

SECTION I

Theoretical Perspectives

1

The Psychodynamic Approach to Coaching

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss how psychodynamic thinking can inform coaching, in particular showing how it provides a method for working with the unconscious factors underlying human behaviour. The chapter is structured as follows:

- The distinctive features of the approach: making the unconscious conscious; creating a holding environment; unconscious emotional regulation; defence mechanisms; transference and countertransference.
- Methods and techniques: establishing and maintaining a holding environment; eliciting personal stories; the use of silence; introspection; thinking and the good enough coach; making links.
- Application: skills and performance coaching; developmental coaching; executive and leadership coaching; team coaching; cross-cultural coaching
- Evaluating the psychodynamic approach: strengths, limitations and best use.

The term psychodynamic refers to a broad lineage of models that focus on the role of unconscious processes in human behaviour and, more specifically, on the dynamic relationship between different parts of the mind. Beginning with the ground-breaking work of Sigmund Freud (1922), psychodynamic thinking has been constantly evolving for over a hundred years with numerous influential contributors (e.g. Jung, 1956; Klein, 1988; Winnicott, 1971). The contemporary importance of these ideas has been reinforced through research demonstrating

the power of early attachments on adult behaviour (Bowlby, 1988; Goldberg, Muir, & Kerr, 1995), and developments in neuroscience establishing the role of non-conscious processes in emotional development (e.g. Solms, 1996; Schore, 2003; Siegel, 2010).

Main assumptions

There are four key assumptions that underpin a psychodynamic approach to coaching. First, human behaviour is powerfully influenced by unconscious motives; this means that the coach is constantly curious about what might be implicit, hidden or a blind spot for the coachee. Second, much of human behaviour is unconsciously shaped by past experiences; this means that as part of coaching conversations the coach is likely to invite the coachee to talk about past experiences, and to explore links or resonances between past and present situations. The third assumption is that different parts of the mind can be in conflict with each other; this means that the coach is curious about apparent inconsistencies in what the coachee says or does, and encourages the coachee to become aware of mixed or conflictual feelings. The fourth assumption is that there can be unconscious communication between people; this means that the coach periodically brings attention to her or his own bodily sensations and emotions as possible clues about unconscious communications from the coachee (the countertransference). With these key assumptions in mind, we turn to explore in more detail the distinctive features of the psychodynamic approach, followed by a consideration of its methods, its applications and an evaluation of its strengths and limitations.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Making the unconscious conscious

The primary task of a psychodynamic approach to coaching is to enable coachees to have more choice and freedom. Before coaching, the lack of freedom is represented by coachees having a relatively fixed sense of identity that has been unconsciously shaped by experience. The great potential of psychodynamic coaching is to make the unconscious conscious, to increase self-awareness, to understand the subtle ways in which coachees can limit themselves, and so learn how to approach new challenges with more awareness and freedom. However, this may not be simple to achieve. Unconscious material is often emotionally laden material – it has stayed out of awareness for a good reason. It can be psychologically painful to acknowledge and assimilate. For this reason, the coach needs to understand how to create a ‘holding environment’ for the coachee.

Creating a holding environment

The concept of the ‘holding environment’ (Winnicott, 1965) describes a physical, and perhaps more significantly, a psychological space in which coachees feel safe enough to be open with

their thoughts and feelings; to be able to share their anxieties, frustrations, aspirations and deepest hopes. The metaphor of 'holding' comes from the idea of a mother's attuned response to, and handling of, her baby. In psychodynamic coaching, 'holding' takes the form of being sensitively attuned to the underlying emotional agenda of the coachee, and making choices about pace, focus and questioning that meet the coachee's readiness. The practical methods for creating a sense of holding are discussed further in the section on Methods and Techniques.

Unconscious emotional regulation

A contemporary psychodynamic perspective views the regulation of emotions (rather than instincts) as lying at the heart of much of human behaviour (Schorer, 2003). As a result of previous relationships, particularly those with our parents or earliest caregivers, we develop distinctive but unconscious strategies for regulating our emotions and for building up a sense of self-identity. These early emotional habits tend to persist into adulthood because they become part of the developing brain's neuronal structure and brain chemistry (Gerhardt, 2004). These unconscious strategies are the engine of what Freud first described as 'the dynamic unconscious', an out-of-awareness part of the mind that shapes how we relate to ourselves and to others.

The goal of the coach is essentially to expand the coachee's capacity for emotional regulation, that is, to enable the coachee, through the trust and containment of the relationship with the coach, to revisit difficult emotional territory in a way that is contained, so that the need for defensive strategies is reduced, and in which thinking rather than reacting can take place. By creating a space in which feelings can be experienced and labelled in language, they become phenomena that can be looked at and understood. Such a reworking of inner emotional territory, from disconnected sensations of emotional distress that have to be instantly defended against, to meaningfully connected patterns of experience, is transformative because what was once unconscious has been brought into awareness.

Defence mechanisms

Defence mechanisms, such as repression, denial and projection, are specific examples of unconscious patterns of emotional regulation that operate to avoid or minimize emotions that are currently experienced as too difficult to tolerate. The particular form of our defences develop unconsciously in childhood and later, in situations where we perceive that others will not adequately regulate our emotions, or where our emotions will be perceived as socially unacceptable. For example, coachees in organizations often use intellectualization as a way of dealing with upsetting personnel issues, projection as a way of blaming another department for organizational failings, and displacement as a way of keeping busy with unimportant details rather than tackling more important but anxiety-provoking issues.

In coaching the goal is not so much to name specific defence mechanisms but to recognize when the coachee is enacting an unconscious strategy of emotional regulation; they are a clue that the coachee is in psychological territory that feels problematic or overwhelming. In time, with sufficient holding and with the development of a working alliance underpinned by trust and rapport, the coach is likely to gain some understanding of the underlying emotional agenda, and so gradually move towards exploring the nature of these feelings with the coachee, their origins, their development, and their impact on current behaviour and performance.

Transference and countertransference

One of the primary tools for gaining access to the coachee's implicit and potentially limiting interpersonal strategies is through the dynamics of transference and countertransference. Transference refers to the implicit assumptions that we make about others based on our past experiences. If a coachee has experienced frowns from a routinely disapproving parent, he/she may attribute to a frowning coach disapproval that was actually an expression of confusion. If a coachee has experienced a parent's preoccupation with time as somewhat rejecting, then the coachee may experience the coach's strict management of session times as rejecting rather than appropriately bounded. Transference can refer to any piece of unconscious learning that is applied to a new context, but its impact is most tangible when the transference occurs in relation to the coach, for example with the coachee unconsciously behaving towards the coach as if he/she is the coachee's boss or colleague or parent. If the coach is vigilant to how he or she is being perceived by, and related to, by the coachee, the coach can gain some understanding of how the coachee is unconsciously projecting ('transferring') an aspect of another person, or of themselves, onto the coach.

One of the ways that the coach may come to understand the transference – the coachee's unconscious projection of aspects of a past relationship onto the coach – is through the countertransference. Countertransference refers to the feelings, bodily sensations, thoughts and behaviours that can be unconsciously evoked in the coach by the coachee. This apparently mysterious transmission of unconscious feelings is understood in terms of a further mechanism, projective identification. Projective identification, a concept originally introduced by Klein, is a process where the unconscious emotional experience of one person can be communicated to the unconscious of another. This is thought to occur through subtle nuances of behaviour, such as facial expressions and modulations in the pace, tone and rhythm of the voice that are processed rapidly, non-consciously, and non-verbally in parts of the human brain (possibly the mirror neurons; Iacoboni, 2009) that are also linked to our perception of bodily sensations (Schoore, 2003). By tuning into bodily feelings and sensations, the coach can experience the coachee's non-conscious signals and so come to learn something about the coachee's disowned emotional state.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

There are a number of methods and techniques that are particularly characteristic of the coach working from a psychodynamic perspective. These are: establishing and maintaining a ‘holding environment’, eliciting personal stories, the use of silence, introspection, thinking and the ‘good enough’ coach, and making links.

Establishing and maintaining a ‘holding environment’

I have already described the importance of the psychological ‘holding’ that arises from the coach’s attunement and responsiveness to the coachee. We can think of this attuned ‘holding’ as paradoxically offering the coachee both boundary and space; the boundary of appropriate challenge and clear expectations, and the space to follow impulses and to flow freely and creatively with associations and connecting ideas. Psychological holding needs to be matched and supported by certain practical conditions, such as setting up clear boundaries for coaching sessions, both in terms of time and space. The coaching should take place in a quiet, secluded room, away from distractions such as the possibility of colleagues gazing in through a glass window. It is also important for the coach to manage the boundary of time clearly and firmly, expecting to start and end at the agreed times.

A further aspect of ‘holding’ comes from setting clear expectations at the outset of coaching, including the idea that conversations will explore past experiences and the patterns of learning from those experiences that may be playing through in the present. Many coachees are relieved to be given permission to talk widely and fully about themselves and their lives, while others are initially uncomfortable or embarrassed about the idea of talking so personally. In my experience this discomfort is often based on a concern that personal recollections may be upsetting and may evoke strong feelings of vulnerability. In such circumstances, it is useful to normalize the idea that visiting a full range of emotional experience is part and parcel of the coaching experience, and that exploring how much we can trust another person with our vulnerability is often an important learning edge.

Eliciting personal stories

Much of coaching is either concerned with what is happening in the present, or with what the coachee would like to happen in the future. However, in the psychodynamic approach we also want to explore the coachee’s past experiences and possible links to their present circumstances. This can be achieved in two, complementary ways. First, by asking coachees in one of their early coaching sessions to give a detailed account of their life to date, starting with their childhood and their earliest relationships with siblings and parents, and continuing forward through the stages of education, career history, and including key events in their personal lives. By

inquiring into key reactions, responses and feelings at times of joy, achievement, challenge, difficulty, setback, loss, etc., we can gain a very rich picture of our coachees' lives, and how their experiences may have shaped them. We can also note how they tell their story, what they gloss over and what they get caught by, as unconscious clues to possible areas of difficulty (see Holmes, 2001, and Lee & Roberts, 2010, for a discussion of narrative coherence).

In addition to a biographical account towards the beginning of a coaching assignment, the coach may also invite coachees to consider possible resonances between a current situation and something that happened in the past. For example, I may say to a coachee who is currently feeling very stuck and disempowered by a boss, 'if you cast your mind back, does this current situation remind you of any other situation from earlier in your life, perhaps in previous job roles, or at school, or perhaps even from your childhood?' If questions like this are asked in an open, exploratory way, as an invitation to think broadly and inquisitively, coachees develop an increasing sense of themselves as characters who are, at least to some extent, shaped by experience, and whose present-day beliefs and styles are often implicit, unconscious extensions of those earlier experiences.

The use of silence

Coachees commonly assume that a coaching session should be filled with conversation. However, if the coach and the coachee are to have time to reflect, and to allow associations and links to emerge, it is important to foster the value of silences. There are a number of ways in which the coach can encourage the use of silence. First, the coach can model the possibility of silence in sessions by taking time to pause and reflect before speaking. In this way the coach demonstrates that, unlike most day-to-day conversations, pausing and going inward to examine what is arising within is a valid aspect of the work. Second, sometimes it is useful for the coach to ask the coachee how they feel about silences, and possibly to invite them to experiment with what it feels like to pause and reflect during sessions. Third, it can be useful to direct coachees towards introspection (see below), which usually involves a degree of silent reflection.

Introspection

Learning to introspect is important for the coachee because it provides the basis for self-knowledge and understanding. Some coachees will naturally turn inwards in response to a question, examining their inner worlds and weighing what is true for them. However, many coachees spend little time looking within themselves and may need to be supported in learning how to introspect. I have found it useful to teach coachees about the distinction between thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and actions (these categories are used in cognitive behavioural coaching), and to ask them to describe what they are currently experiencing in each of these domains as a particular issue is discussed. In my experience it is particularly useful to spend time helping

coachees to tune into their bodily sensations and emotions, because they can be quite disconnected from these domains of experience. Opening up these aspects of experience as territories for investigation can in itself be a source of revelation, showing how formerly out-of-awareness body signals and emotions are directly linked to particular thoughts and impulses to act.

Thinking and the good enough coach

Working with the transference and the countertransference are challenging aspects of the psychodynamic approach, because disowned feelings of the coachee can be unconsciously projected into the coach, and containing these feelings often challenges to the limit the coach's own capacity for emotional regulation. They can find themselves filled with feelings of anger, or disgust, or desire, or boredom, and with a blocked capacity for thinking. In my experience such disruptions to the coach's thinking are not uncommon (Bion, 1962). The goal for the coach, and I think coaching supervision can be invaluable here, is to find a way to reinstate the capacity to think. The coach needs to operate with a dual mode of attention, to attend to his/her own self-regulatory functioning and at the same time participate fully with the coachee in mutual exploration. The 'good enough coach' – an adaptation of Winnicott's phrase, the 'good-enough mother' – is not someone who always gets this right – rather it is a coach who manages to return him/herself to a state of regulation, having temporarily been overwhelmed. It is probable that the coachee, at an unconscious level, perceives this two-stage process, the rupture in the holding environment, and then the coach's return to a thinking state, and so gains an implicit, experiential knowledge that such feelings can be contained. Working at this level is undoubtedly demanding on the coach, but it lays the ground for a fundamental shift in the coachee's capacity to think about feelings, and clears the way for making more explicit links, such as those between past experiences and their impact on the present.

Making links

In making links (or interpretations as they were described by Freud, 1953) the coach is helping coachees to develop a more integrated self-awareness, and a more self-compassionate understanding of why they are the way they are. The naming of experiences – memories, thoughts, feelings, aspirations – and making links between different aspects of experience enables them to be perceived and expressed as part of a more coherent sense of identity and personal narrative. One of the most powerful links that the psychodynamic approach seeks to make is between past and present. In my experience coachees will often make links themselves, simply by being invited to explore possible past experiences that resonate with present situations. However, this is not always the case, and so it is important for the coach to offer possible links or formulations in a very tentative, way, inviting the coachee to 'try on' an interpretation of his or her behaviour, rather than immediately to accept it or dismiss it.

For example, a coachee had a reputation for being difficult and abrasive with his colleagues, and his career was stalling as a consequence. After working with this man for some time, and based on what he had shared with me about his early life and relationship with his father, I suggested to him that his difficulties with current colleagues were, in part, an unconscious rerun of his unresolved frustration with his father's lack of attention for him (a transference interpretation). He was initially quite dismissive of this interpretation, and seemed to become annoyed with me as if I was his heartless and mis-attuned father. But, over several sessions, as we worked through this idea, he was increasingly able to acknowledge its relevance for him. By recognizing the unconscious agenda driving his behaviour he was able to look at his current relationships more objectively, and to discern ways in which he could influence and collaborate with his boss and colleagues more effectively.

APPLICATION

In this section I look at the psychodynamic approach in relation to five types of coaching: skills and performance coaching; developmental coaching; executive and leadership coaching; team coaching; and cross-cultural coaching.

Skills and performance coaching

Viewed as a method for optimizing performance in organizations, skills and performance coaching has become an established management development intervention. On the face of it the psychodynamic approach does not appear to be the most obvious fit in a context where the emphasis is on fulfilling certain behavioural competency standards. However, in many situations behavioural change cannot be achieved without understanding the underlying issues blocking change.

I introduced the concept of ACE patterns (Lee, 2006), integrated patterns of Actions, Cognitions and Emotions, to make explicit the link between unconscious emotional issues and their impact on behaviour. For example, a junior manager who had not managed to improve her presentation skills, despite being sent on various skills development workshops, received a single session of coaching with me. She described how she would freeze when in front of an audience. I asked her to describe this experience of freezing (the Action) in detail, and then to look back through her history for times when she might have first had this experience. She reported that she would freeze like this when seeing her father's blank face as she sought his permission to do something, and went on to describe her deep fear (Emotion) of his disapproval. The link that we made was that she was unconsciously projecting her father's disapproval onto the blank faces of the audience when she made a presentation, and consequently froze with fear. By recognizing this link, she could begin to approach presentations less dogged by her unconscious fear

of her father's disapproval. This example illustrates that improving performance often requires coachees to increase their awareness of unconscious emotional blocks, and the psychodynamic approach provides an elegant method for making links and raising the coachee's self-awareness.

Developmental coaching

Development coaching is concerned with the development of the individual as a whole. While other types of coaching, such as performance or career coaching, are more focused on enabling the coachee to develop in a specific area, development coaching has a broad remit encompassing a coachee's personal life as well as his/her work life. Thus, development coaching might explore such areas as overarching purpose, underpinning values, signature talents and strengths, key obstacles, career ambitions, and personal and work relationships. The breadth of the approach means that developmental coaching is likely to draw on a range of theoretical traditions, including that of psychodynamic thinking.

One of the central goals of both developmental coaching and the psychodynamic approach to coaching is to increase awareness, since awareness of self and others is viewed as the foundation for making choices that are consistent with the purpose, values, ambitions and strengths of the coachee. The psychodynamic approach can be particularly useful in this context, because many people find that as life goes on they have gradually lost sight of their core passions and convictions; life has become a series of compromises, diluted ambitions, disillusioned hopes, opportunities avoided due to fear. For example, I worked with a senior manager in the pharmaceutical industry whose passion for healing, his core motivation for entering the industry, had been forgotten amid the daily challenge of meeting revenue and profit targets and managing a large sales force. Through an exploration of the stories of people he found most inspiring, he recalled how much he had enjoyed working in a health centre as a student. He also recalled that his father, a self-made businessman, had disapproved of his altruistic, 'softer' side, and had strongly directed him towards a business career. He realized that his desire for his father's approval had unconsciously influenced his choices over many years. This psychodynamic awareness opened up a much wider exploration of his choices, as he became less constrained by his unconscious desire to please his father.

Although developmental coaching, like psychodynamic coaching, is more focused on raising awareness than on achieving specific shifts in behaviour, an increase in awareness typically leads to a shift in how a coachee thinks and feels, and these deeper shifts are often the key elements that underpin a more enduring shift in behaviour.

Executive and leadership coaching

In executive and leadership coaching, we are usually working with a population of managers who have already achieved a good deal of success in their careers, but whose future development

requires them to shift perspective; for example, to augment their technical competence with a more strategic view, or to temper their driving leadership style with greater political awareness and effective influence skills. I have suggested (Lee, 2006) that if managers are to be successful leaders then they need to become authentic, in the sense that they consciously balance their personal needs and convictions with the needs and convictions of their colleagues, whether in their team or the wider organization. Drawing on attachment theory, I have suggested that we routinely come across leaders whose authenticity and consequent effectiveness is limited by their use of unconsciously defensive leadership styles, which I call defiant and compliant leadership. Defiant leadership arises where a manager denies his/her vulnerability or self-doubt by adopting a dominant and dogmatic style, which tends to evoke resistance and frustration in others. Compliant leadership arises where a manager avoids confrontation by too readily fitting in with the needs of others, and so limits his/her capacity for assertiveness and creativity.

The psychodynamic approach to coaching provides an opportunity for leaders to examine the relational assumptions that unconsciously underpin their leadership styles. The defiant leader, contained by the coach's attunement and resilience, finds a space to look at feelings that have long been banished from awareness, and so finds an opportunity to re-examine the need to be controlling of others. The compliant leader, invited to connect with hidden frustrations, learns to confront others in a useful way and so gains confidence in his/her ideas and their potential value to others. In this way, psychodynamic coaching can provide a rich learning environment for evoking authenticity and increased effectiveness in executives and leaders.

Team coaching

Just as individuals can adopt defensive strategies for managing feelings, groups can also behave in ways that defend against anxiety. Bion (1961) proposed three defensive strategies, called basic assumptions: fight/flight, dependency, and pairing. For example, team members, anxious about how to solve a difficult issue, may become distracted and angry with senior management for putting them in this predicament (fight or flight). By blaming others, they spare themselves the emotional challenge of taking responsibility and for integrating the mixed feelings they may have about their capacity to solve the issue.

Another way the team may manage their anxiety is by idealizing one of the team members (or sometimes the coach), and then relying on them to resolve the challenge facing the team (dependency). While appropriate followership is useful, dependency means that there is a lack of shared initiative and responsibility within the team, and if the idealized leader is not successful then dependency can turn to fight or flight in relation to the leader. A further defensive strategy, somewhat similar to dependency, is to rely on a pair within the team to solve the team's difficulties (pairing).

The goal in team coaching is to enable the team to manage itself in such a way that it can focus on its primary tasks, drawing usefully on the skills and talents of all of its members, managing

differences effectively, operating with appropriate levels of self-disclosure, building creatively on the contributions of others, and effectively managing the boundary with other parts of the organization. By noticing when the team is resorting to defensive strategies, the coach seeks to understand the nature of the anxiety underlying the defence, and from this awareness to decide on an appropriate intervention. This might involve naming the defence in some way, but if the team lacks the resilience to face this observation then the coach might, for example, encourage the team to work on a simpler, more manageable task in order to reinstate its sense of its effectiveness.

Cross-cultural coaching

In its emphasis on the impact of past experiences and the subtleties of context in shaping our behaviour at an unconscious level, the psychodynamic perspective brings important insights to cross-cultural coaching. It highlights the need for the coach to be vigilant to his/her own inevitable, implicit biases in relation to others. Transference, whether from the coach to the coachee, or vice versa, is an unconscious prediction or assumption about another person based on past learning and, in this sense, it is a pre-judgement or prejudice. Such transference prejudices are problematic if they remain out of awareness as implicit truths about others. In cross-cultural coaching, the coach needs to examine his/her own assumptions about the impact of a coachee's cultural origins, to explore his/her capacity to suspend judgement, and to cultivate understanding and a sense of empathy with the coachee's particular life conditions and circumstances. It is important to recognize that many cultural experiences are significantly different from our own and, depending on the kind of issues to be explored, some coachees will benefit from working with a coach who has direct knowledge or personal experience of their cultural background.

EVALUATION

In this last section I consider the strengths and limitations of the psychodynamic approach and finish by discussing the contexts in which this approach can be most usefully applied.

Strengths

The psychodynamic approach opens our minds to the possibility that there is substantially more going on below the surface of coaching interaction than can be seen on the surface. Whether it is in the hidden agendas of an organizational sponsor, the defences of a coachee or the diversionary games of a team, the psychodynamic approach provides an unparalleled resource for

investigating and making sense of unconscious processes and their role in shaping, and often limiting, the achievement of goals.

Applied to the arena of coaching, this approach usefully emphasizes the importance of managing boundaries, since it is through an experience of ‘holding’ and safety that coachees can allow their defences to loosen. While coaching is necessarily more flexible than counselling or psychotherapy with regard to the regularity of sessions and the location of meetings, the psychodynamic approach encourages us to recognize that the containment provided by fixed start and end times, a consistent physical environment, and explicit confidentiality, all contribute to an experience of holding, and so make possible a deeper exploration of the coachee’s ways of making meaning.

The coach informed by psychodynamic practice will also have a particular appreciation of the role of restraint and silence in one-to-one work. Viewed as a space for thinking more than doing, reflecting more than solving, coachees come to experience the coach’s restraint as an invitation to go deeper into oneself, to ask the question ‘why’, to sit with the discomfort of not knowing, to tolerate distressing feelings, and to discover the transformative potential of awareness.

The psychodynamic approach does, however, set a challenge to coaches to stretch their own developmental capacity for meaning-making, and undertaking one-to-one work with a psychodynamic practitioner is perhaps one of the most powerful ways of promoting that. The task for the coach is to be able to take a meta-perspective on their own implicit biases and defences, and through this process gain a more expansive awareness of self and others. It is the emotional resilience that comes from such self-awareness and integration that provides coachees with the profound experience of psychological containment, and so enables them to visit parts of themselves that have long been disowned.

Limitations

However, the depth of the psychodynamic approach is not always appropriate in coaching. Quite apart from whether coaches feel qualified to move towards unconscious territory, there are many coachees who neither want nor need this style of work. Coachees are often looking for relatively short engagements to help them think through a particular issue, and so favour approaches that focus on the present and the future, without needing to dig into patterns learned from the past. Where coachees have specific goals or a preference for pragmatic solutions, the psychoanalytic question ‘why do you want that?’ may be less useful than ‘what do you want?’ and ‘how can you get it?’

Furthermore, the psychodynamic approach has the potential to be overly concerned with problems, and so miss the value of focusing on a coachee’s strengths. The positive psychology movement has arisen out of the concern that much of psychological theory has come out of the clinical treatment of mental disturbance, which consequently views people as problems to

be solved. Psychoanalytic theory must take some responsibility for this problem-centric bias, and coaches drawing on the psychodynamic approach need to be cautious about pathologizing coachees. Valuing and building on strengths, appreciating what is working already, and actively celebrating coachees' achievements are important aspects that can put the psychodynamic approach into a more balanced and constructively useful context.

Best use

The psychodynamic approach brings great depth and insight to the work of coaching, and as such is most appropriate for contexts where coachees are interested in exploring the roots of their meaning-making patterns, or where they feel stuck and are prepared to do what it takes to achieve an enduring shift. Leadership, developmental and team coaching, together with coaching supervision, are the areas that lend themselves most to the psychodynamic frame, and in all of these areas I have witnessed the profound effectiveness of the approach. Having said that, I would reiterate that the effectiveness of coaching often derives from the ability of the coach to flex his/her style, to draw on multiple approaches, and so respond usefully to the changing needs of coachees. The psychodynamic approach used within an integrative coaching framework is a potent method for evoking change.

FURTHER READING

- Freud, S. (1960). *The psychopathology of everyday life*. London: Penguin.
Classic account of the unconscious in everyday life, such as the 'Freudian Slip'.
- Holmes, J. (2001). *The search for the secure base*. Hove: Brunner-Routledge.
A very accessible discussion of attachment theory in psychotherapy, including a discussion of narrative competence.
- Lee, G. (2006). *Leadership coaching: From personal insight to organisational performance*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
My own pragmatic integration of the psychodynamic approach into coaching, based on work with senior leaders from the UK, Europe and the USA.
- Winnicott, D. (1971). *Playing and reality*. London: Penguin.
A ground-breaking psychoanalyst and paediatrician who writes very insightfully about the experience of working with children.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- To what extent is a psychodynamic approach to coaching relevant in a context where a person or organization is looking for tangible behavioural change?
- From a psychodynamic point of view, what thoughts might be in your mind about a coachee arriving late for sessions, and how might you address that in the work you undertake with the coachee?

- Imagine you find yourself feeling bored or distracted during a coaching session. Explore two or more hypotheses you might have about this, based on thoughts about the transference/countertransference dynamic?
- What would the psychodynamic perspective suggest about the possible, unconscious expressed feelings if a coachee is:
 - Constantly friendly, positive and enthusiastic about the work.
 - Constantly distant, sceptical and challenging.
 - Filling the session with talk and giving you little opportunity to comment or ask questions.

And for each of these, what might you say or do to deepen the coaching relationship?

ONLINE RESOURCES

To access videos, journal articles, case studies and useful web links relevant to this chapter please visit:
<https://study.sagepub.com/coxhandbook3e>

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