Philosophy of Coaching: An International Journal
Vol. 8, No.1, May 2023, 04-20
https://philosophyofcoaching.org/v8i1/02.pdf

Aligning the ontologies of leadership and coaching using Leadership-as-Practice

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Abstract

Leadership studies have replaced old, reified definitions of 'hero-leaders' to incorporate post-modernist ideas. By contrast, managerial coaching studies consistently leave out any discussion of their underlying ontologies and often appear to rely on philosophies that "reduce[s] complexity to simplistic variables in a highly structured cause and effect relationship" (Hurlow, 2019, p. 124). Given that the role of leadership is widely acknowledged in the managerial coaching literature, we apply a Leadership-as-Practice lens to demonstrate how a process ontology has the potential to change everything. To rejuvenate the field, ensure philosophical and epistemological alignment, promote future research, and improve training opportunities, we offer the new term: 'leaders-who-coach'.

Key Words: Leadership-as-Practice; Leaders-who-Coach; Process Ontology; Managerial coaching

1. Introduction

"I Am Because You Are" (Ubuntu philosophy)

"But once we switch from thinking and talking of "things," and of human activities—from within that Cartesian-Newtonian, mechanistic world, in which everything exists in separation from everything else, to thinking of them from within an organic or living "world" of growing and developing "things," in which every "thing" is dynamically related to every "thing" else—then everything changes." (Shotter, 2016, p. 135).

In this paper, we enter the field of coaching alongside a new scholarship of leadership with a view to examining the specific sub-domain of coaching which is currently referred to by various terms including 'managerial coaching', and 'leader-as-coach', whereby managers or leaders, develop "coaching competenc[ies] to provide support to other members in the organization" (Chong et al., 2016, 122).

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Our intention is to show that whilst leadership theorising has advanced through the adoption of new philosophical lenses, managerial coaching theorising appears to lag behind. Consequently, when new ontologies drawn from leadership studies are considered, the existing approaches to managerial coaching are incommensurate and outdated.

Ontological misalignment is a critical issue (Stout & Love, 2021), and without transparency and clarity those interested in working alongside leaders in organisations; those interested in training leaders as coaches; and those concerned to advance the philosophical underpinnings of the management coaching discipline, risk ever-growing confusion. Fundamentally we risk the continuing production of research that cannot be relied upon for comparative purposes as a field of study. Writing in this journal, the *Philosophy of Coaching*, is the ideal context within which to challenge the status quo. Coaching studies in our view need to make visible their philosophical underpinnings and be ready to adopt new ones that are commensurate with contemporary leadership paradigms.

Put simply, we propose, that a shift in ontology has profound implications for those working in the field of managerial coaching and, as per Shotter above, 'everything changes.' By focusing our attention on the philosophical underpinnings of leadership and coaching we believe we can explain why so many challenges exist in this field and ignite a new way to respond to them. We address the multitude of terms for managerial coaching by introducing a new and more ontologically accurate term for the phenomenon, underpinned by process ontology, *leaders-who-coach*. This new term helps researchers and practitioners to understand and work from a set of common principles by distinguishing it from all other terms. Similarly, therefore, it helps to address the plethora of definitions for the act of coaching within an organisational context when an external coach is not involved. The leader-who-coaches approach also allows us to see why there continue to be problems of measurement and to set a progressive agenda for future research. Finally, and importantly, revealing misalignments allows us to understand the failings in the current approaches to training employees to use the skills of coaching (McCarthy & Milner, 2013) and offers a new way forward. For the avoidance of doubt, the focus of this paper is on the specific intersection of evolving leadership theorising and managerial coaching – we use this latter term to encompass the many similar constructs until introducing our new term in section 4.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We start by exploring some core challenges within the extant literature on the topic of 'managerial coaching'. We then explain the new philosophical underpinnings of leadership through the lens of Leadership-as-Practice which relies on a process ontology. Next, we align managerial coaching with this lens and draw upon evidence found within the existing literature to clarify why the 'leader-who-coaches' is a more accurate and useful term to describe the construct at hand. Finally, we briefly explain the consequences for future research as well as for practitioners seeking to develop these skills.

2. Managerial coaching

The academic field of coaching seems dominated by studies of professional coaching (Dixey, 2015), primarily where an external provider works as a coach with employees (see, for example, Jones et al., 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). These professional coaches work with their clients (coachees) over some time in individual or sometimes team coaching sessions generally focused on the professional development of their clients.

However, the sub-domain of coaching that we are specifically interested in is where the manager or leader takes the role of coach or uses the skills of coaching internally (Chong et al., 2016; Grant & Hartley, 2013; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019; Nyfoudi et al., 2022; Zheng et

al., 2022). The organisational opportunity here seems enormous (Sherpa Consulting, 2019) given the growing expectations and demands that managers use the skills of coaching and, that organisations cannot afford professional coaches for everyone (Renshaw & Robinson, 2020). However, this field of research is struggling with widely acknowledged problems including a multitude of different terms, definitions, and measures which we believe are inhibiting progress both for researchers and practitioners (Lawrence, 2017).

The challenges in the managerial coaching literature

1. No, or few, extant philosophical underpinnings

Ontology and epistemology are no trifling matters in scholarship (Sharma & Bansal, 2020). An ontology that admits of witches will adopt starkly different epistemologies to an ontology that does not. This is taken to be of such importance that doctoral students are expected to cross a threshold in their understanding of these issues of philosophy to achieve success and commence an academic career (Wisker, 2010). The importance of this is further emphasised in our field by the naming of the journal in which this paper sits and its aim to 'challenge pre-existing assumptions about coaching practice' (ref, https://philosophyofcoaching.org/mission/). Noting how this stands aside from, for example, the International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring whose very name risks positioning itself, whether intentionally or otherwise, at the centre of the positivist traditions of Evidence-Based-Management.

However, this understanding that philosophy matters, seems to be lacking in much of the managerial coaching literature. By way of example, most papers fail to state directly the paradigm in which they are working. Some, such as Carrell et al. (2022), use language and methodology that makes it clear they are considering managerial coaching within the paradigm of positivism, which 'reduces complexity to simplistic variables in a highly structured cause and effect relationship' (Hurlow, 2019, 124). Similarly, DiGirolamo and Tkach, (2019); Ellinger (2013); Ellinger et al. (2008); Ellinger & Ellinger (2021) do not declare their perspective but instead rely on their description of methods and research approaches to shine light on their meta-assumptions. As Dixey notes, "[f]or the most part, research in this area has favoured a quantitative approach" (2015, 78) but we are only able to discern philosophical foundations by reference to their methods. Largely, in the managerial coaching literature, the philosophical perspectives of the authors, are unstated.

The risk here is that authors in the field do not know their philosophical perspectives, or they do not care about their philosophical perspective, or that they are confused as to why it makes a difference (all issues identified in other fields, see for example, Isaeva et al., (2015)).

2. Confused philosophical underpinnings

The second concern is that in some papers focused on managerial coaching, the underpinning philosophy is made extant, but it appears that the full implication of these paradigms has not been heeded. For example, Dhar (2022) sets out to remedy an overly simplistic view of managerial coaching, suggesting that models need to be able to take account of more nuances and relationships that are nonlinear. However, their proffered explanatory framework simply includes more variables and more mediating variables. Having noted the restrictions of the old paradigm they remain strictly within it and simply make it more complicated.

In a similar manner, Nyfoudi et al. (2022) declare their use of social cognition theory, which is emergent and at a team-level. Nevertheless, they rely on methods that raise questions on their ability to capture the nature of the phenomenon they seek to study, in this case using survey instruments at the individual level. Similar problems appear too in Zheng et al. (2022) using knowledge transfer theory which is emergent and dynamic (see for example Nonaka & Takeuchi (2011)) and not restricted to dyadic exchanges but they return to a moderated mediation model. As a final example, Anderson (2013) places great emphasis on challenging leader-centric theories but continues to use dyadic measures embedded in Leader Member Exchange, which may be no better than the theories they purport to challenge.

By contrast, some papers are explicit and aligned. Hamlin et al. (2009) declare and explore the implications of their critical realist philosophy, whereas Anderson (2013) expressly calls upon humanistic management theory and leadership practice. These two exceptions aside, it appears to us that managerial coaching scholars are too often adopting a positivistic paradigm (inferred from the methodologies they apply), remaining silent as to their philosophical perspectives or are using theoretical ideas that do not entirely fit with their chosen methods, an issue they do not address. The risk of generating unreliable findings as a result of these hidden issues or confusions is significant (Blaikie, 2007; Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

3. Same or different phenomenon?

Compounded by and potentially a result of the lack of clarity about paradigmatic assumptions, there are also problems with the range of nomenclature in the field of managerial coaching. This results in the possibility of scholars assuming the findings from one study apply to another or can be collated, when the phenomenon of study differs (Carrell et al., 2022). A basic premise of good research is that both units of analysis and levels of analysis need to align for any generalisation or aggregation to be valid (Gronn, 2015). Authors have sought to establish differences through the use of numerous constructs including (alphabetically) anytime coaching (Kloster & Swire, 2010), coaching moments (Turner & McCarthy, 2015), corridor coaching (Grant, 2010), leader-as-coach (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Milner et al., 2018), manager-as-coach (Ellinger et al., 2003) and workplace coaching (Schneider et al., 2022). These multiple definitions may coalesce on the same phenomenon or they may be incompletely isomorphic (Carrell et al., 2022; Lawrence 2017). Whilst this is indicative of a field of research still in its infancy (Ellinger et al., 2003) acknowledging and foregrounding contemporary leadership ontologies offers a way forward.

Two, mostly implicit, yet significant factors within these different terms for our purposes, are the extent to which managerial coaching is a distinct time-bound activity and whether it follows a process in its application. Hamlin, Ellinger, and Beattie (2009) found commonalities across coaching in general, executive coaching, life coaching, and business coaching reporting that "common to all four variants is that [intention] of providing help to individuals and organizations through some form of facilitation activity or intervention" (p. 18). This commonality indicates that, at least at a basic level, the phenomenon is being construed as a separately identifiable activity, one which occurs between two colleagues without the use of an external practitioner. For example, McCarthy and Milner (2020) explore the 'opportunities' to coach in situ thereby seeing it as a distinctive event in line with Hamlin et al.'s (2009) description of the 16 papers they considered to be investigating managerial coaching as being 'a type of planned coaching intervention". In a similar vein, Ahrens et al. (2018, p. 2) describe how this activity "can occur via formal coaching sessions, with a dedicated time set aside to have a coaching conversation" which aligns with several other papers' descriptions (see, for example Carrell et al. (2022); Hicks & McCracken

(2010); Orth et al. (1987)). Other researchers, however, have advocated that management coaching is not a distinct identifiable event, (Anderson, 2013; Dixey, 2015; Hamlin et al., 2008). We return to the importance of this difference in Section 4 below.

Of greater significance perhaps, many papers explicitly define coaching as a 'process'. Others use the term 'coaching process' (see for example, Dhar 2022 and DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019). Hamlin et al.'s (2007) review paper identified 16 definitions of managerial coaching of which 8 included the term process and 2 included the term 'systematic'. Lawrence's (2017) review of the managerial coaching literature covered an additional 11 definitions of which 7 also included the term 'process'. However, the use of the word 'process' in this context is not, as far as one can tell, a reference to process as an ontology. Rather this relates to the management of the dynamic not to the nature of the dynamic itself, in other words building the riverbanks, but without noticing that the river is flowing swiftly past. We acknowledge that other authors may be using the word process consistent with a processual ontology, but as described above, the lack of reference to their ontological influences, which would be especially important when countering any status quo, combined with ontological inconsistencies, indicates that this is not the case. We return to this issue below given the fundamental differences between ontological views and its importance for managerial coaching.

4. Measurement is doubtful when definitions are malleable

Unsurprisingly the many different terms used in this field and the variety of definitions mean that there are a growing number of measurement tools that have been designed in the last two decades (Lawrence, 2017) with little or no common agreement on what should be valued and therefore what should be measured. In our view, what these approaches do share is an implicit assumption that basing their approach on a philosophy of positivism will help to establish credibility. This, however, renders human behaviour into a finite number of variables and through modelling assumes that it can be predicted (for examples, see De Haan et al., 2019).

Hagen and Peterson (2014) have identified many problems of conflicting theoretical foundations and methodological weaknesses in existing measures of coaching. They determine that the theoretical underpinnings are often unstated or unclear which, we surmise, is indicative of ontological misalignment. Examples useful to our arguments include when a measure designed for the investigation of managerial coaching has been developed primarily for external coaching or based on an external professional coaching model (Park et al., 2021). Another example of methodological weakness is when a measurement tool offers a brief definition of coaching but then ask respondents questions about when they are 'coaching' (for example, the Goal-focused Coaching Skills Questionnaire (GCSQ) (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007)). When time and attention is limited, it stands to reason that respondents will not pay attention to the given definition and will simply answer the questions by reference to their own existing ideas of 'coaching', whatever that may be. This has the effect of diminishing the validity of the findings from such measurement.

This misalignment continues in the GCSQ (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007) where there is an emphasis on "The GCSQ has been found to be a reliable and valid measure, distinguishing between novice and professional coaches" (p. 758). Yet the literature speaks consistently to the view that managerial coaching differs to professional coaching (Dhar 2022; Lawrence 2017) so the GCSQ's ability to distinguish in this way suggests it is measuring something other than managerial coaching. Here is a core disjuncture: how can such a tool be relevant when its justification links to an entirely different phenomenon with its concomitant philosophy?

5. Measurement is doubtful when definitions vary socio-historically

Researchers have identified inconsistencies between practitioners' descriptions of what managerial coaching may be and academics' definitions (Lawrence, 2017) which may be adding to the research problems in this field. We are not surprised by this issue given our personal experience of over 30 years in leadership development where we consistently find that practitioners, when asked, have significantly different definitions of coaching.

Some examples of potential contextual explanations for these differences that we have noticed in our work as practitioners could be gender (sporting terms are more likely to be used by men), cultural (Asian and African identities are more likely to describe coaching with hierarchical overtones), and experience of leadership training (those without training are more likely to offer a wider range of definitions). These experiences indicate 1) that researchers are potentially asking respondents to use personal heuristics not accepted definitions, and 2) respondents may be reflecting back what trainers have told them about coaching. In a similarly distorting manner, "Much of the training in the managerial coaching domain is being provided by external coaches. If those external coaches are training managers to coach in a way that doesn't reflect the nature of their roles, then this is likely to result in sub-optimal outcomes." (Lawrence 2017, p. 44). This issue of definitional inconsistency between practitioners and academics offers a further reason why a new term for the managerial coaching phenomenon centred on distinct, transparent and justified ontological principles is needed.

We now turn to explain ideas from recent developments in leadership theory before exploring how applying these to the field of managerial coaching may help address the issues we have identified above and provide a new way forward.

3. New leadership theory

The re-orientation of leadership theorising has been brought about by the realisation that both a) much of current leadership theory does not work in practice; and b) the new realities of organisations are more complex, dynamic and entwined than have hitherto been understood (Collinson, 2012; Grint, 2010; Hicks, 2016; Tourish, 2019).

In a scathing review of well-established and highly used ideas of leadership, Collinson and Tourish (2015) note that most teaching for leaders about leadership adheres to a rather narrow set of psychological assumptions and approaches thereby privileging the role of hierarchically senior individuals. This thinking perpetuates a highly "leader-centred" set of theories. When adopted via such 'theories' as transformational leadership or authentic leadership, scholarship becomes focused on identifying those traits, behaviours, and competencies that are seen to be most highly correlated with effectiveness. This 'hero leader' construct, with all its outdated androcentric traditions and leadership development misunderstandings, is no longer relevant to the future of organisational success (Collinson et al., 2017; Meindl et al., 1985). One of the assumptions of this leader-centred approach is that leadership is a relatively stable construct that is amenable to atomisation, disaggregation, and measurement. This was an understood and acknowledged criticism included in the Anderson (2013) paper.

To expand this point further, Collinson and Tourish (2015) note that, for example, transformational leadership has grown so complicated and conflated that its theory and practice are impossible to use. Referencing an exhaustive review by van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) they note 58 moderating variables in the literature that allegedly have relationships with 37 dependent variables. They also found 52 mediators predicting 38 different outcomes. Yet, there is little evidence that human behaviour can be rendered

predictable in this way (Grey, 2004). We note too that the managerial coaching literature includes numerous studies that take this approach (Carrell et al., 2022; Dhar, 2022; Zhao & Liu, 2020; Zheng et al., 2022).

In sum, for the last two decades scholars have concluded that despite 100 years of leadership theory, little can be said to reliably work in practice (Avolio, 2007; Barker, 2001; Collinson, 2011; Collinson et al., 2017; Day et al., 2014; Grint et al., 2016; Meindl et al., 1985).

A second impetus for these new approaches to leadership comes from expanded contextual realities faced by organisations. "Increased complexity and ambiguity coupled with the need to respond faster to complex market conditions has led to new emerging patterns of accountability, inter-dependency and co-ordination which constitute a shift in the division of labour within organizations" (Fitzsimons et al., 2011, 313).

Two examples from the business world demonstrate how organisations are beginning to shift to this new ground. In the global pharmaceutical company Novartis, the CEO Vas Narasimhan, has publicly talked about the 'unBoss' initiative, which is an idea grounded in eastern philosophy, inspired by the Chinese text the Tao Te Ching, and offers a contemporary reworking of "leadership" (FT, March 15, 2020). Similarly, KPMG, a global consulting colossus have adopted a leadership development framework called 'Everyone A Leader' (KPMG website, accessed, December 2022) which aims to encourage colleagues throughout the organisation to step forward regardless of hierarchical position.

The failure of individualised theories of leadership along with these new contextual realities that can only be fathomed by the collective knowledge of many, have in combination fuelled the need for new ideas of leadership.

Process Ontology

We now introduce the idea of process ontology, which is distinctive and set apart from the usual meaning of the word 'process' as used in most fields of study, including the managerial coaching literature. By our usage in this paper, 'process ontology' refers to a set of theorising that follows scholars such as Feldman and Orlikowski (2011); Hernes (2007); Langley and Tsoukas (2016); and Shotter (2016). Sometimes referred to as 'strong' process these authors identify that actions are situated and consequential; dualisms are rejected; relations are mutually constitutive, and nothing is independent of another phenomenon. Although resurrected in modern times, the roots of this ontology trace back to Heraclitus who viewed reality, "not as a constellation of things but as one of processes. He argued that substantializing nature into enduring things (substances) is a fallacy because these are constituted by varied and fluctuating activities: 'Process is fundamental: The river is not an object but an ever-changing flow; the sun is not a thing, but a flaming fire. Everything in nature is a matter of process, of activity, of change' (Rescher, 1996: 10)." (quoted in Langley et al. (2013, p. 4)). In this way process ontology is radically different from other paradigms arising from Cartesian-Newtonian thinking.

Process ontologies require us to see how everything and everyone is in interaction, flux and always changing (Chia, 1995; Langley & Tsoukas, 2016; Schatzki, 2001). Thus phenomena, including human behaviour, are emergent and co-arising and cannot be reduced to variables. Process research requires scholars to consider phenomena as in motion, as unfolding over time, as becoming. Process views see the world in terms of interlinked events, activity, temporality, and flow (Langley et al., 2013) rather than in terms of dependent and independent variables that lead to predictable relationships and outcomes (Fachin & Langley,

2018). Thus, it can be determined that 'process' in this sense is entirely incommensurate with Cartesian-Newtonian and mechanistic worldviews.

Leadership as Practice

Viewing the world with a process ontology re-orients our understanding to recognise that "[l]eadership ….[becomes] a phenomenon produced and sustained in interactions, [as] a situated and relational phenomenon" (Crevani, 2018, 84). Furthermore, leadership most likely involves multiple actors and multiple sets of circumstances. Or as March (2008) said, "history is not produced by dramatic actions and postures of leaders, but by complex combinations of large numbers of small actions by unimportant people" quoted by Vogus and Rerup (2018, 228).

Building on this scholarship, the Leadership-as-Practice (LAP) field proposes that leadership occurs as a set of non-normative practices rather than residing in the traits and behaviours of an individual (Raelin, 2007, 2016b).

Leadership-as-Practice is a useful and applicable way of observing process at work because it sees leadership as emerging and growing within the recursive and co-mingled activities of collaborative agents (Raelin, 2016; Robinson & Renshaw, 2022; Shotter, 2016). Thus, the Ubuntu saying "I am because you are" points to this entwining of lives. In answer to where or what is the source of leadership? (Drath et al., 2008), or, where does leadership emerge and manifest itself empirically? (Ospina et al., 2018), LAP responds by considering the practices (not the people). LAP is a non-entitative, non-compositional and non-substantive approach where the focus is not on the intra-psychology of the individual, nor on the inter-relating of the individuals but on the trans-actions or trans-subjectivity of multiple agents (Robinson & Renshaw, 2022). Recognising that the entanglement of agents can leave no one or thing unchanged, it is from the constitutive entwining and continuous refiguration of each other(s) that leadership emerges (Shotter, 2006; Simpson, 2016).

This radical re-thinking of leadership which has come about in the last two decades moves away from the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm to a process ontology, one that is more fluid and less atomistic (Shotter, 2016). Further, once these new ideas of leadership have been grasped, it is impossible to amalgamate with a coaching model that is underpinned by an incommensurate ontology.

4. Aligning leadership and coaching ontologies

McCarthy and Milner (2013) state that "[r]ecent writing on leadership suggests that coaching is linked with effective management behaviours and offers a way for managers to implement leadership theories" (p. 3). Furthermore, a processual view necessitates the integration of managerial coaching ***into*** not ***onto*** leadership so that the practice can be entwined.

Whilst some authors have recognised that managerial coaching is bound up in everyday interactions (see, for example, Park et al., 2021) our contention is that across the coaching literature, as described above, the processual view (emergent, in flux, and never repeatable) is ignored in favour of more linear views (causal relationships and predictable models of behaviour). The philosophical implications are usually not considered in extant literature in the field of managerial coaching. Whilst it could be argued that many papers could be interpreted as aligning with a processual and LAP view of the world, we feel this is unlikely as the authors persistently work with variables and atomisation. Furthermore, with

respect to the intersection with leadership and the LAP perspective, this literature is relatively recent (the earliest papers date to 2008 (See Carroll et al., 2008)) and unlikely to have inspired and informed authors until more recently.

As proposed earlier, leadership can be seen through the lens of process; "recognizing leadership wherever it occurs, not restricted to a single or even small set of formal or informal leaders…" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, 666). Furthermore, this arises in the everyday "messiness" of real-life interactions (Robinson and Renshaw 2022) which are up, down and around all levels of the organisational structure. There is evidence of this philosophical distinction in managerial coaching, for example Clutterbuck, Megginson and Bajer (2016) discuss the value of employees integrating coaching into their daily routine, arguing that it is unrealistic if not undesirable for managers to be expected to adopt the role of a professional coach. This is consistent with their adoption of the ideas of a coaching culture to suggest that coaching is best instilled in the very bones of an organisation. Whilst this aligns on first inspection with a processual ontology, Clutterbuck et al.'s (2016) work is explicitly based upon the philosophical views of Evidence-Based Management which, as we have said, continues to rely on variables and atomisation. In our view, based on the evidence described above, the wider doctrine of managerial coaching has yet to catch up and explicitly recognise the process philosophy and its implications. Scholarship in management coaching studies appears to be firmly linked to competencies and entities, which is a feature of the substantialist school of thought (MacKay et al., 2020). We suggest that this is outmoded and needs to move to a more processual view of on-the-go moment-by-moment coaching (see for example the critical agenda described in Hurlow's social constructionist coaching, 2019).

Evidence of the problems created by misunderstanding the ontological realities can be seen when managers say they are happy to provide formal coaching sessions for their staff when they have been able to prepare in advance and have the time to coach, and yet struggle to spontaneously apply coaching skills in everyday conversations (Chong et al., 2016; McCarthy & Milner, 2020). This desire to prepare is indicative of viewing managerial coaching as a distinct activity, happening at specific points in time, rather than one that is emergent and interwoven with other leadership activities. Similarly, researchers report that managerial coaching is unsuccessful if either party is unwilling to take part (McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Chong et al., 2016; Dixey 2015) This may be because of the proceduralised way in which coaching is being added ***onto*** leadership (as a separate activity), not ***into*** leadership.

Leader-who-coaches: a new term with consistent ontological underpinnings

The LAP lens allows us to see that managerial coaching consists of a range of behaviours which happen within the practice of leadership in contrast to an employee seeking to act 'like a coach' or 'as a coach'. Whilst some of the existing terms for managerial coaching offer potential to reflect these new ontological underpinnings, such as corridor coaching or anytime coaching, in practice these are used in support of distinct time-bound activities (Grant, 2010; Kloster & Swire, 2010). It is for these reasons that the terminology of 'leader-as-coach' or 'manager-as-coach' is inappropriate and misleading. Redefining an existing term, such as the leader-as-coach construct, offers one approach to resolve these issues, however in our view this invites confusion given its existing use by researchers and practitioner-trainers whose ontology does not appear to be aligned with the as-practice community. Whilst opportunities may exist for leaders to act like (professional) coaches, more often than not this is not the case: the skilled employee using coaching skills is simply a ***leader-who-coaches***. We introduce this new term to make it clear that the role of coaching skills is entwined within the actors' everyday leadership practice.

We define the term leader-who-coaches as anyone (irrespective of hierarchical position) who embeds into their interaction with a colleague an intention to help that colleague solve their own professional dilemma(s). It represents a state of mind in which one is facilitating the release of agency in another. It takes place interwoven with the messiness of everyday leadership activities. Leaders-who-coach, embody an understanding that relationships and outcomes are mutually constitutive.

We acknowledge that many academics and practitioners will find this definition to be too broad. Specifically, too broad to enable statistically driven empirical analyses so often called for in the literature (Jones et al., 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). This however underpins the very nature of our argument in this paper. A positivistic desire to identify direct causal relationships through quantitative analyses and hypothetico-deductive rationalisation is inconsistent with a process ontology in which the phenomena of interest are constantly changing by reference to their context and interactions. These methodological approaches will not enable greater understanding of leaders-who-coach, they only serve as inappropriate reductivism.

Table 1 below summarises the differences we have described above as well as some examples of the implications for elements generally recognised within managerial coaching that arise when a processual LAP view is taken hence distinguishing leaders-who-coach.

	Managerial Coaching	***Leaders-who-Coach***
1. *Underpinning philosophy*	Cartesian-Newtonian Ontology	Process Ontology
2. *Locus of leadership*	Either intrapersonal or interpersonal	Constitutive entwining and continuous refiguration of each other(s)
3. *Conceptualisation of 'self'*	Traits and characteristics. Skills, knowledge and competencies	Defined in its relationships with others, the 'self' is not stable but evolves from co-action
4. *Locus of coaching*	Time set apart: added onto current work activities	On-the-go: added into current work activities. Coaching is embedded
5. *Standards of confidentiality*	Clear and maintained	Provisional and negotiated as needed
6. *Guiding precepts*	Assumptions of linearity and causality	Conversation is dynamic and emergent and responsive to the needs of all parties
7. *End point analysis*	Success can be measured and might be considered as the growth and development of the coachee	Mutually constitutive and never ending. Everything and everyone are changed by being in trans-action and trans-subjective

Table 1 – Leaders-who-Coach: Using a process ontology changes everything. Created by the authors drawing upon Carroll et al., (2008); Robinson & Renshaw (2022); Rosile et al., (2018)

Defining the leader-who-coaches construct to include a state of mind or 'an intention' has been endorsed in the literature, e.g. Lawrence (2017), where the importance of a particular mindset has been identified. A range of skills are appropriate to enact this. These include those identified in existing literature, such as creative questioning, generative listening, enabling the creation of actions, and building trust and rapport (see, for example, Grant, 2010; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). We do not have space to explore these different dimensions of a leader-who-coaches in this paper. However, crucial to their application is that they are embedded within everyday activities rather than being distinct, combined events that one might point at and say: 'they are now coaching'. Again, there is evidence to support such distinctions in existing literature, but these do not provide ontological clarity which is the distinction we are making.

The LAP lens and the 'as practice' approach positions leadership such that everyone is or can be involved. In other words, leadership and being a leader is not a function of experience or seniority, rather it is a function of actors' behaviours, choices and actions. Hence the leader-who-coaches construct moves us away from the restrictive assumption, held in many research papers in the field, that coaching is an activity of the supervisor/employee or line-manager/employee dyad (Dahling, Ritchie Taylor, Chau & Dwight (2016), Gregory and Levy 2010, Zheng et al., 2022 plus the papers using LMX which is dyadic). As already recognised by some authors in the field, these skills can be and should be applied on a peer-to-peer basis and even upwards (Cox et al., 2014; Sue-Chan and Latham 2004). To take a small example, the skills of listening are widely identified as being part of the coaching toolkit (Ellinger et al., 2003) and it would be absurd to suggest that this skill might not play a role in the direction of the employee-to-senior colleague. The as-practice lens leads us to understand why this is the case and to avoid definitions of managerial coaching which are limited to the manager/employee dyad.

5. The consequences for future research – LAP changes everything

As a result of applying the leader-who-coaches definition to this field of study, the research methodologies need to shift so that they are aligned. Langley (1999); Fachin & Langley (2018); Langley and Tsoukas (2016) all write extensively on different methods appropriate to process research. Always the aim is to foreground the lived-reality of what people do rather than what they say they do when acting as leaders-who-coach. As described earlier, this contrasts with many studies in managerial coaching which ask actors what they do. Central to any methodological choice - including ethnography, case studies, diary studies and observational studies - is the acknowledgement that data is multi-level across multiple units and boundaries are ambiguous.

Furthermore, the existing approaches to measuring managerial coaching where psychometric techniques are applied, are shown to be ontologically incommensurate (see particularly Langley, 1999 on this issue). As the leader-who-coaches uses their skills within the everyday messiness of ordinary life, separating these skills out in a way that is necessary for traditional statistical analyses, no longer makes sense. Previous authors have questioned the positivistic approach, for example Schneider et al. (2022, 66) stated "Coaching as a complex, dynamic process (Ely et al., 2010) may be hard to capture solely through standardised scientific evaluation methods (Osatuke et al., 2017)". Applying a processual ontology demonstrates why this is the case.

In researching the leader-who-coaches field the LAP lens also guides researchers to ensure that we investigate all the relevant actors. As described above, the leader-who-coaches

can act at a peer-to-peer level, across boundaries, i.e. to juniors elsewhere in an organisation or with people in other organisations, as well as upwards to those of greater seniority. This significantly widens the opportunities to understand and explore this phenomenon by comparing different arrangements within which the leader-who-coaches operates.

Using the process ontology of LAP to construct a definition of leaders-who-coach has further implications in what is considered managerial coaching behaviour. Consider, for example, in a colleague/coach relationship there may be times where issues of confidentiality are confounded (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; McCarthy and Milner, 2013). And, there is the possibility that the act of delegation may become a substantial part of the interactions of a leader-who-coaches, including to colleagues they do not line-manage. There is considerable opportunity to deepen the research into these areas of management coaching.

6. The consequences for practitioners – The misalignment of training interventions

Within this new frame, leaders-who-coach, what is the appropriate way to decide what the phenomenon looks like and hence to offer training in the discipline? Where do the boundaries lie around this nascent discipline? Unsurprisingly, this for now, remains uncertain terrain and offers an important opportunity for further research. Some core elements are probably less contentious with scholars of managerial coaching who generally seem to agree on a set of skills such as active listening, powerful questions, adopting different perspectives. However, these component skills are often tied to procedural sequences such as the GROW model or some other model of accomplishment. In contrast, every aspect of a coaching session "cannot be notarised and codified" (Grant, 2011, p. 121). Thus, we expect that in alignment with our proposed processual approach an array of different skills should be taught such that they can be assembled and re-assembled as needed by the leader-who-coaches.

Existing literature already speaks to significant problems and inconsistencies with training employees in the skills of coaching. For example, McCarthy and Milner, (2013 p. 12) noted that 'When managers do get some training in coaching, it is often in the same training programs that full-time coaches attend, with no consideration of the different applications of coaching by the coaching manager. These short courses typically train participants either in a proprietary model or a publicly available single coaching model like GROW'. The fluidity and dynamism that applies to the requirements of managerial coaching is lacking in the training developed by professional coaches (DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019). And these professional coaches are very often the designers and providers of training for employees which therefore offers the wrong starting point and is inconsistent with their roles and their needs (Heslin et al., 2006). As Dixey (2015) concluded, employees need training to enable the application of their coaching skills such that "employees are not typically aware they are being coached." (p. 84). The failure to recognise the ontologies of the leader-who-coaches explains why these disconnects continually exist. We suggest that the power and influence of professional coaching accreditation bodies is orthogonal to the training needs of organisational employees wishing to coach given the distinctions we have identified in this paper.

Training approaches need to be amended or newly devised and implemented that encourage and enable employees to understand the individual components of the leader-who-coaches toolkit which can be developed 'in practice' consistent with their 'as practice' realities. Long classroom-based training interventions encouraging participants to see coaching as a separate activity, for example through role-modelling activities (Ellinger, 2013) should perhaps be replaced by short learning that participants can then practice through small

personal behavioural experiments within their everyday existing leadership practices. This might be supplemented by on-the-job style training by colleagues (Powell and Yalcin, 2010). This offers a route to developing the component skills which, together, create the expertise of the leader-who-coaches.

7. Conclusion

The importance of internal coaching between colleagues up, down and around organisations is widely acknowledged. The numbers involved are already high and the expectations that more need to develop and apply their skills is regularly identified (PwC Consulting, 2016; Sherpa Consulting, 2019). We urge the scholarly community to reorient research and practice through the construct of a leader-who-coaches inspired by the Leadership-as Practice lens. This approach provides insight to several of the dilemmas and challenges evident in the extant managerial coaching literature.

Aligning the ontologies of leadership and coaching using the LAP frame changes everything, as Shotter (2016) previously advised. It provides a new way of defining leadership that transcends the usual adherence to power, position and title. It provides a way of seeing management coaching as processual, embedded in the everyday employee interactions that are messy and essential for organisations to progress. It disabuses us of the idea that humans are simple variables in an elaborate equation and instead encourages a more critical scrutiny of measurement techniques and an inclusion of measures that are, initially at least, more qualitative and dynamic in nature. Lastly, the alignment of leadership and coaching into leaders-who-coach begins to identify the possibility of a series of dimensions that are not usually considered as part of the coaching toolkit but may be necessary in a way that has hitherto been ignored.

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