysed on the basis of themes. The comments of the participants were analysed in two parts. The comments on the functionality of the designed model were analysed first, and this was followed by an analysis of the comments on the uniqueness of the model.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to describe the development and evaluation of a competence executive coaching model.

RESEARCH DESIGN

- The study was conducted while one of the authors was involved in teaching doctoral students in consulting psychology and executive coaching, specifically in the USA. The approach involved a literature review of two executive coaching models (The Strategic Executive Coaching Model and the GROW Model) and a qualitative study using focus groups and content analysis to develop and evaluate the competence executive coaching model (Bryman, 2007).
- Although only two models are described in this research, the first group of participants studied the theory of coaching over a six-month period while enrolled in a coaching programme as part of their doctoral studies in consulting psychology. The author and the participants studied and analysed a prescribed text and 46 relevant journal articles during the programme. In addition to their study of the prescribed material the participants gave 22 two-hour presentations on different aspects of coaching and were requested to supply additional books and journal articles during their presentations, so that they could explore the theory of coaching beyond the prescribed material. This resulted in the participants being exposed to a representative sample of material in the field of coaching. They were also exposed to competency models which are not as commonly used in the USA as in South Africa. This allowed them to evaluate different coaching models from a competence (outcomes-based) approach.
- When the first focus group interviews were conducted, the participants had already completed the programme in coaching and were familiar with the competence models and methodology. The second group of participants comprised practising coaches chosen on the basis of their knowledge of both coaching and competence models.





A COMPETENCE EXECUTIVE COACHING MODEL

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This competence executive coaching model consists of five distinguishable phases, beginning with a contracting/recontracting competence. This competence forms the basis of a successful coaching intervention and involves contracting with the business, the relevant parties who will be involved in the intervention and the candidate.

The assessment criteria in this contracting/recontracting competence can be summarised as follows:

- Coaches orient themselves to understand the business context.
- Coaches familiarise themselves with the leadership profile in the organisation.
- Consultation takes place with relevant parties on the expected outcomes of the intervention.
- Rapport is established with the coachee (executive) and the expected outcomes are determined.
- The possibility of an effective working relationship is determined.
- The coachee is oriented to the nature of the intervention.
- The appropriateness of a coaching intervention is determined.
- Agreement is reached on the participation of relevant parties.
- An acceptable coaching contract, which includes a budget, is negotiated.
- The contracting process is evaluated in terms of role clarity, expected outcomes, milestones and time boundaries (time, space and task).
- A second contract can be negotiated and developed, if required.

ASSESSMENT/RE-ASSESSMENT

The second competence in the model is called assessment/reassessment and involves a comprehensive assessment of the leadership competencies of the coachee.

Conduct an executive competency assessment and reassessment

- An executive leadership competency model is created for the specific organisation.
- Suitable assessment tools for assessing individual development needs, based on the competency model, are identified or developed.
- The coachee's current level of performance is assessed.
- The gaps between current and expected levels of performance are identified.
- The results and assessment process are evaluated in terms of the organisational context, leader profile, expected outcomes (organisation and individual) and contract.
- Corrective steps are taken if necessary.
- A reassessment is conducted after a six-month period.

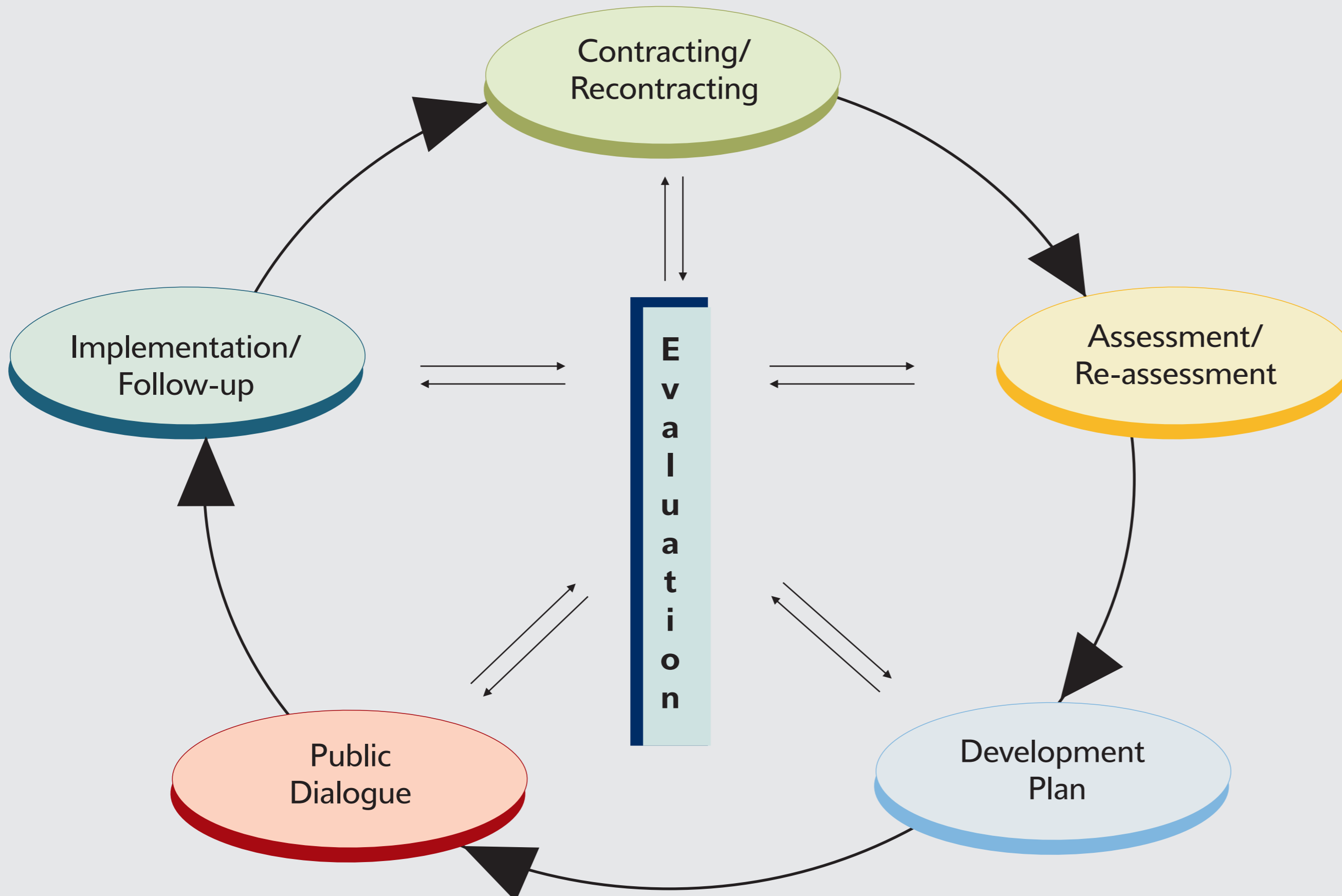
DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The development plan competence consists of two components. Firstly, feedback from the assessment is presented to the coachee and a discovery and internalisation process is facilitated. This is done in a specific, structured way so that the coachee is not overwhelmed. The second part of this competence consists of constructing a development plan for the coachee.

Compile an executive coaching development plan

- Rapport with the executive is re-established and the outcomes to be achieved are reaffirmed.
- An open and honest feedback session on the assessment results is conducted.
- The coachee is given the opportunity to reflect on and internalise the assessment results, to ask questions and to ventilate feelings.
- An integrated summary highlighting strengths and development needs (3 each) is presented.
- Agreement is reached on the development areas.
- A structured development plan using appropriate action learning strategies and coaching sessions is developed.
- Agreement on the development plan and process (time, space and task) is reached with the relevant parties.
- The suitability of the development plan is evaluated in terms of the organisational context, leader profile, expected outcomes (organisation and individual) and contract.
- Corrective steps are taken if necessary.

Figure 1: Competence Executive Coaching Model



CONCLUSIONS

The literature review provided scant evidence of competence executive coaching models and there seems to be a specific need for this in the training of coaches in South Africa. Hence, the model that was developed is an attempt to provide trainers with a structured model for the training of coaches. The model is presented in competence or outcome format and consists of five unique competences or phases, namely contracting/recontracting, assessment/reassessment, a development plan, public dialogue sessions and implementation/follow-up. Each phase is followed by an evaluation process to determine the effectiveness of the specific phase.

The model is regarded as a unique contribution by the research participants in that it describes both the competences and assessment criteria in a coaching process. The findings from the focus group study also suggested that the model may help to improve the effectiveness of coaching training programmes. It provides not only a basic model, but also the criteria against which the success of prospective coaches can be measured. The differences relating to the content of the model seem to reflect the individual approaches of different coaches, and although the participants agreed on the usefulness of the model and the competences in general, they believed that the model would be applied somewhat differently by coaches with a background in psychology and those with a management or business background. The participants also warned against the perceived risk involved in the use of public dialogue sessions.

IMPLEMENTATION/FOLLOW-UP

Finally, once all these phases have been successfully completed, the intervention can be implemented. This involves exposing the coachee to all the action learning interventions, and conducting the coaching and public dialogue sessions.

Implement the executive coaching development plan

- Monthly coaching sessions are conducted with the executive.
- Learning and development processes are facilitated during the coaching sessions.
- It is necessary to facilitate opportunities to reflect on experiences and consider the application of knowledge, skills and competencies in the work context.
- Quarterly public dialogue sessions are facilitated between the executive and relevant parties.
- The action learning activities complementing the coaching sessions are monitored and supervised.
- The effectiveness of the development plan and process is evaluated in terms of the executive's progress, monthly meetings, interactions with relevant parties and feedback received.
- The development plan and process are adapted as necessary.
- Managing the relationship and keeping the coachee involved and connected between coaching sessions is of paramount importance. Without this, the coachee can easily become disconnected from the coach and the process.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

The relevant parties involved in the public dialogue competence are peers who have been trained in giving feedback on the coachee's progress during structured public dialogue sessions. These parties, who have been trained in the contracting phase of the intervention, provide valuable information on the coachee's behaviour in the work context.

Plan and conduct public dialogue sessions

- The relevant parties are oriented on the nature of executive coaching intervention and the development plan.
- The relevant parties are educated about the importance and value of feedback.
- The relevant parties are educated about their roles and responsibilities and appropriate feedback techniques.
- An initial public dialogue session between the executive and the relevant parties is facilitated.
- Agreement is reached between the executive and relevant parties on roles, responsibilities and feedback sessions (time, space and task).
- The feedback from the relevant parties is analysed, noted and incorporated in future interventions.
- Corrective steps are taken if necessary.

