i-Coach
NEW YORK

Use of Self in Executive Coaching

By Michael H. Frisch Ph.D.

Experienced executive coaches often find that their own perceptions of and intuitions about clients can significantly accelerate progress in coaching. Such *use of self* interventions, however, have never been clearly described. This article explores them through practice examples, a literature review, and an informal survey of experienced coaches of their *use of self*. These explorations yield a definition and a descriptive model that proposes two independent underlying variables that together differentiate four broad types of *use of self*. Specific recommendations for learning and applying *use of self* in coaching practice are also made.

Acknowledgements

While the idea for this article sprouted two years ago, it has grown and been nurtured in the coaching greenhouse that is iCoachNewYork. My faculty colleagues there, Bob Lee, Karen Metzger, Jeremy Robinson and Judy Rosemarin, each fed the developing seedling and share credit for the resulting fruit. I would also like to acknowledge the coach colleagues in my wider professional network here in New York for their active interest and openness in responding to my questions about their *use of self.* Finally, I would like to acknowledge both my coaching clients and the participants in iCoachNewYork coaching classes who prove again that trying to help others pushes our own learning.

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In the empirical tradition of science, understanding begins with observation. The first step in that tradition is detailed description of a phenomenon to better identify its antecedents, impacts, and the variations of the phenomenon itself. As an experienced practitioner, and constant student, of executive coaching, I have observed that *use of self* in coaching is such a phenomenon: inconsistently described and understood yet often pivotal in its impact on client progress. This paper aims the empirical light on *use of self* in coaching to foster both understanding and application of this important tool.

Use of self may be analogous to beauty and other subjective concepts: we know it when we see it but it is elusive to describe in all situations. To aid in that description, this paper presents the results of a search of how coaching theorists and writers have used the term *use of self* and in what contexts they have used it. It also summarizes the findings of an informal survey of active executive coaches to explore how they use the term. In addition, it deconstructs *use of self* moments to identify underlying factors that explain variations in the application of *use of self.*

If you ask experienced coaches to talk about their most exciting, and progressive, moments in coaching, they frequently describe *use of self:* an intuition, image or flash of insight about a client that had an important effect on the direction and/or progress of the coaching. These moments of clarity may or may not have been directly articulated to the client, but they exert a pivotal influence on the coach's posture with the client, bringing positive effects for the client. These moments are typically described as spontaneous, that is unexpected and unplanned, which may add to why they are memorable and

exciting. Coupled with that spontaneity there may be a sense of risk as well; they may contain perspectives likely to be difficult for the client to accept. Deciding what to share, and when, challenges the coach's judgment about how best to help the client. In short, *use of self* moments are often unplanned and challenging for the coach, but contain enormous potential for advancing the client's insight and developmental progress.

Similarly, while clients do not label a coach's behavior *use of self,* they feel the impact of it. Assuming the tool is used sensitively, a client will feel *seen* and understood at a level rarely experienced. *Use of self* makes a coach's tuning in to the client overt, whether at the behavioral or a less visible emotional level. These can be very powerful moments for clients because the coach is taking a risk in stepping away from the client's overt content or situational stories. A coach's *use of self* broadcasts that the client is a unique, interesting person and not just a reflection of the facts of his or her situation. While potentially radical for both coach and client, revealing an inner experience of being with a client is an invitation for connection with the coach; a professional intimacy that can quickly establish or cement a foundation for collaboration. For both client and coach, *use of self* moments can be gratifying and productive in moving the coaching forward.

Furthermore, given the frequency with which *use of self* examples are offered when coaches are asked about memorable moments (i.e., critical *positive* incidents in coaching), they may also shed light on key competencies for executive coaches. While this article is not a review of the competency literature of coaching (there are many competency lists available), aspects of *use of self* are likely to be key elements of what separates competent from highly effective coaches. Furthermore, the prerequisites for *use of self* include several key emotional intelligence characteristics (Goleman, 1995). In other words, self-reflectiveness (rather than reactivity), self-insight, and sensitivity to impact on

others are examples of key requirements for the coach to employ *use of self* and are well described in the emotional intelligence literature. More broadly, it may be useful to identify the competencies for effective coaching that set the stage for *use of self*

Further research could explore that hypothesis toward obvious application in training and supervising coaches. Exploring the *use of self* concept has value both to the wider field of coaching and to its day-to-day practice. This paper is aimed at describing *use of self* to support further research and to help coaches more fully to harness the power that *use of self* moments contain.

Use of self is actually a subset of a larger set of skills that all types of professionals use. These have been referred to as *Reflection-in-Action* (Schon, 1983) and they have been used to describe the way successful professionals solve problems in concert with others. Reflection-in-action expands the identification of professionalism beyond technical expertise. It celebrates the uniqueness of each professional challenge and encourages practitioners to be theorists about what is relevant and what to do about it. "Many practitioners, locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection . . . . Others, more inclined toward and adept at reflection-in-action, nevertheless feel profoundly uneasy because they cannot say what they know how to do . . . ." (Donald Schon, 1983, *The Reflective Practitioner, p. 69*) This text legitimizes a reflective process and encourages its use in trying to understand professional problem solving. In so doing, professionals become broader and more facile thinkers, capable of juggling a variety of perspectives without resorting to a limited, although definitive, answer.

While Schon makes the case that all professionals should employ a reflective stance, the helping professions, where the practitioner him or herself is the instrument of progress, most readily demonstrate the value of reflection-in-

action. Staying open to unexpected revelations, entertaining hypotheses about meaning but using intuition to make the connections, tolerating ambiguity that encourages clients to make interpretations, reframing and then reframing again as new impressions are formed about a client's situation. These are all examples of reflection-in-action that therapists and other counselors are encouraged to use. When the counselor draws key data from his or her own reactions, usually emotional, then we have the special case of *use of self* within reflection-in-action.

Use of Self in the Coaching Literature

"You know, as I am listening to you I find it hard to concentrate on what you are saying. I get a breathless feeling, and it is hard to know when I can break in." (Mary Beth O'Neill, 2007, *Executive coaching with backbone and heart,* p 99.)

"When I introduced the idea that thoughts rather than feelings would be useful for this client, he responded with enthusiasm . . ." (Dan White, 2006, *Coaching leaders,* p232.)

"I imagined other employees being disappointed and even angry with [the client] for not dealing realistically with [a managerial challenge]. When I described my hunch . . . she let out a sigh of relief . . . she finally knew what was wrong." (Dan White, 2006, *Coaching leaders,* p237.)

"The coach feels that she is treading on eggshells . . . any feedback may come across as overly critical . . . . The coach points out that relationships at work may be repeating themselves in the coaching . . . This is a relief to the [client]." (Erik de Haan & Yvonne Burger, 2005, *Coaching with colleagues*, p 79.)

"You sound settled but not fully satisfied. What do you risk in reaching for the next level?" Michael Frisch, example from a coaching session.

Most books on coaching do not contain index headings on *use of self* but most do include related phenomenon. For example, Mary Beth O'Neill, in her book, *Executive Coaching (2nd Ed.)*, 2007, emphasizes a very useful concept she calls "Signature Presence" to both describe and encourage the coach's impact on the client. In Erik de Haan and Yvonne Burger's (2005) *Coaching with Colleagues*, several concepts related to *use of self* are described, such as the coach tapping into "implicit" information and using "here and now" communication. Dan White (2006) in *Coaching Leaders*, encourages coaches to use their intuition but to also be a self-critic to avoid influence by the coach's own fears or biases. These are both interesting and disparate ideas; no text actually contained a clear definition of *use of self* or descriptions of how it might be used.

However, their valuable ideas on this topic deserve more complete description. Mary Beth O'Neill (2007) devotes a full chapter advocating that coaches need to develop a strong "Signature Presence" in working with clients. Her rationale is that in the pressured and confusing world that executives live in, coaches must bring their own point of view if they are to provide value to the client. They must be "differentiated" from the client or else be superficially "reactive" to the clients world. She offers excellent advice about developing one's "presence" and reducing "reactivity". While she doesn't mention *use of self* per se, her concepts can be thought of as prerequisites for *use of self*, since there is no self to use if a coach is dependent on the client's approval and enmeshed with his or her issues.

She also encourages bringing "immediacy to the moment:" "How you interact with the [client] and your internal reactions to her can be useful information." (Mary Beth O'Neill, 2007, *Coaching with backbone and heart,* p. 33-34.) O'Neill suggests four steps in which to bring immediacy: 1. "Scan for parallel processes between the [client's] actions and what the [client] does with you; 2. identify your reactions to the [client's] actions; 3. speak directly to the [client] about your

experience of her; and, 4. make the connection between your experience . . . and the ways she may be doing the same thing elsewhere." O'Neill is describing the coach extrapolating his or her own experience of being with the client to the experiences that others might be having and then providing that as feedback to the client. This "in the moment feedback" is one form of *use of self*, although it can range from sharing more dispassionate observations of the client's behavior to more subjective emotional reactions of the coach. Also, it assumes that the value is in the reporting the feedback to the client, basically the sooner the better. However, in some coaching situations, it may be more valuable for the coach to contain those reactions and use them later, coupled with other feedback.

Dan White's (2006) *Coaching Leaders*, in a chapter called 'Distinctive Approaches to Coaching", has a section labeled, 'The Coach's Use of Self.' (p 230-239). This section emphasizes the importance of the coach's self-awareness about his or her own fears or limitations and the coach developing a "Reflective Practice" to stay in touch with that self-awareness. White emphasizes the importance of grounding what the coach does in what is useful for the client rather than what the coach prefers or is comfortable with. In a later section, 'Applying Use of Self' (p. 257-8), White provides an example of how he changed direction with a client, dropping an emotional goal that appealed to White and replacing it with a cognitive one that the client found more achievable. This example illustrates *use of self* in helping the coach self-manage by recognizing coach preferences when they diverge from what the client needs or finds useful; i.e., the practical solution over the elegant one.

He also devotes attention to the coach's use of three "subpersonalities": sensitivity, intensity, and playfulness. These are described as continua, requiring the coach to be self-aware and controlled enough to vary how much of each is useful at different stages in the coaching. Underlying that awareness is White's

description of "intuition," informed by cognitive, emotional and physical signals, as an important source of insight for coaches if they can learn to access and trust it. Finally, White describes coach "self-revelation" as a *use of self* tool. In these situations, the coach discloses something of his or her own life's struggles as a way of encouraging or enlightening the client.

For White (2006), *use of self* is primarily aimed at the coach's self-insight, especially in terms of course changes and adjustments that align with client needs rather than the coach's habits. This requires the coach be thoughtful and self-reflective after the fact as well as the ability to be a self-critic. In White's conception, *use of self* is mainly a protection against the coach's over-use of certain coach tendencies. It grounds the coach in an observer's perspective that ironically brings more objectivity (or a more varied subjectivity) to practice choices that coaches make. It fuels flexibility for the coach but need not be an overt part of the interaction, as it was for O'Neill's (2007) "Signature Presence." As a result, examples of White's *use of self* are more difficult to capture in exchanges with a client, even though he is the only writer in the field of coaching who employs *use of self* as an actual text subheading.

With de Haan and Burger's (2005) *Coaching with Colleagues*, *use of self* taps into some familiar concepts, emphasizing that the coach needs to tune into implicit or non-verbal information about the client and that the coach needs to be emotionally self-aware. Unlike the other books, however, de Haan and Burger put *use of self* in a larger theoretical frame: the challenge of countertransference. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory and practice, these authors extend points made by others that countertransference, i.e., feelings that a helper has about a client's words and actions, "can be used as a key to deeper understanding of the client." (p. 78.) Use of countertransference is not described in detail but there is the clear implication of its value to the coach, and that, echoing earlier theorists, those feelings are useful for the coach in

understanding the client, and in self-monitoring for the coach, even if the coach's feelings remain unexpressed.

It should be noted that there is an intellectually rich and complex literature that focuses on countertransference in clinical psychology applications (Giovacchini, 1989; Gorkin, 1987; Natterson, 1991). De Haan and Burger's (2005) equalizing of countertransference and *use of self* is actually an over-simplification of that literature. Countertransference was labeled by Freud as the clinician's transference reactions to the client, or to the client's transference, and was viewed as interfering with the curative process in psychoanalysis; he gave it a clearly negative connotation (Natterson, 1991). While there was limited dissention to that negativity from Freud's contemporaries, it wasn't until the 1960's that practitioners began a vigorous debate about the usefulness of countertransference. That debate continues today but there has been a growing appreciation of the usefulness of therapist reactions to the client and a broadened list of what those reactions might be, not delimited by the concept of transference.

Summarizing the three coaching texts above in which *use of self* phenomena are given clear importance in coaching, there are three variations described. First, *use of self* is a coach self-monitoring skill that helps to keep the focus on the client's needs by overtly acknowledging the coach's preferences, fears, needs, etc. Second, *use of self* brings the coach into the client's world as an "other," reacting to the client as others might and then describing those reactions to build the client's self-insight. This appears to be synonymous with "in-the-moment feedback" and helps the coach maintain a useful presence separate from the client's hectic world. Thirdly, *use of self* is used to describe coach self-disclosure to a client about the coach's past experience or choices that are similar to what the client might be facing. The intent of these could be to join with the client as

in "you are not alone in facing this type of challenge" or to suggest an approach, as in "here is an example of how I handled a situation like yours."

Informal Survey of Experienced Executive Coaches

There have been many opportunities during the two years that I have been thinking about this article to ask experienced coaches about *use of self.* At some point, I made a conscious effort at professional meetings and client-sponsored coaches' forums to ask colleagues in a one-on-one discussion for a working definition of *use of self.* I wanted to understand the range of definitions to the term that exist in practice to informally test two hypotheses: 1. U*se of self* is viewed as a very useful tool for coaches, and, 2. The working definition of the term itself lacks consistency and precision.

During approximately 10 such discussions, the first hypothesis was not supported, while the second one was, with distinct variations in definition. Taking each hypothesis in turn, approximately half of those I asked did not actively think about *use of self* in their coaching practices and didn't relate to the term. In effect, their models of coaching, while well developed and active, did not incorporate this tool in an overt way. I was surprised by this and when I looked back on my sample, there was an obvious, although unintentional split: those coaches with HR, OD, training or I/O Psychology backgrounds vs. those coming out of clinical or counseling backgrounds. In other words, those who had been therapists talked readily about the value of *use of self* but coaches coming out of an organizational context did not. It is apparent that if concepts similar to *use of self,* such as transference and countertransference, have not been part of a coach's training, they are much less likely to be familiar with and apply the concept.

However, even among those coaches who found *use of self* valuable, there was variation in the definition. The most striking variation was that some coaches

defined *use of self* as *self-disclosure* just as White (2006) described in his examples. This self-disclosure included personal information, ostensibly to put the coach and client on a more equal footing, and sharing stories about the coach's professional struggles and how they were overcome to give the client examples of how to tackle his or her own challenges. Other coaches defined it in countertransferential concepts or more broadly as any insights coming from their own internal experience of clients. Some defined it both ways. One coach defined *use of self* as modeling specific behaviors that the client needed to improve, such as clear communication or better organization. In addition, all equated *use of self* with the coach actually doing or saying something, such as articulating an observation or feeling, rather a more indirect use which might guide questioning or the coaching process but not be apparent to the client. For all of those who resonated with and valued the tool, *use* was the same as *responding or reporting back*.

Conducting these discussions helped me sharpen my own opinions about *use of self* and how to define it. Certainly the terms *intuition* and *in-the-moment feedback* apply because they draw on a coach's direct experience in working with a client. There may be overt and tangible behavior that the coach is reacting to but the actual source of *use of self* data is internal to the coach; the coach's resonance in response to the client. Calling it countertransference appears to narrow that resonance and immediately places it within psychoanalytic theory and debate. While the concept of transference, for client or coach, may bring valuable understanding of specific reactions on either side, *use of self* does not need to be *counter* anything. It may be the natural handoff from where the psychoanalytic literature has taken countertransference but it doesn't require an understanding of how that theoretical debate has progressed.

In addition to clarifying what *use of self* is, my discussions with coaches also clarified what it isn't, or shouldn't be. Self-disclosure by a coach of either

personal information or life examples from his or her own challenges already has a tradition of use in coaching, albeit mixed, but doesn't tap the depth of the coach's experience of the client that *use of self* does. Furthermore, both varieties of self-disclosure can be easily misused. Hearing about a coach's "war stories" in dealing with leadership challenges or other aspects of career or organizational life may have some very modest usefulness to clients but will not help the client feel *seen* and understood. Also the client can easily experience coach self-disclosure as implicit advice giving, which most professionally trained coaches would eschew. A coach sharing personal information can be perfectly fine, but it isn't going to materially advance the work. In both, coach self-disclosure isn't primarily about the client, and clients are likely to experience them as such; he or she may be interested but more likely will be waiting for the focus to return to them and their world. Certainly modeling positive examples of behaviors that a client is developing is useful, but doesn't need to be included under *use of self.*

Definition of *Use of Self*

Given how my discussants' described *use of self,* and how it was treated in the coaching literature, a working definition is called for. *Use of self: A coach's thought or feeling reaction to a client that the coach is both aware of and will use, either directly or indirectly, in the service of the coaching*. *Use of self* requires that the coach *tune in* to his or her reactions to the client: what is said or unsaid, and overt behavior as well as facial expressions, non-verbal cues, and other subtle forms of behavior. That tuning in is more than just observing; it requires that the coach have the presence of mind to examine and articulate, at least to oneself, reactions to those observations, or as Schon (1983) put it, *reflection-in-action*. The coach must have a healthy egotism about his or her reactions and believe that they truly matter to both the relationship with the client and the client's development.

That is one reason why *use of self* is not usually leveraged by beginning coaches. As coaches gain experience, they can learn to differentiate thoughts and feelings that may be useful from those triggered by doubts or anxiety-driven reactions. Feelings in particular are difficult to describe let alone attribute to something coming from the client. Experienced coaches gain both self-knowledge and a repertoire of client experiences that can help to separate signal from noise in their own feeling states. The other key element that experience can bring is confidence to *use* subjective reactions even though there is never surety about what they mean. Experienced coaches develop an internal indicator of usefulness: this thought or feeling is about the client and it is important vs. I am not sure where this reaction comes from nor what it means. These types of judgments are refinements that come after mastering the challenges of building client relationships, guiding the coaching process, and controlling other essential aspects of the engagement.

Certainly there are times when what the client does triggers a clear reaction, either positive or negative, in a coach and there is no deep insight required. For example, the client who gives the coach a gift of a book that had come up in casual conversation or the client who keeps the coach waiting or does not show up for an appointment. Yet *use of self* is more than just the natural human responses to interpersonal dynamics. Coach responses may be clearer at some times than others but *how to use it*, if at all, is never obvious. There is always a range of ways to react and a judgment about what would be most useful. A coach who simply thanks the client for the book or reacts angrily to being kept waiting is not *using him or her self*. A coach who self-reflects on reactions to the event and then interprets it toward insight about the client is using self: "I wonder if the client is thoughtful/attentive/insensitive/self-involved with others too, and if so, how could I use my own experience of that quality in the service of the coaching?"

A Descriptive Model of *Use of Self* in Coaching

Even within the definition above, there can be a wide variation in what constitutes *use of self*. At a relatively simple level, *use of self* involves reflecting a feeling or offering an interpretation of what the client is saying. For example, "When we changed topics to talk about your peers, I heard a noticeable change in your voice toward anger." This might lead to a discussion about what it might mean: "What were you thinking about as we began to discuss your peers?" It also might be tied back to on-the-job situations: "Improving relationships with your peers is on your development plan but it sounds like there are some unresolved feelings about them."

Another variation is in-the-moment" feedback when the coach observes the client behaving in ways that are notable for some reason or clearly tied to a developmental theme. "I am finding it very difficult to follow what you are describing to me. It reminds me of the feedback from the 360 survey that people have trouble following your points." This is a clear invitation to examine the dyadic situation with coach and client toward a better understanding of what the client does with coworkers. If the client responds favorably to the invitation, the coach might pose other questions to explore the moment: "What were you feeling as you spoke?" or "How might you have noticed that I was lost?" or "What one message did you want me to understand?"

The coach's interpersonal experience of the client's is likely to reflect others' experience as well. This allows those reactions to be brought into the room for discussion and analysis. For example, consider a client who is thought to be judgmental and off-putting by others, but in fact can be quite warm and humorous. A coach can look for the behavioral cues in the client tied to the "judgmental" perception, such as tone, facial expression, verbal style, etc., and connect those to situational triggers. This can bring both insight to the client and ideas for improvement. It does require that the coach have confidence that

his or her perceptions are generalizable to others and be able to deconstruct what drives those perceptions.

When the coach's observations come from his or her own idiosyncratic feelings and reactions, they are more difficult to use but can be powerful. They can bring out unspoken truths that the client is experiencing but may not be aware of. For example, in listening to a client talk about his relationship with his boss, the coach senses distance and fear in the client's voice. The coach simply might say, "You don't sound too happy about how you two are getting along," and pause. This could lead to an exploration of hidden feelings that may not have been revealed voluntarily: fears, hopes, predictions, etc.

Probably the most challenging use of self is when the client triggers a personal, negative emotional reaction in the coach, such as anger or dislike. These can occur with clients who are inconsiderate of the coach's time or in other ways communicate lack of respect for the coach. Experienced coaches try to depersonalize these situations, viewing the client's behavior as a statement about fear, lack of motivation, or some other response that is interfering with the client's engagement with the coaching process. Even so, coaches need to think about how to use those reactions. They could lead to deeper conversations about commitment to coaching and what the obstacles are to full participation. They could also lead to insights applicable to work behavior such as ways in which the client "acts out" negatively to maintain control on the job and the impact that has on others.

For example, a client who takes phone calls during coaching sessions may make a coach feel under-valued or controlled. Instead of just being silently resentful or reacting angrily, the coach's *use of self* requires an examination of the feelings, their possible meaning or usefulness to the client, and consideration of *how* to use them. In this way, if the coach chooses to tolerate the client's

behavior at that point in the coaching it does not reflect passivity or abdication by the coach. Timing is an important consideration in how best to use feelings and observations that emerge.

If the coach decides to use those feelings overtly and share them with the client, word choice is also an important consideration. Modeling emotionally intelligent communication is recommended in speaking about reactions, such as, "When you take phone calls during our sessions, it interferes with my ability to connect to what we are discussing. I find it distracting. It also makes me wonder about your commitment to this process." Or, phrasing could go in another direction, "You know, when you check your Blackberry during our meetings, I can identify with what I heard from your direct reports about lack of attention from you."

Obviously, these examples of *use of self* demonstrate both its range and difficulty, in terms of self-reflectiveness and articulateness. They require confidence and experience. But as the survey of experienced coaches confirmed, *use of self* is worth the difficulty it presents: it can be liberating for the coach and provide unexpected and especially useful insights for the client. That level of interpersonal honesty is very rare in most relationships and may be completely non-existent for executives who define their connection to others in terms of authority and power. *Use of self*, when shared, is an invitation to interpersonal closeness or intimacy, which can be exciting, scary, and freeing.

Given the impact and the challenge of *use of self,* a clearer understand of its variations is warranted. Pulling together descriptions from the literature, the survey of experienced coaches and my own experience in trying to use my self in coaching, two orthogonal dimensions appear to underlie *use of self* moments: 1. The extent to which the response is grounded or linked to an established development theme, and 2. The extent of the interpersonal or emotional intensity in the coach's responses to the client. When placed on an XY axis as

two intersecting continua, these two dimensions define a space with four quadrants, each representing a different variation on *use of self*.

High Interpersonal Intensity
(Use of the coach's idiosyncratic emotional reactions; requires interpretation)

D   C

Unsure/no clear   Clearly aligned with
link with   development theme
development   or development plan
theme or plan

B   A

Low Interpersonal Intensity
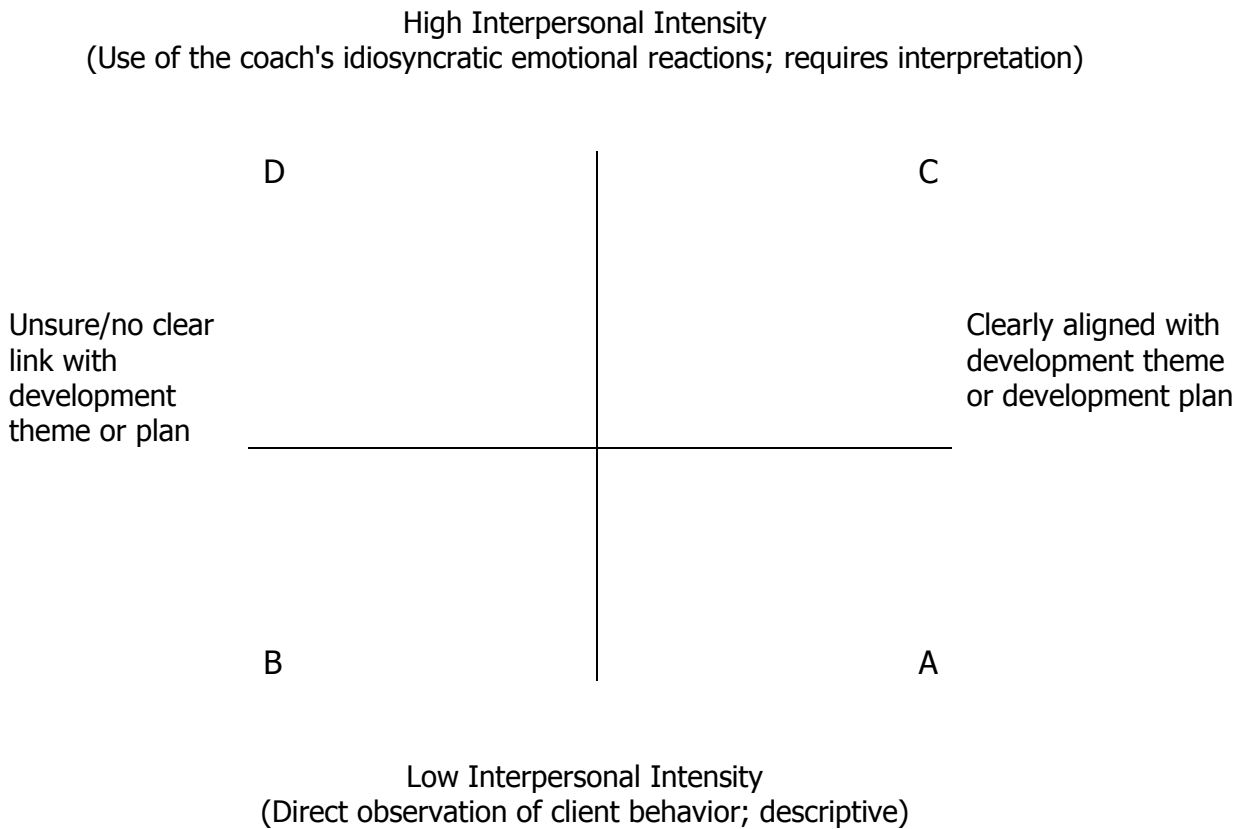(Direct observation of client behavior; descriptive)

Figure 1: Axis depicting the two underlying factors in the range of *use of self* interventions

Quadrant A describes those *use of self* moments when the coach would share direct observations about the client's *in the moment* behavior that tie into a likely development goal. This often occurs in the middle to later stages of coaching when the coach is familiar both with the client's developmental goals and their behavioral manifestations, especially during coaching sessions. These are often an expected part of the coach's role and can be overtly contracted with the client as a way to capitalize on *here and now* time together rather than waiting to describe *there and then* events. For example: "When you jump from topic to

topic as you just did, it is an example of what we need to work on under the 'clarity of communication' development goal." Or a slightly more pointed example is, "It is difficult for me to interrupt you at times and make a point. Leaving more room for others to speak fits into our 'better listening' objective." In fact, coaches may suggest that clients role play specific situations that relate to development objectives to allow for immediate feedback. Such feedback may be more bounded than other *in the moment* coach feedback but do involve the coach's *use of self* in reacting to what the client does.

Quadrant B describes those direct observations that the coach would share about the client's immediate behavior that do not tie into a development goal or previously discussed theme of the coaching. These could occur at any point in a coaching engagement as a coach *tunes in* to a client's behavior, mood, tone or other signals. Some might be as simple as a reflection of a feeling. For example: "You seem tired today." Others might be an interpretation with an invitation to explore, such as, "I have the impression that you are frustrated. What's causing that?" These may feel riskier than Quadrant A to a coach since it is unclear where such observations may lead. Therefore, they represent more of a decision process for a coach. While Quadrant A *use of self* observations have a clear linkage to the coaching agenda, Quadrant B observations do not. Sharing them may help to foster openness in the relationship and broader discussions, although not directly focused on the development plan. Under engagement time pressures, coaches may choose not to make these observations overtly, although they still can be useful to the coach in understanding the client.

Quadrant C is similar to Quadrant A in the coach's *use of self* but the data are different. Quadrant A's data are more behavioral observations of the client; Quadrant C describes the coach's more emotional reactions to the client, even when tied to a development theme. Again, these would occur in the middle or later stages of coaching when development themes have emerged and the

coaching relationship has a solid foundation of trust. While the observed behavior can be linked to a development goal, the *use of self* data is more personal to the coach. For example: "When you call to change appointments on short notice it reminds me of the negative impact such switches have on your direct reports." Or, "Sometimes I find your words neutral but your tone and facial expression very severe, similar to the feedback we got from peers." Quadrant C asks the coach to examine his or her emotional reactions to the client, and if warranted, use those overtly to more deeply explore a development theme. Such interventions are more immediate and are likely to have a stronger impact on the client than the reporting of feedback from others. As with examples from other Quadrants, *use* of this material may constitute the coach's self-reflection and insight into the client without choosing to share it, depending on many factors.

Quadrant D takes Quadrant C a step further by describing the coach's more idiosyncratic and emotional reactions to the client but without any linkage to a specific developmental theme. Quadrant D requires the coach to be an astute self-observer and tune into emotional reactions generally, without a filter or cognitive gate for developmental relevance. As such, Quadrant D may tie into the concept of countertransference in the more general sense of the term that the newer psychoanalytic theorists have posited. Not all reactions need to be shared to be useful. Acknowledging feelings to oneself, reflecting on them, discussing them with a colleague or supervisor are all very valuable activities for the coaching even if then never are "reported" to the client. But when they are shared, they can lead to powerful moments of insight for the client. For example, "You know, I experience that tone in your voice as dismissive. It tends to shut me up." Or, "It feels to me that the coaching isn't very important to you." Or, "I didn't hear a clear statement about whether you are going to handle that differently or not." Quadrant D moments can be challenging for a coach to handle but they also can open up unexpected and important avenues for growth.

Using two continua and the resulting four Quadrants to describe *use of self* has several advantages over a simple definition, even if that definition is clear. First it operationalizes the definition of *use of self* and thereby explains the variation that is possible within the boundaries that are set by that definition. Second, by suggesting the underlying factors, coaches can be liberated to employ a wider range of *use of self* and make more conscious choice about what they choose to share from their reactions. Third, it legitimizes the different levels of risk that coach's experience in using oneself. As depicted here, the Quadrants are likely to be experienced as risky in the order discussed, from A to D. Newer coaches can begin to use self in the initial Quadrants and work up to the others. So in that sense, the descriptive model is also a recommendation for how to learn to use oneself in coaching.

The model assumes value in having *use of self* insight, whether shared or not. Therefore, it does not address the decision process that coach's go through in deciding to share a *use of self* observation. While listening to and tuning into oneself is foundational to everything else, there is also the challenge of deciding when to share those observations. That decision process may require treatment in another paper, but it certainly benefits by experience. Learning to share observations from Quadrant A are probably a necessary precursor to share the observations from the other Quadrants; deadends or disconnects are less exposed and easier to recover from in the early Quadrants and can still be learning experiences for the coach. Sharing too much of the later Quadrants may overwhelm some clients. In addition to *if* an insight should be shared, there are also decisions about *when* and *how to phrase it* that come into play. One can over-think these considerations and lose the important authenticity of *use of self* moments but in learning to use the skill, timing and phrasing do figure into impact. As coaches gain experience and confidence in their *use of self* they can

modulate if, when, and how to share these important insights in ways that are more likely to have positive impact on clients.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

This paper has focused on describing *use of self* phenomenon in the interest of clarifying it and thereby supporting coaches in learning to use it. However, to end on a somewhat more practical note, there are recommendations that operationalize some of the conceptual underpinnings of the paper, especially for newer coaches:

- Remember, *use of self* is not about coach self-disclosure or stories from the coach's life. While these may be useful at times, they are not included under this definition of *use of self.*

- Bring your observations, reactions, feelings, and intuitive perceptions about the client *to your own consciousness* (with no immediate intention to share them with the client), even if after sessions. Be an astute observer, able to articulate, at least to yourself, what you see, feel, and react to in the client. Consider this information as essential data in understanding your client without any pressure to share it with the client.

- Consider options about what, if anything, to do with your subjective reactions to the client. These might include simply sharing an observation, overtly linking a reaction to an emerging development theme, or just thinking about it further.

- If you choose to share an observation or reaction, examine your words for any hint of negative judgment. Deconstruct your observation to get as close as possible to your own observations and the client's behavior: describe rather than evaluate.

- If you are sharing your own feelings, use "I" messages and own your reactions. Be sure that your feeling is really in response to the client and does not reflect your own fears, insecurities, and limitations. This is a judgment that does benefit from experience and from dialogue with trusted supervisors and colleagues.

- It is useful and interesting to try to interpret your reactions and figure out why you feel the way you do, although you may decide not to share that interpretation. It is also useful to describe a reaction and invite a dialogue with the client about where it comes from and what it might mean in the client's wider world.

- On the one hand, timeliness is useful in sharing your observations; on the other hand, behavior tends to repeat. Therefore *being ready to be spontaneous* based on past unshared observations may be a useful posture when you do decide to share them.

- Discuss *use of self* in your learning community: colleague, case supervisor, coaching instructor. Explore your idiosyncratic reactions to the client. What images are triggered, or spontaneous reactions have you had, in response to the client? What emotions bubble up in you as you experience the client? What insights emerge about your client as you reflect on these questions and how might you use those insights with your client?

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