

Executive coaching through Action Research

James Walker

“No one has ever taught anyone anything, you need to create an environment so that learning occurs”.

Executive coaching is not about teaching how to do something like perform financial calculations or setup a work roster. Rather, coaching is about helping the client to refine perspectives of his or her roles within the organisation and beyond, focussing on understanding how to act effectively on that perspective. That refinement is the result of learnings arising from the coaching *environment*.

The *environment* from the quote above is developed jointly by the client and coach and the quality of their relationship determines its effectiveness. Each method of coaching relies on this relationship as it develops within the particular circumstances faced by the client.

The principles of action research provide one framework for coaching. Action research is defined by Wikipedia to include: *“either research initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others ... to improve the way they address issues and solve problems”.*

In action research terms the *immediate* problem is the reason for coaching. Applying the *reflective process* to the *immediate problem* is the cornerstone of coaching. In my experience an essential principle of action research is that client and coach are each learning from the *reflective* processes, guided by the coach and maintained by them both.

The day-to-day activities of the client’s world provide the milieu for coaching. There are circumstances in which an entirely new initiative can provide additional value for the client. For example, an action research based project can help the client develop effective stakeholder management approaches. Client and coach can work with the client’s management of his/her role, personal proclivities, and desires, within the context of the project and beyond.

The same results can be achieved when coaching occurs within the normal day-to-day business but may take longer than insights from a specifically designed and initiated project. Of course the continuation of the new initiative over time naturally becomes absorbed as part of the day-to-day.

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