An Artificially Intelligent CDF Coach: Considerations regarding App-based executive coaching

Proposal: An app-based coaching system would have to foster in its user a CDF-based 'coach persona', and in the client a higher level of self-awareness of the coaching conversation. Such an app would use social-emotional prompts and clusters of TFs in order to re-fashion the coaching dialogue according to strictures derived from CDF ("artificially intelligent CDF coach") focused on "lean and agile" coaching: The app would:

1. *Reduce chances of anecdotal input from the client (deepening the universe of discourse)*
2. *Raise the coach's self-awareness of what s(he) puts into that universe*
3. *Empower the coach to select/place targeted social-emotional responses (questions and comments) to chosen client prompts*
4. *Make cognitive prompt proposals for triggering succinct, "scorable" client answers*
5. *Shift behavioral 'persuasion' to developmental 'listening'*

And so forth.

Although developmental coaching in the sense of the Constructive Developmental Framework is in its infancy, practiced by a small community often mixing behavioral and developmental coaching, the notion of a 'strictly' developmental coach in the sense of CDF is an attractive idea. In this blog, I am speculating what such a device would look like, what kinds of knowledge of CDF its use would presuppose, and what its benefit for clients would be.

What CDF-based Coaching is
Developmental coaching is rarely practiced in its pure form. This is the case because very few coaches have learned developmental theory and themselves are for the most part in an other-dependent position of meaning making, thus dependent on clients' expectations. This state of affairs is of little benefit above all for executives who often are self-authoring, and thus tend to be more highly developed than the coaches they are assigned to or hire.

When thinking of a way out of this dilemma that holds up self-organization in organizations, both in individuals and teams, the notion of an artificially 'developmental' coach is an attractive one since it would upgrade coaching practice and thereby funnel new benefits to managers and executives who increasingly are asked to work in and with teams.

What has been missing in coaching for a long time is a notion of coach and client being developmentally 'in the same boat', thus under lifelong development as adults. The benefits of realizing this simple notion, both in the emotional and cognitive domain of coaching, are tremendous. Simply put, coaching in this perspective changes into an undertaking in which the primary focus is put on the quality of coaching dialogue for both parties of coaching. This new focus is based on a notion familiar from CDF, that in a professional conversation 'every word counts' since verbal language embodies concepts whose depth is often merely skimmed, both in emotionally and cognitively focused conversations.

It is here that a CDF-based coaching 'app' could achieve a revolution. This revolution would comprise the following facets:

1. The app would force a strict distinction between social-emotional and cognitive coaching concerns, not in order to separate but rather link them.
2. The app would serve as an in-depth interviewing or 'intake' tool, enabling the coach to set limits to what can be said by the client, in the sense of reducing the breadth of client input to depth, both of awareness and listening.
3. This would be achieved by the app by guiding the coaching to become highly selective both about the experiential domain discussed and the responses fashioned to client concerns.
4. A coach-guiding app would require the coach to study developmental theory in both of its branches, social-emotional meaning making and cognitive sense making, as modeled by CDF.
5. By implementing such a app, the behavioral notion of coaching, now dominant, would be "put in its place", to be used more selectively, and without conflicting with a strictly developmental coaching strategy.

Basic App Design

Wherever client responses can be 'filtered' to reduce the merely associative, 'anecdotal', use of language, coaching conversations gain not only in conceptual precision but also therapeutic depth and effectiveness. For this reason, the app here envisioned is above all a 'noise reducer' cutting down on clients' tendency to walk "all over the place", whether the domains walked through are emotional or cognitive (or psychological).

The app thus enforces a clear delineation between what is emotional, cognitive, and psychological, domains which, in the app's "expert" use, can be linked as the coach sees fit, based on his/her adult-developmental understanding of the client. In short, the separation the app achieves between the three domains in question is a means to an end, not an end in itself; it is meant to enable linking disparate but co-defined domains of human functioning.

In light of these notions, the app's design is tripartite: (A) social-emotional, (B) psychological, and (C) cognitive.

A

Clients' social-emotional issues can best be elicited by using 10 prompts chosen by the client as topics of conversation. One subset of these prompts (e.g., "important to me") is geared to boosting the client's self-confidence, while a second subset, when chosen by the client, helps the client articulate what is a problem for him or her, or is not working as it should. The app's language model needs to help the client to clearly articulate either concern.

B

Clients' psychological issues can be implemented by making use of M. Aderman's 'Need/Press' Questionnaire. The questionnaire distinguishes 3 clusters of 'traits': self-concept, approach to tasks, and interpersonal perspective (emotional intelligence). In this module, the client is prompted to speak to 1 of 6 issues in each of the 3 clusters, presented in the App in a suitable wording that invites client articulation of strengths and weaknesses.

C. Clients' cognitive issues are implemented within CDF's "Three Houses" metaphor which distinguished between a client's "Task House", "Organizational House", and "Self House". In the first, the client's function and roles are at issue, while in the second, the influence of the client's organizational environment gets a hearing. In the third, the client's professional self is evoked in reference to his/her motivation to do the work in question and the career path the client envisions.

In all three domains, conceptual clarity in terms of DTF moments of dialectic and thought forms (TFs) is a major goal. This entails that the app both prompts and enable the coach to proceed as a highly flexible and holistic thinker whose task it is to challenge the client's ability to raise his/her level of self-awareness.

Inter-module Linkages
The separation of modules A, B, and C is strictly operational, in the sense that it is meant to guarantee that the rich interconnections between the modules can be instantiated by the coach in line with the real-time needs of the client.

For instance, a client may have chosen to converse about what is *important to him* in leading a specific team. He has placed himself in the social-emotional domain where self-positioning, self-observation, and perspective-taking are at issue, specifically, the social-emotional 'stage' of meaning making development the client seems presently to occupy.

A CDF-approach to social-emotional issues is that they are inseparable both from psychological and cognitive topics. For example, what is important to a client always has a psychological aspect as well as a cognitive one. The psychological aspect may trigger 'approach to task' issues, or else 'self-conduct' issue, and may also entail a particular way of taking perspectives on others in the sense of emotional intelligence.

A conversation about what is important to a client also has a purely cognitive core which concerns the systemic details of what is important, their unfolding in real time, past, present, or future, and the way they transform for the client over time, and be influenced by way of the client's agency.

Clearly, the app must facilitate making these connections for the coach who, when working *expertly*, will want to connect all three modules for the sake of gaining clarity about what is important to the client.

Summary
Developmental coaching in the strict sense of DTF is still a stepchild of the coaching industry, in part because learning to think in terms of adult development is not easy for most coaches, is costly, and takes time.

For these reasons, designing CDF-based apps for executive coaching and mentoring is an entirely feasible undertaking, given that CDF is a storehouse of well-honed procedures that

enliven real-time coaching sessions and steer them in the direction of cognitively crisp entailments in all three domains of consciousness briefly explored above.