

**SIGNIFICANCE OF COACHING IN THE CONTEXT
OF EMOTION REGULATION**

Ivana NOVOTNÁ, Jarmila BLAHOVÁ, Sláva ŠATANKOVÁ

SLOVAK UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN BRATISLAVA,
FACULTY OF MATERIALS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN TRNAVA,
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND HUMANITIES
ULICA JÁNA BOTTU 2781/25, 917 24 TRNAVA, SLOVAK REPUBLIC
e-mail: ivana.novotna@stuba.sk, jarmila.blahova@stuba.sk, slava.satankova@stuba.sk
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Abstract

Coaching as a form of development has opened new possibilities and broadened the sphere of competence for personal or manager development since 1990s. At the beginning, there was not enough literature related to this topic, but progressively it has been popularized in so much that some authors have released their books in several languages. John Whitmore (2004) warns about the misuse of popularization of a new term (coaching), by using which many managers hide their reluctance against a modification or disability to change something in their traditional managerial style. Emotion regulation is the base for successful leadership, success in work life in general and satisfaction in any relationship. In the paper, the authors focus on the significance of coaching for the personal and professional growth as a systematic method using several strategies of emotion regulation.

Key words

coaching, emotion regulation, reappraisal, self-directed learning, feelings, emotions

INTRODUCTION

We could say, the state of mind in which one does not feel any emotions (besides pathological states that are spinning out of a norm) probably does not exist. Sometimes we experience very strong emotions in connection with some particular situations, and, at another time, we seem to be in a neutral state when we are not shaken by any intensive emotion. The truth is, such neutral state is more or less inaccessible and, we can say, emotions affect us with lower or higher intensity. As such, they are our life-long companion.

Emotional states affect behaviour indirectly, but they do not cause it. When we are feeling angry or annoyed, we are more likely to act aggressively. When we are relaxed and calm, we will more likely take time to make decisions. The gap between emotion and response can be a kind of thinking or another emotion or state that surrounds the first emotion.

DEFINITION OF EMOTION

In wider sense, emotions cover subjective experience of favour and disfavour accompanied by physiological changes (Hartl, Hartlová 2000). We define them as “*conscious feelings of different vibrations that express human relationship to both relevant events of external environment and they are connected with different levels of physiological activation, which evoke the state of action readiness.*” (Slaměník 2001, p. 12). Atkinson et al. (2003, p. 391) defines an emotion as “*a complex psychological state arising in the reaction to the particular emotive experience.*”

In contrast to feelings, they consist of physiological correlates. Feelings express just pure experience outline of emotion. (Hartl – Hartlová 2000).

Six elements of emotions

Emotions consist of **six elements** (Atkinson et al. 2003):

1. Affective state – subjective experience of an emotion.
2. Inner physical reaction (connection with autonomous nerve system), e.g. raised voice when we are angry.
3. Cognitive assessment whether the event is positive or negative.
4. Face expression – e.g. disgust manifested by frowning, open mouth and half-closed eyelids.
5. Reaction to an emotion – e.g. negative emotions influence us to perceive the world as an unpleasant place.
6. Tendency to action – e. g. anger leads to aggression.

Emotions signalize a threat to an individual, they influence cognitive processes, redirect attention, regulate social interactions, encourage readiness to action, to sexual activity, keep romantic relations, protect close contacts, help to keep social values and norms, strengthen the social roles and group cohesion, they are intergroup envy carriers and are instrumental to communication, etc. (Slaměník 2011). From the evolutionary point of view, they represent time-proved problem solving of adaptation. (Stuchlíková 2002).

Emotion classifications

We distinguish various kinds of emotion classifications. Specialist publications mention (Slaměník 2011):

Lower emotions (they occur in people or animals).

Higher emotions (they occur just in people and they are bind to their social needs, values and norms, e. g. embarrassment, shame, guilt, jealousy, envy, pride, love etc.).

There is a continuum between the kinds of emotions. Simple emotions become more complicated, e. g. repeated joy from seeing another person can grow into love, but, in the same way, love can change into envy and anger (Slaměník 2011).

From the point of view of intensity and duration, we divide emotions into (Suchý – Náhlovský 2012):

- **Affect** – very intensive, short-term emotion,
- **Mood** – less intensive, long-term emotion,
- **Passion** – intensive, long-term emotion.

Tomkinson’s classification of primary emotions is the most well-known within academic and extra-academic circles. Particularly they are: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. These primary emotions have their clearly recognizable face expressions. Later, this basic repertory was enriched by others, such as contempt, joy etc. (Slaměník 2011).

Atkinson (2003) itemized the list of eight primary emotions and related situations by Plutchik: sadness (loss of beloved person), fear (threat), anger (obstacle), joy (potential partner), trust (membership in a group), disgust (disgusting object), anticipation (new territory), and surprise (sudden appearance of a new object). The author states that those emotions can be found in every human culture and in the whole animal kingdom, as well.

EMOTION REGULATION

As the results of expressed emotions are not always desirable and beneficial, it is useful to ask for their appropriate regulation. Whether we should pay attention for the particular emotion or rather ignore or curb it, or, on the contrary, encourage it, it depends on the specific culture which an individual lives in. However, different cultures have something in common. They share the attitude that the certain control over our emotions is always necessary (Stuchlíková 2002). The discussion about the emotion control within the academic circles has begun in the 80's of 20th century and has been attracting the attention of public till today.

According to Eisenberg et al. (in Slaměník 2011, p. 48), we can define emotion regulation as “*a process of initiation, keeping, adapting or change of occurrence, intensity and duration of inner emotional states and physiological processes connected with emotions, often serving to reaching the personal aims*. The goal of regulation is to maintain, strengthen or reduce an emotion and its external expression, usually considering the social context. The truth is that an individual alone can try to regulate their emotions to avoid consequences of their behaviour influenced by emotions, or to reduce the negative emotions bringing up against an individual's psychical and physical behaviour. (Slaměník 2002).

Emotion regulation relates to (Stuchlíková 2002):

- What kind of emotions a person feels
- When he/she feels them
- How he/she experiences them
- How he/she expresses them

Bad emotion regulation produces some non-adaptive output. Too strong, but also too weak regulation can result into troubles. For example, unreasonably weak regulation of feelings of guilt can lead to depressive behaviour and excessive regulation of the feeling of guilt that is obstructing that feelings, can relate to paranoid and sociopathic disorders. The aim of emotion regulation is to decrease or increase either negative or positive emotions (Stuchlíková 2002).

There exist several ways of emotion regulation. We use many strategies spontaneously and inadvertently. These are mostly day-to-day routine behaviour, e. g. japery, lighting a cigarette, looking for a support from another person, daydreaming etc.

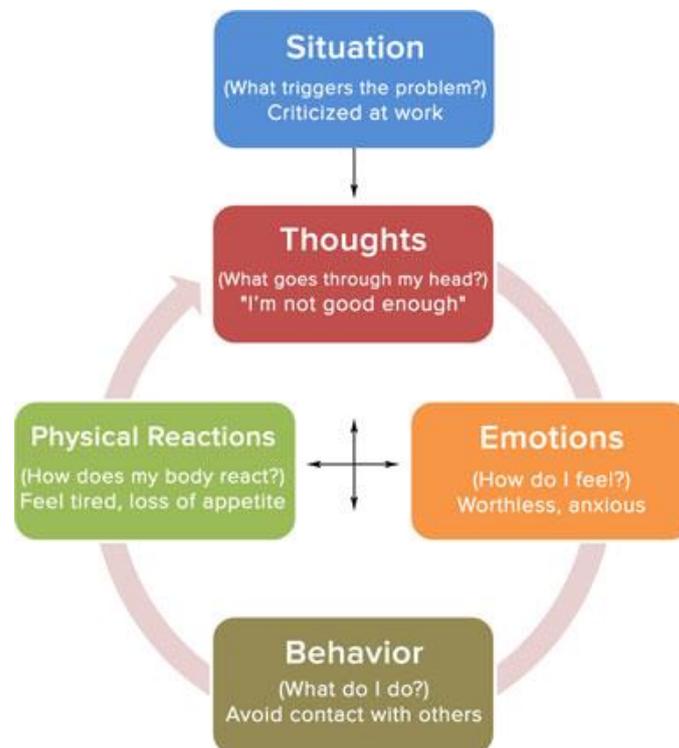


Fig. 1 Cycle of Consequences. from: <http://www.online-therapy.com/cbt>

Important fact is that our thoughts, and not external stimuli like people, events and circumstances, cause our feelings and behaviours. It is not the stimuli that cause our emotions, but it is our interpretation and perception of the stimuli. This insight could be significantly beneficial for us since then we can change the way we think and act. There is a cycle of consequences with everything we do, as we can see above in Figure 1. Emotions, thoughts and our behaviours are interconnected, and this cycle can become insane unless something happens to change it. Learning how to understand and work with the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviours is the important part of popular therapy techniques, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (Rolston – Lloyd-Richardson 2017). However, in the same breath we can say the goal is identical with that of coaching.

Reappraisal and social comparison

From the academic publications, we know various versions of emotion regulation. One of these is a **reappraisal**. It is a well-known and frequently used selection strategy involving reinterpreting the meaning of an event to alter its emotional impact. This reinterpretation leads to decreasing or, on the contrary, to the strengthening, increasing of a particular emotion (Stuchlíková 2002). It comes from the fact, that the emotion will change if the importance of the situation changes. That means if a person reinterprets the situation, their emotional reaction will change. Reinterpretation directs perception of the situation to be less painful and more acceptable by an individual. By this strategy, we can reduce e.g. feeling of guilt or shame, and thereby the situation is reinterpreted as less important and without a significant influence on the person's role. Jealousy can recede thanks to the fact that a person stops to overestimate and rate previously suspicious acts of behaviour of their partner, sadness and embarrassment aroused by refusing and by other person's behaviour, can be changed by reducing the importance dedicated to that person. Another person or other people who are very close to an individual can help them to reevaluate the situation or the event. It could be generally seen with negative emotions (disappointment, sadness etc.), when the originally attached stature of the situation can be diminished by another person's intervention (Slaměník 2011).

The authors Parkinson and Totterdell (in Stuchlíková 2002) file the reappraisal into the wider category of regulation strategies, which is well-known as absorption. Besides the reinterpretation, they file also another strategy into the absorption; the one focused on thinking about how to solve a problem.

One of the forms of cognitive reinterpretation is so called **downward social comparison** – strategy based on the fact that individuals preferentially compare themselves with those who are worse off or less happy than they are. This strategy makes us feel better about ourselves and can be comforting, but it has been said to provide only momentary relief, and is not a long-term solution (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wehmeyer, 2013 in Curwen 2017).

The above-mentioned techniques and strategies as well as a lot of others (such as situation selection, modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change and response modulation) can be used by a coach for achieving the improvement in emotion regulation of a coachee.

COACHING AS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD

The significant difference between excellent and average leaders is hidden in such competencies as empathy, emotional self-control, coach/mentor, inspirational leadership and adaptability. We distinguish some additional competencies, as well. Achievement orientation, influence, teamwork, conflict management and organizational awareness are considered to be the crucial (Boyatzis 2017).

Coaching as such includes various topics and fields of interest – concerning both work and personal life. “*Life balance*” is one of the most popular and most required issues discussed during individual coaching sessions. Participants are aware of balance or imbalance of work matters and other aspects of life – as Whitmore (2004) mentions: partner relationships, affinity for children, free time, entertainment, adrenaline activities, time for oneself, time for keeping healthy and fit, sharing a community life, where they belong. Burnellová (In Wildflower 2015) appeals on immersing into “*critical self-reflection*” and learning of noticing one’s own thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the situations when we are in troubles. The aim of this method is to learn something new about oneself and about the situation as such. New knowledge can open the way for new concepts of how to adapt our behaviours so that they are in harmony with our ambitions. During a coaching session, coachees can adopt a new viewpoint, which sometimes results into a change, so that the clients discover that their thoughts or judgements about themselves or about other people had not been useful, or they notice a mistaken premise that restrains their own behaviours (Burnellová, In Wildflower 2015).

For future studies of coaching, it could be useful to take into the consideration the question of coaches' wider lives impact on the coaching practice. Further exploration of coaching could be enriched by drawing on phenomenological concepts of care and relationship (Cronin – Armour 2017).

Feelings accompanying this kind of learning are often perceived as unpleasant. Rosinski (2011) explains that the self-questioning, cognitive and emotional work may be discouraging and can bring the flashes of doubt into our minds. In such moments, it is the time for a coach to encourage and remind the coachees of their desires and cherish the journey.

Useful emotions

Hereby we must say that emotions, such as surprise, fear, confusion or shame are useful because they are the source of new opportunities. Coachees are encouraged to find new ways and ideas how to change and improve their own behaviour, and this fact as such causes a growth. “*Coaching enables to realize existing imbalance and helps a coachee to harmonize different aspects of their lives to create a beneficial influence on their work and their personal life, as well*” (Whitmore 2004, p. 14).

Gilbert and Whittleworth (2009, p. 6) describe coaching as “*the art of facilitating another person’s learning, development and performance. Though coaching people are able to find their own solutions, develop their own skills and change their own behaviours and attitudes.*” Thus, they can gain greater competence and overcome barriers. The authors consider coaching as a major tool that enables a real change of behaviour and delivers improved performance.

An experienced coach rarely suggests the solutions; they rather reflect the ideas, evoke the solutions and support their implementation. As Whitmore (2002, p8) said, this process “*is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them*”.

Principles of coaching

We can easily find method of coaching significant and excellent as a tool for improving our emotion regulation, because this process is interactive and its core principle consists in self-directed learning. Coaches believe everyone has their best answers inside and the task is to draw them out. Wilson (2012) sums up eight principles of coaching as follows:



Fig. 1 : 8 Key Principles of Coaching

Source: http://www.coachingcultureatwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/What_is_coaching.pdf

When thinking about the significance of coaching in the context of emotion regulation, we can find a lot of points in common within these eight principles of coaching. Awareness leads us to gaining new insights and to the ability of identifying goals in our life. Self-responsibility helps us to create our own and independent solutions rather than being told what to do, and thus directs us to taking ownership of our decisions. Self-belief and forgiveness enable us to treat mistakes as learning experience and help us believe that achievement is possible. Solution focus in coaching encourages us to focus on the solution rather than on the problem, since then we can find more energy, optimism and strength to deal with it. Challenge and Action uncover new options and perspectives and arouse desire for activity and change, so important in self-regulation.

As we can see, coaching is a process, developmental and interactive where a coach “enables coachees to find their own solutions, discover new opportunities, and implement actions. Coaches act as facilitators. They listen, ask questions, and enable coachees to discover for themselves what is right for them.” (Rosinski 2003, p5). And that is why we can make a great progress in our emotional self-regulation using that helping tool coaching undoubtedly is.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, let us point out relevance of coaching by focusing on the impact this method can bring into our lives through the improvement and well-being. As Rosinski (2003, p3) mentioned “coaches can help people find practical solutions to the concrete challenges they face.” Specific problems and trials, people must deal with, can relate to leadership, communication, ambitious work goals, work-life balance, stress and difficult circumstances. It is very beneficial to have somebody who can lead us and inspire how to learn, understand and use our emotions properly, think creatively and overcome harmful stress. Coaches are those who can help people to deploy their talents, unleash their own potentials and establish constructive relationships. Coaching bears fruit, since, as Rosinski says (2003) it is an action-oriented process and not an isolated event. It takes place over a period of time so that the tendencies to regress (falling back into an old pattern) can be easily dealt with and target objectives achieved in a very systematic and sophisticated way.

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