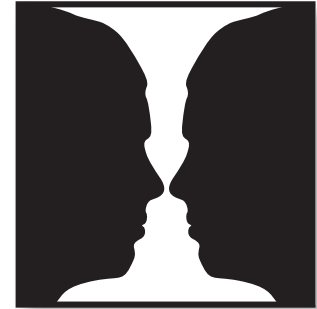


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## Psychodynamic Therapy, Coaching and Coaching Psychology interface

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### Abstract

*This article will provide an overview and discussion of the psychodynamic school of coaching psychology and psychodynamic therapy. Furthermore, we will consider some of the main similarities and differences in the application of psychodynamic coaching with a special focus on distinctions between therapy and coaching. These distinctions will be presented as thirteen bullet-points.*

**Keywords:** *psychodynamic coaching, psychodynamic therapy, similarities and distinctions, coaching versus therapy*

### Psychodynamic psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and psychodynamic coaching

First, an important distinction is made between psychoanalysis and psychodynamic psychotherapy, where psychodynamic therapy is theoretically and methodologically inspired by psychoanalysis, but without complying with the special rules that apply to a classical psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis was conceived by Sigmund Freud and can shortly be defined as a set of psychological theories and techniques rooted in the notions of the conscious, preconscious and unconscious, and a wide range of other concepts (Freud, 1920, 1950). Psychodynamic coaching is a particular way of working with

people in their personal and professional development and the aim is to help or support change, either in the person's personal life or at work. Psychodynamic coaching offers development and improvements of individuals and other arrangements, which will be expanded upon below.

### Introducing psychodynamic coaching

This first part of the article is structured to briefly label a few general descriptions of what characterise the intervention form established with the term psychodynamic coaching.

In Denmark, the work and title "psychologist" is a protected title whereas anybody can call him-

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self or herself a coach, which also indicates that coaching calls for a theoretical standpoint. In recent years, there has been an increase in the demand for coaching services in Denmark, and there is an increasing demand for coaching in people's work-life (Spaten, 2013). Still there is not a common understanding of what characterises professional coaching. An evidence-based approach is fundamental and necessary for us if we are about to achieve consensus in this diverse field (Spaten, 2013). Psychodynamic coaching occurs as a concept by combining coaching with psychodynamic theory. Psychodynamic coaching, which balances between coaching and therapy, raises the question who can properly and meaningfully practice this type of intervention.

Psychodynamic coaching - as an intervention form can be conducted in many ways - there may be individual psychodynamic coaching, and there may be psychodynamic coaching of couples - which is addressed as "Psychology of the meeting". Psychodynamic coaching is furthermore used in relation to groups and finally psychodynamic coaching may be conducted in organisations. As an applied psychology, there exists a wide range of forms of practice.

A crucial determinant of psychodynamic coaching is to perceive the conversation as a process that links the coachee's past and present as a basis for creating a desirable and realistic future.

Psychodynamic coaching operates with the concept of an "implicit context" in coaching. The idea behind the concept is that the coaching process can give the coachee an opportunity to exceed an exclusively individual understanding of the problem and propose a broader understanding and framework for explanation. The term "implicit context" also relates to the issue of transference.

According to Beck (2009; 2014) psychodynamic coaching works with a particular structure for the progress and content of coaching processes with four distinct and different steps. The steps are termed: 1) the coachee's request for consultation; 2) first coaching session: goals and framework; 3) the course of coaching sessions and as the final step 4) conclusion: evaluation and goodbye.

Following Beck (2009) psychodynamic coaching can be compared with a conversation, but it is not *therapy*, although paradoxically it has recently been called "therapy for normal functioning people". Psychodynamic coaching is a hybrid that

combines psychodynamic theory with the practice found in psychoanalysis, group analysis, therapy, supervision, role analysis, personal development, and groups and coaching. Psychodynamic coaching, focusing on in-depth understanding of human nature and how the coachee's subconscious affects the interaction with the outside world (Allcorn, 2006). Psychodynamic coaching deals with a current problem in the light of the past and aims to investigate the coachee's unconscious. Psychodynamic theory differs from other theories by emphasising the notion of the unconscious. In psychodynamic coaching, the present has an important impact, which can be seen as a limitation in the psychodynamic coaching. There will be problems that can't be fixed and there are goals that only some can reach (Beck, 2009).

In the following presentation, we will touch upon and seek to clarify what specifically characterises psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy on thirteen selected points. A short introduction of a range of differences and similarities between these two forms of intervention will be offered alongside the following thirteen bullet-points, according to existing literature within psychodynamic psychotherapy and psychodynamic coaching. However, the practical structure of the coaching sessions are built upon Beck's (2009; 2014) understanding of psychodynamic coaching. Ulla Charlotte Beck have graduated after education in social studies and psychology. She is the author of the book "*Psychodynamic Coaching - focus and depth*" (2009), several chapters and articles regarding psychodynamic coaching and has been practicing psychodynamic coaching in private practice and in companies since 1988.

## 1 The coaching relationship builds on trust and confidentiality

Yes, across all psychological approaches to coaching and therapy there exists a consensus that the relationship between the client/coachee and the coach is built on trust and confidentiality. The psychodynamic approach is no different. Trust is perhaps especially important in the psychodynamic professional relationship because of the necessity of the client/coachee opening up to the coach about early childhood experiences. Furthermore, a psychodynamic agenda means that the client will have to work with both conscious and unconscious feelings, emotions, wishes, motivations and pat-

terns before development can occur (Beck, 2009; Allcorn, 2006). This process depends on the joint effort of the client/coachee and the coach. Additionally, the success of this process also depends on the professional relationship.

There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy regarding the importance of trust and confidentiality in the professional relationship. The coach needs to be psychologically present and pay attention to the emotions that arise in relation to the coaching work including jealousy, envy, powerlessness and disclosure (Visholm, 2011).

## 2 Requests to understand 'unconscious motivation'

Yes, both psychodynamic therapy and psychodynamic coaching work with conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious processes. The unconscious processes and patterns are therefore essential when working with coachees in psychodynamic coaching.

According to Nancy McWilliams, (2004) the overarching theme amongst psychodynamic approaches is to help people focus on honesty among themselves, and on better chances for living a satisfying and useful life. Although there are many different psychodynamic approaches, McWilliams mentions, that there is not one true technique in psychoanalytic therapy. Anyhow, according to Mitchell and Black (1995), three things are mentioned with widespread consensus: Respect for the mind's complexity, the importance of unconscious processes and the value of subjective experiences (McWilliams, 2004).

Psychodynamic coaching is an effective tool to work "deep", concentrated and targeted with the coachee. There are universal beliefs and attitudes underpinning the effort to apply psychodynamic principles to the understanding and growth of another person. The coach's work is active and focus indirectly on the coach's work with him- or herself as an instrument receiving both the conscious and unconscious processes that are present in the relationship and in the parallel processes generated through what is told during coaching conversations. It is mainly through the understanding of the parallel processes and the process of the coach-coachee relation that the movement and the enduring change development are created (Beck, 2009). When unconscious patterns and dynamics be-

come conscious, it becomes possible to work with them. When unconscious relations are brought to consciousness, it is not only because of a cognitive insight or understanding established, but a simultaneous deeper emotional inner connectedness (Beck, 2009; Allcorn, 2006).

Personal development consists of making the preconscious conscious. When there are no actual dysfunctions – (human pathologies) – but frustrating, unwanted or unsatisfactory conditions within the normal range, it can be developmental stimulating to uncover the preconscious relations. It allows you to make conscious choices of change in life.

There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy regarding the attempt to understand unconscious motivation.

## 3 The coaching relation is "non-directive"

Psychodynamic coaching focuses on a joint effort of the coachee and the coach. In the first coaching session, the coachee and the coach will agree on the overall focus and goal for the sessions and additionally discuss the roles of respectively the coachee and the coach (Beck, 2014).

The success of the sessions relies on the compliance of both the coachee and the coach. It is important that the coachee is willing to be open-minded and speak honestly to the coach. If these conditions are not met, the coachee will not encounter insight or development. Therefore the coachee must work and do 'free-associations' and acknowledge feelings that emerge in the sessions as opposed to trying to hide, lie or embellish the truth. Furthermore, the coach must engage in the coaching sessions to the best of his or her abilities. The psychodynamic coach must offer possible hypotheses and will obtain knowledge through questions, structure and tasks. The hypotheses must be based on knowledge, experience and what is said and felt in the sessions. If problems emerge regarding these processual requirements, they must be included and discussed during the sessions (Beck, 2014).

It is essential that the process and atmosphere of the psychodynamic coaching sessions is kept open because the coach cannot know and tell what will be discovered. The coach can achieve this by constantly being curious and open to all unconscious material (McWilliams, 2004). The coach will by asking the "right" questions help the coachee's dis-

cover their true selves and find their true wishes for the future.

Essentially the coach is not directing or giving the coachee's "the answers" but helping them discover it themselves. "*The goal of psychodynamic coaching is that the client – through insight – can combine the past, the present and wishes for the future to make realistic action plans.*" (Beck, 2009, p. 14).

Psychodynamic coaching is more action based than psychodynamic therapy. As previously stated, psychodynamic coaching revolves around a defined topic or problem, where the success of the coaching sessions depends on the joint effort of respectively the coachee and the coach. In that sense, psychodynamic coaching is slightly more directive than psychodynamic therapy. There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy in the sense that the coach/psychologist will not provide the coachee with the "right" answer (Roberts & Jarrett, 2006).

#### 4 The work is focused on here-and-now problems

In psychodynamic coaching the coach and coachee work with a defined problem and a specific goal for the coaching agenda. The aim is a structured personal development, which creates increased courage to act and focus. Coaching is both oriented towards individuals and work relations in organisations, and aims to understand and process what is happening around them. Psychodynamic coaching works actively and focuses directly towards the coachee's problem. The focus deals with what the coachee wants to work on or improve right now, and if something else appears along the way it will be taken up after the current coaching sessions (Beck, 2009). The coachee will finish one problem at a time, which is mainly because coaching is time-limited. The purpose of psychodynamic coaching is to make the coachee's discover and achieve insight in their own history, personal patterns, internal structure and the current context.

Furthermore coaching can help the coachee connect past, present and hopes for the future with realistic possible actions. This requires that the coachee goes through the demanding process where preconscious and unconscious processes are made conscious (Beck, 2014).

There is a distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy. Psychody-

amic coaching is more intense, stretches over a shorter period, works with a limited subject and focus on what is relevant right now in the coachee's life. Psychodynamic therapy is more open to deal with problems occurring during the sessions, and might have more focus on the impact of the past than on the here and now.

#### 5 Transference plays a major and significant role in the coaching sessions

Yes, a key factor in the psychodynamic approach is the relationship between the coachee/client and the coach/psychologist. Essentially, the concept of transference and countertransference makes it possible to understand and work with the relationship between the client and the coach.

The concept of transference refers to the redirection of the client's unconscious feelings, fantasies, attitudes etc. for a significant other transferred to the coach (Busch & Milrod, 2009; Diamond, 2013). The psychodynamic reasoning is that these unconscious feelings repeat themselves in the relationship with the coach because the coachee is unconsciously trying to recreate an original relation. Transference can be played out in many forms, such as dependence, lust, hatred, mistrust, attraction towards the coach etc.

The concept of countertransference on the other hand refers to the unconscious anchored feelings that arise in the coach during the sessions with the client (Betan & Westen, 2009). These unconscious feelings and emotions disrupt the coach from working with free-floating attention - a concept by which the coach listens to the client in a completely aware manner with no preconceived ideas. This, however, is an ideal situation that most likely cannot happen completely. Countertransference is almost as important to understand as transference because the coach's examinations of their countertransference provide valuable insight into the client's transference. The coach must be open and curious to countertransference, because once these unconscious processes have been identified; the coach can use this knowledge to work with the feelings and emotions of the client.

The relationship between the coachee and the coach, including transference and countertransference, provide extremely important data which in turn helps the coach to form and test hypotheses (Busch & Milrod, 2009).

There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy regarding the concepts of transference and countertransference.

## 6 The main emphasis is on direct problem solving

As previously, stated, psychodynamic coaching is a particular way of working with people's personal and professional development and the aim is to help or support change. The goal of psychodynamic coaching is to facilitate (more) insight; thus the coachee can make (more) realistic action plans. This is achieved by combining the past, present and wishes for the future.

The psychodynamic coaching agenda will have a defined and delimited focus that will define the structure and overall purpose of the sessions, thus making the emphasis of solving the problem that the coachee sought coaching for quite important. However, solving the coachee's problem is done by facilitating development or change in the coachee (Beck, 2014).

There is a distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy regarding the emphasis on direct problem solving. Psychodynamic coaching revolves around a specific and defined subject that in a specific number of sessions is supposed to be resolved, whereas psychodynamic therapy revolves around what is important for the client right now in the moment in the therapy session. In psychodynamic therapy, the main goal is not to solve the client's problems, but to facilitate development in the client, thus making the psychodynamic therapy agenda stretch over a longer period compared to psychodynamic coaching.

## 7 The psychodynamic coaching agenda is time-limited

As mentioned earlier in this paper, psychodynamic coaching works with a defined problem and a specific goal within a certain period. The aim is a structured personal development, which creates increased courage to act and focus. The following section will be about the time aspect in psychodynamic coaching. As briefly mentioned, the coaching sessions can be divided into four following steps:

The first step involves the first contact between the coach and the coachee. The coachee will be presented for an assessment that can indicate whether or not the coachee can be offered coach-

ing and when the coach has created a good rapport the coach can move on to the next step. The second step is during the first coaching session where all formal things become clear, such as which goals the coachee would like to achieve, how is the time frame, what is the salary and the overall framework for the session(s). The third step is the actual series of coaching session and the final step is the ending, the evaluation of the coaching sessions and saying a proper goodbye (Beck, 2014).

As mentioned, coaching works towards a specific goal with a desire for internal or external change in the coachee's life. This requires the coach to be able to work focused on a problem in a limited amount of time. It is a development that can only be done in a specialised collaboration between the coach and the coachee. In psychodynamic coaching, the focus is on the coachee's past and personal history and the coach needs to be aware about transference.

Psychodynamic therapy differs from other non-psychoanalytic treatments because the client is having therapy sessions more frequently. Based on this knowledge there is a distinction between psychotherapy and coaching in the time horizon, where psychodynamic coaching is time limited where psychotherapy is not (Beck, 2014).

## 8 The coaching session has a specific and typical agenda every time

Psychodynamic coaching has a specific session structure and the physical environment is precise established, but there is not a specific agenda every time (Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010). Psychodynamic coaching is investigative, exploratory and constantly open to discover new contexts. Psychodynamic coaching works with structured exercises because the focus in psychodynamic coaching is more narrow and specific than in psychoanalysis.

Psychodynamic coaching has many therapeutic benefits, but there is a distinction between psychotherapy and coaching: Psychodynamic coaching is time-limited, which means structure is important if you are to achieve the goal of coaching (Beck, 2014).

## 9 The coaching relation is a significant "change agent"

Coaching can help coachee's become aware of unconscious processes and patterns in their lives, which can be seen as an agent of change (Safran, Muran, & Proskurov, 2009). Before this change can

happen, it requires that the coach can contain the coachee's feelings (Beck, 2009). Containing means that you should be able to contain the other, especially when the other cannot bear to contain her/himself. Containing is a term for the mental function to hold, carry and manipulate mental material in a relationship. The process of containing can transform anxiety and confusion to understanding and peace. Change can only occur when the coachee achieves insight into the unconscious processes and patterns and the coaching relationship is an important element in this change process (Safran, Muran & Proskurov, 2009).

The coaching relationship is very important because it is through this relationship that the unconscious or preconscious can become conscious. You cannot do it yourself, but through containment, transference, and countertransference the unconscious or preconscious can become conscious (Diamond, 2013; Sandler, 2011). It is important that the coach learns to contain feelings of anxiety and uncertainty because it might help their coachee to find meaning and deal with fearful thoughts and ideas as well (Allcorn, 2006).

As a coach, you should not try to block the coachee's feelings by repeating the rational messages about the background and necessity of change. Instead, you must create space and endure the coachee's feelings, frustration; you must listen to the coachee, hold it and then send it back in a form that is easier to carry for the coachee (Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010; Sandler, 2011).

There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy regarding the concepts of the relation as a significant "agent of change".

## 10 Deals with the problem's aetiology

As previously, stated, psychodynamic coaching is theoretically and methodologically inspired by psychoanalysis, without complying to the special rules concerning classical psychoanalysis: The focus in psychodynamic coaching is on helping the coachee make realistic action plans by combining the past with the present and wishes for the future (Robert & Jarrett, 2006).

Hence, psychodynamic coaching might deal with the problem's aetiology, but also following the psychodynamic assumption that life events and choices are connected. The psychodynamic approach seeks to view current events in the lights of

the past, typically early childhood, and because the problems aetiology is an essential part of psychodynamic coaching (Beck, 2014; Sandler, 2011).

There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy regarding the necessity and importance of dealing with the problem's aetiology.

## 11 The psychodynamic coaching sessions are very structured

Yes, a psychodynamic coaching session is very structured. Psychodynamic coaching is divided into different stages in which the coach has to be aware of many different verbal as well as non-verbal elements. A typical coaching session following a psychodynamic approach looks as follows:

The first contact is very important and there is much information to be aware of. For this reason, it is a good investment of time to stay alert from the very beginning. As a coach, you need to be aware of transference and countertransference from the very beginning including the mood, feelings, perceptions and fantasies it produces to be in contact with the coachee (Sandler, 2011). The coach can write all notions and fantasies down no matter how biased, subjective and unfounded they are. This systematised way of writing down can help coaches to get in touch with what is activated in them (Beck, 2014).

The coach ought to emphasise on creating the frame and setting goals during the first coaching session. The coach and coachee's common goal is to find out what the coaching sessions should attend to. It is up to the coach to clarify what different roles the coach and coachee have, and it is the coach's responsibility to clarify the overall frame of how to work. Coaching is a joint process in which both efforts are crucial. The coachee must be prepared to be open-minded and speak honestly. The coach must engage in the work and present hypothesis and let the coachee know what is happening in terms of relevant ideas and possible explanations in the coach's mind. The sharing of experience and honesty is very important and if there are disturbances in the coach-coachee relation, this should be articulated. The coach can be perceived a bit like a "detective" and should always be curious. The coach seeks to understand the events in the coachee's life as coherent. It is a common task for the coach and coachee to figure out how the current situation is linked to the past (Beck, 2014).

There are various points that are important to be aware of in the coaching process. The structure in the session should always be observed and deviations noted. The introduction will be about 5-10 minutes, the actual situation will be around 15-20 minutes, the “detective work” approximately 1 hour and reflections will be 20-30 minutes.

The final and last coaching session has two tasks; it must be dedicated to completion and will cover an evaluation and farewell: The first will be to evaluate, reflect on and conclude the process. The second task will be to end the relation in a professional and good way, saying a proper goodbye (Beck, 2009).

### 12 Homework is a significant ingredient during sessions

Yes, homework is a significant part of psychodynamic coaching sessions. Susan Long presents a model she calls Role-Biography (Long, 2006), and the model is based upon doing drawings. The well-known psychodynamic notion is that nothing is random, whether it comes to a person choosing jobs or an organisation choosing employees for a position. Freud’s famous dictum is that there exists no mistakes. As persons, we think that these choices of jobs are something we do consciously, but the psychodynamic school says that we should think of current events in the light of previously ones. In these tasks, the coachee is asked to draw their role biography. This means the client’s role in their family, throughout childhood, youth, adult life and where the person is now. By studying these drawings afterwards, patterns and unconscious material can be seen, interpreted, and understood. This process might help the client to get insight (Long, 2006). This work will be done partly during sessions and partly as homework, e.g. as dream exercises, and gives an example of psychodynamic coaching homework.

### 13 Coaching settings will typically include work with experiments and “data” collection from the coachee’s environment

No, it is not typical for psychodynamic coaching settings to work with experiments or “data” collection from the client’s environment, but that does not necessarily mean that settings cannot use these kinds of information. Some of the more well-known kinds of data collections used in psychody-

amic settings are –as just mentioned– interpretation of dreams and drawings (Long, 2006). These kinds of data collections might be given in the form of homework assignment or might be executed during sessions. However, the focus of psychodynamic programmes will always be on the personal development of the coachee; thus making the focus of the coachee’s environment less important.

There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy regarding working with experiments and data collection from the client’s environment.

## Conclusion

Psychodynamic coaching occurs as a concept by combining coaching with psychodynamic theory. Psychodynamic theory differs from other theories by emphasising the notion of e.g. the unconscious. In psychodynamic coaching the present has an important impact and this might be understood as a limitation concerning psychodynamic coaching. As earlier mentioned, there will be problems that cannot be fixed and there are goals that only some people can reach (Beck, 2009).

Psychodynamic coaching is a hybrid that combines psychodynamic theory with the practice found in psychoanalysis, group analysis, therapy, supervision, role analysis, personal development and group-work. A crucial determinant of psychodynamic coaching is to perceive the conversation as a process that links the coachee’s past and present as a basis for creating a desirable and realistic future. In psychodynamic coaching, it is important for the coach to pay attention to the coachee’s unconscious feelings and be aware of her own reactions to the coachee. The thirteen points above presents some of the most distinct characteristics of psychodynamic coaching, and lengthwise compared to psychodynamic therapy. Similarities and differences between the two are presented and shortly described.

Just like any other approach, the psychodynamic coaching relationship is built upon trust and confidentiality. Although trust and confidentiality might be especially important because of the profound work in psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy. Both psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy work with conscious, preconscious and unconscious processes. When unconscious patterns and dynamics become conscious, it becomes possible to work with them,

and therefore there is a request to understand “unconscious motivation”. A key factor here is the relationship between the coachee/client and the coach/psychologist. Especially with the concepts of transference and countertransference, which are the same regarding psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy.

Psychodynamic coaching is slightly more directive than psychodynamic therapy. There is no distinction between psychodynamic coaching and psychodynamic therapy, in the sense, that the coach/psychologist will not provide the client with the “right” answer (Robert & Jarrett, 2006). In psychodynamic coaching, there is an emphasis on solving the coachee’s problem by facilitating development or change within the coachee (Beck, 2014). Additionally, psychodynamic coaching deals with the problem’s aetiology, because of the psychodynamic assumption that life events and choices are connected. The psychodynamic approach seeks to view current events in the lights of the past, typically early childhood, which deals with the problems aetiology as an essential part of psychodynamic coaching (Beck, 2014).

The psychodynamic coaching agenda is time-limited, whereas psychodynamic therapy is not. This means that the structure in psychodynamic coaching session is important in achieving the goals set out for the coaching programme. The sessions are very structured and follow the same setup each time. Therefore, psychodynamic coaching is more intense, stretches over a shorter period of time, works with limited tasks, and focus on what is relevant right now in the coachee’s life. Psychodynamic therapy is more open to deal with problems coming up during the sessions.

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