Base Metal...

January 2025

Alchemy of Coaching

Introduction

Coaches often use instruments to assist clients in their self-awareness and to support clients to develop themselves and their relationships. Whether choosing to employ inventories in life coaching or having to use a particular psychometric specified for executive coaching for example in leadership programmes, there are considerations for the coach. One of these is the limited perspective which an instrument, however well-chosen, will provide: the person is more than a particular profile will reveal. In this edition of Base Metal Paul explores some of the issues concerning using psychometrics in the context of the coach's continuing professional development.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Issues for the coach when using psychometrics in coaching

In recent time, we have dealt regularly in these pages with aspects of CPD, the importance of development as a coach, and its place at the heart of most professional accreditation. One of my larger clients recently announced that they would be changing the psychometric tool that they use, which has necessitated a substantial piece of training for me. This has led me to reflecting on what this specific experience has brought me, and what (if any) wider lessons there might be. This column will not be about specific tools or approaches, but the wider aspects of such CPD both in its direct experience and its ramifications.

Having spent many hours debriefing coachees against one psychometric approach, it was both instructive and frustrating to look at the whole process through a different lens. I found myself asking questions like 'how far is it useful or relevant to 'read across' from the tool that I know well when trying to get to grips with a new one?'. Some of the questions that I asked during the training were also very clearly formed from and through my knowledge of and previous experience with another tool, and the challenge wrought by that recognition is not inconsiderable. What is seemingly foundational thinking in one context is almost peripheral or inconsequential in another, which has made me reflect quite extensively on the basis for my approach to and usage of such tools.

When debriefing a coachee on their psychometric report from any tool, it is incumbent on the coach to ensure a suitable level of understanding and context to ensure that the interpretations reached are meaningful and valid. As such, a good level of expertise on the part of the coach is necessary, alongside various means of helpfully exploring a profile. My experience here is that one size fits few, and particularly when dealing with a complex and multi-layered approach, there are key decisions for the coach in what to focus on, as well as how to impart enough knowledge for the experience to be meaningful in a very short time. However well such large scale operations talk about whole day workshops involving multiple exercises and physical elements, for many (if not most) of us, the experience of delivering debriefing is an extremely time-limited one. Finding effective ways for the coaching pair to 'get up to speed' is critical, as is developing strategies for quickly recognising where in the profile and tool it might be most effective to work, and how to provide enough explicable context without the session becoming a teaching one.

Similarly, the skill of being able to read and understand a coachee at speed (in my context, often one for whom the debrief session is the first of a set of coaching sessions), to be able to effectively tailor the approach to fit the reality of the individual is a significant challenge. The profile itself can, of course, help us here, given that it is designed to give insight into the preferences and approach that that individual exhibits (or at least has

exhibited in the questionnaire). We will all, however, have experienced situations where our assumptions turn out to be misleading, and our reading of a profile leads us down an unhelpful path. Managing these individual differences (and indeed our own preferences and responses) is not easy, when under such time pressure.

When doing practice debriefing sessions during the training, I found myself reflecting on the dual aspect of trust in this environment. The coachee must be able to trust that their coach has the relevant expertise and understanding to give them meaningful insight and experience as a result of a session. The coach needs to trust themselves to both draw on that expertise (however well developed), but also crucially on their skills as a coach, to inform how they go about the task. Any such session is, after all, a coaching session, even if there is an agreed input (the profile/result) and a need for some non-coaching content (to create enough mutual understanding). If this 'coaching proper' bit is missing, we risk short-changing our coachee, and severely limiting the potential learnings that they can draw from the tool and their understanding of both it and the profile that results from it.

Q. How do you balance the sometimes competing needs of tool/approach understanding and maximising the potential output from such coaching interventions?

Book review

" Psychometrics in Coaching: Using Psychological and Psychometric Tools for Development", edited by Jonathan Passmore, Kogan Page, 2012

This book provides understanding of models, theories, related research and reliability for a range of instruments. It explains how to use them, and includes a chapter on giving feedback. It covers the field and can be complemented by other publications dedicated in greater depth to particular instruments.

One such example is:

"Gifts Differing - Understanding Personality Type", Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter B. Myers, Davies-Black Publishing, 1995

Drawing on the work of Carl Jung, this book distinguishes categories of personality type and styles and shows how these reflect our perceptions of the world. It describes how the MBTI instrument can be used to assist in relationships in practical every-day life.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Up to a certain point every man is what he thinks he is." F. H. Bradley

"We can obviously make a wrong use of self-knowledge, just as we can of any other knowledge." Carl Jung

"We discover in ourselves what others hide from us, and we recognise in others what we hide from ourselves." Vauvenargues, 1746

Let us know your response to Base Metal articles and reviews. ***We welcome guest contributors!***

Contact us We look forward to all kinds of communication for **Base Metal**... it's a forum for sharing and learning about coaching. Please do send us ideas, thoughts, suggestions or feedback.

paul@alchemyofcoaching.com ray@alchemyofcoaching.com

Our coach development guides, articles and papers are available from www.alchemyofcoaching.com

Alchemy of Coaching