

Greater than the sum of our parts

Katherine Long

The Dilemma

Once upon a time there was a person, let's call her Donna, who decided that she wanted to be more effective in helping people to achieve their dreams and goals. She came across something called coaching. The more Donna researched it, the more she realised that she wanted to become a coach, so enrolled on a course. Once she started to learn and practice, the feeling that she was on the 'right track' and that she was fulfilling a sense of purpose in her life was tremendous.

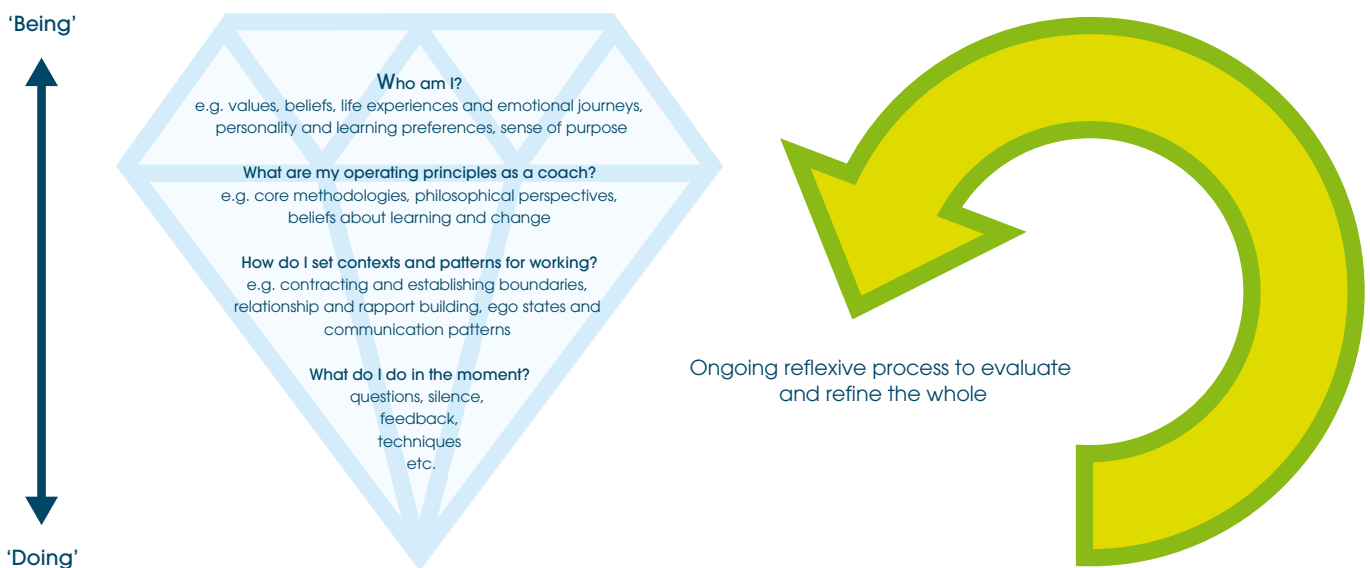
On leaving the programme Donna set up in business, and as a conscientious lifelong learner, made sure she kept up with her CPD. Things started to get more complicated.

There were so many new models, theories and techniques coming into the profession. As a professional, should she know about them all? Undergo further training and qualifications? What about the commercial angle? Which models were in vogue and would have most currency or sex appeal with potential clients?

Donna started to struggle – she still loved what she did, but somehow 'her way' was starting to feel second rate in comparison to the range of 'uber-techniques' she encountered. In addition, Donna felt that there was a gap – some of the models and approaches were useful additions to her practice, but quite a few just didn't feel authentic to her. Donna started to ask herself a few questions:

- 'If I feel that using some of these tools is inauthentic to me, then what would being authentic be like?'
- 'Is there anything out there that could help me work out how to connect who I am as a person with what I do as a coach?'
- 'I'm the one 'tool' I bring to all my sessions – but what exactly is that 'tool' and how does it fit with all the other stuff?'

Did the story end happily? Did Donna find any answers? Why did this coach end up feeling like this in the first place? Could it be that the coaching profession and its supporting literature has a blind spot that is creating this sort of confusion?



I once went to a presentation where the speaker provided a definition of coaching and mentoring. Mentors, I was told, are people. Coaching, on the other hand, is an activity. As a relatively newly qualified coach I struggled to process this view. When I reflect back now, it seems to me that this rather disembodied definition of coaching indicates the nature of the blind spot, i.e. that coaching is essentially a delivery method of a set of skills and techniques, and that for coaches to be effective they need to become increasingly proficient in these. Given that the delivery method is normally via a person, doesn't the person fit in the mix? Could it be that we need a better way of understanding ourselves in order to be authentic, congruent and effective?

In a profession that abounds in models, I am loath to propose a new one. And yet my thinking and reflecting in this area over the last two years feels best expressed by one. It's just a model, and as such has its flaws and limitations, but if it can support coaches in better understanding the whole which is greater than the sum of our parts, then it's served its purpose.



The Diamond Model

Imagine you are looking through a window of a room and observing a coaching conversation. What do you see happening in the moment? And what sits behind that? And what else is behind that?

Whilst we can see that the coach is partnering with the coachee and skilfully supporting them by using a range of techniques and approaches, there's a lot more in the room. What about the relationship and the contracting that sits behind this conversation? What about the core operating principles that the coach is working to? And what about who the

coach is as a person – their values, beliefs, map of the world, life experiences and physicality? And how do those things present themselves in the conversation and impact what's happening?

The model opposite brings all of those elements together and is based on two premises which have a logical outcome:

- That who we are as a person is connected to who we are and what we do as a coach.

- That gaining congruence and authenticity brings greater effectiveness to our coaching.

- Therefore, in order to be more effective we need to be authentic and congruent between who we are as a person and who we are and what we do as a coach.

The model is diamond shaped, and diamonds, whilst beautiful, are crystalline and inflexible, which doesn't suggest an interaction between the layers of who a

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coach is and what they do. What may be more helpful, but requires a greater stretch of imagination is to see it as a diamond shaped lava lamp with the different levels mixing and influencing each other in a permanent state of flux, and supported by an ongoing reflexive process.

Application of the Model

The model can be applied in a range of ways. From a CPD perspective, a coach can use this to explore connections between the four levels, and to identify strengths or development needs. It can support supervision, by providing a common perspective between the coach and supervisor, and help to identify the sources of achievements as well as causes of presenting issues. It also suggests a tool for coaches to work through in identifying their signature

presence and to therefore market themselves more authentically.

Questions to ask in working with the model could be:

- How does who I am and my sense of purpose connect to the ways in which I am applying coaching? Or the contexts in which I coach?
- What are the core operating principles I adhere to and how do they fit with my core beliefs or map of the world? How well do I understand these principles? How do they inform what happens in the moment?
- What kinds of relationships or patterns in coaching am I building with my coachees? How does this impact my effectiveness?
- Where does what happens in the moment come from? What could

change to make me more effective in the moment?

- If not this model, how else might I conceptualise the interaction between who I am and what I do?

The Diamond model may also support ways of seeing more clearly the inter-relationships within and between existing sets of coaching competences. When testing the model to see how it compared to EMCC's framework, it was relatively straightforward to map EMCC competences against this model. Whilst EMCC's framework doesn't set out to explore the relationship between the different competences it identifies, it organises them in four broad categories (Who we are, Our skills and knowledge, How we coach and mentor, How we manage the process) which are very close to the different levels within the Diamond model.

Some final reflections on diamonds

Making random connections can be a great way of getting new insights. In developing this model, I did some research on diamonds in order to stimulate my thinking. I'll leave you with some facts about diamonds which hopefully leaves you with some interesting thoughts!

- Did you know that diamonds are created through incredibly high temperature and pressure – 1000 degrees and 30 kilobars.
- That in their natural state, so called 'rough diamonds' can be amazingly beautiful and complex, and have a range of forms including dodecahedron, cube, rhombododecahedron and octahedron.
- Diamonds also exist in a startling array of colours, which range from deep blues, reds, yellows and black.
- And did you know where the largest diamond is? It's in space, a mass of crystallized carbon formerly known as star BPM 37093, now known as the biggest diamond in the galaxy, fifty light years away from Earth in the constellation Centaurus. The diamond is estimated to be 2,500 miles across and weighs approximately 10 billion-trillion-trillion carats – a one, followed by 34 zeros = 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 carats.



Contact:
katherine@theocm.co.uk