

CHAPTER ONE

Learning from family business coaching practices

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Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present critical discussions on the nature of learning emerging from coaching family businesses. The chapter will showcase a few relevant activities to demonstrate selected areas of learning from family business coaching practices.

Drawing on the experience of delivering professional development activities for coaching psychologists and coaches, my focus is on the process of identifying the types of learning arising from coaching family businesses. The rationale for extrapolating learning elements from coaching sessions is to highlight that coaching itself is a learning process and should be integrated in the academic practice.

The critical issue is how learning from the coaching practice can be used to develop relevant coaching tools and techniques. The emphasis is on coaching practitioner's engagement with the learning from the practice, and to develop insights in the delivery of effective coaching for family businesses.

Key questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do coaching practitioners learn from their own practices? • What types of learning are dominant from family business coaching practices? • What is the outcome of engagement with the coaching practice from a personal learning and professional development perspective? • What are the ethical and good professional issues in the delivery of learning from coaching? • How do learnings from the coaching practices provide a source for shared learning for the coaching practitioners and coachees?

Learning from coaching practices

A brief overview of literature with a focus on learning from coaching practices is indicating the absence of any direct evidence on the nature of learning from coaching family businesses. This is due to the lack of focus on coach's learning from the coaching session because attention is given to the coachee and the sessions are designed in this direction. The learning implicit in a coaching practice is thus remaining uncovered and unexplored.

The discussion in this section aims to demonstrate that learning is embedded in the coaching sessions from a coaching practitioner's perspective, and that coaching practices can be further developed by the learning from the coaching sessions. This informal learning can thus provide a valuable source to apply to develop coaching practices.

There is evidence about potential rich learning environment during the coaching sessions and the reflective practice-based learning in use to facilitate coaching practice (Grant, 2011; Turesky & Gallagher). The key questions in this context are if there is any learning style used by coaching practitioners specifically for family business coaching? Is there any effect of the learning style on the coaching outcomes? Can we map out learning outcomes from coaching sessions?

The underlying psychological model in this context is cognitive outcomes during the coaching sessions, and their direct influences on the coaching style and social interaction with the coachees. We can use Blooms taxonomy of cognitive outcomes approach here to represent the

types of learning from a coaching session for a coaching practitioner. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) summarised the approach in two types of dimensions—cognitive (remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, create) and knowledge dimensions (propositional knowledge, procedural knowledge, metacognitive knowledge). The learning from a coaching session can be referred to as “metacognitive” knowledge as it involves pre-existing learning and new learning from the practice on a continuous basis. This is also in line with Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle, the essential feature is “learning by doing”.

If the activities in a coaching session are considered as learning activities for the coach and coaches. Then these activities must be aligned appropriately to the coaching outcomes to get the maximum benefits for both knowledge enhancement and performance as a coach. The alignment of learning activities with learning outcomes has been a primary focus in all types of learning (Biggs, 2003), and learning style (Honey & Mumford, 1982). Learning is influenced by the context (Jarvela, Volet & Jarvenoja, 2010). Social and individual learning processes occur concurrently and represent distinct systemic levels (Volet, Vauras & Salonen, 2009). In the coaching context, a coach is learning from delivering coaching as well as from the interaction with the coachee and this is occurring concurrently in a coaching session. To what extent a coach can personalise the informal learning from a coaching session remains to be explored.

The critical discussion is indicating the need for coaching education incorporating the learning from the coaching sessions to provide rich, deep, and focused insights in the coaching practice with a forward planning element for the coach to develop and deliver effective and appropriate coaching tools and techniques. A distinction must be drawn between coaching education and learning from the coaching sessions, and the focus in this chapter is the latter. For example, coaching education refers to formal institutionalised delivery of learning activities and resources to enhance good practice, and usually they are called, “training”, “professional development events”, “continuing professional development”, “personal development”, etc. Whereas, learning from the coaching session is informal, unstructured learning unless the coaching session is designed in such a way as to benefit both the coachee and the coach from a learning perspective. Vella, Crowe and Oades (2013) presented a critical analysis of coaching education

and identified the dominance of a prescriptive approach in coaching education, as such, no attention is given to interpersonal competencies, personal learning, and socio-cultural aspects of coaching. My discussion in this chapter is to demonstrate that informal learning from a coaching practice can be a valuable source of knowledge gaining exercise, and can also serve the purpose of formal educational experience in coaching, if the coach has the ability to map out the learning from coaching.

Drawing on the proposed concept of “critical moment” in a coaching session by Haan and Neib (2012), I will develop arguments on “critical learning” arising from critical moments during a coaching session for the coach to incorporate in their cognitive functions and social interaction with the coachee. Although critical moments during coaching can be anxiety related leading to the termination of coaching sessions, however, a large percentages of reported critical moments is related to emerging new insights and realisations (Haan, Bertie, Day & Sills, 2010). The emerging new insights and realisations can be regarded as learning processes. A coach can have the opportunity to apply these aspects of learning from critical moments to facilitate coaching, and for use in personal and professional development. The critical learning can itself be a learning object and further exploration can bring new areas of learning from coaching. Critical learning here refers to new insights, realisations, increase understanding, and novel ideas during different intervention stages of coaching. I have proposed an inventory of “critical learning” in coaching in the activity section in this chapter (Activity 1).

Mapping out areas of learning from coaching practices

Drawing from the literature, it is evident that coaching is a learning process itself independent of any other learning activities in association with coaching techniques at a particular session. The learning is informal and the coach can negotiate the learning with the coaching environment to get maximum benefits, for example, a coaching practitioner may arrange to keep a reflective diary of each coaching session to note the changes in his/her behaviour and understanding of the effectiveness of the coaching techniques, and this can form a series of informal learning segments, from which formal learning may be drawn

to generate professional skills and knowledge enhancement. However, learning from a coaching session is similar to the notion of the learning combination lock (for further information, see Hartley, Woods & Pill, 2005), as the learning is drawn from a complex process of formally designed coaching session (External), and a coaching practitioner's motivation and commitment to learn from the session (Internal) including previous coaching experiences. If the combination of both external and internal factors are aligned appropriately then we can expect the potential learning to happen for the coach. Good coaching sessions can also bring collaborative learning experience for both the coach and a coachee. This is achieved through the dialogues between the coach and the coachee and from the discussion with other members of a family business.

There is ample evidence to suggest that informal learning can be assessed using a work-based learning approach (Eraut, 2004). However, informal learning from a coaching session is not monitored, evaluated/assessed as yet, in a family business context. This is because learning from coaching sessions are taken for granted, and the learner is unaware of the learning (Eraut, 2004). The learning in this context is considered as tacit knowledge, hence less attention is given to use the knowledge to deepen understanding of good coaching practices, and to modify/improve the approach of family business coaching. A good plan to assess the learning from coaching can be included in the coaching intervention programme so that learning from a coaching session can be credited and recognised appropriately.

Informal learning is happening continuously without a coach's conscious awareness and efforts to learn, enriching their "educational biography" as they progress in their lifeline.

If coaching is a powerful learning tool then it will be very important to use for personal and professional development and the most appropriate step in this context is to capture the learning and map out the scope of learning from coaching practices. I have identified the following types of learning from coaching sessions:

- Formal learning
- Informal learning
- Continuous professional learning activities
- Collaborative learning

- Experiential learning
- Professional engagement
- Reflective learning
- Enquiry-based/problem-based learning.

Each of these learning types may not necessarily occur at the same time in a coaching intervention, rather there can be one particular learning type prominent in a coaching session, although both formal and informal learning are likely to be present in a coaching intervention. An example is presented below to clarify the process of identifying a learning type in a coaching intervention with family businesses.

Example

A coaching practitioner is asked to help a family business, which is facing huge loss despite high work commitments and dedication of all family members, including good interpersonal relations and communication. The coach may use problem-based/enquiry-based learning to untie the complex knot of the business failure reasons, and at the same time learning about the key issues using this type of approach. As such, the learning emerging from this approach is grounded in problem-based/enquiry-based learning.

The process of mapping out the types of learning embedded in a coaching intervention requires careful planning and designing the coaching sessions. This can also be a part of professional development in which planning and implementation of planning to achieve expected learning outcomes will be addressed.

Delivering learning from family business coaching practices

There is enough evidence to suggest that a structured coaching session can bring effective outcomes (Grant, 2011). To establish any learning from coaching family businesses, we may draw attention to the nature of coaching in this context. For example, family business coaching involves a blended approach using two parallel coaching intervention, one for the family dynamic and functions,

and another for business (Shams, 2011). Any learning from family businesses can be unfolded if we exploit this blended approach to establish the nature of learning embedded in family business coaching from a coaching practitioner’s perspective. The learning can be how a group (family) functions and how a business operates using an evolutionary approach. Belbin’s (1981) team roles can be used to learn group functions in a family context, and Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) model of group development can be used to learn about business managements, functions, operations and governance. Applying Belbin’s (1981) model, the distribution of family member’s role in a business can indicate if their performances are conducive to function as a team. It is expected that family members will perform to the best of their abilities if the assigned role is natural to their ability to perform in that direction. For example, if the founder of the family business is a “shaper” then this may help the other family members to accomplish their tasks using a focused approach. However, if there is no plant, then the group may lack creativity and problem solving skills. An activity (Activity 2) is proposed to help the coaching practitioners to use Belbin’s model to identify team roles in a family business, and to offer effective and ethical coaching intervention. Using an integrated group function model based on both Belbin’s (1981), and Tuckman and Jensen’s model, it is possible to draw a functional route of a family business. For example, if a role assigned to a family member is facilitating, then the role-play will be distinctive at the forming stage, in which good interpersonal relation is important to establish. The diagram below is displaying the integrated model.

This integrated model can be used to assess each family members performance in relation to the assigned role. A coach will be able to

	Plant	Monitor evaluator	Coordinator	Resource investigator	Implementer	Complete finisher	Team worker	Shaper	Specialist
Forming									
Storming									
Norming									
Performing									
Adjourning/ Mourning									

Diagram 1. An integrated family group function model.

detect the functional issues arising from team roles and in each stage of the family business team development. An activity to link this model in action is presented in the activity section (Activity 3). The model is a useful framework to identify functional route of role performance to family business team development.

*Sharing learning from coaching family businesses:
promoting peer practice and collaborative
learning*

A pragmatic approach to capture learning from family business coaching practices is to generate interests in professional discussions and including the key learning issues in formal educational programme. Both these areas are increasingly being used to develop novel approaches to promote coaching psychology (Shams, 2013). Drawing from my work with peer practice group, I am able to highlight the rich and deep learning benefits from group discussions and through sharing ideas in selected issues in coaching psychology. This type of professional development platform can provide further impetus to articulate learning issues from coaching practices. It is through group learning and collaborative efforts, that we will be able to develop this area of coaching psychology, that is, learning from coaching practices to develop professional coaching psychology practices. Collaborative learning (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) from professional engagement with others can be a powerful source of knowledge gathering exercise. This can then lead to the development of communities of practice in coaching psychology (Shams, 2013). We can apply the notion of “situated learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in a coaching session to understand the learning emerging from the interaction between a coach and a coachee. The social construction of learning from a coaching intervention needs to be researched to add knowledge about the nature of learning from coaching practice, and how a coach can be benefitted with learning from the practice as a part of their professional development. The social media has an important role to develop collaborative learning from coaching practices, and these are, Twitter, Facebook, Linked-in, Vimeo, blog, professional group member’s network online discussion forums etc. In addition, personal reflective diary/journal and record of learning from each coaching

session can bring further benefits to the learning achievement in a coaching context.

Family business coaching practitioners' initiatives to develop a professional group to facilitate discussions around good and ethical practices in family businesses in the UK can make an important contribution to develop coaching psychology. Although there are family business support groups and family business organisations, however, there is no professional engagement from coaching psychologists with these organisations except for making any one off contribution. As family businesses are contributing a high percentage in national economy around the world, it is important to deliver family business coaching as an important subject area in the higher educational institutions. This will then help to build up knowledge and understanding of psychology of family business from a coaching context. It is interesting to note that although coaching psychology is now formally delivered by a number of UK universities and higher education institutions, however, family business coaching is not included in the curriculum. The exclusion of this area demands attention from academics and practitioners to deliver an inclusive coaching psychology programme in the higher educational institutions.

Activities and assessments

Activity 1: Inventory of critical learning

Instruction:

This inventory aims to record the occurrence of "critical learning" during different coaching intervention stages.

Please put a tick against each area of your critical learning (new insights, realisations, increase understanding, novel ideas) at different points of the time line in a coaching intervention.

Analysis:

Draw a graph indicating the stage point where your learning is higher than at any other stage point. This may then help you to understand how you can engage with learning at that stage taking a focused approach.

Coaching time line	New insights	Realizations	Increase understanding	Novel ideas
Beginning				
Middle				
End				
After-end				

Activity 2: placing family members in different team roles

Instruction:

Obtain information on each member’s role in a family business using the nine categories below. Place each member of a family business (family and non-family) in the role category to assess their performances.

	Plant	Monitor evaluator	Coordinator	Resource investigator	Implementer	Complete finisher	Team worker	Shaper	Specialist
Father									
Mother									
Sons									
Daughters									
Uncle									
Auntie									
Niece/Nephew									
Non-family member									
Other—specify									

Activity 3: functional route to family business teamwork

Instruction:

The following model can help a coach to identify the role performance of each family member in relation to family business team development. For each stage of the team development on the left side of the table (forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning), please indicate the involvement of each role.

An example is presented below.

Learning outcome:

It is expected that at the end of this assessment, a coach will be able to develop a functional route of each family member to develop family business teamwork. The functional route will help the coach to identify any dysfunctions in the role performance affecting the team development.

	Plant	Monitor evaluator	Coordinator	Resource investigator	Implementer	Complete finisher	Team worker	Shaper	Specialist
Forming									
Storming									
Norming									
Performing									
Adjourning/ Mourning									

Diagram 2. An integrated family group function model.

A completed example:

	Plant	Monitor evaluator	Coordinator	Resource Investigator	Implementer	Complete Finisher	Team worker	Shaper	Specialist
Forming	✓								
Storming		✓			✓				
Norming			✓			✓		✓	
Performing			✓	✓			✓		
Adjourning/ Mourning							✓		✓

Tips for learning from your practices:

Can you apply a “practice what we preach” concept in your coaching practices?

Below are a few major tips for you to learn from your coaching practices:

1. Draw a list of intended learning outcomes from each coaching session.

2. Keep a record of what you have learnt in each session and at what stage.
3. Evaluate your learning experience in each session using this five-point scale: Good—Adequate—Same as before—Little learning—No learning.
4. Relate new learning to any previous learning to develop a reflective journal.
5. Monitor your progress to develop new learning using a peer supervision approach.
6. Explore the possibility of developing any new techniques and tools from the new learning to apply to your coaching practices and for wide application.

Conclusion

Coaching can provide a rich learning environment for the coach to increase their cognitive functions, and social aspects of learning. The learning inherent in a coaching session usually remains unexplored due to the lack of awareness of learning emerging from the coaching practice. This is also due to attention paid primarily to the coachee, as such the learning needs of the coach are not taken into consideration at the time of coaching intervention. However, informal learning occurring naturally from the coaching practice can provide very useful knowledge to enhance good practice with ethical consideration appropriately. The learning in this context is called “metacognitive” knowledge because of the blend of new knowledge with the existing knowledge. If the learning objective from the coaching sessions can be aligned with the approach of coaching and assessment of the coaching outcome, then a coaching practice will bring equal level of benefits for both a coach and a coachee. There is hardly any research attention in this area and I have argued for increasing awareness of the benefits of learning from the coaching sessions for a coach to develop professional skills. Although the nature of learning is not yet established through empirical research, however, the informal learning embedded in coaching sessions can stimulate further development and insights in delivering effective coaching intervention.

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