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# **Developmental coaching**

Working with the self

Second edition

*Tatiana Bachkirova*

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## Introduction

It is now more than 10 years since the first edition of this book was published and a lot has changed in the world, in my life and in the knowledge landscape of coaching during this time. All of these were good reasons for updating this book and for me to be excited about this opportunity. But it was not until I actually opened the document to start re-structuring and re-writing it that I realized how personal this book has been for me. It is not only because I am the sole author on this occasion, unlike the many edited volumes and academic papers that I have worked on. It is not also because it was written with my own voice addressing the reader directly and not being constrained by a restrictive word limit, an unusual luxury for an academic. What made the first edition so personal for me was the time and the circumstances in which I worked on it: I had written it in 9 months, straight after a life-threatening operation, the successful outcome of which was highly uncertain throughout the writing process. It felt then as though it might be the only opportunity to give a life to this book. There was an urgency of sharing what I had arrived at in the process of my inquiry and teaching on the topics that this book addressed. This, of course, could only be done with openness about the doubts I had, ownership of a few developed convictions and gratitude to the sources and influential texts that helped enormously during this process.

Although I have been working on this second edition in a much better place in life in comparisons to 10 years ago, I decided to approach it as my one and only opportunity to revise this book. There are other projects that I would like to now give my attention to. This attitude helped me to engage with the project in much the same spirit as I had for the first edition and it was with this intention that I was making decisions as to what to keep and what to change in terms of the book content. On the whole, it was satisfying to recognize that the essence of the theory that I developed in the first edition had not changed. I still stand by the main propositions both in terms of theory and practical application. However, my thinking on these ideas is now greatly enriched by clearer explanations and more supporting evidence. To start with, new developments in various disciplines over the last 10 years have allowed for new insights to be incorporated and to support some of my key ideas. The rapid growth of research in coaching allowed the applied element of knowledge to be more evidence based, and my in-depth engagement with the philosophy of pragmatism proved to be a perfect container for the theory and practice of my approach.

In addition, since this book was first published, I have been teaching this approach in many programmes and numerous masterclasses for wide international audiences. I have also used it in coaching supervision with those who appreciated this perspective. This allowed me to clarify and sharpen the messages of the book and to engage openly with some sticky points that it was important to be aware of. To support practice, I have developed new activities and accumulated examples that facilitate the learning. This has resulted in my being able to present a more refined theory with greater applicability to practice.

Before I introduce specific sections of this edition and the way they are updated, it is important to explain how I see the current and future challenges of the coaching industry and discipline. This should help to position the main intention of this book.

*The context*

Ten years ago, coaching practice, being famously interdisciplinary, was seen as rather patchy. Having no theories of our own, we, as coaches, enjoyed the benefits of borrowing theoretical and practical ideas from many disciplines that seemed relevant to coaching. At the same time, an important ambition was to be seen as a distinct professional service with many attempts to draw precise boundaries between coaching and other related practices. This concern of the precise ‘differentiation’ has now faded and is something that mainly worries the beginners in the field. Another strong agenda for coaching as a discipline in its formative years was to demonstrate the effectiveness and added value of coaching which led to many studies aimed at addressing just that. This urgency has also gradually decreased and has now modified into the desire to identify not just *if* coaching works but *why* and *how* it works. In terms of practice, professional bodies continue their ‘gatekeeping duties’ to the profession by using various ways of identifying competences and creating differentiating structures for coaching expertise. Although these structures are now defined, established, and generally obeyed, a clear movement for the appreciation of uniqueness and diversity in the nature of coaching expertise is also growing and could be influential in reforming future attitudes.

I see these changes in the coaching field and its accompanying discipline as an expression of our growing need to care about *the substance* of what coaching can offer to the world. Such substance, I believe, can only be uncovered through recognition of the complexity of our practice that is concomitant with the rapidly increasing complexity of the organisations, social life and changing environment within which coaching takes place. We have to move away from our attachment to simplicity, our desire to explain more with less, and to believe that we can find universal formulas that are claimed to work in every coaching situation. The more closely we investigate the nuances of coaching practice, the greater the complexity of what we do is revealed.

With increased complexity and unpredictability of clients’ issues and coaching situations comes infinite variation in *how* they can be addressed. All of this requires coaches to be able to appreciate such diversity and develop flexibility in our strategies. This does not mean that some patterns in our work cannot be identified, or some useful algorithms cannot be used, but it does require a deeper understanding of such patterns and questioning of simple explanations. To face all these challenges, we need to recognize that the complexity of our thinking must match the complexity of our practice. I hope that you, reader, will be able to increase this capacity by various means, including engagement with this book.

One of the main ideas underpinning my main message is to recognise the diversity of our clientele and the need to rise to the challenge of working intelligently with such diversity. This book does not prescribe a particular way of working but invites you, the reader, to look at each approach through the lens of the idea of *development of self in action*. In fact, in this edition I give a name to this theory: *Development of Self in Action – DSA* for short.

I believe that this theoretical approach can inform the adjustments coaches might wish to make in their practice if they are interested in working in a more developmentally-minded way. Those who already identify as developmental coaches can adapt this theory so that it forms an ‘underpinning’ of their practice. For them, I am pleased to add in this edition a definition of developmental coaching that I found something of a challenge to

arrive at previously:

*Developmental coaching is a partnership between the client and the coach that addresses the current needs of the client with a view to increasing their overall capacity to engage with challenges of life and to create a better platform for further growth.*

### *The structure of the book*

In terms of the main logic and structure of the book it still begins with the notion of self and the importance of the multiple way of seeing the self, which is obviously about the *S* aspect of DSA theory. I make an effort to explain this multiplicity from a number of other disciplinary positions as the rest of the book depends on this notion. This part of the book may be heavily theoretical for some, but I hope that engaging with it may be developmental in itself for the curious practitioner.

I also introduce in this first section of the book various theories of adult development. This is where the *D* of the DSA theory begins. These theories are now very popular in the coaching world, but I would like to say at this point that my interest in them might be at some variance to the norm. It is not about fascination with later stages and not even about helping everyone to develop. It is much more about supporting people wherever they are in the difficult world that we live in. I see an unfortunate mismatch between what is typically advertised as the focus of ‘developmental’ coaching and the actual developmental needs of the majority of coaching clientele. It often happens that the needs of coaching clients are not about great ambitions or getting promotions as we might be ‘aspirationally’-disposed to believe. Quite often they just need to feel that their abilities match the expectations of the job they are in, to feel that they can cope with increasing pressures of life and environmental concerns, and to feel understood and accepted by others. In light of this I would like developmental approaches to be more attuned to the real needs of clients.

I believe that if people address their current needs, they become more open to other values and potentially to issues of wider concern. My hope is that we as coaches can contribute to the development of the critical mass of people who understand many problems we face in the world and become ready to act. I would like coaches to be better equipped for working with issues facing the many – not just those seen as already highly developed or members of some sort of organizational elite.

I start *the second section* of the book with the description of and justification for DSA theory as an underpinning of developmental coaching. Although the core of the theory is the same as described in the first edition, I make clearer in this edition in what way this theory is different from others, meaning the explicit focus on action – the *A* of the DSA. What I am concerned with is how we act and what allows us to act. In this section I also elaborate on the philosophy of developmental practice and specific aspects of it, such as mechanisms of development and a developmental framework that allows for differentiation of clients’ themes for coaching.

*The third part* of the book is about coaching practice that can be properly adjusted for serving clients in a way

that is harmonious to their developmental needs and potential trajectory. I also clearly differentiate my position on coaching the soul. This strand of the book retains its importance but now stands separately from the developmental stages in order not to create a confusion between values and abilities. An important new addition to the book is also a section on the education and supervision of coaches – the main focus of my academic and professional life.

Just a short note to mention how I use some typical terminology... For simplicity throughout the book I call the two members of the coaching partnership ‘coach’ and ‘client’, rather than ‘coach’ and ‘coachee’. I will refer to the organization that sponsors coaching or plays an involved role in this process as an ‘organization’, rather than an ‘organizational client’. I try to use plural throughout the book, but when it makes more sense to use singular rather plural, I will use ‘she’ referring to a coach, and ‘he’ referring to a client just for clarity and simplicity, not for any other reason.

*And finally . . .*

I offer DSA theory and a developmental coaching approach as one possible way of seeing coaching on the wider scale of the evolutionary process and at the same time as an intimate one-to-one interaction with a focus on a concrete theme important for a client. However, as with any theory, this is only one particular map to a vast territory. I hope it makes sense to you as it does to me, but I am fully aware that it may be also just a story that appeals to my prejudices and preferences. I hope that this theory can be further developed by others who will be interested in questioning and researching it. We need more research in coaching and I am looking forward to new data that will help to support or disprove any of the propositions contained in this book.