

## John Whitmore: The GROW Model

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### Unlocking potential

The key to unlocking the potential, which coaching provides, is the ability to be aware. Awareness means that the coach can gather facts and information, and determine the relevance of these, being already in possession of an understanding of the dynamics of the organisation in question. Due to the nature of coaching, and the fact that it deals with human nature, an awareness of psychology on the part of the coach is also important.

Another of Whitmore's central concepts is responsibility. An acceptance of responsibility results in a commitment, which optimises performance. He emphasises the need to move away from a 'blame culture', where responsibility is constantly shifted onto someone else.

According to Whitmore, the job of a manager can be simplified to two central tasks: to get the job done, and to grow his/her staff. If the principles of coaching are applied to that job, then both of those tasks are undertaken simultaneously. Therefore, the title of Whitmore's model is rather appropriate.

### The GROW Model

The GROW model is based around the theory that using questions rather than instructions in an organisation will foster change more readily. The acronym GROW stands for Goal, Reality, Options and Will. It provides a relatively simple framework for structuring a coaching session, and has been adopted by many of the world's major organisations.

- **Goal:** After discussion, a target to be reached in the session should be developed.
- **Reality:** It is important that this session is grounded in reality. The person being coached should be able to assess their present situation, and give concrete examples of their performance to date. Feedback should be provided at this point.
- **Options:** This stage offers the opportunity for the person being coached to suggest possible courses of action, and together with any that the coach puts forward, these should be evaluated and a choice arrived at.
- **Will:** The final part of the process involves the person being coached making decisions and having the willpower to commit to them. Future steps to be taken should be confirmed and the coach should agree with the client how they will be supported through the ongoing development process.

Under these headings Whitmore suggests types of questions to develop the session as productively as possible.

#### Goal:

- How do you want your career to progress?
- What outcome do you want from this process?
- How do you feel this process will help you?
- Will this session be sufficient to cover the points you need to cover?
- What would it take for this process to be a success?

#### Reality:

- How do you see your style of management/leadership?
- How do you think others view your style of management/leadership?
- Can you provide examples of this?

**Options:**

- How could the situation change?
- How could you improve the situation?
- Can you provide some specific options for action?
- Are you aware of the possible downsides to those options?
- Which of these suggested options would you like to try?

**Will:**

- How can you put these options into action?
- Are you aware of any obstacles to these actions?
- What further support do you need from your coach?
- Does your organisation offer in-house support for change?
- If not, can you push for an in-house support system?
- Can you put this action plan into writing?

It is important to be aware that at all times in this process the client is gently being nudged towards developing their own action plan rather than being ordered along a certain route. Due to this more client-led approach, the GROW model is seen as being less directive than some other forms of coaching.

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[1] Sir John Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance: GROWing People, Performance and Purpose* (Nicholas Brealey, 2002).

[2] Timothy Gallwey was a tennis player in the 1970. He wrote *The Inner Game of Tennis* in 1975, which put forward a new way of coaching the sport. Gallwey believed in each person's innate ability to learn and perform. He saw the role of the coach as a facilitator of the player's own awareness of their development.

## **Co-Active Coaching** (Laura Whitworth, Henry Kimsey-House and Phil Sandahl)

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The central principle of Co-Active Coaching is that both parties actively collaborate in the coaching partnership. It is based on the following four fundamental principles:

- the client is naturally resourceful and capable of finding the answers to their challenges themselves
- the agenda comes from the client and is the key focus of the coaching relationship
- the coaching addresses the client as a whole person
- the coaching relationship is a 'designed alliance' for promoting action and learning, in which the client, and not the coach, is ultimately in control

The model concentrates on the development of specific coaching skills and techniques rather than on the content or structure of a coaching session. A visual representation of the model can be found at the end of this article.

### **Client's Agenda**

The sole purpose of the Co-Active coaching relationship is to meet the client's needs and help them to get the results they want. The authors highlight three important elements of the client's agenda, which features at the very centre of the model:

- fulfilment (achieving success and reaching one's full potential)
- balance (addressing all aspects of the client's life)
- process (focusing on the means as well as the end result)

### **The Designed Alliance**

The coaching relationship is the framework for effective coaching, creating the conditions that enable the client to achieve their goals. As such it is represented as a circle on the model, encompassing the client's agenda. As the relationship is tailored specifically to meet the client's needs and is a collaborative partnership between two equals, the authors refer to it as a 'designed alliance'.

It is the coaching relationship, not the coach, that empowers the client to meet their challenges, as both parties grant power to the relationship rather than to each other. As the client plays a key role in designing it and is ultimately in control, long-term change is therefore more likely. The notion that learning is more effective when individuals create it themselves and take ownership of it ('Total Learner Involvement') is supported by many leading thinkers in the field of Accelerated Learning, an approach to people development based on the science of how the brain learns best.

### **Five Key Coaching Skills**

It is no mistake that the coach does not appear on the model. As the central focus is on the client and their agenda, the coach as a person is invisible. The coach's role is to create the context in which the client can work on their agenda. The authors highlight five key 'contexts' that the coach brings to the coaching that allow this to happen. These could also be described as the key skills of coaching.

## **Listening**

Co-Active Coaching attempts to offer a deeper insight into the fundamentals of effective listening skills than the superficial level offered by many coaching books.

The authors offer a three-level listening model for helping the coach to understand what constitutes truly effective listening:

1. internal listening – the listener focuses on what is being said and interprets what it means to them
2. focused listening – the listener becomes detached from their own thoughts and opinions, focusing instead on the speaker and understanding the speaker's perspective, and looking out for not only what is said, but also what is not said and how it is said
3. global listening – the listener uses all senses and tunes in to the most subtle of signals to pick up on every aspect of the speaker's communication, including emotions, values and motivations

However, the key to effective listening, according to the authors, is not only in paying attention to all the information that is being received, but also in deciding what to do with this information. The coach creates an impact on the client by steering the discussion appropriately, based on the information that they have received through careful listening.

## **Intuition**

As intuition can be vague and rather difficult to explain or verify, it is often regarded as unreliable, and is dismissed and mistrusted by many. According to the authors, however, it is 'one of the most powerful gifts a coach brings to coaching'.[2]

It is not our intuition that fails us, they argue, but the interpretation that we attach to it when attempting to express it.

The authors encourage the coach to think of intuition as an intelligence that can be finely tuned with practice. By trusting it, learning to relax and tune into how it is received (through the senses, for example, or as a 'gut feeling'), and being careful not to attach interpretations to it, the coach can use intuition as an effective tool. The best way of doing this, they say, is by expressing it in the moment as soon as it is received.

The authors also make a distinction between intuition and judgement, and stress the importance of not regarding intuition as being 'right'. It is an observation, and should be communicated as such rather than stated as fact.

## **Curiosity**

As the central tenet of Co-Active Coaching is that the client is capable of finding the answers to their challenges themselves, questioning is a fundamental skill of the Co-Active coach.

The authors are keen, however, to stress the difference between questions that merely elicit information, and questions that demonstrate a genuine interest in understanding the client and helping them to explore their world.

Unskilled use of questioning can lead to a defensive attitude in clients, especially if they feel that a 'correct' answer is sought. This can cause clients to either resist or give the reply that they believe is wanted. Curious

questioning, however, breaks down defences, encouraging the client to explore themselves and give an answer from within.

When the coach is curious, they are not in 'expert' mode. Curiosity demonstrates that the coach doesn't have all the answers and is genuinely interested in working with the client to find them.

This helps to build rapport and trust, and is also tremendously flattering and confidence-building for the client.

In this way, the coach is able to reach deep into the heart of issues with the client, making important discoveries that can contribute a great deal to the client's learning.

### **Action/Learning**

Co-Active Coaching provides a framework of accountability for generating change. The mutual support of the coaching partnership creates focus and discipline, helping the client to identify and measure their actions and learning.

Accountability, explain the authors, does not mean attaching blame or passing judgement, it simply means that the client reports on, or gives an account of, their actions in order to create feedback and forward the learning. As the agenda and the results belong to the client, the coach puts the client in charge and holds them accountable for achieving them.

For the coaching to be successful, it is essential for the coach to set expectations early on in the relationship, ensuring that the client understands that they are ultimately in charge, and making it clear that the coach will not force any actions or pass judgement on performance, but will notice and enquire about intended actions that have not been taken.

In Co-Active Coaching, claim the authors, the coach will 'see effective ways to rigorously hold others to account and do it with a light hand'.

### **Self-Management**

As the client is the focal point of the coaching relationship and the key aim is to help the client to work on their own self-management, there is no place for the coach to impose their own judgements and opinions. It would, of course, be impossible for anyone to deny the existence of personal thoughts and feelings, but the key, explain the authors, is in being able to recognise when they begin to intrude on the coaching session and put them on hold until after the session.

In this sense, the coach's well-being is as important as the client's. The coach must prepare themselves emotionally, physically and mentally to help the client by ensuring that their own fulfillment, balance and process are in alignment before the session.

Setting aside personal distractions, however, does not mean that the coach should avoid being direct or truthful when necessary. The authors point out that coaching, for both parties, cannot always take place within the 'comfort zone'. Often, exploring the most difficult or sensitive issues can lead to significant discoveries, and skirting them means that some of the most important learning points for the client are therefore lost.

In this way, the Co-Active Coaching model resembles Mary-Beth O'Neill's 'Backbone and Heart' approach to coaching, in that it expresses the importance of having the courage to articulate oneself clearly while still being in tune with the client.

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[1] Laura Whitworth et al, *Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life* (Davies-Black Publishing, 1998). For more information on the Coaches Training Institute (CTI), see [www.thecoaches.com](http://www.thecoaches.com).

[2] See *Co-Active Coaching*, p 9.

## **James Flaherty: Evoking Excellence in Others**

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Flaherty breaks down coaching to its very foundations. Rather than outlining a set of tips and techniques to apply to the coaching process, he offers coaches the opportunity to ask themselves fundamental questions about the way they work with people. He aims to prompt reflection rather than to prescribe particular coaching methods, and as such takes a flexible approach to coaching.

### **The products of coaching**

Although he does not prescribe particular methods, Flaherty does outline what he believes the desired outcomes or 'products' of coaching should be, and as a result proposes behaviour as the key to coaching, as it is through behaviour outcomes are reached.

He defines the products of effective coaching as:

- lasting high-performance
- the ability to self-correct behaviour
- the ability to continually self-generate improvement

### **The premise of coaching**

Flaherty's alternative theory, 'The Premise of Coaching', proposes a deeper understanding of, and respect for, human behaviour. Its central focus is on understanding the client's perception of events (or 'structure of interpretation') and how this guides their behaviour. He argues that it is not stimuli that lead to behaviour, but people's interpretation of the world around them. By using appropriate language and providing appropriate practices, the coach can allow the client to make observations about themselves, recognise different interpretations, and put them into action to change their behaviour.

There are similarities between Flaherty's Premise of Coaching and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), one of the concepts of which is 'the map is not the territory'. In other words, there is no reality, only what we each perceive. We therefore cannot assume that everyone's perceptions will be the same, and must explicitly share each other's perceptions in order to understand each other.

### **The five principles of coaching**

Building on this theoretical foundation are Flaherty's five principles of coaching, which can be outlined as follows:

- a relationship of mutual respect, trust and freedom of expression is an essential basis for all coaching
- coaching focuses on achieving outcomes, based on continual feedback
- learning is two-way: the coach has the potential to gain as much from the partnership as the client
- clients are not empty vessels: the coaching must fit in with their own existing commitments and interpretation of the world
- coaching is not simply about applying a series of techniques and processes: it requires flexibility and innovation

## **The flow of coaching**

He applies his theory and principles to the coaching process, which he terms 'the flow of coaching':

- establish a relationship to create a strong foundation for the coaching
- identify an opening and offer coaching as a genuine partnership
- observe and assess the client's competency, situation and 'interpretation of structure'
- enrol the client, agree mutual commitment, make the coach/client partnership explicit, and share the work
- define the structure and carry out the coaching itself

This process has a clear focus on understanding the client and their needs and serves as a useful guide to setting up the coaching partnership. What it neglects to include, however, is ongoing monitoring of the partnership and post-development review and evaluation.

Flaherty focuses on an area that he claims many books on the topic of coaching neglect: an explicit understanding of human beings. Other books do discuss the coaching relationship and stress the importance of concentrating all efforts on the client and their agenda. What makes Flaherty's approach refreshing, however, is his attempt to move the coach away from viewing coaching as a collection of tips, techniques and models. Instead, he encourages the coach to develop explicit theories on human behaviour and understand each unique individual's motivations and perspective of the world.

## **Conclusion**

Although Flaherty outlines general processes, such as the 'Flow of Coaching' his principal aim is to offer theories that stimulate thinking and encourage coaches to develop their own practices and approaches. He places firm responsibility on the coach to understand the client's 'structure of interpretation' that leads to their behaviour, in order to help them to see other perspectives and alter their interpretation and behaviour as a result.

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[1] See James Flaherty, *Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others* (Butterworth Heinemann, 1999).

[2] As defined by the New Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford University Press, 2001).

## Carl Binder: The Six Boxes

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The 'Six Boxes' model[1] was developed by Carl Binder, a leader in the field of Human Performance Technology,[2] co-founder of Binder Riha Associates, and a former Associate Director of a human learning research laboratory. The 'Six Boxes' are based upon Thomas F Gilbert's Behaviour Engineering Model.

The 1978 book in which Gilbert's model is outlined, Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance,[3] is still in print today, and is regarded as a classic work on human performance. It set out to provide a precise definition of human competence and to find a way of measuring this. Gilbert also wanted to find out why people became incompetent, and to formulate a model for engineering human competence.

Gilbert's Behaviour Engineering Model is based on his division of the factors affecting human behaviour into three personal and three environmental factors. The personal factors are those that people bring to the job, and the environmental factors are the supports that enable people to function effectively at work. Gilbert believed that if these factors were all present, then competence or even exemplary work would be achieved. If any of these were taken away, then the result was incompetence.

Carl Binder's model updates Gilbert's concept of six factors that influence human behaviour: three environmental, and three individual.

This updated version is more easily understood and explicable to most managers, as it omits some of the weighty intellectual terminology, thus eliminating the need to understand theoretical behavioural engineering. The original title of the model has been changed to 'Six Boxes' in order to move the emphasis away from controlling individuals' behaviour, which has certain negative connotations.

The model presents six major influencing factors on human behaviour, and splits them into environmental and individual factors. The basic premise of the model is that in order for people to function effectively, they need to have input from all these six factors, or 'boxes'. So, a coach can use the six 'boxes' to analyse the individual and identify the source of any gaps in performance.

### Environmental factors

The three 'boxes' of environmental factors are:

#### 1. Expectations and feedback

This first 'box' deals with the organisation's expectations of what the individual should achieve, and its methods of giving that individual information on their performance with respect to those initial expectations.

#### 2. Tools and resources

The second 'box' is concerned with the range of interventions at the organisation's disposal, including everything from computers to consultants. The 'Six Boxes' model also includes heat, light and other environmental factors.

#### 3. Consequences and incentives

The final environmental 'box' includes both positive and negative consequences and incentives, monetary or otherwise. It deals with not only workplace, but also social repercussions.

## **Individual factors**

The three individual factors are:

### **1. Skills and knowledge**

This 'box' covers both training and non-training processes that are designed to further educate the individual. There is a fine line between what may be included here, and what constitutes a part of the Tools and Resources 'box'.

### **2. Capacity (selection and assignment)**

This 'box' concerns unique personal qualities, such as physical or mental ability, that the individual brings to the organisation. The organisation has to direct these capacities into suitable assignments in order to make the most from them.

### **3. Motives and preferences**

As with the other 'boxes', the title is relatively self-explanatory, and deals with an individual's attitude towards the job, and work environment.

## **Possible uses of the model**

Binder puts forward a selection of suggestions for uses of this model as a coaching tool:

### **Achieving a consensus between different elements of the client organisation for coaching efforts**

When dealing with a variety of individuals from the client organisation, who may well come from different areas and so have their own agendas to follow, this model can be useful as a way of drawing together the disparate concerns. Each individual can insert the areas of their concern into an appropriate 'box', and the varied concerns can be drawn together through discussion.

### **Producing ideas for improving performance**

The 'Six Boxes' model illustrates how improved performance is dependent upon all six areas being in concert. For example, the area that may appear most obvious to many people for improving performance is 'skills and knowledge', but investment in this area of the organisation will not reap any rewards if the other areas are lacking.

### **Following those ideas through**

Ideas for improving performance are no good if they are not taken forward and followed through properly. The model can be of use here to make sure that the target audience for the changes is maintaining the initiative. For example, if the changes are to be effective, they need to cover all the elements in the 'Six Boxes' so that individuals know their expectations, the resources at their disposal, and the consequences of following or not following the action plan.

### **Everyday Performance**

In the same ways as described above (i.e. performance will not undergo second order (lasting) change if any area of the model is neglected) the 'boxes' can be used to make sure that everyday performance is at maximum capacity. Managers can use the 'boxes' as a guide and a reminder of the factors affecting human behaviour and, therefore, performance.

### **Affecting organisational change**

Again, the model can be used to emphasise the necessity of change being spread throughout the factors, and is a useful tool to draw together different departments within an organisation. It enables those trying to communicate to speak to each other in a common language.

The major key point in this model is that if any one of these 'boxes' is neglected, the performance of the individual is compromised. Overall change comes about through the implementation of change in all six areas. If one is ignored then any change will be limited to first order (temporary) change only.

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[1] Carl Binder, 'The Six Boxes: A Descendent of Gilbert's Behavior Engineering Model' in *Performance Improvement*, No 32 Vol 6, pp 48-52. Available online at: [www.binder-riha.com/sixboxes.html](http://www.binder-riha.com/sixboxes.html).

[2] The field of Human Performance Technology (HPT) is defined by the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) as: 'a systematic approach to improving productivity and competence, [using] a set of methods and procedures – and a strategy for solving problems – for realizing opportunities related to the performance of people.' For more information on HPT, see the ISPI website at [www.ispi.org](http://www.ispi.org).

[3] Thomas Gilbert, *Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance* (International Society for Performance Improvement, 1996).

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*Source; NHS Scotland, The Organisational Development Toolkit.*