

Learning on the Run 27: Measures of Dialogic Coaching

What are some of the outcomes we might anticipate from dialogic coaching?

The Interest. A significant component of my practice is leadership coaching. My approach is still planned, but I am becoming even more attentive to the here and now conversation that I am having where the client is the decision maker on what stories are important and what to pursue. My interest is in an I-Thou conversation where the client is the expert and I do not “intervene.” The premise of a dialogic approach to coaching is: Change the story, change the behavior. (1)

In Theory. I enjoy working with specific criteria, concrete measures and numbers. With that frame, I began to collect “measures” of the outcomes of successful coaching. These measures help to remind me of what progress might look like (and even here, I am coming to believe that progress is co-created by the coach and the client), and what questions might be of greater use. Here are some criteria of progress that I am paying more attention to.

- Shifts in their frame of their reality; The “what is” and the “what’s possible” story has changed.
- New actions, values, goals are expressed; People in the organization have noticed the changes.
- Adopts a spirit of inquiry; curiosity has increased and imagination is engaged.
- Is self-empowered; Takes voluntary irreversible action; Feels excited by the possibilities.
- There are more options to choose from; Greater choice in decisions.
- Relationships are renewed or created; Can see more opportunities for partnering.

Possible Applications. My role has been gradually changing from interventionist to co-conversationalist, helping to ask more questions about beliefs, stories and assumptions. At the onset, I clearly state my belief in the client’s “smartness” for articulating, reassessing and perhaps reauthoring the story that is most challenging for them. At the end of our session when I ask my clients what did they take away or learn from our conversation, I have begun to listen for these criteria as successful and worthwhile measures of progress.

Commentary. In a Dialogic Approach, I recognize that the whole frame of reference of measures runs counter to having a more immediate relationship that is generative. Although, it does help me to know what “generative” looks like in practice.

(1) Much, but not all, of my reading has been in: G. Bushe and R. Marshak (Eds.) Dialogic Organization Development. San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler, Pub., 2015