



Competence-Based Coaching Supervision: Based on The Project to develop a Russian National Coaching Professional Standard

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Abstract. My article is essentially a reflection of an experience I shared with an audience of around 80 Russian coaches in Moscow, in March this year. I was a guest of the Association of Russian Coaches, who had invited me to demonstrate a 30-minute coaching session at one of their weekly competence-based coaching supervision events. These events are organized by a volunteer working group, who have tasked themselves to develop the “Standard for the Russian Coaching Profession”. These particular events are designed to help Russian coaches develop their awareness, understanding and practice of the Russian ‘coach professional standard’ competences. The article presents reflective writing approach, within the same structured framework that I offer to my coaching clients, to encourage and develop their own reflective practice and enrich their personal learning. The framework comprises these four questions: What happened and what caused it to happen that way? How did I behave, think and feel as it was happening? What were the main learning points from this experience? How will I apply that learning to my future behaviour? My main finding from this experience was the powerful role of compassion in a coaching conversation – even a short conversation between two people meeting for the first time – to generate a space of mutual trust and safety. By focussing on my “being” rather than “doing”, I was able to be fully present. My client felt safe to share and explore and this helped him generate the internal shift he was looking for.

Keywords: competence-based coaching; compassion; being not doing; presence; trust.

On 26th March, 2014 I had the great privilege and pleasure of taking part in a coaching supervision event in Moscow, hosted by the Association of Russian Coaches. The evening event was part of a series of coaching supervision events, which are organized weekly by the working group developing the Standard for the Russian coaching profession. These competence-based coaching supervision events are designed to support coaches’ awareness, understanding and practice of the Russian “coach professional standard” competences. I had been invited as a “guest coach” to demonstrate a 30-minute coaching session, in front of an audience of around 80 mainly Russian coaches.

My own coaching practice is aligned to the professional ethical standards of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC). Alongside my private practice I am also an associate of The OCM – a UK-based, global provider of coaching services and coach training – whose founder, Eric Parsloe, also co-founded the EMCC in 1992. I completed my Senior Practitioner coach training with

the OCM in 2010, nearly 30 years after I first began coaching people as a leader / manager within the UK public sector. I have been an external coach since 2007.

In this article I aim to capture my reflection and learning from this very worthwhile coaching supervision event. I am writing my reflection in a format that I first learned with The OCM and which I now use with my coaching clients to encourage their own personal reflection, and to help them structure their reflection in a way which optimizes their learning and development. The reflection is structured around the following four questions.

- What happened and what caused it to happen that way?
- How did I behave, think and feel as it was happening?
- What were the main learning points from this experience?
- How will I apply that learning to my future behaviour?
- What happened and what caused it to happen that way?

My coachee for this 30-minute coaching demonstration was selected by our audience. Attendees had been asked in advance to volunteer an issue on which they would like to be coached. At the start of the event we listened to three issues individually presented by three volunteers and I invited the audience to select their preferred candidate. A large majority chose Igor, whom I met for the first time that evening.

Igor described himself as a psychotherapist who had lost his sense of personal and professional purpose. He voiced his coaching issue as his concern that his own lack of direction rendered him incapable of supporting his clients to find theirs. He wanted to break this negative cycle and experience a sense of renewal.

After clarifying and re-stating my commitment to confidentiality, I began our session by asking Igor to outline the outcome he was looking for in our 30-minute coaching session. He told me that he was hoping to experience a kind of “shift” inside himself, which would enable him to see things more positively.

I was very conscious that Igor had presented a deeply transformational need, and that the kind of work normally necessary to support the kind of change he wanted might usually occur over a far longer period than the 30 minutes available to us. I was also aware of wanting to strike an appropriate balance between serving Igor’s needs and visibly demonstrating to our audience the coaching competences set out in the Russian coaching profession Standard.

During our coaching session Igor spoke in Russian and I in English. Our conversation was interpreted by Mikhail Klarin, who is a lead member of the working group developing the Russian coaching profession Standard.

How did I behave, think and feel as it was happening?

To support the outcome Igor wanted, I sensed that it might be helpful for him to explore how he experienced his issue, rather than what he thought about it. I offered him a gentle breathing / focusing exercise, to center and ground his energy and to help him become more aware of what he was feeling in his body. I also practised the exercise with Igor, in order to share his experience and generate a safe, trusting, “relational field” between us – a kind of “co-presence”.

I brought Igor back to his issue and asked him to describe what he felt, and where he felt it. I sensed that it might be helpful to Igor if this feeling became more tangible, and so I invited him to talk about its shape and size, its colours and textures. He began to describe a water fountain, and the colours it reflected through a prism of shining light. He saw the underground plumbing supporting it (suggesting that it was man-made – of his own making?), and the sky towards which it reached.

As his vision expanded, his tension relaxed, his language changed, his complexion reddened. I felt a sense of awakening within him. Igor himself expressed that he felt more alive and ready to move forward. He identified the next steps he wanted to take straight away.

Throughout this experience, I stayed very quiet and engaged in “whole body listening”, to allow Igor to speak freely and be fully heard. I guided my breath to be calm. I opened my heart and sank deep into my body. I wanted to be a reassuring presence: attentive, connected and fully present for Igor.

Following the coaching session, I engaged in a free and stimulating exchange of ideas with the audience. I heard their feedback, observations and comments and I did my best to answer their questions. During this phase of the evening I felt an overwhelming sense of humility and privilege to be sharing my learning with such a supportive and genuinely curious group of professionals.

What were the main learning points from this experience?

Something happened in my 30 minutes with Igor, on a small stage, in front of a large audience, that enabled a shift to occur within him. The shift was powerful enough to stimulate the change Igor was looking for and he felt that he now had the tools he needed to effect what he wanted.

For my part, I experienced the power of simply being present, of creating space, trust and safety, of letting go of my own anxiety and thereby helping Igor let go of his. This has reinforced my sense that perhaps the most helpful asset we have as coaches is our “being”, rather than our “doing”. Might our quiet, intuitive presence indeed be the most powerful vehicle for transformational change in our client?

I found that the competence-based Russian Standard for the development of the coaching profession provided me with an excellent framework for the conduct of our coaching session. The competences mirror those of the ICF and the EMCC, which are practiced by coaches internationally. Developing this Standard is an excellent opportunity for Russian coaches to be formally recognized.

How will I apply that learning to my future behaviour?

This experience was a wonderful “adventure in awareness”. It has enabled me to feel a little more comfortable in my skin, to trust myself to have the courage to “be enough”. I will continue to explore this in my future behaviour, both in and out of my coaching sessions.

This felt like another important step in my personal coaching journey and I am grateful to the Association of Russian Coaches for this opportunity.