

GROWTH INDICATOR

David Clutterbuck and David Megginson's emerging concept of Coach Maturity offers a refreshing and insightful lens on coach development. **Rachel Ellison** interviews Professor Clutterbuck on the model, and invites perspectives from coaches and buyers of coaching

A discussion about grafting quince trees; having '007' in your mobile phone number; being an authoritarian father-figure to your team, when many of its members have their own dads or are even parents themselves; examining the individual client's whinge about work for its potential as an organisational narrative. These real – certainly eclectic – references and explorations, popped up in my recent supervision, in a coach assessment centre and during a recent coaching session with a client in global retail.

At the time, I had put it down to the creativity and daring speculation that informs my personal definition of psychodynamic systemic coaching. But now, I also put such diversity and eclecticism down to maturity – coach maturity. The genuine confidence and profound practice of a coach who can dip in and out of models and philosophies with ease and self-awareness. The coach who can let go of the 'doing' in favour of 'being'. The coach who gives the session to the client, as opposed to

running it themselves, and then worrying whether or not it was a good session. It's hardly ego-free.

Professors David Clutterbuck and David Megginson created what they term a 'Coach Maturity model'. It's a matrix of stages and behaviours that they noticed while running coach assessment days with organisations, such as Asda and HSBC. For them, Coach Maturity is an emerging concept.

The model

There are four levels of Coach Maturity. At level 1, there's the newly hatched GROW coach, who is safe and secure using basic tools and techniques. The coach is 'in control' of the session.

Level 2 is the Process Based coach who aims to 'contain' the client's stuff.

Level 3 sees the coach 'facilitate' the client's ability to deal with their issue themselves. The coach now has a coaching philosophy, rather than tools, techniques and models alone.

Level 4 displays a greater level of maturity and security in the coach's work. The 'Systemic Eclectic' coach enables, asking: 'Are we both relaxed enough to allow the issue and the solution to

emerge in whatever way they will?' (see Table 1, p36).

"I came up with the model whilst watching coaches coach at assessment centres", explains Clutterbuck. "Models-based coaches drained the energy from the room. We noticed that clients new to coaching, were often told what their goal was by the coach."

Clutterbuck continues: "More experienced coaching clients felt pushed towards a solution too early. They told us: 'The coach didn't really listen. They focused on my issue, not on me'."

"In another case, the client stopped the session after 15 minutes and said they felt they didn't have a sense of purpose. We nearly fell off our chairs when the coach said: 'That's a pity. We haven't got time for that, so let's get back to the subject'."

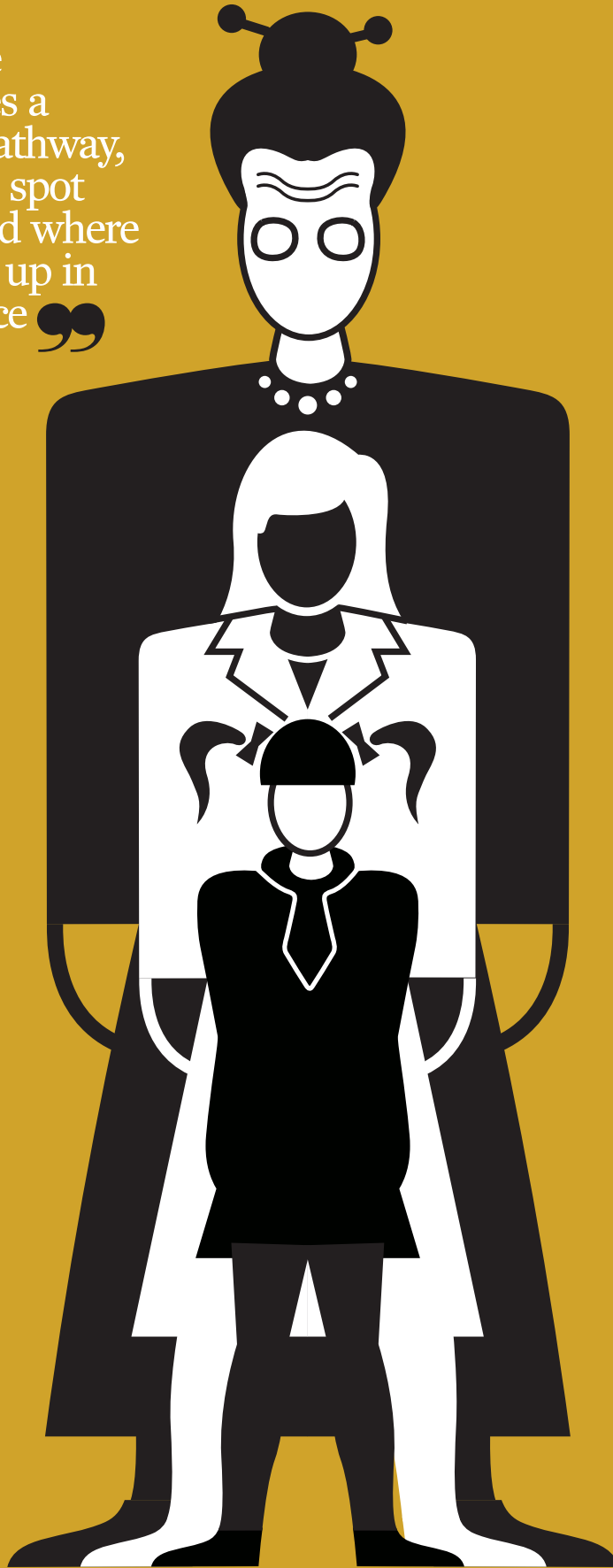
In Clutterbuck's opinion, the coach was driven by their own process, not the client's need.

"In another live coaching demonstration", says Clutterbuck, "the client burst into tears because the coach had got stuck, floundered and then suddenly asked the client: 'So tell me about your mother'. Unfortunately, the client had just buried her mother."



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Clutterbuck says he feels humbled by the Coach Maturity model. He won't, though, place himself in any particular box: "I hope the model creates a developmental pathway, so coaches can spot where they are and see where they might end up in their practice. The core quality of a coach is humility and self-awareness," he says. "Nobody gets to Systemic Eclectic. You're missing the point if you think you have."

He emphasises that a coach with a lot of experience may not be a 'mature' coach: "10,000 hours of coaching doesn't necessarily mean you've gone through all the levels of the Coach Maturity model. We must recognise that not every coach has the mental architecture and humility to get there."

Making sense

For Liz Macann, former head of coaching at the BBC, the Coach Maturity model came as a relief:

"I'm not a philosophy-, models- or process-based coach," she explains. "So when I first heard David Clutterbuck mention the term 'Systemic Eclectic', it was like a release of guilt I'd been feeling for not sticking with one philosophy or coaching stance. Years ago, I'd been told if you're a Gestalt coach, you have to stick to Gestalt. If you're a GROW coach, then you need to see the process through. But that never felt right to me. I found value in using bits of this and bits of that, from what I'd learned from different people and different issues. Clutterbuck and Megginson's Coach Maturity model suddenly gave recognition, from two senior coaches, that my way is perfectly fine."

"It suddenly made sense for me, of how I had travelled from a GROW coach, who thought they

The Coach Maturity model

Are you a 'mature' Systemic Eclectic coach?

Observation in coach assessment centres and conversations with coaches shed some light on what makes a Systemic Eclectic coach. How do you fare? Have you reflected on your...

- Personal philosophy of coaching
- Understanding of the business context
- Freedom from the tyranny of the question
- How you use coach supervision and mentoring
- How you maintain professional development and integrate learning
- How you identify and manage boundaries
- Your personal journey as a coach
- Knowing what kind of clients and situations you work best with
- Understanding what makes a fully functioning individual
- Understanding what makes an effective organisation

Does this sound like you?

- You have immense calm, because you are confident you can find the right tool if you need it
- Yet you hardly ever use tools. When you do, they are subtly integrated almost seamlessly into the conversation
- You place great importance on understanding a technique, model or process in terms of its origins within an original philosophy
- You use experimentation and reflexive learning to identify where and how a new technique, model or process fits into your philosophy and framework of helping
- You judge new techniques, models and processes on whether they will enrich and improve the effectiveness of potential responses to client needs
- You use peers and supervisors to challenge your coaching philosophy
- You take a systemic and holistic view of the client and the client's environment; and of the coaching relationship

1 (adapted)

had a handle on things...to one both daunted and delighted, to sit with emotional mess and ambiguity. I now embrace working with a mish-mash of psychologically informed theoretical influences. I do that in addition to embracing everyday life experiences, for the potential analogy or metaphor they bring," says Macann.

Adding rigour

Clutterbuck hopes the model will also assist buyers of coaching to make more knowing choices in

selection and matching.

Sarah Barnett, leadership development manager at Asda, says the model helps ground her intuition: "I select and match our coaches on 'feel', but this model gives gravitas to that feeling or intuition. It adds rigour."

She continues: "Because I'm not an experienced coach, it helps me articulate why I think a coach would be a good match for a particular colleague in the business. Or why a coach isn't the right fit for Asda."

It also helps Barnett and the

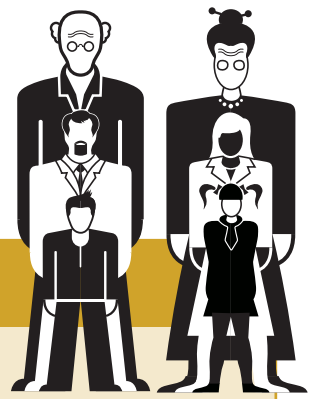


Table 1: Coaching Maturity levels: a comparison

Coaching approach	Style	Critical questions
Models-based	Control	How do I take them where I think they need to go? How do I adapt my technique or model to this circumstance?
Process-based	Contain	How do I give enough control to the client and still retain a purposeful conversation? What's the best way to apply my process in this instance?
Philosophy-based	Facilitate	What can I do to help the client do this for themselves? How do I contextualise the client's issue within the perspective of my philosophy or discipline?
Systemic Eclectic	Enable	Are we both relaxed enough to allow the issue and the solution to emerge in whatever way they will? Do I need to apply any techniques or processes at all? If I do, what does the client context tell me about how to select from the wide choice available to me?

¹ (adapted)

Talent Team find the right coach-client match from the coaches they have selected: “For example, people coming from outside Asda have often had coaching before. So I’d choose a more eclectic coach for them. But someone who’s come up through the business and hasn’t had coaching, might need a more process, tools-based coach to start with.”

Barnett believes the Coach Maturity model has the potential to improve the bottom line at Asda: “Someone with a Level 3 or 4 coach who is facilitating and enabling, takes our leaders to a different mindset and rationale,” she says. “I think that allows them to read their team and the business better, as a result.”

Another perspective is that of the internal coach trainer. Macann has trained more than 200 internal coaches for the BBC, Samsung and the Charities Aid Foundation. She challenges the Coach Maturity model’s notion that the Level 1 and 2 coaches, have to be “controlling coaches”.

“A lot of internal coaches will be

sticking to GROW for safety and to reach solutions. When I train new coaches, I absolutely ask them to hand over the content of a coaching session to the client, from the beginning,” she says.

“I’ve struggled to think how, when you’re growing new coaches, you could replace the foundation blocks that I use: GROW, the five levels of listening, questioning and building rapport.

“I argue that you need all these bases in each of the stages of the model, to help the client move their thinking and generate insights.”

The next stage

It’s an interesting discussion. And that’s part of the point of the model: to provoke and stretch our thinking about who we are as coaches and what we offer as coach trainers, supervisors or accrediting bodies.

Clutterbuck sees the potential of the Coach Maturity concept to be incorporated in course design, coach observation and coaching criteria. “Coach selectors might

also test for ‘coach dexterity’,” says Clutterbuck.

“That means the ability of a coach to move with ease up, down and through all the stages of the model in a coaching session.”

But what comes after the Systemic Eclectic stage? “If there is a next stage or level”, says Clutterbuck, “I’m not mature enough to recognise it...maybe someone wiser will show me.” ■

Reference

¹ An extract of a chapter by Professors David Clutterbuck and David Megginson, ‘Coach Maturity: an emerging concept’ from *The Handbook of Knowledge-Based Coaching: From Theory to Practice* (eds.) Leni Wildflower and Diane Brennan (John Wiley & Sons, 2011). The extract appeared in *The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching*, 8(1), December 2010.

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