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**THE
EMBODIMENT
IN
COACHING**

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PREFACE

The Embodiment in Coaching adds a bodily perspective in the field of coaching. It gives food for thought and provides answers to the following questions:

How can we learn through the movement of the body?

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What can we learn from the movement of the body?

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a theoretical framework, principles, insights and guidance for using embodiment when coaching and/or training people in coaching. This chapter could contribute to you if you are an adult educator, trainer coach, counsellor, youth worker or social worker. We aim to:

- .: Become familiar with the terms and the principles of embodiment
- .: Become aware of the embodied methodology
- .: Learn two ways of approaching embodiment.

When referring to embodiment in the learning and coaching process - we mean that both the mind and the body are included. Learning happens at all levels: body, mind and emotions. (Sieler, 2003) In other words, learning everywhere and not only from the neck up. Thus the body is not only perceived as a brain train, but as a source of experience, memory and so much more (Walsh, 2020).

The Embodiment in Coaching is comprised of 2 elements:

1. Embodied Learning for Coaching
2. Embodied Coaching

The **Embodied Learning for Coaching** refers to learning about coaching through embodiment. In other words, how by simply moving your body you can learn several coaching concepts. **Embodied Coaching** refers to using the coachee's embodiment while coaching them. It is all about using embodied coaching tools and intervene on a bodily level during the coaching session.



Both perspectives are introduced with relevant background information, methodology and an example session (see the table below). As such, you can get a glimpse of the approach in a theoretical and more practical manner. The example sessions are an invitation to apply your learning to a group of colleagues or to your coachee.

Chapter Structure

Embodied Learning for Coaching

The methodology of Embodied Learning for Coaching
Example Session- Assumptions of a coach

Embodied Coaching

The methodology of Embodied Coaching
Example Session- Embodied Scaling

References

Sieler, A. (2003). Coaching to the human soul: Ontological Coaching and Deep Change. Volume III: The Biological and Somatic Basis of Ontological Coaching. Victoria: New.

Walsh, M. (2020). EMBODIMENT – Moving beyond mindfulness.

Embodied Learning for Coaching

The methodology of Embodied Learning
for Coaching

When movement becomes a vehicle

FOUNDATION OF EMBODIED LEARNING

There are four principles that apply to Embodied learning.

1. Interaction

Interaction plays a pivotal part in learning. Interaction in an embodied session becomes a very dynamic and playful term and it happens on 3 levels:

- a. between the trainer and participants
- b. between the participant and their peers
- c. between the participant and their understanding of the concept.

In such a session all three levels of interaction unfold interwoven. The interplay between the trainer and participant, as well as peer to peer learning, brings up another aspect of the interaction, in a body and mind level. Lastly but definitely not the least, when the learner interacts directly, physically and mentally with the concept.





2. Discovery

The methodology is based on discovery. The embodied sessions imply seeing learning not as a product, but as a process and therefore supporting participants in concentrating on their own engagement and progress. As such the participants start looking at coaching, not as a static science but as an ongoing discovery.

3. Isolations

Working with isolations has the huge benefit of focusing. In the embodied session we isolate the language, so they can focus on the body. Thus, the whole session is in silence (apart from the reflections) so the participants can completely focus on their embodiment instead of (the) words.

4. Creative techniques

The embodied methodology includes a rich variety of creative techniques:

- .: Pure movement
- .: Body & Space Awareness
- .: Dancing & Contact improvisation
- .: Active meditations
- .: Constellations
- .: Physical Theatre

These are the different ways in which we usually exaggerate and put the situation in a different context. This supports participants to become aware of how they behave in a specific situation. The creative techniques are always connected to a theoretical concept. There is an example in the next part. The theoretical concept is the “Assumptions of a coach” and the creative technique which is used is Pure movement.

Structure

There is a specific structure that the embodied sessions follow (Nasiakou, 2018). The session starts with an Introduction, a Warm-up, continues with a Main part and the Integration parts and finishes with a Closing.

The Introduction and the Warm-up have several purposes: to lure the participants into learning in an engaging way, to physically warm up the body, to enhance creative movement and to get the participants in a specific mood (playful/ focused/ energetic/ relaxed).

In the Main Part and Integration Part, learners explore and gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical concepts through the movement of their bodies. At this stage, the experience provokes the insights and reactions needed to move towards learning in a more conscious way.



Every **Closing** includes reflection and sharing. In order to pay attention to differences originating from various learning styles, reflection on learning is guided with questions according to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory-model (Kolb, 2015). The **Reflection** plays a crucial part in the learning process because while creating and observing connections between physical experience and abstract thinking, the "understanding is more resilient and can stretch to fit in new situations" (K. Schaffer et al., 2001). Sharing thoughts and ideas with a couple of peers/ the whole group enhances peer learning and empowers the learners to gain new insights through other peoples' reflections.

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EXAMPLE SESSION

Assumptions Of A Coach

“What do you think about your target group?”

Revealing unconscious patterns

Coaching is based on the assumption that the client is able to solve their own issues and the coach is there as a catalyst. This is a concept that is easy to understand but difficult to implement. Behavioural change on assumptions level is very much needed. Thus you can use an Embodied Learning session to uncover the coaches' assumptions of their target group.

Below, there is a step by step description of the Embodied Learning session: Assumption of a coach in relation to their target group. This session offers the frame where movement enables participants to feel the concept of assumptions in their body and get a clear view of their own assumptions of their target group.

Your lines for the session are in Italics.

Background info and tips are standard script.

Introduction

In this session, we work with embodied metaphors. Embodied metaphors, usually reach unconscious levels and can reveal patterns we are not aware we have created.

Together we will go through a simple walking exercise to support us become aware of some of our presumptions.. Let's start!

Warm-up

You start with a short warm-up 2'-3' to enable people to feel relaxed and focus on the exercise.

Simply walk around the room. Focus on yourself and walk normally. Feel like you are walking down a street that you know. You know the area, you take this route daily.



Main body

You slowly start to introduce one by one the 4 metaphors of movement. Every time you introduce a metaphor, colour your voice accordingly, do the embodiment of the metaphor yourself and move in between people. With this, participants get in the mood and feel comfortable to move. When they are into the process, you can step aside and observe. In between the different metaphors, you support the participants to break with the emotional state they are in so they can start with a clean slate and go on to the next metaphor. You can do this with the “Break State” exercises.

First metaphor: **Eggshells**

Just, imagine that the floor is full of eggshells. You are actually walking around eggshells. Lot's of fragile eggs are everywhere around you.

What does it feel like when everything around you is fragile?

Break state

And the eggshells disappear. You are again on a well-known street. It's a sunny day and you are happy. Put a smile on your face and walk down the street.

Second metaphor: **Weight on shoulders**

And now imagine that a very heavy weight lands on your shoulders and you are carrying it. It is far too difficult to walk with so much weight. It is heavy but you keep on walking.

What does it feel like to walk with so much weight on your shoulders?

Break state

Finally, the weight vanishes into thin air. You are again on a well-known street. It's a sunny day and you are happy. Put a smile on your face and walk down the street.

Third metaphor: **Bubbles**

And suddenly the room is filled with bubbles! Lots of soap bubbles fall from the ceiling. They are soft and playful. More bubbles around you!

What does it feel like to walk around bubbles?



Break state

And the bubbles disappear. You are again on a well-known street. It's a sunny day and you are happy. Put a smile on your face and walk down the street.

Fourth metaphor: **Tight rope**

Just look at the floor. You are walking on a tight rope. Be careful not to fall. It's a demanding process. You need to keep your balance all the time.

What does it feel like to walk in such a way that you can keep your balance?

Break state

Finally, the tight rope goes away. You are again on a well-known street. It's a sunny day and you feel relaxed.

Integration

The integration phase will support the participants in creating a link between their embodiments in several metaphors and their target group. As such they will become aware of their own assumptions of their target group.

Slow down your moves and stop. Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Exhale slowly. Continue breathing at your own pace and visualise your target group. Visualise the people you work with.

Now look back at the 4 metaphors. Visualise which metaphor represents your target group. Do you perceive these people as fragile as eggshells? Heavy as a weight on your shoulders? Playful as bubbles? Or demanding as if you are balancing on a tight rope? Choose a metaphor that fits. If none fits, create your own word and the metaphor.

In a moment I will ask you to open your eyes and walk with the metaphor that fits for you. Open your eyes and start walking.

Simply observe your body without judging it. How does your body automatically responds to your target group?

Break state

Slow down, and drop the metaphors. Make eye contact with people while you are walking at a slow pace. Stay together with the person near to you and sit down.

Closing

The closing part comes, at last, to support them create the links between the embodied experience and their profession.

In couples discuss how you feel about your target group. What is the image in your mind about them? What insights have you gained from this activity?

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Andrew Austin and his initiative of metaphors of movement. He uses the metaphor of walking on eggshells, which was a true inspiration for me to create the embodied exercise.

Embodied Coaching

The methodology of Embodied Coaching

Your body is your ally.

FOUNDATION OF EMBODIED COACHING

In the 19th century, Lakoff (1980) stated that abstract cognitive states are embedded in states of the body. Complementary to Lakoff's point, neuroscientists perceive embodiment as an established way to bring awareness from the mind to the whole body. Embodiment is well supported by cognitive neuroscience and enhances the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, Gendlin, Bateson and others who argue that "the body shapes the mind" (Gallagher, 2006).

A couple of years ago, cognitive scientists stated a radical hypothesis that the brain is not the only available cognitive resource to solve problems. The body and its movement do much of the work required to achieve our goals, replacing the need for complex mental processes. This simple fact drastically changes our perception about "cognition", and thus, "embodiment is not simply another factor acting on an otherwise disembodied cognitive process" (Wilson, 2013).



Principles & Structure

The core principles of Embodied Coaching are two and form its structure.

1. Raising awareness

We function 95% of our daily lives on autopilot- things happen without much thought behind our automated actions. Thus, we create stories and we do not question them anymore. We actually live in them- we embody them. The way we act shapes us. By becoming aware of how we embody our stories it's possible to build new ones (Strozzi, 2014).

Raising awareness is the first step because we cannot change what we do not see. At the same time, we are so much used to live in our body but not familiar with looking at the body. That implies the need for applying Embodied Coaching tools and exercises, using the physical space and asking questions that target the body.

Asking questions that target the coachee's embodiment, requires having a sharp observation on their embodiment. The trap we might fall in here is that we want to observe everything. This is pretty much impossible because the amount of information that comes from the movement of the body is enormous.

Having a Checklist with "Embodied points of observation" can be a useful tool in the coaching process (see the table below). For beginning chose 3-5 points of observation of the coachee.

Embodied Points of Observation

- ∴ Breathing
- ∴ Body posture
- ∴ Body position in space
- ∴ Distance
- ∴ Eye contact
- ∴ Facial expressions (lip activity, frowning, jaw, blinking)
- ∴ Movements
- ∴ Micro movements

For each point of observation, focus on the tempo/ intensity/ quality/ size/ levels/ direction of the movement. Let's take the example of observing the movement of the hand.

Is it fast, medium or slow? (pace)

Is it a low, moderate or high level of intensity? (intensity)

Is it a smooth or harsh movement? (quality)

Is it a big, medium or small movement? (size)

Is a low, medium or high level? (level)

Is it inwards or outwards? (direction)

Watch out not to fall into the trap of interpreting the movements. You are only making observations and focusing on them with questions.

2. Building new patterns

Raising awareness steers the coachee's attention from their thoughts to the signals their body is giving them. As such the starting point to building new patterns is their physical body. This can be done by physically embracing the desired situation/success (see the next example: step on the number 10). It is important to get the coachee in the success mode, and it is crucial to ask the coachee to describe their emotional state and their embodiment. You can support them by asking questions on the points of observation and help them verbalise the difference with their prior embodiment.

This part is a reference point for achieving their goal. The next part is about finding opportunities for practising the desired embodiment. The repetition of the practice is a major step in building the new pattern. Training the coachee to intervene at a physical level, as a result, their thoughts get influenced. As such they get clarity and achieve more success.

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EXAMPLE SESSION

Embodied Scaling

How to measure progress?

On a scale of 1-10, where 10 is the stage you have achieved your goal, how would you rate the stage you are at right now?

The origins of Scaling were published in 1965 when the psychologist Hadley Cantril who wrote an article in which he described the intervention named The Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale (Cantril, 1965). This intervention can be seen as an ancestor of Scaling. Scaling has become very popular with therapists and coaches and the last decades and scaling questions are among the most commonly used techniques for coaches.

Scaling is a tool which enables the coachee to assess their position in relation to their goal and thus to gain a perspective towards their goal. In a Scale from 1 -10, 1 represents the first step made and 10 the desired end result.

Embodiment offers another perspective on Scaling: the physical representation of the scale. By physically creating the Scale on the floor and acting on it, the coachees minimise their minds cognitive load, which leaves open more resources for other cognitive processes (Sweller, 1988). That means they no longer need to remember or visualise their past, present or future steps, they can actually step on them.

In the Embodied Scaling the physical space, the floor markers and the coachee's embodiment play a significant role in the process. For this reason, make sure that:

- ∴ There is enough space
- ∴ You prepare 10 floor markers/papers and number them from 1 to 10.
- ∴ You create your checklist of 3-5 embodied points of observation



How to use Embodied Scaling?

Explain the coachee that the floor markers represent the steps they need to take in order to achieve their goal. Give the floor markers to the coachee and ask them to place them on the floor. In the meantime, you gather a lot of information about the coachee's perspective on the situation.

Points of observation and questioning:

- i) the shape that the coachee creates (could be a straight line/ a curve/ a circle etc)
- ii) the distance between the floor markers (they could be placed close or far from each other at equal/ unequal distances)
- iii) the embodiment of the coachee while in the process (could be slow/normal or fast pace, wide or small steps etc).

You are there to simply question your observations and thus empower the coachee to become aware of their actions.



After having placed the floor markers you can ask them to step on different positions in order to explore the present moment, the past and the future. There you ask questions accordingly. Where you start highly depends on your intuition.

There are different angles of how you can work it out, still, the invitation is to stay with the person at the moment and act accordingly.

1st angle: Present

The times we live in, most people are mainly busy with their next steps. This keeps them from acknowledging the point where they are now and what are their achievements so far. It's is very important that you offer the coachee the opportunity to pause and look where they now stand in relation to their goal.

How to do that? Ask the coachee to step on the paper that they feel they are now (let's say they position themselves on 4) and let them express what it means to be on 4. Examples of questions:

- .: How do you feel now?
- .: What shape does your body take?
- .: What is your body telling you?
- .: What are your current thoughts?
- .: What has worked well so far?
- .: What do you take away from this?

2nd angle: Past

From the present position, you can ask them to look back- to physically turn and look back at 1 and share what kind of steps they've taken. Alternatively, you can ask them to step on 1 and walk until 4. In every step they physically take, they say what they did.

3rd angle: Future

From the present position ask the client to go to the desired position. While on their way, they say out loud what the steps are they have taken. Alternatively, you can ask them to go directly to the desired number to first get the sensation in their body of what it feels like to be there! Let them close their eyes and focus and guide them into a success mode. When in the mood, people usually smile and display an open body posture. This is a very empowering embodiment and strengthens the clients to undertake the actual steps in their lives.

Closing

Ask the person to take up the position they want to express right now. When they are doing so, ask what is there for them. Then slowly close the process and ask the coachee to destroy the scale.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Afonso Bertolo for introducing me into the embodiment and for teaching me the Embodied Scaling.

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