

An Improved Approach to Technical Assistance: A Modest Proposal

by

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Definition: What Is Technical Assistance (TA)?

“...knowledge-based assistance to governments intended to shape policies and institutions, support implementation and build organisational capacity.”*

*Cox, M. & Norrington-Davies, G. (2019), *Technical assistance: New thinking on an old problem*

The Challenge

“Capacity development [CD] is arguably one of the central development challenges of the day, as much of the rest of social and economic progress will depend on it....If all the stakeholders are to make fundamental progress, they will need to experiment with new approaches....they will need to design institutional innovations to support capacity development.”*

*Fukuda-Parr, S., et al. (2002), ‘Institutional innovations for capacity development’, in *Capacity for Development: New Solutions to Old Problems*

Definition: What is Capacity Development?

“...a locally driven process of learning by leaders, coalitions and other agents of change that brings about changes in socio-political, policy-related, and organisational factors to enhance local ownership for and the effectiveness and efficiency of efforts to achieve a development goal.”*

*World Bank (2009), quoted in Zamfir, I. (2017), *Understanding capacity-building/capacity development: A core concept of development policy*

What Forms Does TA Take?

- Embedding technical advisers within government agencies to develop capacity and/or support organisational change
- Embedding technical advisers within aid projects to support design and implementation
- Providing policy advice, often linked to development finance
- Providing advice to help frame government legislation and regulations
- Sharing experience through South-South cooperation and/or civil society networks

What Forms Does TA Take (Cont'd)?

- Scholarships and training courses (e.g., Australia Awards)
- On-the-job training, mentoring and coaching by embedded experts
- Twinning or organisational partnerships between equivalent institutions in two countries (e.g., PNG Institutional Partnerships Program)
- Programs with flexible funding, able to engage experts for short- or long-term roles in support of a set of reform or capacity building objectives (e.g., DFAT facilities)
- Funding for intermediary organisations (e.g., Australian NGO Cooperation Program) able to partner with government agencies in developing countries

Why Does Adviser-based TA Often Fail?

- The adviser lacks the necessary skills as a trainer, coach or mentor
- The adviser has no interest in transferring his or her knowledge and skills to counterparts, especially if this could result in working himself or herself out of a job
- The adviser prefers to do the job, rather than transferring the necessary knowledge and skills to his or her counterparts
- The adviser does not have an adequate appreciation of the local context

Why Does Adviser-based TA Often Fail (Cont'd)?

- The adviser does not have a local counterpart
- The adviser is hard pressed to find the time or resources to train, coach or mentor his or her counterparts
- Organisational incentives of the host agency work against effective CD, e.g., the adviser is under pressure to simply to get the job done

An Alternative Approach to Adviser-based TA

- Employ adult learning principles
- Introduce qualified and experienced executive coaches to work with:
 - Advisers
 - Counterparts
 - Counterparts' supervisors

Adult Learning Principles*

Principle	Interpretation
Need to know	Need to know what, why and how
Self-concept	Desire to be autonomous and self-directing
Prior experience	Recognition and understanding of prior experience
Readiness to learn	Relation to real life, usefulness
Orientation to learning	Problem-solving, experiential
Motivation to learn	Internal satisfaction, intrinsic value

*Based on Knowles, et al. (2015), *The Adult Learner*

Adult Learning Principles (cont'd)

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”*

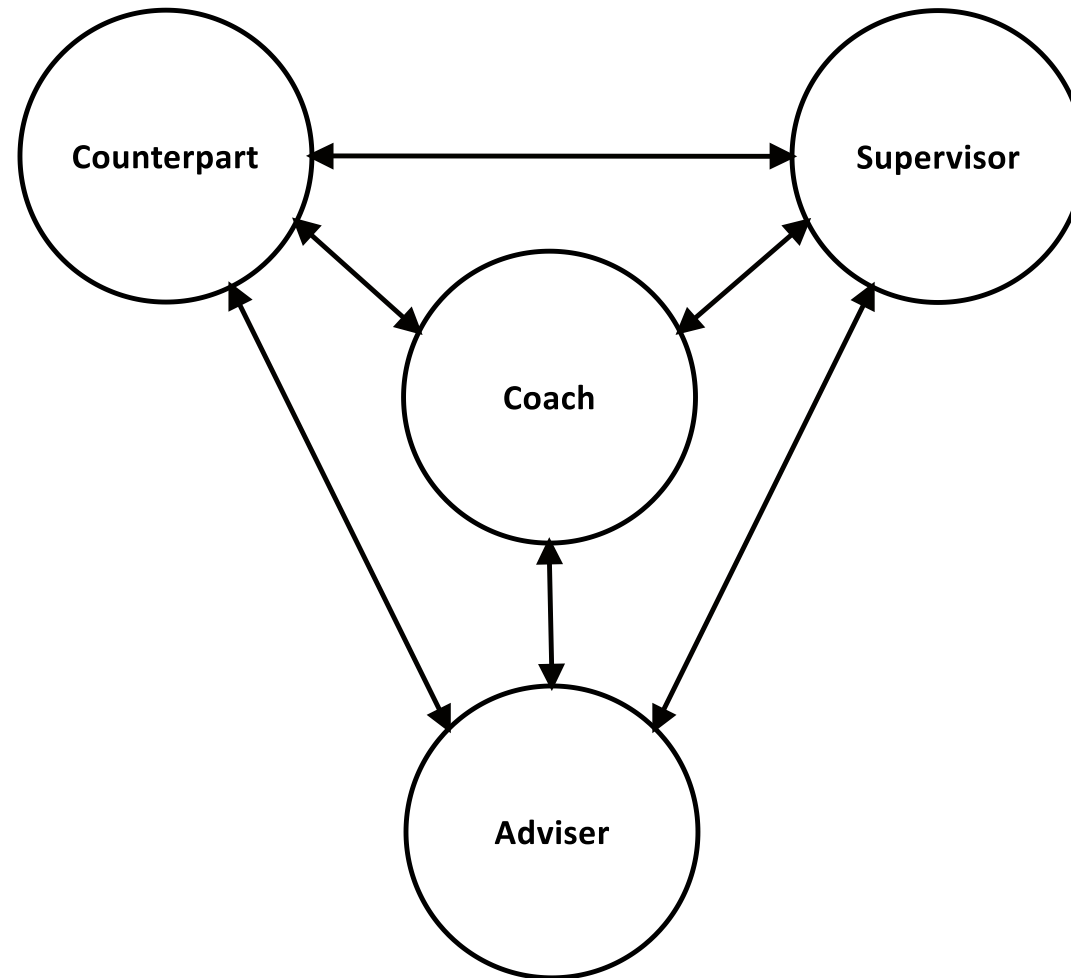
*Popularly attributed to Benjamin Franklin

Definition: What Is Executive Coaching?

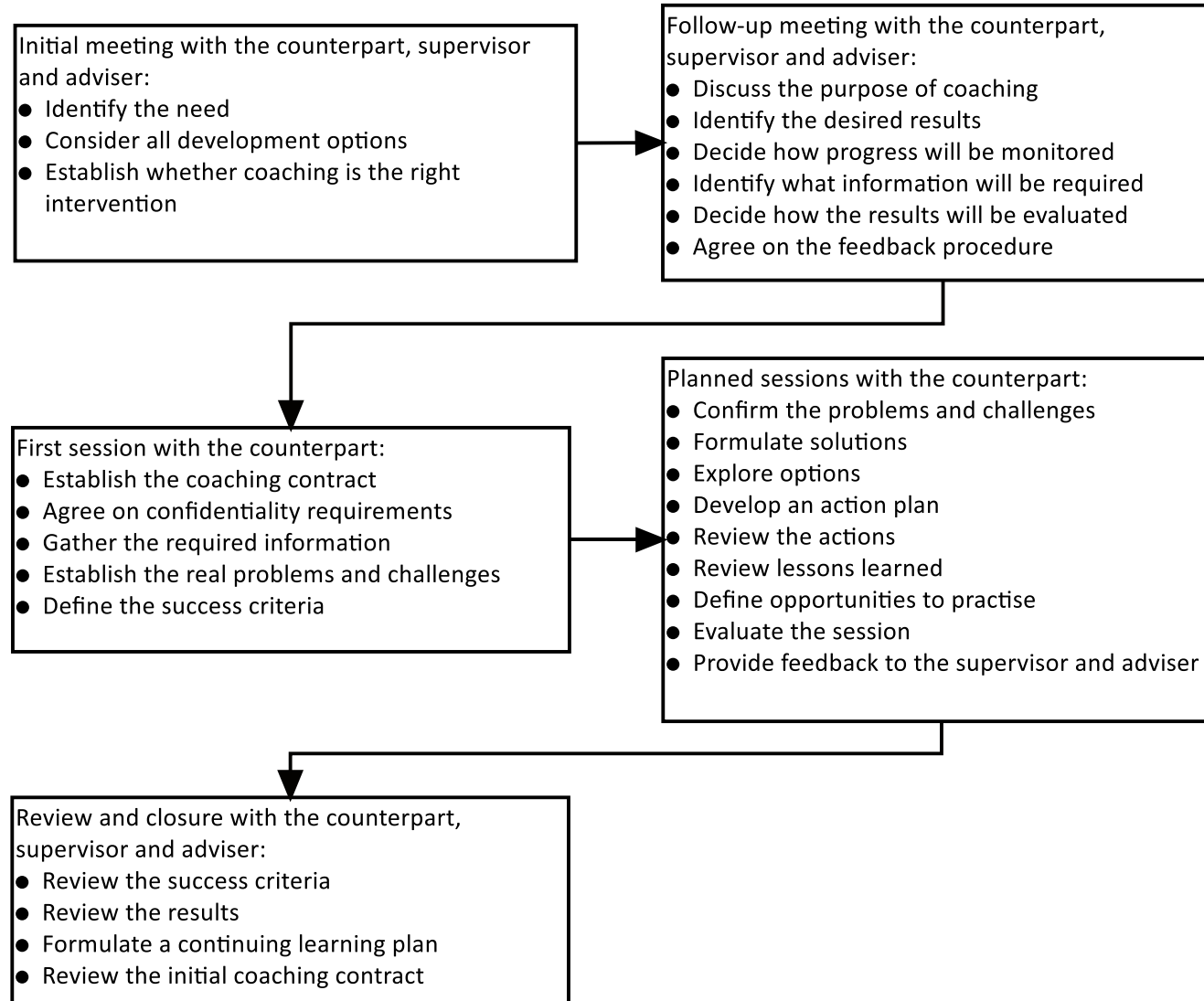
“... an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short- and long-term organizational goals.”*

*Stern, L. (2007), 'Executive coaching: A working definition', in Kilburg, R. & Diedrich, R. (Eds.), *The wisdom of coaching: Essential papers in consulting psychology for a world of change*

What Would the Alternative Approach Look Like?



Sample Coaching Program*



*Based on Jones, G. & Gorell, R. (2012), *50 top tools for coaching: A complete toolkit for developing and empowering people*

Critical Success Factors

- Supervisor buy-in
- Adviser buy-in
- Counterpart buy-in
- Appropriately qualified and experienced executive coach
- Appropriately structured and implemented coaching program

Intended Outcomes

- Cadre of counterparts who have reached the anticipated level of competence
- Cadre of counterpart supervisors with knowledge of coaching and mentoring and an ability to provide ongoing mentoring to their immediate reports

Success Measures

- Targeted number of counterparts who have reached the anticipated level of competency within the established time frame
- Positive feedback from all stakeholders
- Sustainability of the gains achieved

Coaching Example from PNG

Leadership and management program for mid-level public servants who had demonstrated both high performance and high potential:

- 10% formal learning of management principles and practices through structured workshops
- 20% learning through regular interaction with participants' peers and one-on-one coaching between workshop sessions
- 70% learning through practical application in the workplace of principles and practices

Results from Survey of Participants

How would you rate the usefulness of the coaching sessions (on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = not useful, and 10 = very useful)?

- 15% of participants said 9
- 85% of participants said 10

What the Participants Said

- “The training has taught me how to lead by example.”
- “The coaching gave me valuable insights into how to create a high performing team and culture.”
- “The training provided leadership and management skills that are directly relevant in the workplace.”
- “The training helped me to improve my presentation skills and mobilise my colleagues into action.”
- “I will improve what I do in future by applying the techniques I learned in this program.”
- “All intending managers and their line managers should attend this training.”

Notable Quote

“...coaching can move beyond short-term changes and promote an in-depth transformation for the individual and for international development as a whole.”*

*Rocha, V. (2022), *Coaching within international development: A path to change and self-reliance*, UNESCO Regional Centre for Education and Planning