Transformational Coaching and Mentoring Approach for Enhancing the Individual Efficiency: The Advaita Way

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Abstract

Each individual is different from the other based on ‘trigunas’—satva, rajas and tamas. Sattva means balance, order, purity, value systems, positive orientation etc. Rajas mean change, movement or dynamism and materialism for good cause. Tamas means too inactive, negative, lethargic, dull, or with negative attitudes. The ‘gunas’ decide the way the individual react to the environment. Transformational coaching should recognize the characteristic of each personality and mold the coaching methods to suit the respective gunas of each person. ‘The six Pramanas’ (means of valid knowledge) as propounded in Advaitha system of philosophy provide the vital means to impart intellectual capabilities and harness the required skills as required for the individuals. This conceptual paper tries to analyze the usage of six pramanas and their effectiveness in coaching and mentoring of different type of individuals. The paper dispels the myth of ‘one size fits all’ concept as far as the training needs are considered. This can be a transformational methodology which can revolutionize the coaching and mentoring procedures and provide incremental intellectual impetus of the people.

Key Words: Transformational coaching, Individual efficiency, Pramanas, Advaita, Trigunas.

Introduction

Vasudaiva Kutumbakam is a philosophy that believes the whole world as one family. The concept originates in the Vedic scripture Maha Upanishad (Chapter 6, Verse 72):

अयंबन्धु रयम्नेति गणना लघुचेतसं उदारचरिताम् तु कसुधैव कुटुबकं

Only small men discriminate saying: One is a relative; the other is a stranger. For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but a family. It is a Sanskrit phrase meaning that the whole earth is one family. The first word is made up of three Sanskrit words - Vasudha, Eva and Kutumbakam. Vasudha means the earth, Eva means emphasizing and Kutumbakam means a family. It means that the whole earth is just one family. According to the author of Hitopadesha, Narayana, the main purpose of creating the Hitopadesha is to instruct young minds the philosophy of life in an easy way so that they are able to grow into responsible adults (enlightenedleadershipnow.com). Here the question arises, if the whole humanity is one, why there are so many differences? Why the way of thinking is different? Why individual learning styles are different? And many more questions arise.

Many studies reveal that every individual is different and are driven by their own mental temperaments known as gunas in Sanskrit which are of three types. Each has a distinct character of its own. Sattva is the state of thoughts in equanimity, serenity, objectivity — when a person is poised, mature, contemplative, detached from worldly involvement and excitement. Hence he is described as being trans-active. Rajas is the state of passionate, desirous and agitated thoughts — when a person bristles with frenzied actions leading to his involvement in the affairs of the world. Tamas is the state of thoughts in inertia; a mood of lethargy, indolence, indifference, indisposed to activity, in a condition of sloth and sleep and with no intellectual conviction to pursue. A person steeped in tamas lives a dull, inactive life, with hardly any response to the world. The ‘gunas’ decide the way the individual react to the environment. Knowing the ‘Guna’ is the key for understanding the nature of the person. It is important to understand that every individual is different and knowledge assimilation is different. This research focuses on coaching of individuals in their own style, which is a customized coaching. To
identify their receptive style of learning we may need to look back to various manuscripts like vedas, upanishads and epics. A concept of ‘Pramanas’ from Advaita (one of the systems of Indian philosophy) explains this very clearly.

Human behavior is very complex to understand and handle. In today’s competitive world there are many tools to understand the personality and attitudes of an individual. Many tools are backed by one or the other vedic philosophy. This research concentrates on few concepts from Advaita pramanas which can be used for coaching and mentoring of individuals to increase efficiency and engagement towards talent management.

Literature Review
Every individual requires different coaches at each stages of life. At early teen stage, the coaching of ‘Values’ plays a vital role. In the teenage, coaching about the ‘Enlightenment’, In adulthood a coaching of ‘Sustainability’ and ‘Career Growth’ plays an important role. The coaching subliminally happens by various people that they encounter in life closely at the particular stage. The various people may include parents, friends, role models, teachers etc. The learning is a lifelong affair ranging from cradle to grave. A beautiful Sanskrit sloka summarizes the way a person receives learning inputs. It says, “acharyat padamadatte padam shishyav svamedhaya padam sabrahmcharibhyah padam kalakramena ca” which means ‘of all the learning that a person gets, only a quarter of it comes from the teacher; a quarter comes from his own intelligence; another quarter he acquires from his contemporary students and the last quarter only in due course of time through experience’. But every individual interacts with many of them in various instances, however, they will not learn everything from the people whom they interact with, but they learn what appealed to their senses and accordingly would be their behaviors. For instance from the episodes of Mahabharata-The Great Indian Epic, Pandavas and Kauravas were taught at various stages by people of similar virtues and both of them had many people in common with whom they interact with. Then, why is this disparity of thought processes? Does it reflect on their attitudes and personalivities? The simple answer is that they have assimilated their attitudes according to their Gunas. Pandavas and Kauravas have been coached by Guru Dhronacharya. Kauravas association with their maternal uncle Shakuni influenced them towards Tamasa guna. The coaching of ‘satva tatva’ (the spirit of satva ) by their gurus was not adapted by Kauravas with the positive spirit, as their psychological desires were driven by Shakuni continuously towards tamasa guna.

Likewise, Pandavas also get coached by Lord Krishna in various instances and choose to be ethical and follow dharmic principles (Dharma is an integrated scheme of life process by which one is prevented from falling down and is uplifted spiritually. It is therefore a way of life or a value system). They believed Lord Krishna is most valid source of knowledge and at many instances they followed his advice. Kauravas, on the other hand believed Shakuni as the most authentic source of knowledge and adapted him as a coach. Kauravas believed blindly and did whatever Shakuni has instructed (Shakuni is the maternal uncle of Kauravas who had evil influence on the lives of Kauravas and his character is found in the epic Maha Bharatha)

The ‘Arthashastra’ which was written in 4th Century BC by Kautilya is written in instructional tone to the King Chandragupta. What is the relationship between Kautilya and Chandragupta? Is he a teacher or preacher or savior or strategist or what? The one word which explains the relationship is ‘Coach’. Coach has many faces like friend, teacher, preacher, savior, sharing love, compassionate, strategist and relative. Coach takes the face as per the requirement and temperamental status of the coachee.

The knowledge brought about by any valid means of knowledge is valid. The coach persuades their followers with their experiences and leading by examples. They influence the followers by gaining trust, showing the leadership qualities and knowing individual gunas. Every individual assimilates knowledge in their own styles. Coach guides the path and develops the self-efficacy in the followers to reach the goals, facilitating and empowering at various levels.

Coaching in this context is mainly focused on Knowledge sharing, and the journey with in. The whole purpose of personal coaching is that it has to be tailored to individual and could be able to customize it by developing their own ideas on what they want coaching on and the approach which suits them to
find the answers for themselves. Developing a learning organisation by providing suitable changes through the challenging environment, new opportunities, ensuring the required development in business towards and in employees, to engage and work towards the growth and upgradation of their skills is the need of the hour.

**Pramanas**

An effective coaching platform enables employees to learn, share knowledge and collaborate seamlessly through any coach. Coach has to provide employees with instant access to the critical knowledge needed to do their job effectively. Knowledge Assimilation and Knowledge Accommodation for any individual happens in the brain (Atherton J S, 2013). These two words are complementary processes through which input from outside world is internalized. Knowledge Assimilation happens when the individual acquires knowledge and process according to their own preconceived notions. The mind has its database already built, with its fields and categories already defined. If it gets new knowledge for authentic source, which fits into those fields, it will assimilate it without any trouble. Assimilation process will not change the internal journey of brain, rather it will shelf the knowledge by squeezing it to the need of the coachee. Knowledge accommodation, on the other hand accommodates itself to the evidence with which it is confronted and thus adapt to it, which can be a more difficult and painful process. It is like, what happens when the new information is provided which does not fit the pre-existent fields and categories. The information understood as illogical and irrelevant data and it generates a need of developing new data structures and definitions in the brain to accommodate the new information. Both of these complementary processes exist together and have a dialectical relationship.

To get the best out of coaching, we need to start by exploring their origin, evolution and application to leadership development and individual knowledge adoption style. It is extremely important that the right means of coaching is adopted, otherwise even the existence or persistence of that knowledge will not be evident. These ‘means of knowledge’ are called Pramanas as explained by Hindu Philosophy. This research focuses on six pramanas which were propounded and accepted by Advaita Philosophy of Adi Shankaracharya.

The teachers of Advaita philosophy describes ‘six’ pramanas in detail. ‘Pramana’ in Sanskrit signifies ‘means of knowledge’. They explain which pramana has to be resorted to & also when; is decided by the situation and the nature of object concerned. This can be primary source for customized coaching or brain based coaching. These six means of knowledge are:

- Pratyaksha (Perception),
- Anumana (Inference),
- Upamana (Comparison),
- Arthapatti (Postulation),
- Anupalabdhi (Non-apprehension), and
- Sabda (Verbal Testimony).

These six valid means of knowledge can be assimilated and accommodated, and every one can get coached consciously or unconsciously in day to day life. It is extremely vital for a coach to understand each of these pramanas properly, so that they don’t start coaching, using the unsuitable means of knowledge for coaching. The unsuitable means can cause more knowledge accommodation than knowledge assimilation. The accommodated knowledge becomes overloaded and not processed according to thought of a coach. Proper understanding of Pramanas not only facilitates channelizing of our energy properly but also culminates in the attainment & fulfillment of the objective of coaching. The detailed explanation with examples is given below.

1. Pratyaksha (Perception): Pratyaksha pramana is immediate cognition or a direct perception. Direct perception can be external and internal. External perception is driven by five senses namely smell, taste, sound, touch, and vision through five organs (ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose). Internal perception means the immediate cognition of knowledge, anger, hatred, love, pain, happiness etc., in the minds of people. The knowledge assimilation process is very fast as both the mind and the sense
organs in all direct perception are involved. The proximity of direct cognition is the intrinsic characteristic of perceptual knowledge, and does not merely depend on the organs of perception. In Pratyaksha pramana, the knowledge is clear with a limited scope. So a person can be coached using this pramana for individual development where there is a limited scope and the internal and external perceptions are possible. The coaching through direct perception is possible for tamasic persons. A tamasic person may not appreciate what is not directly visible to the sense organs. A mentor may have to resort to reasoning faculties of the mentee and try to exhibit experiments, visuals etc to reach the mentee. The coaches who rely on this pramana can coach by demonstrating the desired behavior by himself or by pictures and videos, doing few lab experiments, creating role models etc., where the knowledge assimilation is systematic and can be reinforced by the coach.

2. Anumana (Inference): This pramana is translated as ‘knowing after’, which means the method of deriving knowledge from existing knowledge. In other words, giving inferences to what they know. Every individual has knowledge of an invariable relationship between two things and on that basis while seeing one they tend to infer the presence of the other. The anumana pramana is the logical process of gaining knowledge. The knowledge assimilated is called inferential knowledge or also known as the logical deduction. Perception forms the foundation of anumana, but at the core of all inferential knowledge lies the knowledge of vyapti or the ‘invariable concomitance’, the invariable relationship between the two objects. As it is seen in any professional organizations the basis of perceptual knowledge that wherever there are clear goals and rewards there is good performance. Having known the invariable connection between the two we can logically deduce the presence of fire whenever we see smoke. This is anumana.

In all inferential knowledge there are definite steps to be followed. The following steps are accepted for logical deduction of knowledge by the teachers of Advaita Vedanta:

a. Perceptual evidence - We see clear goals and rewards
b. Invariable concomitance – Whatever goals assigned and accepted are in turn fulfilled, you will be rewarded as per the organizational policies.
c. Conclusion - Therefore every performance towards goals will give rewards.

This kind of pramanas, a coach can use where the knowledge of logic has to be imparted in the coachees. In other words, there may be many people who want to learn from the logic perspective and more interested in knowledge assimilation than knowledge accommodation. This pramana orientation coaching may be suited to rajasic characteristic persons who are prepared to open up their minds for logic and reason. Here more refined concepts of knowledge can be imparted to mentee when compared to anumana pramana where only direct inferences are believed true by the mentees. We find a very good example for this in Gita. Arjun is a Kshtriya who can fight in the battle-field only if he is convinced by logic and reason. Krishna, apart from imparting the larger concepts of vedanta, sought to appeal to the logic and reasoning faculty of Arjun. He says, ‘if you win the battle, you enjoy the kingdom; if you die in the battlefield, you attain heaven and so fight for a righteous war’.

3. Upamana (Comparison): Upamana Pramana is defined as a process by which the knowledge of A’s similarity to B is gained from the perception of B’s similarity to A. This methodology is seen as distinct from mere inference, and is thus accepted as a valid mediate method of knowledge. This can also be termed as role model approach. Coaching sessions should contain this type of approach in few cases. Upamana is observational knowledge which comes out from comparison and similarity. For an instance, this method can be used for coaching and enhancing knowledge by comparison & similarity to logically communicate the nature of integrity and commitment towards work and various other things in an organizational setting. Nature of integrity and commitment leads to better productivity. By perceiving the organization progression and profitability, workers integrity and commitment can be appreciated.

The coachees who fall under this kind of pramana, they can be taught using vicarious modelling, case studies, lectureand real time examples where it gives them the scope of comparison and learn what to be done or what ought not to be done. This has to be done off the job and give scope for the coaches to
think independently, by which they can achieve wisdom in the learning. Tamasic and Rajasik people
could be coached by deducing comparisons and using similes. A tamasic, by nature, emulates others.
He needs a powerful role model for mental support.

4. Arthapatti- (Postulation, supposition or presumption): It is a distinct valid method of mediate
knowledge. It is in fact a method of assumption of an unknown fact in order to account for a known
fact that is otherwise inexplicable. The classic example of this method of knowledge is, if the
efficiency of the organization is higher it means that people are working which may infer that people
are happy and committed in turn gives indication to other employees to be happy and committed.
Arthapatti can either be from what is seen or from what is heard. The use of this method in Vedanta is
in assuming rightly the implications of Upanishadic statements. Like in the statement ‘The knower of
Self transcends grief’. Here we see that merely knowledge destroys grief, then it can be assumed
without any doubt, that all grief has to be false then alone it can be destroyed merely by knowledge. So
this is assumption. Satvik people could be coached by the pramana of Arthapatti. Again, in Gita, we
come across the classical mentor, Krishna, graduating his mentee, Arjun from tamasic and rajasik
stages to satvic stage in order to give deeper insights of Vedanta to Arjun. A satvic can able to
meditate and can perceive higher levels of knowledge without direct inference or logical means.

5. Anupalabdh (Non- apprehension): It literally means non-apprehehension. Anupalabdh is a separate
independent pramana according to Advaita. Non-existence of a thing is apprehended by its non-
perception. This method of knowledge is seen very often, and is evident from statements like: ‘There is
no trainer in the training room’, ‘There is no disturbance here’, ‘This room is not smelling good’ etc. It
may seem paradoxical that non-apprehehension of a thing is a means to the apprehension of its non-
existence (abhava). But in fact both non-perception as well as perception serves as a means to get
variety of knowledge, for the simple reason that the knower is conscious of both. They lead to positive
& negative experiences. Knowledge of non-existence of a thing can be on the basis of direct or indirect
knowledge. For example, in-built capabilities, motivation, commitment, engagement etc. fall under
this category. It could either be on the basis of our immediate non-perception of a thing or even on the
basis of inference or verbal testimony. In the former the knowledge is immediate while in the latter
case, which is applicable in supra-sensual objects, the knowledge of abhava of a thing is mediate.
The coach has to identify and foster the inherent capabilities and harness the assimilation capacity of
individuals. This leads to the self-efficacy motivation and people will start believing in themselves and
start working with more confidence. This develops engagement and sense of belongingness in them,
which can also be termed as Organization citizenship behavior. When one cannot perceive his own
strength, it may be the duty of the coach to explore his latent talents and goad him for greater goals. In
Ramayana, Hanuman could fly the sea only when his real potency was revealed to him.

6. Sabda(Verbal testimony): It is also called ‘apta-vakyas’ which means statement of a trust-worthy
person’, and agama (authentic word). A verbal statement given by most credible person or trust worthy
person creates an effective knowledge transmission. With reference to an example quoted above from
Mahabharata about Bhishma, Shakuni and various Gurus are the credible people for Pandavas and
Kauravas. Pandavas took Krishna’s words as authentic and Kauravas took Shakini’s words as most
authentic. We learn mostly by means of words. An oral or written message is a universal mode of
communication. Verbal statement conveying valid knowledge must have an authentic source which
must be free from defects. Only a competent person possessed of knowledge can impart accurate
knowledge. Such knowledge needs no verification, unless of course there is doubt about its reliability.
If the examples are quoted from the most authentic sources like Upanishads, Epics, they are treated to
be most reliable. Among the western philosophers only a few recognize verbal testimony as a valid &
independent means of knowledge, but a majority of Indian philosophers do. A coach has to be most
authentic source. The coachee has to trust the coach. When there is trust deficit the knowledge that
happens will lose spirituality and authenticity. It is very important that organizations should identify the
coach whose credibility is very high. The engagement of quality coaches whether internal or external
ones should actually make the complete difference. This should enhance the value of coaching process. Sabdapramana is most effectively used for all satvic, rajasic and tamasic characters if the mentee follow the dictum of ‘walk the talk’ leadership. These are the six pramanas, which Advaita believes for knowledge sharing. This has been largely illustrated in Advaita and believed that these are the ways a person assimilates knowledge.

Coaching ByPramanas- A conclusion

‘Coaching is arguably the most powerful method for developing managers’ ‘capacity for leadership.’ (Lee, 2003). Coaches come from diverse backgrounds as Organization Development, Learning and Development, Adult Learning etc. This rich mix has led to an overabundance of coaching styles as well as varieties of coaching. A great deal of coaching is undertaken by coaches who have no psychological interest and in the main this is appropriate for skills or performance based coaching. However there were few arguments within coaching (Bluckert 2006;Lee 2003; Milan and West 2001) that certain kinds of coaching requires a psychological competence, not necessarily requiring coaches to become psychologists or psychotherapists(Gillie&Shackleton, 2009). To make this happen the usage of pramanas can be the vital tool for the coaching sessions.

This approach of coaching through pramanas will make a difference only with the combination of four factors. They are expectancy (akanksa), consistency (yogyata), contiguity (asatti), and knowledge of the purport (tatparya-jnanam). Understanding of all this facilitates is very important. Expectancy which is called as ‘akanksa’ in Sanskrit, means every individual has some expectancies in life. The expectancy can be personal or professional. Coach has to identify the expectancies and always facilitate every coachee to fulfil his/her expectancies.

Having known these ‘pramanas’, when a qualified ‘pramata’ (knower) takes resort of these and turns his focus to ‘prameya’ (object of knowledge) then ‘prama’ or valid knowledge is instantaneously brought about. The knowledge brought about by any valid means of knowledge is alone valid knowledge, it does not &cannot depend on verification by other means, because the other means have no reach to that. The right knowledge does have some definite indications and thus validity of a means is confirmed by the perception of those indications in the pramata. So instead of wasting one’s time trying to see a form by our nose we should rather open our eyes and fulfill our aspiration. This alone is the objective of understanding the various means & methods of knowledge at our disposal.

References


Websites