Coaching style inventory

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Coaching conversations and change

In any organisation, the way that people work together contributes to performance and results. But what influences the way people work together? In spite of many who would prefer to think otherwise it seems less to do with senior managers and directors moving in mysterious ways and more to do with the quality and style of conversations that people, throughout the organisation, choose to have with each other. You could even say that conversations - in terms of what and how things are talked about – create the context and the content for management and leadership. In other words conversations are important because they create the environment for service delivery, performance improvement, innovation and change.

So what factors influence the quality and style of conversations? What's the recipe for productive interactions? A century and more of research reinforces the common sense notion that there is no one management, coaching or leadership style for dealing effectively with other people: to stand any chance of being effective you need to behave in a way that is responsive to the situation you find yourself operating within.

Sense-making and responsiveness

Being responsive to the context requires that we can accurately make sense of our situation. Sense-making is about observing and assessing situations – allowing us to create a structure and a context for choice and decision taking. It is then down to behavioural flexibility: our ability to produce behaviours appropriate for the context as we see it.

Responding to situations within the context and structure as you define them

Making sense of situations – creating the context and structure for the conversations

This inventory can be useful in gaining some insight into your sense-making preferences and the boundaries you put around your conversations. The suggestion is that sense-making either limits or enlarges these boundaries and therefore limits or enlarges the choices we give ourselves in coaching conversations.

How to complete this inventory

In the pages that follow a number of opportunities for coaching conversations are outlined. In each case four choices of responding to the situation are described - you are invited to evaluate these options in terms of your view of their effectiveness.

Allocate 4 points for the option you consider most effective, 3 points for the next and so on.

Once you have made your assessments of the various situations please turn to page 12 for information on how to score and interpret your results.

1 Michael's performance has been gently declining over the past few weeks. In your opinion, he now needs prompts and reminders to get projects and assignments finished on target. In bringing the matter to his attention you discover nothing outside of work seems to be affecting him. Do you…

Points

A Ask Michael for his proposals for improving the situation

B Outline a plan of action for him to follow in order to resolve the situation

C Explore a number of possible courses of action, inviting Michael to evaluate each and select the most appropriate

D Meet with him to discuss overall goals and objectives and hope to set specific targets

2 You have just been promoted to a new management role. You know the previous occupant had a fairly hands-off style and that the team has a reputation for working well together and generally getting the job done. Your initial strategy is to…

Points

A Define tasks and responsibilities for all team members

B Review past performance with the team with the aim of creating options for improvement

C Facilitate a discussion with the team with the intention of clarifying overall goals and direction

D Continue the hands off approach

3 Nick is getting bogged down with a problem and has asked for your help. He rarely asks for your assistance. In listening to the way he describes the situation you wonder if he is tackling issues that lie outside his comfort zone. You decide that the best way to support him is to:

Points

A Encourage him to look at the situation from another perspective

B Ask him to outline his options in dealing with the situation, easing in a couple of your own to get the ball rolling

C Suggest that he summarises his approach so far, enabling a step back from the situation to be taken

D Clarify your understanding with a few more questions and then suggest the way forward

4 You have become aware, via a few: "Can I have a quick word?" conversations, that all is not well in your team. All team members are experienced and have a track record of success. Up until now the team has displayed consistent signs of high quality working relationships. Your chosen course of action is to…

Points

A Suggest some ways forward and check the reaction of the team

B Allow the team to sort it out for themselves

C Announce your recommendations for moving the team on without much reference to the things you have heard

D Facilitate an exploration of the problem without suggesting any solutions of your own

5 Rubens, an experienced team leader, asks for your advice on how to handle a performance issue with his team. At your request he outlines the background to the situation, your response is to:

Points

A Get him to think through what he wants to achieve from the situation and leave him to work out what to do from there on

B Suggest that you will raise the issue directly with his team

C Use probing questions with the intention of giving Rubens the chance to focus on the facts of the situation

D Ask Rubens what he thinks he should do, adding suggestions of your own if he doesn't come up with anything

6 You have been asked to get a project team "back on track" as they are well overdue with delivering some key commitments. From what you know of the team you are reasonably confident that they have the potential to complete their task. As you are attending the next meeting, your strategy is to:

Points

A Hold a review of progress so far

B Outline a range of options for improving performance and ask the team to select their preferred way forward

C Seek commitment to overall goals and deliverables, leaving the team sort out the how

D Come up with an action plan and introduce it during the meeting

7

7	You have been in your current role for around nine months or so. In that time you have had a couple of one to one sessions to clarify roles, responsibilities and targets with Lewis, one of your regional managers. You have another session coming up, and are of the opinion his performance is beginning to improve. You decide the best thing is to…

Points

A	Remind him once again of priority tasks	
B	Talk about future opportunities	
C	Ask him to review the past few months, taking time to agree the progress being made	
D	Avoid any input of your own and wait to find out what Lewis wants to talk about	

8	You have noticed that Jean's performance ratings are beginning to show a downward trend. You have had a couple of sessions to try to bring about some improvements but, so far, no difference has been made. At your next meeting your intention is to…

Points

A	Attempt to open up some new perspectives on the situation by outlining your own views and then seeing what Jean has to say	
B	Set goals and targets for Jean and explore how they could be achieved	
C	Introduce new working procedures and seek Jean's commitment for their implementation	
D	Avoid raising the issue directly but be willing to explore it if Jean brings it up.	

9 You have just taken on a new management role and you know that the previous occupant had a reputation as a hard taskmaster. You want to maintain levels of efficiency and productivity but would prefer a warmer, more human, working environment. Your preferred course of action is to…

Points

A Emphasise the importance of deadlines and tasks

B Spend time with the team but on a mainly social level

C Get team members involved in more decision making in the context of your overall goals

D Spend time with your new team to explore priorities and key issues

10 One of your team members is usually keen to take on new challenges and responsibilities. More recently however they are not showing much enthusiasm for a number of changes you wish to implement. You decide to…

Points

A Seek to agree alternative methods that could be followed that would still reach your goals

B Emphasise the reasons for the new procedures and targets

C Explain the thinking that has led you to conclude that things should change and ask for input on the way forward

D Let sleeping dogs lie for the time being and hope that the enthusiasm returns

9

11 You are sure that there is scope for reducing costs in Fernando's department but, a few months into the role; you notice he hasn't seized the opportunity to implement changes. You bring the matter to his attention, outline your concerns over missed cost reduction opportunities and then…

Points

A Encourage him to talk about his departmental aims and objectives

B Leave him to think about the matter and come back to your next meeting with a few ideas

C Scope out a few options and invite him to think through the positive and negative consequences of each one

D Make a couple of proposals for sharpening up a few of the work processes in his section

12 You have generally found your team to be fairly productive and flexible. Recently, various suggestions for improvement have come from the team leading you to conclude that it would be a good idea to reshuffle team roles and responsibilities. Your preferred way forward is to…

Points

A Give the team the relevant background information and ask them to let you know of any changes they decide to implement

B Work as part of the team to jointly reach a decision and plan implementation

C Outline your intentions, linking them to overall goals, and then encourage the team to make the decision

D Work out the changes yourself and then offer your ideas with a timetable for action

Turn the page for scoring instructions…

Scoring guide

Using the table below, insert the scores you gave to the options for each situation against the appropriate letters in each column. Then total the scores in each column to give your basic scores for each coaching style.

	Expert	Guide	Developer	Catalyst
1	B	C	D	A
2	A	B	C	D
3	D	B	A	C
4	C	A	D	B
5	B	D	A	C
6	D	B	C	A
7	A	C	B	D
8	C	B	A	D
9	A	C	D	B
10	B	A	C	D
11	D	C	A	B
12	D	B	C	A
Totals				

Transfer your basic scores for each style onto the grid on the next page…

Interpreting your results

Insert the totals for each style onto the grid below and read on for some steers on how you can make sense of your scores:

| Expert	Guide	Developer	Catalyst

Implications of your scores

The maximum and minimum points you can allocate to any one style are 48 and 12 respectively. As this inventory aims to assess how you interpret and assess situations the basic message is quite straightforward – the styles attracting higher scores (towards 48) in relation to the others suggest a degree of comfort or habit with perceiving those styles as appropriate. Unsurprisingly, styles with relatively low scores (tending towards 12) imply a lack of enthusiasm for judging them to be useful.

Style preference: If your score for one style stands out higher than the others you can consider yourself in possession of a preferred style. This is the style that you are likely to assume is the most useful to employ. The implication therefore, is that it's your default style – the one you spring for through force of habit or when under stress. Alternatively, your coaching context (nature of the task, relationship to the people you deal with etc.) may be suggestive of a particular approach. The higher this score in relation to the others offers an indication of the intensity of your preference for this style.

Flexibility: If your scoring is distributed across the styles in a fairly even manner a degree of flexibility in interpreting situations is suggested. Flexibility of perception and interpretation is a sturdy springboard for flexibility of behavioural style. The converse is also relevant – an uneven distribution of scores suggests a bias towards narrowly framing the requirements of coaching situations. The consequence of narrow framing is the potential for limiting your options when taking part in coaching conversations.

A continuum of coaching styles
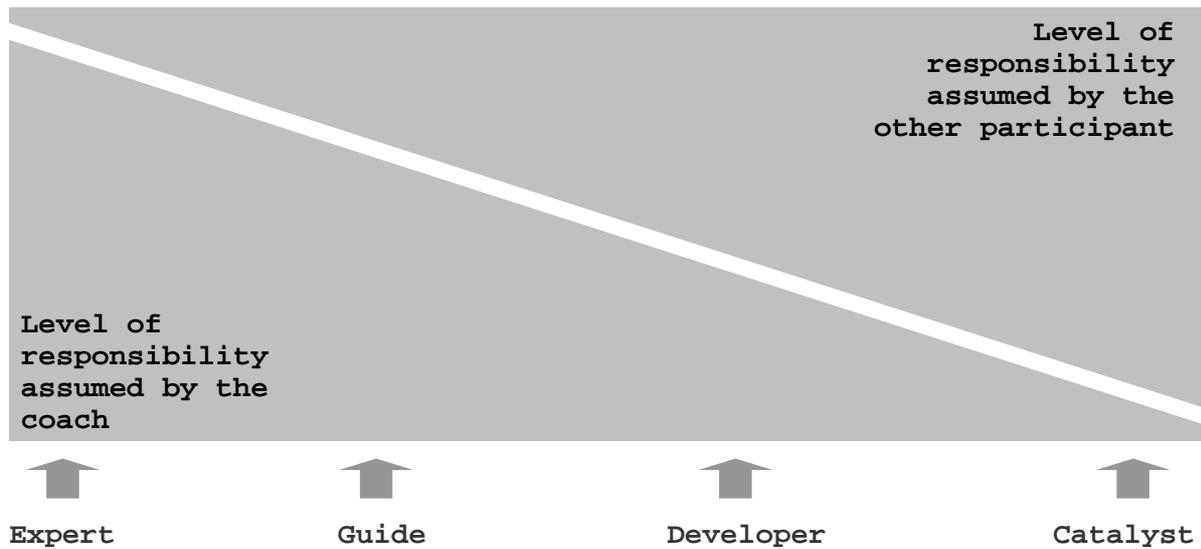
The diagram shows a continuum of coaching styles with varying levels of responsibility assumed by either participant to the conversation. Dynamic models of coaching rest on the belief that no one style is appropriate for all situations. Variations in the context and purpose of the conversation, our personal goals and preferences, and differences in the people we interact with all collude to make the search for a magic bullet futile. This suggests that basic skills for effective coaching are:

- Sense making: weighing up situations, using your awareness, perspectives and expectations to determine the most appropriate style to employ. Sense-making creates the context and the structure for our coaching conversations.

- Responsiveness: the capacity to put a repertoire of styles into practice – implying a degree of choice and variability of behaviour.

How do your scores compare?

You may need to modify any ideas emerging from thinking about your raw scores in the light of how your scores compare with those of others. Your scores are normed in relation to a group of middle and senior managers who have already completed the instrument allowing raw scores for each style to be positioned along a percentile range. The table below shows raw scores for each style in relation to percentiles.

Mid-range percentile positions suggest that you are close to average in your use of that style. In terms of numerical scores: a score of 29 for catalyst means that you allocated more points to this style than about 80% of the people in the norm group - in other words this puts you in the top 20% for this style preference. In contrast a score of 35 for guide or developer puts you around the 25th percentile: 75% of the people who have completed the inventory gave this style preference more points.

	Percentile range:				
	Low	Low-mid	Mid range	High-mid	High
	1 – 25	30 – 40	45 – 60	65 – 75	80 – 95+
Expert	12 – 17	18	19 – 21	22 – 23	24 - 48
Guide	12 – 35	36	37	38 – 39	40 - 48
Developer	12 – 35	36 – 37	38	39	40 - 48
Catalyst	12 – 23	24 – 25	26 – 27	28	29 - 48

Scores that put you at either the high or low ends of the percentile range suggest a tendency for using – or avoiding – a particular style when you assess coaching opportunities. High or low positions may also be saying something about your job situation: it could be that the people you interact with, or the demands of your work environment, encourage high or low use of a particular style. There is also the possibility that your own habits of thinking, your management mindset if you will, enable you to rely more or less upon some styles than appropriate.

What to do next

The table below summarises the characteristics of each coaching style – you can use this in conjunction with your scores to work towards an assessment of your strengths and weaknesses as a coach.

To finish there are a number of review questions on page 17. An optional extra task is to help us enlarge the norm base for the instrument by completing and returning the form on page 19.

Characteristics of each style

|	Focus	Impact	Risk and control
Expert	**Getting the job done – achieving tasks efficiently and effectively. Performance, technique, methods and tactics.**	Physical, intellectual and interpersonal. Acquiring and applying knowledge	Risk is low and control is high – agenda is determined by the coach
Guide	**Skill building – increasing capacity in the role. How to move towards agreed goals and objectives**	Intellectual and interpersonal. Accumulating, applying and refining knowledge, solving problems	Risk is still low, control still high; coach is mostly on comfortable ground, but needs to create a working relationship
Developer	**Enlarging capability - agreeing and setting goals, creating future paths and objectives**	Interpersonal and emotional: influencing self and others, creating new opportunities	Risk is medium to high – personal involvement is integral to the working relationship
Catalyst	**Values and perspectives - creating an agenda for change via developing awareness, sense of personal vision and purpose**	Emotional and interpersonal: integrating relationships with personal values	Risk is high, control is low – limits are tested and new territory is explored by both participants

Review and reflection

How does the output of this inventory compare with assumptions you make about yourself as a coach?
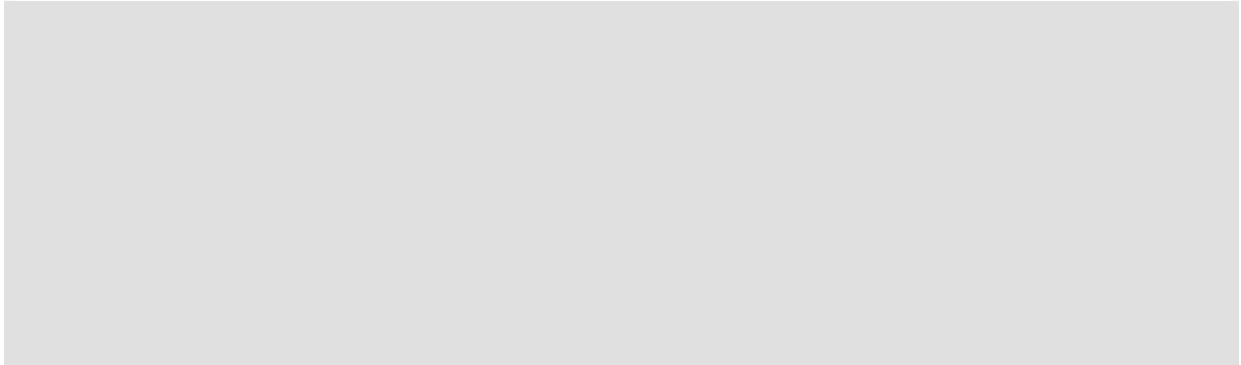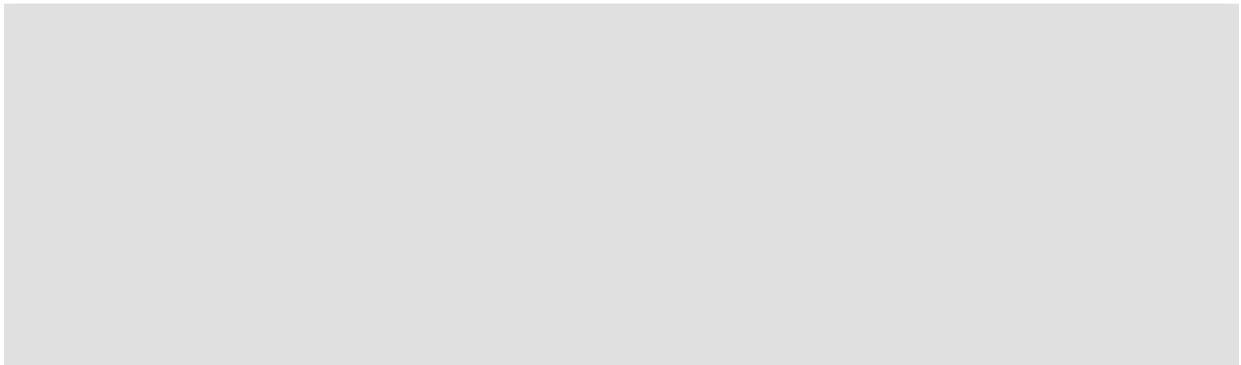
What do you want to reinforce about your approach to coaching conversations?
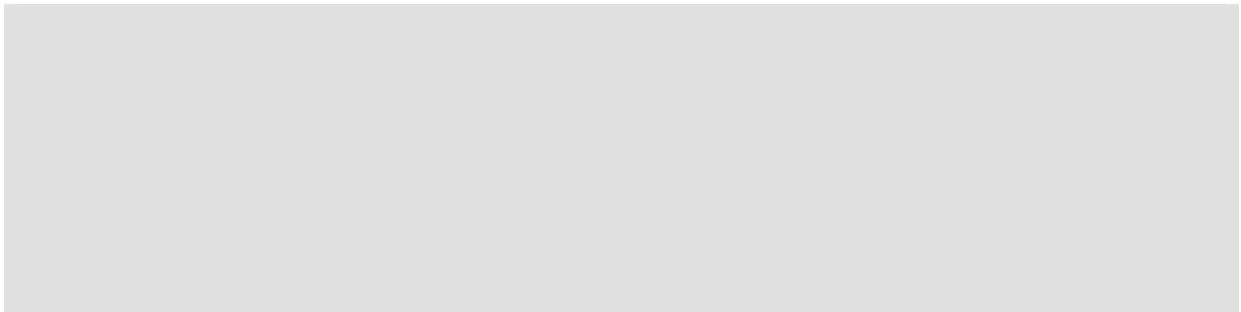
What do you want to modify about your approach to coaching conversations?
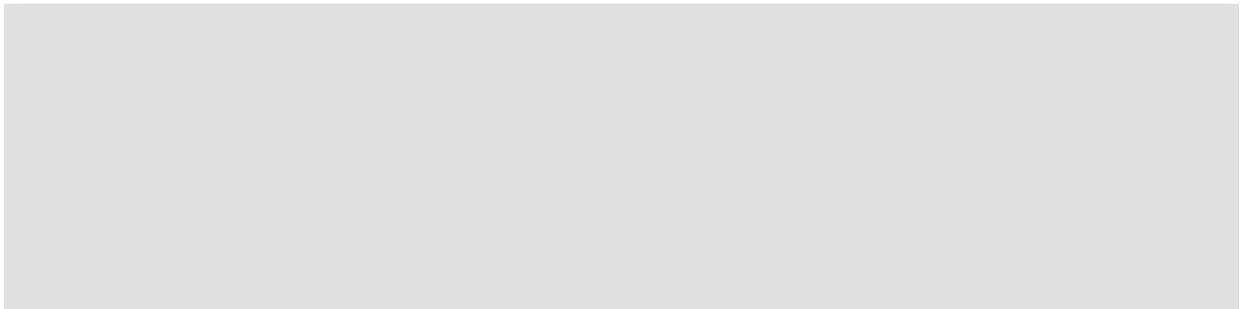
Other thoughts in relation to your capability as a coach?

You can help us build a norm base for this instrument by completing and returning this page to: Jon Kendall, Castleton Consulting Limited, Regus House, Fairbourne Drive, Atterbury, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom MK10 9RG.

Your scores from the questionnaire:

Expert	Guide	Developer	Catalyst

Personal details:

Male ☐   Date of birth[dd/mm/yyyy]:……………………………………………

Female ☐

Type of business:

Accounting/banking/finance		Insurance/financial services	
Business/information services		Law/legal services	
Communications/telecommunications		Management consultancy	
Computer/office equipment services		Mining/oil and gas	
Contracting/construction/engineering		Pharmaceutical/medical products	
Education		Printing/publishing/advertising	
Entertainment/recreation/sport		Real estate/land development	
Farming/fishing/forestry		Research/scientific services	
Food products/processing		Social services	
General manufacturing		Transportation	
Government (Central and local)		Wholesale/retail	
Healthcare/medical services		Utilities	
Hospitality/travel/tourism		Other	

Indicate your functional area and level, select one option from each column

Functional area		Level	
Accounting/finance		Managing director/chief executive	
Administration/operations		General manager/senior executive	
Customer services		Director	
Data processing/systems		Divisional/functional head	
Distribution/fulfilment		Department/unit manager	
Human resources		Supervisor/foreman	
Manufacturing		Professional and technical	
Marketing/sales		Administrative and clerical	
Technical/engineering/research		Other	
Other			

Thanks!