

My journey as coach

For me, dialogues are key to every form of development. I first discovered this when I was appointed "Coach" during my early university years in 2006 in my student-job at a Call-center in Rambøll Management. Initially I knew very little about coaching, but I was told that my job was to train, motivate and offer sparring for the interviewers who conducted telephone-based interviews.

During my time as "Coach" (from 2006 – 2011) I developed a strong interest in coaching as a field and alongside my practical experience as a coach/manager for 110 students, I read practically every book I could get my hands on about coaching, which made me discover that, while I held the title of "Coach", I had much to learn about coaching as a craft and that using and developing my coaching practice as a method yielded promising results in relation to my employees.

Since then my passion for coaching and dialogues have only grown. To my great satisfaction, I was hired as intern in Attractor in 2010 (back then it was a different division of Rambøll Management). Attractor was one of the leading coaching environments in Denmark with 15+ experienced coaches and I was absolutely thrilled to be part of it. I decided to spend as much of my professional spare time reading books about systemic coaching (K. Tomm, Moltke et al, communications theory such as Coordinated Management of Meaning (B. Pearce and V. Cronen), Solutions focused coaching (I. Kim Berg, Peter Szabó, Steve de Shazer), Narrative Therapy (M. White, Jerome Bruner), Leadership based coaching (Storch et al), Cognitive coaching (Oestrich), Existential coaching (Spinelli and Van Deurzen) and the works from the Milan School (Checcin, Boscolo et al), Philosophical coaching (Stelter, Ziethen, Stelter et al) Teamcoaching (Molly et al) as well as the likes of Sartre and Kierkegaard for more perspectives on the existential perspectives on dialogues. Alongside the reading I offered myself as a coach in other divisions of Rambøll and in my network (without charge) to get as much practice and training as possible.

I loved being part of a consultancy where coaching was part of the everyday practice in forms of teaching, practicing, sparring, and receiving supervision on my practice and role as a coach. During 2010 and 2011 my own coaching identity began to emerge as I could participate on our EMCC-accredited Coaching program (senior practitioner) and by the end of 2011 I graduated with honors and a lot of motivation. From 2012 I finished my degree at the university, and I was hired as a coach and consultant in Attractor on full time. This was my dream position and introduced the possibility to coach and teach coaching on an everyday basis alongside some of the best coaches in Denmark. I even stated at a conference back then, that I wanted to become the best coach in Denmark by 2020 (now I am not sure if it makes any sense to award such honors at all, but it was – and is – at least a token of my ambitions regarding my own coaching practice).

Since then I have had hundreds of coaching conversations with many different people ranging from students on our programs and at the university and interns to leaders on all levels, consultants, project managers and top managers with the responsibility for billion-dollar budgets. I take pride in representing coaching as a highly skilled competence and craft that requires countless hours of practicing, reflecting and development to master.

My Coaching Practice

My practice as a coach reflects two basic perspectives: a systemic and social constructionist approach to people and organizations and a flexible, pragmatic, and eclectic use of a wide array of techniques and models.

The first is reflected in at least two ways; it raises my awareness on building trust and a productive working relation by using my personal skills, such as listening, using humor and being responsive to create a safe space and appropriate intimacy. The other awareness is to help my clients discover the importance of their relations, communication and personal skills and the way it affects the people and relations around them in their relevant contexts.

The latter reflects my great inspirations from the Narrative, Solutions focused, existential, philosophical, and systemic approaches to coaching. I also typically use visuals during my sessions, often beginning with a blank piece of paper. I strive to let my coaching competences follow the need of the client and hereby not let my coaching preferences dictate the sessions. I begin each session with a contracting phase where my clients determine their needs and hopes for the outcome, so their desired outcomes shape the models and techniques I apply.

Typically, I use the Gamemaster model as framework, where my role as gamemaster allows me to invite the client to adjust the focus and content in the session. I hereby take full responsibility of the process, so the client can focus on the desired content.

I am very inspired by the Narrative approach and I find it helpful to draw a "process line" (My development of a story board with a present, past and future) on a blank piece of paper. When writing and drawing on the line it helps the client to relate different perspectives, people, relations, experiences, problems etc to a coherent pattern that can be re-negotiated or be used for externalizations. The effect of the process line is also to create a visual overview of the clients' situation to make it easier to identify patterns and identify important perspectives. I typically want the client to write on the line herself for the purpose of ownership and agency, but sometimes I help the process along with a few notes and quotations and perhaps a suggestion to where to put certain words or to help along a structure. Overall, I use the narrative approach to internalizations and externalizations, creating new narratives, identifying stronger relations to significant others and all along take care of the client and not turning it in to a therapy session.

In every relation to a coachee I believe that I hold a great responsibility to make sure that the process and outcome takes place within the boundaries of a sound and ethical framework. I am very inspired by the Code of Ethics from EMCC that helps and guides the

foundation from which the coaching relationships takes place. I typically use it openly in new relations as part of my contracting and offer to send the Code beforehand and always as a reference, when asked about my general practice.

Throughout the past years in Denmark, there have been a rising awareness of the importance of diversity in society in general and it is only natural for me to further that agenda in my coaching practice. Diversity is for me the acknowledgement of people, no matter their background, gender, orientation or whatever differences one might find. In my volunteer work as Head of Volunteering and Organization in Roskilde Festival I am deeply involved in projects about equality, communities and under the name of "Unifying leadership" we are promoting diversity as a value. This is also reflected in my coaching practice as an important value and is mirrored in my pricing models (ranging from free conversations to students and volunteers, reduced price to companies that are involved in social work etc.).

Moving forward on becoming the most value creating coach possible

Moving forward, my current aspirations are threefold.

On a personal level, I want to become the best possible dialogical partner and coach I can be. I have learnt that it takes hard work and a high degree of ambition to move in that direction and at all times develop my practice by videotapes of my sessions, reflections, feedback, supervision, sparring, reading and applying it all in new behavior and adjustments of my practice. I am proud of my accomplishments as a coach so far but there is still plenty of room for improvements. For example, I am being invited to coach more and more top managers, and the language-games and formal tone in such sessions often requires a more formal and mature version of myself initially to build trust. At the same time, I do not want to let go of my playful and creative sides, and I truly believe that these competences bring real value – also in the boardrooms. This balance is one of the things I am very keen on reflecting on and developing now.

On a general level I want to prove to the world that "Coaching" consists of sophisticated skills and competences and takes years to master. Also, I believe that the skills of coaching has a very broad range of usability and should not be restricted to 1:1 conversations or team coaching sessions. Coaching is to me a dialogical craft and as a capacity in organizations it can create great results as a relational and dialogical way of relating in everyday organizational life in a broad array of communication contexts.

My final aspiration is to develop and contribute to a general transparency on the coaching field. The field of coaching need to apply a critical on its own practitioners and – alongside my own development – I believe that promoting an individual accreditation is a very important step in Denmark and our coaching environment. I also believe that we need to rethink the way we make the coaching practice transparent to people and organizations. That is why I want to develop videos and other material from practice that actually *shows* what goes on in coaching sessions. It surprises me that so little material and video is available, and I believe that coaching practice – like much else – is a game of "show it don't tell it".