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Chapter 12: Third-Generation Coaching: Theory, Research and Practice

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Introduction

Third-generation coaching describes a developmental step that goes beyond earlier forms of coaching. Coaching needs to be developed further because of rapid changes and growing complexity within all areas of society and its organizations. Although coaching practices are often a mixture of approaches, methods and techniques, third-generation coaching marks a major shift in the relationship between the dialogical partners based on *moments of symmetry* with a strong focus on shared meaning-making and collaborative value reflections.

Originally, the coach worked as a facilitator by more or less exclusively asking questions as a way to help clients reflect on their challenges and to enable new perspectives on their problems. By contrast, a third-generation coach acts as a co-reflecting partner and thus adopts a more active and collaborative position as a fellow human companion through *withness-thinking* (Shotter, 2006) and by sharing his or her own thoughts and reflections with the client. Pausing and lingering in the dialogue opens new possibilities for fundamental self-insights (Stelter, 2019). Third-generation coaching indicates an intentional shift for the coach, away from more or less exclusively asking questions towards a collaborative meta-dialogue. Third-generation coaching can be an integrated part of other approaches. One key question remains unanswered: will more reflective and collaborative approaches inspired by third-generation coaching be more dominant in the future coaching scene (see Greif, 2014)? Furthermore, the idea of meta-dialogue might be most interesting and can even be connected to cognitive behavioural coaching, which also encourages meta conversations, conversations not just about what to do, but what I think, feel, and do.

Theoretical foundation

The fundamental idea behind third-generation coaching has been the awareness of rapid social change and its impact on both professional and civil life. The acronym VUCA draws attention to the challenges of our time: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity. Sharma and Sharma (2019, p. 151) wrote, “In today’s volatile, complex and challenging times, organisational focus on employees requires a paradigm shift.” This paradigm shift is the basic driver for the promotion of third-generation coaching, which builds on and partly includes practices from all three coaching generations.

First-generation coaching has its roots in sports. Its focus is on setting goals and solving specific problems. However, to work towards clear goals is increasingly difficult in a VUCA world. The coaching literature contains growing criticism of such a narrow goal perspective (see David et al., 2013; Ordóñez et al., 2009). The focus on goals and objectives can lock a person into a particular and sometimes narrow lookout;

ultimately, this represents the polar opposite of the purpose of a fruitful and developmental dialogue, which invites new horizons and enables novel perspectives. Therefore, first-generation coaching approaches will have reduced impact on future dialogue practices.

Second-generation coaching revolves around possible solutions and appreciative dialogues. It is rooted in systemic (Hawkins & Turner, 2019), constructionist/constructivist (Pavlović, 2021) and appreciative (Orem et al., 2009) theory and practice. This type of coaching offers a useful ground for our work as coaches and has a future in dialogue practice. However, times have changed, and we need to broaden our understanding of coaching fundamentally. It is becoming increasingly important for both individuals and organizations to focus on purpose, meaning-making and values as the foundation for their way of acting in today's challenging times.

The objective of third-generation coaching is to expand the theoretical foundation of coaching and to invite practitioners to enrich their practice with a collaborative perspective, where coaching client(s) and coach interact as co-reflective partners – as fellow human companions (Stelter, 2016a). Stelter (2014 a; 2014b) introduced the term *third-generation coaching* as the underlying inspiration for a range of different dialogue forms that incorporate changes in society and organizational life at large. Third-generation coaching will be used here as the term that describes the point of departure for the continuing development and renewal of coaching in theory and practice. With its special awareness of the coaching client's current professional and/or personal challenges – often related to organizational and social changes – coaching inspired by third-generation approaches places particular emphasis on values and narrative co-creation and minimizes the emphasis on often short-sighted goals and pure performance optimization. The Danish psychology professor Svend Brinkmann (2017) challenged the agenda of performance optimization by lending a hand to people who are willing to do anything to keep up with development and who are thus at risk of burning out. His work offers an alternative. And he has a point! As long as coaches offer to help their clients pursue the ill-conceived desire to "keep up" at all costs, they should be sacked, as Brinkmann suggested as one of his precepts. This narrow focus on goals and performance no longer seems helpful, also in light of the world's growing complexity and unpredictability. We need to rediscover *the art of lingering in dialogue* (see more in Stelter, 2019) – for our own sake and for the sake of those around us! The shift away from a narrow focus on performance optimization towards seeing human interaction entirely as a matter of collaborative meaning-making is the driver of the agenda of third-generation coaching.

Third-generation coaching in a nutshell

The following presentation will focus on the key elements of third-generation coaching, which Stelter (2019) also defined as a 'transformative dialogue'.

Self and identity are the focus of transformation

The coaching client experiences *transformation* via the intensive co-reflective process with the coach. The term *transformation* is connected to self and identity, concepts that have changed due to the rapid societal changes. Self and identity have become key psychological issues in the late modern or postmodern society we live in. In third-generation coaching two central perspectives of self and identity are merged to present an integral whole:

- Self and identity as relational: Gergen (2009), a social constructionist, has set the stage for a new understanding of individuals as *relational beings*. Gergen defines mental discourses – which is what coaching is about – as originating in human relationships, as a function in the service of relationships and as an action within relationships. Third-generation coaching is a process in the service of a relationship where both parties act as collaborative and co-reflecting partners.

- Self and identity possessing a sensual and existential dimension: the word *identity* comes from the Latin word *idem*, meaning "the same". Individuals are sensually anchored in their *lived* body. Our intentional and sensual orientation towards the environment let us experience the world as consistent. Individuals strive for *stability and consistency* (Stelter, 2014 a). Our actions are implicitly, and sometimes even explicitly, driven by personal values and beliefs, such as freedom, courage, goodness etc. Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect and they guide our actions (Schwartz, 2012). Values serve as a key anchor for our identity. For the coach, it is important to develop a sensibility for the coaching client's life world via empathy, resonating and withness-thinking. (More about this in the practice section of this chapter).

The three central guiding concepts of third-generation coaching

In the following, I address three aspects of the coaching dialogue that can help to expand the client's reflective space. These three aspects are essential features in my understanding of third-generation coaching (see also Stelter, 2014a; 2014b):

1. Value focus

2. Opportunities for meaning-making

3. The narrative-collaborative perspective

Value focus

The ultimate objective of third-generation coaching is to facilitate and build a foundation for leadership, communication and cooperation, not by focusing on specific goals but by reflecting on key values as important landmarks for guiding our actions and navigating in life.

This value-focused coaching process is inspired by *protreptics*, a form of meta-coaching (re-)articulated by the Danish philosopher and leadership theorist Ole Fogh Kirkeby (2009). Translating the term from classical Greek, it describes the art of *turning oneself or others to the core of human existence*. Protreptics is a method for self-reflection and dialogical guidance that has been used in the Greek executive academies for generals and leaders since 500 BCE. Protreptics is a form of philosophical coaching that is focused exclusively on reflections on values not on specific situations or actions. The dialogue between coach and client tends towards symmetry, meaning that both parties are equally engaged in the abstract reflection on specific values or terms, such as "responsibility", "freedom", "care" etc. Unlike conventional (exclusively asymmetrical) coaching dialogues, where the coach adopts a neutral position in relation to the client's challenge or problem, these value-driven dialogues essentially strive for a growing degree of symmetry: coach and client have a shared interest in examining specific values, because these values are of universal relevance to all human beings (see also Stelter, 2016b). After these value-oriented reflections, the consideration of potential consequences for one's future actions may move the dialogue back to a more specific coaching agenda.

Opportunities for meaning-making

Meaning-making is considered one of the most important means of facilitating the coaching dialogue (Stelter, 2007, 2014). Meaning is fundamental because we attribute particular values to our experiences, acts, interactions with others and personal and professional lives. Things become meaningful when we understand how we feel, think and act, for example by telling stories about ourselves and the world we live in. After surviving Nazi concentration camps, the existential psychiatrist Victor Frankl (1988) worked intensively with this concept. Finding and fulfilling meaning is the basic striving of any human being. Meaning-making is a holistic way of integrating past and present experiences as well as ideas about what

the future might bring. Meaning develops in the interaction between action, sensation, reflection and speech.

Meaning-making marks the interaction between sensual and relational processes, which are integrated in the dialogue practice. The distinction that is drawn between these two aspects of meaning-making in the following is purely analytical:

> 1. One point of departure for the coaching intervention is the *coaching client's sensory experience and personal meaning-making*. Here, the coaching dialogue is inspired by a phenomenological-existentialist approach. Together with the coach, the client seeks to understand his or her subjective reality or subjective perceptions and experiences of the context and culture he or she lives in. The focus is on the implicit and often sensory-bodily dimensions of certain situations, actions, or individuals. This perspective may shed light on essential and existentially meaningful experiences and values of past memories – especially uplifting moments – and of what feels right and important to oneself. The process of experiential meaning-making builds a link to practice, habits and routines that are embedded in the flow of action. Immersing oneself in the practice and reliving practices sensorially will often provide a source of new insight for the client into the things we 'just do' without really thinking about them. This sensory awareness that we strive to articulate helps us to understand the inherent meaning of our practices.
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> 2. The second essential point of departure for collaborative coaching dialogue is how meaning is shaped in a *shared process of co-reflection between both coach and client*. In this sense, the coaching dialogue is inspired by relational and constructionist approaches. The coaching client projects certain self-perceived realities from the outside world into the coaching context. The coach is involved in the dialogue as a reflective partner who offers new voices in relation to the presented reality: voices of empathy, of understanding, of his or her own memories, of associations, of reformulation etc. In doing so, the coach takes part in the shared process of meaning-making that will enable the coaching client to see his or her world in a new and, hopefully, more uplifting light.

The narrative-collaborative perspective

The following presents my understanding of the narrative-collaborative perspective as well as its role in stimulating the reflective space in the coaching dialogue. The concept of narrativity and narrative psychology can be seen as an extension of the social constructionist perspective. I see this as a new way to integrate experiential and subjective-existential approaches with relational-constructionist approaches. This is also my own fundamental orientation, a view that regards the two ways as integrated aspects of the coaching dialogue. Other researchers who have similarly sought to integrate the embodied-experimental concept with the relational-discursive concept include Crossley (2003), Shotter and Lannaman (2002), Stam (2001) and Sampson (1996). They all saw the potential in relating phenomenological thinking with social constructionist thinking, which is also the ambition of the author. This is very different from adopting a naturalist perspective, for example by viewing personality as something that is anchored in a more or less stable character feature. Instead, the goal is a culturally oriented form of psychology where experiences and feelings are used to shape narratives with personal and shared values, individually as well as together with others. As Bruner (1990, p. 29) stated, "[Values] become incorporated in one's self-identity and, at the same time, they locate one in a culture." Telling each other stories and developing and exchanging stories and narratives, whether in a coach-client relationship or in a group context, are crucial activities for social

meaning-making; a person's anchorage in a cultural context is always framed by specific values and meaning. Bruner (2006, p. 14) emphasized the importance of storytelling:

> "The principal way in which our minds, our 'realities', get shaped to the patterns of daily cultural life is through the stories we tell, listen to, and read – true or fictional. We 'become' active participants in our culture mainly through the narratives we share in order to 'make sense' of what is happening around us, what has happened, and what may happen."

Narratives structure events and order them in a timeline. They make stories – the source of meaning-making – coherent and, as a result, make life meaningful. Narratives give rise to temporal coherence and shape our perception of events, acts, others and ourselves as sensible and meaningful. The plot in any story frames the development of an inner structure and drama (Sarbin, 1986). By telling and listening to stories, we make our lives meaningful.

These three themes should be understood as a necessary theoretical basis and set of guidelines for creating a new dialogue culture. The coach's key question is, "How do I generate meaning, explore values and formulate and reformulate narratives in the dialogue?" The later practice section presents some ideas and guidelines for how to develop concrete dialogue skills as a third-generation coach or as an initiator of and partner in fruitful transformative dialogues. I will examine and outline how these theoretically anchored basic themes can unfold in practice in the actual relationship with and among the clients.

Research evidence

As third-generation coaching is not a closed system but based on narrative, collaborative, reflective and existential theory and practice, the search for and documentation of theoretical and scientific evidence is nearly impossible to cover fully in this chapter. Furthermore, the understanding and terminology of third-generation coaching were initiated by the author only about a decade ago (Stelter & Law, 2010; Stelter, 2014a; 2014b), which naturally limits the amount of research related to this approach. However, different studies will be presented below that are based on main assumptions and ideas of third-generation coaching.

Some of the key theoretical sources of third-generation coaching will be in focus, and afterwards, we will take a closer look on some empirical studies based on the ideas of third-generation coaching.

Narrative research and practice

There is a rich literature in this field, originally inspired by narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990). In the field of coaching, there is a growing interest in narrative approaches (Drake, 2015; Drake & Stelter, 2014; Laurence, 2018). Linell (2010), a researcher and therapist, has based her work on poststructural theory inspired by Butler, Foucault, Deleuxe and others who question the assumption of a deep and universal structure underlying language, culture, and subjectivity. The poststructuralist awareness is focused on the notion of differences, the proliferation of discourses and deconstruction. From a poststructural perspective, the researcher is not "outside" the research as in early positivism; due to this inside position, poststructural research is conducted in a qualitative and contextualized manner. Davies (2000) describes the researcher's engagement with the fleeting reflexive spaces of thought that position "agency" within the play of discourses. Dwyer and Emerald (2016, p. 5) describe how "narrative work is typically within a transactional frame – focused on the way knowledge is created in social settings, whether that is in the interactions between the researcher and participants and/or between participants and others". From that position, research evidence is often based on in-depth investigation of one's own or others' practice. In a single case

study, Stelter (2015) investigated the transformational process of a woman who sought coaching with the aim of losing weight. Because she already knew the author's approach, the specific coaching for weight loss was less about strict behavioural guidelines and more about supporting the client to re-author specific situations and life events in order to empower her to live differently. Drake (2008) wrote about the *era of the artisan*: a postprofessional era in which coaches are seen as master craftspeople skilled in an applied art, an approach to research and practice that is closely related to the actual practice, where coaches are seen as reflective or scientific practitioners (see also Lane & Corrie, 2006; Stelter, 2014, Chapter 6). From this perspective, the concept of *evidence* has to be defined in a different way than in natural or medical sciences (Drake, 2009; Stelter, 2014, Chapter 6). Another example of a more artisanal approach to narrative research is a study by de Ronde (2019), who explored the theme of multi-voicedness in the search of the path of life. In his coaching practice, de Ronde searched for working methods that contribute to the exploration of multiple perspectives in which we live and which provide support for dealing with the life questions we may grapple with. As human beings, we not only live in an ambiguous world but also have to deal with an ambiguous self. The article described a narrative method based on the archetypal biblical story of the prodigal son. By retelling this story three times as three symbolic stories, namely that of the youngest son, the oldest son and the father, the participants were invited to probe their lives from different vantage points and accept all their inner voices. Here, we again become aware of the objectives of narrative approaches that focus on deconstructing the subject's incriminating stories by supporting the capacity of re-authoring and empowerment (see also de Ronde, 2018, and Swart, 2013, 2019).

A different approach to working with narratives was presented by Kerr and colleagues (2019). The purpose of their paper was to construct a conceptual framework for investigating the reconstruction of narrative identity in mental health recovery from a complexity perspective. This conceptual framework provides the foundation for developing a health boardgame to facilitate narrative identity reconstruction. As the authors wrote, the significance of the paper is that it provides a way of integrating concepts and theories with the common theme of adaptive growth (non-linear phenomena) in narrative identity reconstruction during mental health recovery and, further, creates a framework for assisting clients, in a practice-based way, to author their preferred narrative identity. This is important, as narrative identity reconstruction is a key task in recovery. Following Nurser and colleagues (2018), recovery is narrative in character. Creating individual recovery stories aligned with well-being and positive identity is central to mental health recovery. Based on their theoretical and practical models, Kerr and colleagues developed a boardgame designed to facilitate people's narrative identity reconstruction in recovery. The boardgame was intended to be used as a tool in connection with narrative coaching. The boardgame (titled "Heroes and heroines: The recovery journey boardgame") is an immersive role-playing experience designed to be a 'crucible' for adaptive growth in recovery. Using a narrative coaching treatment approach aligned with complex change processes inherent in adaptive growth, provided an integrated framework that may be of value for understanding and facilitating narrative identity reconstruction as part of psychological well-being in recovery.

Wang and colleagues (2017) have presented a narrative based coaching study that explored undergraduate students' experiences of developing mindful agency as a learning disposition, their perceived growth and change as learners and the possible impact of coaching on the students' learning and personal growth. The coaching supported the students' ability to foster positive self-identities and become more reflective, mindful and self-determined (see also Wang, 2018).

The narrative approach was also included in a coaching study by Yip and colleagues (2020), who focused on the transition processes of new leaders, which requires identity work. The authors presented a framework of coaching principles and narrative practices inspired by Drake (2015) and Stelter (2014) (see also Drake &

Stelter, 2014) that can support leaders through the identity transition processes of separation, liminality, and the integration of a new leader identity. In doing so, this paper provided actionable practices for coaching new leaders as well as directions for research on coaching and leadership development.

Grecco (2020) presented a doctoral study with a narrative coaching approach including 31 undergraduate students aimed at helping the participants develop a better understanding of their own narratives. The results of the study suggest that using philosophical coaching approaches, such as narrative based coaching (NBC), to enhance students' narratives can be beneficial to overall well-being, thus supporting the presence of coaching centres on university campuses to boost students' potential both inside and outside the classroom (see also Paaske Nielsen & Stelter, 2015).

A growing field of interest with some relationship to third-generation coaching is narrative medicine (Charon, 2006). This approach places a high priority on listening to the patients' story in order to gain a better understanding of their health issues, general outlook and personal considerations in regard to illness and death, with the purpose of seeing the whole person behind the symptoms and the specific diagnosis. Narrative medicine thus places special emphasis on listening to the patient but also to stories in novels, or other forms of fiction, and essays which patients and health professionals use to make sense of their current life situation (see Fernandes, 2015).

Collaborative research and practice

A second perspective in third-generation coaching is on collaborative theory and practice, an approach that is applied in therapy, learning, organizational development, and coaching. It is important to mention that there is a form of fluid interconnectedness between narrative and collaborative approaches (see, e.g., Madsen, 2016; Monk & Gerhart, 2001; Stelter, 2014a). The research design applied is mainly in-depth and qualitatively oriented.

One example of a collaborative coaching study was presented by LeeKeenan (2020), who applied a qualitative microanalytic approach to the study of coaching interactions for the purpose of understanding the character of collaborative discourse between cooperating teachers (CTs) and preservice teachers (PTs) in practice-based teacher preparation programmes. This study illuminated the complex social and discursive dance embedded within collaborative interactions. It showed how collaborative interactions developed from the strategic repositioning of social roles, which created space for authentic problem-posing by both the CT and the PT, and the co-construction of teaching events, which supported more specific planning toward future lessons. Further collaborative coaching studies carried out in different professional contexts were presented by Burley and Pomphrey (2011), Houchens and colleagues (2017), Roman and Woods (2018) and Tweedie and colleagues (2019).

Collaborative coaching approaches are often included in a broader learning context. In their paper, Jewett and MacPhee (2012) provided an account of coaching elements that were included in an existing graduate literacy course. Here, they described the responses of experienced and less experienced teachers as they began to add collaborative peer coaching to their teaching identities.

Reflective and existential approaches in research and practice

In comparison to third-generation coaching, reflective and existential approaches adopt a different epistemological stance by focusing on the individual's existential challenges that are worthwhile to reflect on as part of an in-depth coaching dialogue. The approach is based on phenomenological philosophy and existentialist psychology. Unlike collaborative theory, which is based on the co-created interrelatedness between both parties, the focus of an existential practice is on ongoing in-depth work with personal

experiences and reflections that may have a genuine impact on the client. Both existential-phenomenological and collaborative approaches are based on a constructivist paradigm (Charreire Petit & Huault, 2008). Reflective and existential approaches are influenced by a philosophical mindset that favours research, often based on theoretical studies and a qualitative research design (see, e.g., Floridi 2013; Hansen, 2016; Courant, 2020).

Studies with direct reference to third-generation coaching

During recent years, third-generation coaching has been the chosen intervention in several different empirical studies. As the promotor of this approach, the author has conducted several studies to document the value and effectiveness of the approach:

Stelter, Nielsen & Wikmann (2011) reported a mixed-method study that investigated the influence of narrative-collaborative group/third-generation coaching on career development, self-reflection and the general functioning of young sports talents with the aim of achieving integration of their sports careers, educational demands and private lives. This third-generation coaching intervention was conducted over eight session of one-and-a-half hours over a period of three months. In an extended version, Stelter (2014) presented the data material, which then also included a follow-up study (five months after intervention), based on both quantitative and qualitative material. The randomized controlled design was based on 77 participants (using a questionnaire measuring recovery/stress, motivation, and action control). A qualitative interview study included six participants. The group coaching intervention had a significant effect on the scores for social recovery and general well-being. One of the central findings was on the improvement in *social recovery*, a construct in the questionnaire that reflected a return to a higher level of social functioning and the participants' growing awareness and inclusion of others in their life. The findings showed significant improvements among the subjects who participated in group coaching. Figure 12.1 illustrates how the 12-week-long coaching intervention influenced the level of social recovery; this positive effect was also present in comparisons between the situation before the intervention and the situation five months after its completion. However, no significant improvement was found from the completion of the intervention to the measurement five months later.

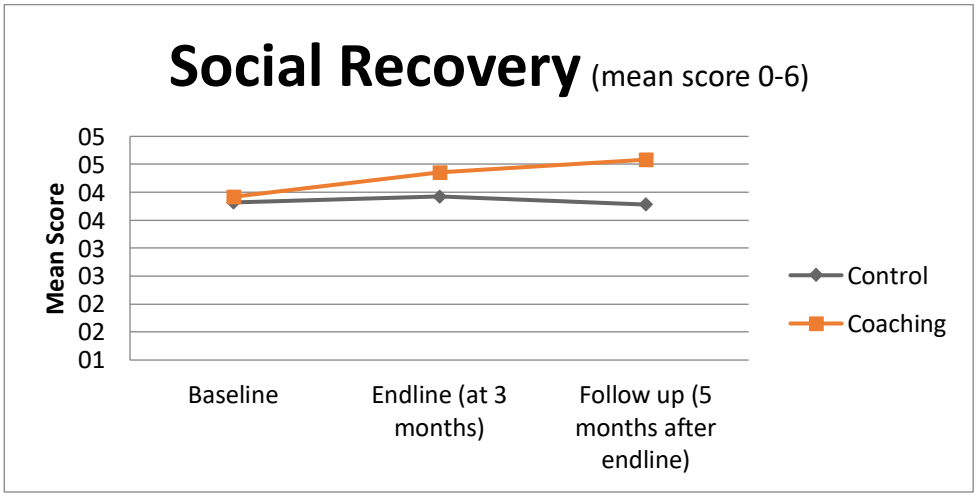

Figure 12.1: Influence of 12-week-long coaching intervention on social recovery

Before intervention to end of intervention: *positive effect*

Adjusted for baseline scores, the coaching group had 0.381 higher social recovery scores after 12 weeks compared to control group. Effect size was medium (r=0.24, p=0.038).

Before intervention to follow-up: *positive effect*
Adjusted for baseline scores, the coaching group had 0.584 higher social recovery scores at follow-up compared to the control group. Effect size was moderate (r=0.275, p=0.035).

End of intervention to follow-up: *no effect*
Adjusted for Week 12 scores, the coaching group had 0.359 insignificant (p=0.247) higher social recovery scores at follow-up compared to the control group. Effect size was low (r=0.163) and insignificant (p=0.247)**.**

Similar positive effects were found for *general well-being.* In the final evaluation at the end of the course of sessions, many participants stated that their behaviour had changed: they had begun to include some of the group members as clients, also outside the coaching context. Some of them also modified the way they related to team or club mates and became more interested in cooperating with the sports coach in their club in a new way. These changes clearly reflect the essence of social recovery.

The qualitative study showed that group coaching participants considered the shared process of meaning-making especially valuable. Third-generation group coaching can be understood as a community psychological intervention that helps to support the development of durable social networks and the increase of social capital. As the final theoretical cornerstone, the following can be highlighted: the social processes that have led to social recovery and which were the result of collaborative meaning-making in communities of practice led to the accumulation of social capital – a central concept that explains how people can cooperate successfully in society and certain social settings and attain a greater sense of social integration and satisfaction. Social capital is a theoretical concept considered to be useful for understanding the importance of social relationships and the formation of civil society. Bourdieu (1983, p.248) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (p. 248). The development of social capital is a key benefit of this highly collaborative approach, which is the main characteristic of third-generation coaching, especially when conducted in a group setting. Stelter and collaborators have conducted several studies fundamentally based on third-generation group coaching, some in the form of case studies (Stelter, 2014; Hansen, Nielsen, Jensen & Stelter, 2019), some with a strong community orientation (Ryom, Andersen, & Stelter, 2017; Ryom, Wikman, & Stelter, 2020) and some with a focus on health and lifestyle change (Stelter & Andersen, 2018; De Dominicis, Elsborg, Andersen & Stelter, submitted).

Other researchers have been inspired by the third-generation coaching approach: Godskesena and Kobayashi (2016) reported a study of individual coaching conducted as a mix of second- and third-generation coaching carried out by an external coach as a new pedagogical element that can impact doctoral students’ sense of progress in doctoral education. The study used a mixed-method approach drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from the evaluation of a project on coaching doctoral students. It explored how coaching can contribute to the doctoral students’ development of a broad set of personal competences and suggests that coaching may work to engender self-management and improve relational competences. The analysis of the participants’ self-reported gains from coaching showed that doctoral students experience coaching as an effective method for supporting the doctoral study process. This study also provided preliminary empirical evidence that coaching of doctoral students can facilitate the doctoral study process, giving the doctoral students an enhanced sense of progress and the perceived ability to change their study behaviour in a positive direction.

As mentioned in earlier examples, third-generation coaching inspired the choice of coaching approach in other studies. One final example that will be mentioned here is the qualitative health coaching study by Knudsen and colleagues (2018), who highlighted the value for patients with cystic fibrosis of telling their individual stories. The young adults included in the intervention rarely spoke to others about their situation and thus valued the opportunity of opening up to a professional coach about their life and concerns. A close, trustful and supportive relationship with the coach were of major importance for them.

Practice

Third-generation coaching practice is not manual-based. Hence, the dialogue between coach and client is more of an art, based on the coach's *relational capacity* and the safety and depth developed in the mutual relationship between both parties.

Relational attitude

The *relational attitude of the coach* is what counts. The following terms might help to illustrate the spirit of the relationship with and among the client(s) (see also Stelter, 2014, 2016a, 2019):

- *Sensitive responsiveness*: the collaborative practice of third-generation coaching facilitates an entirely new conversation culture, where one listens to the other and in turn strives to inspire the other with one's own thoughts and reflections on a particular story or description that one of the participants presented. It is a mutuality that Wittgenstein (1953, p. 122) described as "seeing connections". Listening is more than simply understanding what was said. Listening is not just about absorbing information but involves making meaning for oneself as a listener and inviting the other into the reflections it gives rise to.
- *Relational attunement* and *resonance*: both terms give association to the world of music. Musicians playing together tune into each other. They relate to a common rhythm and melodic figure. Their tunes and melodies match each other. Similar in a third-generation dialogue; when listening to someone's story, the coach will pay attention to him/herself and will then – initially, often implicitly – begin to relate to the client's story by tuning into it from the basis of his or her own sensations and meaning-making. In this way, the conversation partner's story or challenge "becomes one's own". Relational attunement can be describe as a shared or co-created articulation, where a sensation, a sensory impression or a theme is addressed collectively, and where the participants achieve a meeting or encounter. To describe this state, I adopted the term *resonance,* which the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2019) used to indicate a necessary change of focus and awareness towards a better society. By adjusting Rosa's term to the coaching dialogue, we can describe the coach as the other's *tuning fork*, as the coach tunes into the "tone" of their clients. The goal is to develop a sense of *presence* and *attunement* where both parties constantly strive to be in resonance with one another. This is the objective of third-generation coaching, but it will certainly not be a permanent state. There will be moments of "dissonance" where coach and client(s) do not fully understand each other. To achieve relational attunement and resonance should be a main ambition for the dialogue.
- *Withness-thinking*: relational attunement is achieved by means of a special form of co-thinking, which Shotter (2006) calls withness-thinking or withness-talk. It is based on the coach's passion to immerse him/herself in the narrator's situation, allowing him/herself to be gripped by it and linking the narrator's story to his or her own life, experiences and thoughts while listening. Shotter (2006) describes withness-thinking as a way of being with a strong element of sensual and bodily presence:

> "Withness (dialogic)-talk/thinking occurs in those reflective interactions that involve our coming into living, interactive contact with an other's living being, with their utterances, with their bodily expressions, with their words, their 'works'. It is a meeting of outsides, of surfaces, of two kinds of 'flesh' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), such that they come into 'touch' or 'contact' with each other. … In the interplay of living moments intertwining with each other, new possibilities of relation are engendered, new interconnections are made, new 'shapes' of experience can emerge" (p. 600).

Withness-thinking becomes a shared process of knowledge production between the clients. In a mutual process of withness-thinking and presence, the conversation becomes a dynamic dialogue between both parties or – if it takes place in a group – among the clients.

Approaching the practice of third-generation coaching

Third-generation coaching is inspired by both systemic, collaborative, narrative and reflective practices. The essential objective for a coaching dialogue aimed at change has to be to initiate a *shift in perspective* or work towards *transformation*, where clients see themselves or the reality around them in a new light. A closer look at some specific methods or approaches to the dialogue might help to illustrate this objective.

Circular questioning

Circular questions are a central "invention" of systemic theory and practice, an approach first applied in family therapy (see Tomm, 1988). Circular questions break with the linear mode, which means operating on the underlying assumption of a clear timeline or a cause-and-effect link. Linear questions are perfectly fine to use, especially in the beginning of the session, when the coach needs to understand the client's context, the persons involved and the client's basic perception of the situation. Circular questions invite the client to view things differently, to see the world from different angles and new perspectives. Circular questions help the client to explore and discover several and often unusual perceptions of reality, including the realities of others in the client's workplace or other people's positions in relation to a particular event. By asking circular questions the coach also influences the client's way of reflecting on reality, for example through hypothetical questions, a special type of circular question that challenges a particular perception and allows for other, novel perceptions of reality. The coach presents a hypothetical question based on a specific new picture of reality and thus invites the client to experiment and play with this reality and how it might impact the client's perception of reality. Circular questions appear unusual because they often are slightly provocative. Below are some examples of circular questions:

- What happened with you before you decided to introduce XY?
- What would your co-workers mention as their reason for doing things the way they did?
- Let's say that the challenge you face had been dealt with; who would be the first to notice that?
- What would be different if you where the person to make the final decision?
- If you were the fly on the wall, what would you focus on from the first moment?
- If you were to ask your colleague about this challenge, what would her answer be?
- If the problem had been solved, what would be different about the way you get up in the morning, go to work, enter your workplace, perceive your colleagues and so forth?

Externalization

The main mantra for understanding externalizing conversations comes from the narrative practitioners and therapists Michael White and David Epston (1990): "*The problem is the problem, the person is not the*

problem." In many cases it is clear that clients have internalized their problem, as if it stems from their own personality features or character. In an externalizing conversation, clients are invited to tell their story from a different – externalized – angle. Externalization offers the client a new perspective by providing an alternative way of viewing and talking about the problem (White, 2004). The conversation begins by the coach asking the client to name the problem, for example, "the work overload". By re-authoring the story with the problem as the actor, clients have the opportunity to see and perceive their situation in a new light, without blaming themselves or seeing themselves as the cause of all their problems. Externalizing conversations empower clients by distinguishing the person from the problem, on the one hand, and strengthening their focus on dealing with the problems and challenges in a new way.

Statement of position map

In order to support the client in his or her self-concept, narrative co-creative practice uses a so-called *statement of position map*, which adds depth to the collaborative dialogue between coach and client. Narrative theory speaks of "thickening the story". The statement of position map is used to address a specific problem in the following way (see table 1):

Naming

- *What would you call the problem you are describing? Could you give the problem a name?*

Effects

- *How does [name of the problem] affect you? And others?*
- *How does it affect the way you and others act?*

Evaluation

- *How do you feel about the effects of [name of the problem] on you?*
- *How do you like it?*
- *Why?*
- *Could there be a positive side to it?*

Justification – the person's values

- *Do you have a sense of why you feel that way about it?*
- *Why are you not happy with it? [This would be a good time to ask about values]*
- *Is there any aspect of it that you are happy with? What is your wish for your situation and your problem?*
- *In what way does your assessment of the situation differ from the way others see it?*

Table 12.1: *Statement of position map* (Stelter, 2019, p. 99)

Co-creating dialogues – generating moments of symmetry

Narrative, collaborative and co-creative practices employ different strategies to establish a community attitude between coach and client(s). This collaborative stance is especially powerful in group coaching sessions, where the coach functions both as driver of the session and as an involved co-participant. The most co-creative activity in the coaching dialogue is when the coach acts as a fellow human companion (Stelter, 2016 a), accompanying the client on his or her journey, while the two interlocutors position themselves in a mutual relationship that generates *moments of symmetry*. This is a new and innovative feature of third-generation coaching that may also be helpful in other everyday professional dialogues,

where one part actively adopts a co-creative position in relation to a possible colleague or staff member with the purpose of supporting and optimizing the reflective process. In group or team dialogues, any group member can adopt the role of co-active partner. Moments of symmetry can occur when the coach or a group member shares reflections on specific descriptions, statements, feelings or thoughts from the focus person. This should be done in a non-judgmental way. It is an *attitude of resonance*, where the reaction to the focus person's contribution may be inspired by the following questions:

- What kinds of skills, talents or qualities do you value as you listen to the focus person?
- What kind of pictures or metaphors come to mind as you listen to the focus person?
- How does what you have heard relate to your own life, experiences or specific values?
- Based on what you have heard, do you feel inspired to do something in your life differently?

Receiving and giving gifts

This metaphor goes back to the South-African coach and organisational developer Chené Swart (2013, p.168), who wrote:

"When listening to a story teller, narrative practitioners are always aware that they are not only witnessing a story, but in the listening their lives are also touched by the story of the other. This point of being moved and touched by the story being listened to, I have come to call *gifts*. Gifts can be learnings from a story, a reminder of my own values and beliefs which I may have forgotten, a challenge to my own beliefs and ideas about something, an experience of not being alone in my own struggles and thoughts, and so forth."

In terms of how people talk about things, narrative practice distinguishes between two fundamental perspectives:

1. *Landscapes of action* include specific activities or ways of doing things
2. *Landscapes of identity* include all issues concerning specific personal beliefs, attitudes, values, dreams, intentions, expectations and so forth.

When the coach or coaching group member relates to the focus person, they react to these two landscapes – often with particular emphasis on one of them – by responding, as an active listener, to what the focus person said. Listeners can react by either *receiving a gift* from the focus person or by *giving a gift* (see also Stelter, 2019).

- "While listening to you I notice the strength and courage you have shown in the situation, and I feel an energy raising in myself to deal with a challenge I am recently faced with." This is an example of *receiving a gift* in relation to the listener's own *landscape of action*, where the listener finally gets the energy to act.
- "When I listen to you and hear what you have done for these people, I can only express my deepest respect." This is an example of *giving a gift* in regard to the focus *landscape of action*, which has an impact on the listener's *landscape of identity* ("deepest respect").

The following figure (figure 12.2) illustrates how the coach or a coaching group member can respond to the focus person by receiving or giving gifts:

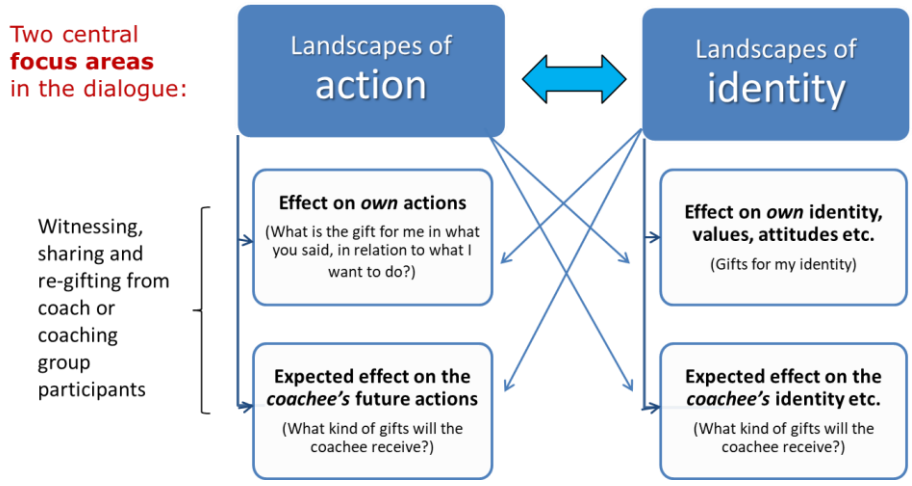

Figure 12.2: *Giving and receiving gifts* (see also Stelter, 2019, p. 104)

Focusing on values

The deeper reflective and existentially based dimension can move into the centre of the dialogue when coach and client involve each other in value reflections. In the dialogue with or among clients (in group or team coaching), the focus will sometimes turn to abstract terms (see, for example, the statement of giving a gift in the previous paragraph, where "respect" was mentioned as being central to the listener).

The coach can direct focus towards a specific central value by asking the client:

- What does *respect* mean to you?
- When did you learn something about *respect*?
- What types of feelings and thoughts come up when you relate *respect* to a person or situation?
- Is there a person in your life who represents *respect* to you?
- How can *respect* be related to and distinguished from similar terms (such as honesty, trustworthiness and so forth)?
- What would be the opposite of *respect*?
- What kind of aura or appearance do you associated with the word *respect*?
- What is the purpose of *respect*?
- How would your work unit or organisation look when *respect* is the key driver?

Reflecting on values often goes deeper than a normal conversation, which is bound to a specific situation. An abstract reflection relates to something fundamental, which may turn out to be central to the client. Because it is abstract and thus universally human, a value reflection facilitates a *moment of symmetry* between client and coach more than a dialogue where the client's specific challenge is in focus. Value reflections are fundamentally liberating. After having a deep reflection on *respect*, the term takes on a life of its own in the client's world and thus prepares the client to act whenever "respect" implicitly comes into the centre of the situation as the right way to act.

Conclusion

Third-generation coaching is not based on one single approach; it is a wide-ranging and seminal understanding of coaching unfolded in a specific form and relational attitude. What is common across different third-generation coaching approaches is the objective of providing a *reflective space* for meaning-making and maintaining a focus on values, which goes beyond the narrow focus on the attainment of predefined goals. The major driver for promoting third-generation coaching is the acceleration processes in our hypercomplex society, its organizations, workplaces and life in general. There is a growing need to find anchor holds by developing social capital, interrelatedness, solidarity and shared values. The most prominent feature of third-generation coaching is the effort to achieve *moments of symmetry* in the dialogue between coach and client, an attempt that resonates with special qualities in group or team coaching contexts. Moments of symmetry create an atmosphere of sharing and collaboration and a space of co-reflection that lays the ground for deep reflections on human existence as the foundation for our actions in the world. The motto of coaching is "in true dialogue, both sides are willing to change", inspired by the Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh.

Five questions for reflection

1. **What do you see as the most prominent challenges in our society, our organizations, our working life and personal life that might have an impact on coaching?**
   Surprisingly, there is very little attention on societal changes in the coaching literature. Earlier on, coaching has been connected to the world of sports. However, by the end of the 20th century, coaching was applied more and more in organisational life. What happened? An explanation can be traced back to the changes in society and organisational life.

2. **What do you see as the most valuable dialogue qualities of a coach?**
   Coaching (and therapy) research has clearly documented that relational qualities are essential in a satisfying and efficient dialogues. Some of the suggestions in this chapter might strengthen your focus on these dialogue features.

3. **How can the three key theoretical aspects – value focus, opportunities for meaning-making and the narrative collaborative perspective – inspire your coaching practice**?
   Third generation coaching highlights these three dimensions as essential. They are the foundation for a dialogue that goes beyond goals and beyond an understanding that the coach is a more or less neutral facilitator of the dialogue.

4. **How might some of the studies presented in the research section lay the ground for your work as a reflective practitioner in coaching?**
   Being a reflective practitioner should be the coach´s main ambition. That means, you start to make use of the research at hand, and try to adapt theory and empirical results as useful inspiration in your own practice. Furthermore, you can start to develop your own small studies, i.e. by righting a logbook based on reflections about your practice.

5. **Based on what you have previously read about coaching and neuroscience in the earlier chapters of this book, what points might lend support to the relational attitude recommended in this chapter?**

The mirror neurons are what pops up in my mind. I first thought to include them in this chapter. After having read this book in detail, I am sure you will be able to come with many more reflections.

Suggested reading

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