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Business Coaching Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT:

The article analyses the main approaches to defining the essence, purpose and types of coaching. Special attention is paid to business coaching aimed at improving the efficiency of business and achieving business goals. The diversity of business tasks allows to apply coaching both to top and middle level managers and their teams in the mode of solving operational, tactical and strategic goals. The success of coaching activities is linked to the professional qualities and strategy applied by the coach. The strategy includes actions, techniques, methods, behavioural models that contribute to solving the client's problems: activating his/her professional potential to find and solve problems. The article provides a comparative analysis of seven domestic and foreign coaching strategies. As a result of the analysis it was revealed that each strategy is aimed at a specific goal: the client's independent search for problem solving, at understanding and overcoming the barriers of the set goal, at modelling one's own behaviour in a problem situation. In addition, it was revealed that each strategy includes three basic stages: setting coaching goals, developing an action plan and achieving the goals. In conclusion, the author proposed a working definition of the concept of "business coaching strategy".

Keywords: business coaching, coaching strategies, coaching technology, human resource management system, organisation development.

Introduction

Coaching has been studied as a social, pedagogical, psychological, managerial, and economic phenomenon by various domestic authors, including S. V. Berezina, L. M. Valiullina, N. E. Vasina, E. A. Galanova, E. S. Denisenko, A. Korolikina, Yu. B. Kostrova, E. I. Kudryavtseva, N. N. Nikulina, A. A. Saburina, E. V. Sidorenko, I. I. Ushakova, O. Yu. Shibarshina, V. V. Shchukin, among others, as well as by international researchers such as R. Carroll, T. Robbins, T. Huebner, and others.

Most studies recognize coaching as a promising technology for team building (linking coaching to sociology), personal and professional development (connecting it to pedagogy and psychology), and organizational growth, particularly in personnel management (associating it with management and microeconomics).

Although the philosophical foundations of coaching trace back to the works of Socrates (as noted by L. M. Valiullina [2]), coaching as a social phenomenon emerged relatively recently, in the second half of the 20th century. Initially, it was associated with sports and referred to individual and group athletic mentoring. However, with the evolution of industrial relations under conditions of intense competition and the emergence of a socio-ethical approach in management, the term acquired a psychological dimension and began to be used to define the institution of professional advisory services.

In Russia, this form of consulting began to gain traction only in the 2000s, meaning that the market for coaching services is still in its formative and developmental stages. Nevertheless, coaching has already become a management style in business, leadership, and corporate governance. In 2020, the "Association of Russian-Speaking Coaches" conducted an expert survey titled "Coaching in Russia," which revealed several key trends: the coaching market continues to grow (with a revenue increase of 17% and a rise in coaching projects by 28%); however, there has been a decline in service costs. While demand for long-term coaching has decreased, clients are shifting from individual coaching to group coaching, which involves not only the organization's executives but also the entire team.

Based on the findings of this study, a positive forecast for the development of the coaching market has been formulated: "In five years, coaching will become an integral part of leadership and personnel training and development. The market will become more structured, segmented, and professionalized, as well as more closely integrated into the international community" [6].

Literature Review

An analysis of various definitions of coaching highlights its key characteristics: in all interpretations, coaching is linked to a consulting (mentoring) service, where the starting point is a client request—an internal or external problem that the client is unable to resolve independently. Therefore, the

coach acts as an expert whose knowledge and skills enable them to identify the root cause of the issue and suggest solutions for its resolution (which aligns coaching with consulting). However, the primary tool in coaching is the activation of an individual's internal resources, whether a specialist or a leader, making coaching closely related to psychological counseling.

E. Denisenko describes coaching as "an individual's training" [5, p. 52–53], while E. A. Galanov defines its goal as "unlocking personal potential, increasing productivity, and improving work efficiency" [4, p. 454]. The realization of personal potential occurs through "awareness of one's experience, formulation of meaningful goals, and identification of internal and external resources for achieving them" [4, p. 455]. The relevance of coaching emerges in problematic situations: according to researchers E. V. Sidorenko and E. I. Kudryavtseva, coaching represents a unique form of "rational clarification of a situation" [10, p. 43]. The role of the coach lies in assisting with problem resolution, including through the activation of personal potential. Similarly, R. Carroll states: "The role of the coach is to help develop a business vision aligned with the leader's values and life goals" [13].

Several authors associate coaching with education, analyzing its educational potential (A. L. Shevyakova, E. S. Petrenko, N. B. Kuttybaeva, A. K. Urazbekov [11]; Yu. B. Kostrova, O. Yu. Shibarshina [7], among others). L. M. Valiullina defines coaching as "a collaborative activity involving active interaction between an individual and their environment," highlighting two fundamental premises: reliance on the natural ability to learn and the enhancement of independent thinking [2].

Coaching technologies are highly versatile, functioning across personal, family, business, career, and financial domains, giving rise to specialized branches such as life coaching, career coaching, family coaching, financial coaching, sports coaching, and business coaching [7, p. 29].

Business coaching is a specialized branch of coaching focused on solving organizational challenges and enhancing employee efficiency in achieving these solutions. E. A. Galanov defines business coaching as "a process of interaction between a coach and a businessperson, their managers, and employees, aimed at improving business performance and achieving set business objectives" [4]. The effectiveness of business coaching is directly related to the development of personal efficiency in both leaders and their teams.

Business coaching targets different levels of managerial personnel, with each client presenting unique requests that shape the selection of appropriate coaching tools. Some experts categorize business coaching into:

1. Executive Coaching, designed for top-level executives,
2. Team Coaching, aimed at developing teamwork,
3. Business Coaching for middle and lower-level managers and specialists [1].

A. L. Shevyakova classifies business coaching based on the significance of the problems being addressed, distinguishing operational coaching (focused on immediate issues), tactical coaching (covering short- and medium-term objectives), and strategic coaching (dedicated to defining new global goals, corporate mission, and carefully developing a strategy to achieve desired outcomes) [11, p. 1024]. However, most client requests involve strategic changes and organizational innovations.

Since coaching is a creative activity, the personal qualities of the coach play a key role in its effectiveness. These qualities include professionalism (L. M. Valiullina [2], R. Carroll [13], among others), active listening and the ability to ask the right questions (R. Carroll [13]), as well as trust and empathy (L. M. Valiullina [2, p. 13]). Professionalism in coaching is not only related to the subject matter (the organizational problem being addressed) but is also demonstrated through accreditation in the field of coaching and consulting expertise. Internationally, several major coaching associations operate, including the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the International Association of Coaching (IAC). In Russia, the Association of Russian-Speaking Coaches plays a similar role by bringing together, training, and certifying professionals from different countries while promoting coaching as a modern scientific and practical discipline.

All these factors highlight the relevance of business coaching strategy as a research topic and provide a foundation for the comparative analysis of different strategies, ultimately leading to a definition of the term "business coaching strategy" in the main section of the study.

Materials and Methods

The object of this study is business coaching strategies, while the subject is the comparative analysis of these strategies. The scientific novelty lies in summarizing accumulated knowledge on both domestic and international coaching strategies currently in use, their target orientation, and implementation technologies. The research is based on domestic and international models applied in business coaching.

Results and Discussion

Business coaching strategies facilitate the achievement of client goals. A review of professional domestic and international literature did not reveal a precise scientific definition of this concept. However, the context in which the term "business coaching strategies" is used implies a set of actions and techniques employed by coaches to achieve results, allowing coaching strategy to be identified as a technological phenomenon.

The relevance of business coaching emerges in response to organizational needs shaped by destabilization (crisis), including the necessity to improve economic indicators, implement organizational innovations, update corporate strategies and management models, address workforce-related challenges, and enhance personal effectiveness among executives and employees [12, p. 74]. Since a coach's role is to activate both professional and personal potential, it is crucial to select appropriate strategies that align with client requests and integrate effective methodologies and tools.

There is no universal strategy for conducting coaching sessions, as the process depends on the specific client request (the problem they seek to resolve) and the tools used by the coach (psychological, economic, and social methodologies).

Various domestic and international strategic coaching concepts exist. N. E. Vasina outlines the coaching process as follows: goal formation, motivation development, overcoming barriers, action plan formulation and implementation, achievement of the set goal, and completion of work with the client (see Figure 1) [3].



Figure 1. Coaching practice algorithm (according to N. E. Vasina)

N. N. Nikulina, S. V. Berezina, and I. I. Ushakov define four key stages of coaching: goal setting and assessment of its feasibility, analysis of success factors and available resources, determination of goal achievement pathways, and selection of action strategies, progress monitoring, and outcome evaluation [8, p. 166].

A. L. Shevyakova, E. S. Petrenko, N. B. Kuttybaeva, and A. K. Urazbekov divide the coaching workflow into two sequential phases with ten stages. The first phase, preparation, includes analyzing previous coaching sessions, setting goals for the current session, and informing participants about the process. The second phase, in-session coaching, involves clarifying objectives and scope, analyzing the problem, generating potential strategies, formulating an action plan, monitoring execution, summarizing the coaching outcomes, and developing further action steps for continued growth [11, p. 1028].

Another widely used strategy in practice is the GROW model (Goals, Reality, Options, Will), developed in 1980 by A. Graham, A. Fine, and J. Whitmore. This model, designed for achieving business goals, consists of four components: goals, reality, options, and willpower. These components represent the coach's workflow stages: the first stage involves identifying the client's request, understanding the problem area, defining objectives, and forecasting results. The second stage includes diagnosing the current state, evaluating prior experiences in problem-solving, and assessing available resources. The third stage focuses on exploring potential solutions, analyzing their advantages, disadvantages, and associated risks. The fourth stage is dedicated to decision-making based on alternative analysis, defining success criteria, identifying potential barriers, and developing measures to overcome them [9].

The FUEL strategy is similar to GROW but focuses on achieving behavioral outcomes among employees. It comprises four stages: structuring the discussion, diagnosing the present situation, defining and analyzing the desired outcome, and formulating an action plan.

The SUCCESS strategy emphasizes identifying barriers to achieving set goals. The first stage involves goal-setting, the second defines conditions for achieving objectives, the third analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the individual in the goal-achievement process, the fourth stage focuses on action planning, the fifth evaluates results, the sixth consolidates the psychological impact of achieved results, and the seventh summarizes the overall process [9].

The STEPPA strategy is designed for goal setting within organizations, enabling structured workflows and the anticipation of potential obstacles. It includes defining the focus of change, identifying objectives, analyzing the client's emotional state, broadening perspectives on challenges, determining an action plan, scheduling activities, and executing the planned tasks in alignment with established goals [9].

The main approaches to coaching process technology are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Main approaches to coaching process technology

№	Authors, Source	Main Stages of Coaching
1	N. E. Vasina [3]	Goal formation, motivation for achievement, overcoming barriers, developing an action plan, implementing actions, achieving the set goal, completing work with the client
2	N. N. Nikulina, S. V. Berezina, I. I. Ushakov [8]	Goal setting and awareness of its feasibility, analysis of key success factors and available resources, determination of ways to achieve goals, selection of action strategies, goal achievement monitoring, and result analysis
3	A. L. Shevyakova, E. S. Petrenko, N. B. Kuttybaeva, A. K. Urazbekov [11]	Preparation for coaching: analysis of previous coaching, setting the goal for the current coaching session, informing about the coaching process. Coaching implementation: identifying the goal and scope of upcoming work, analyzing the problem situation, generating possible strategies, developing an action plan, monitoring plan execution, summarizing coaching outcomes, formulating further development steps
4	GROW Model (A. Graham, A. Fine, J. Whitmore) [9]	Goals – receiving a client request, Reality – diagnosing the current state, Options – identifying problem-solving methods, Will – making decisions based on alternative analysis
5	FUEL Model [15]	1) Frame the Conversation – structuring the discussion, 2) Understand the Current State – diagnosing the current situation, 3) Explore the Desired State – defining and analyzing the desired outcome, 4) Layout a Successful Plan – developing an action plan
6	SUCCESS Strategy [9]	Goal setting, defining conditions for achievement, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the specialist, developing an action plan, evaluating results, psychological reinforcement of outcomes, summarizing results
7	STEPPA Strategy [9]	Identifying the subject of change, defining goals, analyzing the emotional state's impact on productivity, expanding problem perception, formulating an action plan, developing a timeline, executing planned actions in alignment with goals

These strategies differ in their specific focus. Some emphasize the client's independent problem-solving (N. E. Vasina's model, GROW model, N. N. Nikulina's model, etc.), while others focus on understanding and overcoming barriers to goal achievement (SUCCESS strategy). Some strategies center on modeling one's actions in problem situations (A. L. Shevyakova's model, STEPPA).

Regardless of the number of stages, all authors identify three common stages in the coaching process: setting coaching goals, developing an action plan, and achieving the set objectives. These three key components of coaching form a structured system of actions aimed at achieving the intended goal. T. Huebner considers the creation of a strategic document—a roadmap—as a crucial stage in coaching, designed to modernize and systematize every area of the client's business [14].

Based on the above, a working definition of business coaching strategy is proposed: a technologically structured sequence of actions undertaken by a coach, aimed at goal setting, action plan development, and its implementation by activating the professional and personal potential of executives and/or employees of a company.

Conclusion

Despite its relatively recent adoption, coaching has become an integral part of organizational management, functioning simultaneously as a form of psychological counseling for executives and employees, a means of implementing organizational changes, and a type of consulting service aimed at developing optimal business solutions in complex situations. Additionally, coaching serves as a training method for personnel.

Business coaching focuses on aligning organizational development goals with the personal and professional growth of managers and employees. This includes team building, career development, fostering creativity, leadership, emotional intelligence, and enhancing workforce adaptability, all of which ultimately contribute to achieving the primary objective of organizational success.

A coach typically possesses a range of tools and methodologies that facilitate goal setting, attainment, and the evaluation of coaching effectiveness. Various strategies (models) of business coaching have been developed, with their application determined by client requests and specific objectives.

Business coaching strategies can be defined as a technologically structured sequence of actions undertaken by a coach, aimed at setting goals, developing an action plan, and executing it by activating the professional and personal potential of executives and employees.

As noted by N. E. Vasina, no comprehensive evidence base has been compiled in Russia, and at present, no unified platform exists for collecting statistics on coaching effectiveness [3]. However, studies conducted by international researchers have provided data on the impact of business coaching. According to R. Carroll, findings from the Institute of Coaching, a division of Harvard Medical School, indicate that over 70% of coaching recipients report significant improvements in workplace relationships and increased productivity. Financial effectiveness is also evident, as executive coaching studies have shown a 788% return on investment for surveyed companies [13].

Additionally, data from the personal website of renowned coach Tony Robbins [15] presents the following client-reported improvements: 81% improved time management, 70% increased work efficiency, 63% enhanced personal relationships, 60% improved leadership effectiveness, 57% increased confidence and reduced stress, and 47% achieved better health and sustainable results.

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