

CONFLICT COACHING: AN EMERGING TREND IN THE ADR WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The technique known as conflict coaching, unites the main principles of the fields of executive coaching and conflict management, to provide a one on one forum for helping individuals address interpersonal conflict. Common objectives of people who seek conflict coaching include: to improve their conflict competence and responses; to resolve a specific dispute; to prevent an unnecessary conflict from escalating; and to make amends for an unresolved conflict. This process may also be used as a pre-mediation and post-mediation mechanism and as an adjunct to conflict management training. As part of an Integrated Conflict Management System (ICMS) or dispute resolution program or as provided by external or internal practitioners, conflict coaching is an additional option in the spectrum of conflict related services. This paper will provide participants with an overview of conflict coaching as an ADR technique and how the process fits within organizations as a conflict management option, with or without an ICMS. Participants will gain knowledge about the types of considerations necessary for implementing a conflict coaching program and several applications that demonstrate how this unique technique may be used in tandem with or independent of other ADR techniques.

***Keywords:** conflict coaching, coaching, conflict management coaching, pre-mediation coaching, post-mediation coaching*

INTRODUCTION

People who work in the field of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) such as mediators, facilitators, conflict management trainers and others, are involved in many aspects of helping people with their conflicts. Different approaches and methods are what helps make our field a rich one. As one of the pioneers of conflict coaching, my presentation and this paper focus on its development as a relatively new and distinct mechanism, in the ADR field. How conflict coaching is distinct from other ADR processes such as mediation will firstly be presented, by considering the following scenarios:

Karen was appointed as the manager of a 40 person work unit two months ago. In the past four weeks, three of her staff members complained to her boss, saying Karen's micromanagement is stifling them. The boss told her this and that he is questioning his decision to appoint her. Karen told her boss that the staff needed more direction and that the previous manager was too easy on them. Karen and her boss argued about this and she left his office in anger. Karen doesn't know what to do now.

Abdul and Luis are co-workers and they do not get along well. They are opening disputing about all matter of things. Things are getting worse between them and Abdul realizes that the tension is having a huge impact on others and on his health.

Kawas and Margarite have been married 13 years and their marriage has not been doing well in the past year. They have been seeing a marriage counselor for a month and it has become evident to Margarite that things are deteriorating. The counselor is away for three weeks and Margarite wants to talk to Kawas about separating. She doesn't want to wait until the counselor returns.

Mediators reading these scenarios will likely consider the opportunities to assist through mediation. Conflict coaches will consider the opportunities to assist through conflict coaching instead of, or in tandem with mediation. The forum used will depend on several things, including the preferences and objectives of the person who seeks assistance. For instance, Karen may want to think out the argument with her boss and consider how she will approach another conversation with him. Abdul may want to just talk about what is bothering him about Luis and their relationship and explore his options, in this matter. Margarite may want to think out what will be best to say to Kawas. None of these people may want to participate in mediation and they may or may not choose to do so, once they consider their options in coaching.

DEFINING CONFLICT COACHING

Conflict coaching is a unique mechanism that combines the fields of coaching and conflict management and is emerging as a distinct process, in the ADR field. It is a one-on-one technique for helping individuals improve their conflict understanding and skills, to manage interpersonal conflict and disputes more effectively. This and variations of this definition are used to describe a technique with the fundamental objective of helping coachees (people who are being coached) to better engage in interpersonal conflict, in their personal and professional lives.

Assisting individuals with interpersonal conflicts is not a totally new concept, of course. In our personal lives, counselors, psychotherapists, social workers and others including good friends, listen to us struggle with our interpersonal conflicts and use their approaches to help. In some workplaces, one of the many roles of organizational ombudsmen is to assist individual staff members with their interpersonal workplace conflicts. In various ways, others such as union representatives, counselors from Employee Assistance Programs, managers, supervisors and HR professionals, routinely assist individuals with interpersonal workplace conflict situations, as well. However, conflict coaching has become the common lingo used to describe many forms of assistance that ADR professionals and others are offering in organizational and other contexts. As will be discussed later in this article, this poses a challenge for the development of this process within the ADR field, from this presenter's perspective.

WHY IS CONFLICT COACHING EMERGING AS A DISTINCT ADR MECHANISM?

Here are just a few reasons to explain the emergence of conflict coaching as an ADR mechanism. One reason for the growth of conflict coaching is that mediation is not always a suitable forum for addressing interpersonal disputes. This is not only because one or more disputants may not want to participate in this type of process. In some cases, disputants do not appear for scheduled meetings, or one or more of the parties is not satisfied with the outcome, when mediation does occur. Conflict coaching provides a different type of assistance that considers this and the different reasons people may prefer individualized help, to reach their objectives. The types of goals are limitless and often reflect the desire to find ways to prevent or manage conflict situations on their own, by gaining confidence and competence to do so.

Another reason inspiring the emergence of conflict coaching in workplaces, is the need for more processes to address the high cost of conflict in organizations – financial and otherwise. Even when effective conflict management is a competency, there appears to be a paucity of ways for leaders and others, to develop the related skills. Conflict coaching is being used more and more to do so. Though relatively few organizations have Internal Conflict Management Systems (ICMS), where they are in place, including where they are statutorily required (i.e. Canada's federal government), conflict coaching has become one of the options for people seeking assistance with interpersonal conflict. With or without an ICMS, organizational ADR practitioners have come to realize there is a necessity to fill the existing gap for an individualized process.

One more reason for the emergence of conflict coaching relates to the growth of the field of coaching and its wide usage in organizations and other contexts. The International Coach Federation (ICF - www.coachfederation.org) and the International Association of Coaching (IAC - www.certifiedcoach.org), the other international organization, work to advance, support and preserve the integrity of the coaching profession. They do so by among other things, promulgating standards and competencies that lend credibility to coaching. These efforts and the continuing expansion of the field of coaching, all help to increase visibility and lend legitimacy to the concept of conflict coaching.

WHAT CONFLICT COACHING IS *NOT*

Considering what conflict coaching is not, is also an important part of defining the concept.

Counseling/Therapy

In conflict coaching, it is inevitable that coachees vent their version of the incident and their concerns to the coach. The coach remains supportive and non-judgmental throughout. While therapeutic by virtue of this type of experience, coaching is not therapy or counseling. For instance, coaches do not explore past experiences, or the genesis of the conflict behaviors and emotional responses. This does not mean coachees do not refer to historical events, or discuss

the impact that conflict has on them. It does mean there are limitations as to the extent of coaches' interventions. The focus of coaching is the coachees' conflict management goals and the process is essentially, future-focused.

Conflict coaching does not work then, when coachees need or want counseling or therapy, to address unresolved issues relating to their conflict or dispute.

Mentoring

Mentoring usually occurs when a senior person in an organization or position of authority, provides more junior people with the benefit of their expertise. Mentoring is usually given in the form of advice, information and other direct assistance and is not consistent with the **CINERGY®** model of conflict coaching developed by this presenter. Like many other coaching models, **CINERGY®** Coaching does not operate on the basis that coaches give advice. Rather, the operating premise, as articulated by the International Coach Federation's philosophy above, is consistent with the concept of self-determination.

Conflict coaching then, does not work when coachees expect advice and are not willing to participate in a process, that expects them to be their own experts and responsible for their decisions.

Mediation

More on how conflict coaching is different from mediation will be discussed in this paper. For the purposes of the discussion on what conflict coaching is not, suffice to say that unlike mediation, in which a mediator facilitates a discussion with two or more parties in a dispute, coaches do not bring "the other person" into the coaching process to resolve the issues in dispute.

Conflict coaching then, does not work if coachees expect the process to be more of the nature of a mediation, or for that matter, an arbitration.

Agent/Representative

Coaches do not act as an agent or representative for a coachee. That is, the coach will not on behalf of coachees, go to other people in support of the coachee's goal or participate in a process, as the coachee's advocate.

Coaching then, does not work if coachees want/need an agent or representative to speak on their behalf or participate with them in a rights- or interest-based process.

Remedial Coach

Since the 1990's, coaching has evolved as a process to help people achieve their personal and professional goals. It became more voluntary, less stigmatized and no longer a remedial process

for deviant conduct. However, organizations may identify areas for leaders' and other staff members' improvement and when it comes to conflict coaching, people are commonly referred, because they are demonstrating problematic conflict conduct in the workplace. Under those circumstances, it is not unusual for coachees to be resistant to the process and the coach. Lack of clarity or inconsistency about their goals, anger about being referred, assumptions about the reasons for the referral and other possibilities, have an impact on coachees and how coaching is received.

Coaches commonly work with resistant people and employ techniques to assess coachability and to manage the sources of the resistance. As a consequence, resistance does not flag that coaching is not viable.

Conflict coaching does not work when referrals are inappropriate and when coachees resist to the point that they will not willingly engage in the process.

APPLICATIONS OF CONFLICT COACHING

There are many applications of conflict coaching with both personal and professional contexts and a few are described here.

Individual Conflict Coaching for Leaders and Others

Many organizations tend to react to conflict, rather than consider preventative measures and other ways to shift their culture to become one that is conflict competent. In this regard, conflict coaching provides a viable and proactive mechanism for managers and others, to gain their own skills and abilities, to be conflict competent leaders. This is not only for helping managers to facilitate a discussion among their staff who are in conflict. It is also for them to attain and sustain skills to effectively model conflict management competence and engage effectively in their own workplace conflicts.

As such, coaching sessions focus on each leader's conflict management goals and needs. For instance, conflict coaching may be used in a general way, to help people replace counterproductive behaviors with constructive skills and approaches. In the **CINERGY®** model of conflict coaching, clients examine the patterns, themes and elements of conflict that adversely affect them. They consider what steps they may take to improve their skills and what challenges will keep them from conducting themselves more effectively. This form of conflict coaching is especially important for those who find themselves constantly engaged in unproductive conflict – not as a 'mediator' but rather, in their relationships with others.

Conflict coaching may also be dispute specific. In these instances, the participants focus on a particular dispute. Goals may be to resolve a previous matter that is lingering, to manage a conflict or dispute that is in progress, or to prevent an unnecessary conflict from escalating. Coaching in these cases, involves helping the person to conduct a structured analysis of the

dispute and to gain increased understanding of the dynamic, before engaging in problem-solving and skill-building.

Mediation Coaching

To varying degrees, mediators coach parties when assisting them throughout the mediation process and particularly, in pre-mediations. However, the premise of mediation coaching as a form of conflict coaching, is that the coach assists one of the parties who wants help with matters that are beyond the usual scope of the mediator's role, as an impartial facilitator. The role of a coach in terms of preparing and supporting a party for mediation varies and one approach that this presenter has found helpful, focuses on the coachee's conflict conduct that may preclude effective communications in the mediation. For instance, one of the functions of a mediation coach is to help the party anticipate possible reactions from the other side and engage the coachee in practices about ways to respond. Coaches provide feedback that helps the person in his/her efforts to effectively participate in a challenging interaction.

The role of coaching a party to a mediation may also extend beyond the behind-the-scenes function, to actually sitting at the table. For instance, this role has been found to be viable where each party in an interpersonal workplace dispute has a mediation coach. This role is different from that played by the party's lawyer or union representative, in much the manner previously described, with variations appropriate to the process, the party's goals and the coach's role. Essentially then, the coaches attend for the purpose of helping their coachees participate effectively in the process. The coaches also help the party they are assisting, to work with the mediator in pre-mediation meetings and caucuses to explore issues, interests and options. Of course, the involvement of mediation coaches is established in cooperation with the mediator.

For all intents and purposes, mediation coaches are silent partners in the mediation itself, although may be proactive in calling a caucus. Working with his or her coachee prior to the mediation helps build confidence and prepares the person to actively participate in the process. In addition, having the unique opportunity to observe the client in a conflictual situation, provides the coach with important insights into the coachee's behavioral reactions. This assists in obvious ways, for post-mediation work, in keeping with the goals relating to the coachee's conflict management skills and approach.

Differences between pre-mediation coaching and a pre-mediation meeting

Since many mediators, especially in workplace and family mediations, hold pre-mediation meetings, the following describes some of the differences, according to the **CINERGY®** model that is used for pre-mediation coaching.

In *pre-mediation coaching* for an interpersonal workplace/family dispute:

- The coach coaches one of the parties only

- coaching is oriented to helping the person gain conflict management skills when s/he goes into the mediation, not only to address a specific dispute
- there is usually a series of coaching sessions, before the joint meeting
- between coaching sessions, the coachee works on relevant matters regarding active participation in mediation and his/her conflict management approach, conduct, etc.
- the coachee examines range of options in detail, exploring mutually-acceptable choices
- the coachee considers the range of possible approaches for communicating to the other side, during mediation and after mediation
- the coach helps coachees consider other possible perspectives, based on the individual's examination of various elements of the conflict and dispute
- the coach champions the individual being coached
- the coach does not usually participate in mediation and if s/he does, is not as an advocate (as previously described)
- pre-mediation coaching may be part of a process that also includes post-mediation coaching
- the coachee rehearses what to say with respect to his/her concerns, i.e. the possibility of encountering pushback, behaviors that are likely to upset, etc. and the coach provides feedback and observations
- there is no written report at the end of coaching

Generally, in a **pre-mediation meeting** for an interpersonal workplace/family dispute:

- the mediator meets with each party prior to the joint session
- it is dispute-oriented and more process-oriented than coaching, e.g. generally, the mediator explains the process, roles and expectations of parties
- there is not usually a series of pre-mediation meetings
- the mediator may provide possible perspectives for each party to consider
- some mediators may explore communications with 'the other person' at the mediation
- the mediator is neutral about both parties
- the mediator facilitates the mediation process and helps both parties work towards a mutually acceptable outcome
- the mediator may have parties work on other matters relevant to the issues to be mediated, before the joint session
- the mediator is not involved in ongoing work with the parties after the mediation
- to maintain impartiality, the mediator does not usually go to the extent that a coach does in helping parties prepare for their participation in mediation

- the mediator and/or the parties (or legal counsel when applicable) commonly draft an agreement at end of process, if consensus is reached

As indicated, there are both similarities and differences between pre-mediation coaching and the meetings conducted by the mediator prior to mediation. Essentially, the role and intention of the coach and mediator are what distinguish the function and approach.

Post-Mediation Coaching

Another application of coaching used by **CINERGY®** Coaching is for post-mediation coaching.

Objectives of Post-Mediation Coaching

Post-mediation coaching as previously referred to, is a voluntary and confidential process that either party may choose, after they have engaged in mediation. This process may be employed whether or not parties have engaged in pre-mediation coaching. Among other things, this process may be employed by a coach or the mediator trained to provide conflict coaching, to:

- help one or both disputants to manage any concerns and adverse reactions, in the aftermath of the mediation
- assist one or both (or more) parties to continue to develop the relationship
- coach one or both (or more) parties to improve conflict management skills
- work with one or both parties about any unresolved issues, that became apparent after the process

Applications of Post-Mediation Coaching

As a process that may form a part of providing mediation, **CINERGY®**'s model of post-mediation coaching is premised on the notion that mediation does not in every case, fully resolve parties' feelings and the issues between them. Even if for all intents and purposes, the issues are resolved and the relationship is reconciled, parties may well benefit from follow-up coaching, regarding lessons learned and areas to develop about managing conflict and other related matters.

In the usual course, mediators do not know the extent to which the outcome was successful, or the relationship unfolded, or what if any, after effects may prevail after the mediation process is over. Mediators trained also as conflict coaches are in a unique position to provide continuing intervention for one or both parties - whomever may want it. Having observed how the parties conduct themselves and being aware of the outcome of mediation, the mediator-coach may also provide useful feedback and observations on the party's conflict conduct, reactions and so on. Alternatively, if matters in dispute and/or with respect to the relationship are not resolved, coaching helps to facilitate how the party or parties who choose this process, may manage the unresolved situation and relationship.

Considerations

It is this presenter's view that the mediator is not the ideal person to be a pre-mediation coach for both parties. This is on the basis that preparing the parties for the process is different if you are operating as a coach versus functioning as a mediator-coach. In my respectful opinion, being a coach and then, the mediator, risks compromising the mediator's perceived or actual impartiality.

On the other hand, if coaching is offered to both parties at the mediation as a post-mediation intervention, the parties are aware that any/either of them may choose this process and the chance of perceived bias on the part of the mediator-coach is not as likely to be an issue. Coaching both or one of the parties at this juncture will therefore, be chosen by whomever wants some follow-up, either specific to the dispute or generally, e.g. regarding their conflict conduct, etc. This view may be challenged and among other perspectives, is open to dialogue.

A Coach Approach for Conflict Management Training

Training managers and others who are in positions to provide a conciliatory forum for addressing disputes between staff members, is prudent practice. Training of this nature not only gives participants the skills and confidence to effectively mediate differences among employees. It also provides staff with a way to deal with their differences in a conciliatory way, with support and assistance. Training that is coach-like geared to teaching how to facilitate conflict management not just dispute resolution, helping managers and others to assist people to take responsibility for their own conduct, rather than being told what to do or not to do.

A further application of conflict coaching is as an adjunct to conflict management training. For instance, managers are trained to facilitate disputes between and among their staff; HR professionals learn how to mediate a range of workplace disputes; non-managerial staff may be taught to conduct peer mediation or conflict coaching; and so on. The duration of training, the content and the extent of what can reasonably be taught and sustained is variable, such that many workplaces question what type of training yields the most significant return on investment. Adding conflict coaching to the process provides value to learning conflict management skills, in a unique way, as will be discussed next.

It is an understatement to say that generic conflict management training is not enough to help participants build skills and conflict competence. That is, one to three days of training in conflict management does not fully equip people to effectively manage conflict, between themselves and others, or as a facilitator/mediator. It has become increasingly clear to this presenter, that other modalities such as pre and/or post-training coaching and a staged approach to training, helps facilitate, optimize and sustain learning. Considering this notion, one suggested model for training managers or others, to facilitate or mediate disputes between his/her staff members follows:

Pre-training conflict coaching:

Coaching for conflict management training in advance of the workshop, is designed to help participants to specifically identify and deconstruct their:

- particular conflict management style
- reactions to conflict
- ‘hot buttons’
- conflict approaches that are the most and least comfortable for them
- conduct and that of others, that may interfere with managing conflict
- goals and action plans for improving conflict engagement

In this stage, assessment tools may be used and the coaching focus is on increasing self-reflections and clearly identifying the gaps for each person in terms of their conflict management skills. Individuals also, examine their own responses to conflict, apprehensions and tendencies. Based on this information, trainers are able to tailor-make training scenarios. Also, participants who are prepared in this way, generally approach conflict management training with higher levels of awareness about their particular issues, enabling them to focus on these areas for their development.

Conflict management training workshop:

As a starting point for training managers to facilitate disputes, it is important for trainers and the organization to be clear about the organization’s objectives. Understanding the corporate culture and what the goals of training are, is not necessarily a straightforward task. Conflict management trainers have a significant responsibility to consider the range of related variables that include helping the organization articulate their goals and expectations. Accordingly, conflict management professionals play an integral role in not only designing training programs, but also in recommending the number of days of a workshop and what initiatives will help sustain training.

Post-workshop conflict coaching:

Post-workshop coaching is one suggested method aimed at sustaining participants’ conflict management skills. One-on-one coaching after training is complete, helps to ensure that each participant has gained sufficient insights, confidence and skills, to apply their skills. Coaches help sustain their learning by focusing on the specific needs and areas where continued assistance is required for the ongoing development of each participant. This may be done by individual or group coaching.

Divorce Coaching

Another application of conflict coaching is divorce coaching. Divorce coaching is a process in which a coach assists individuals adjust to the transitions that occur and to help reduce the chaos

and stress experienced, as a consequence of separation and divorce. (Coachees need not actually be married to use this process, since the issues, emotions and coaching procedures apply to anyone involved in the ending of a relationship.) Among other things, the coaching process helps people to focus on what they need to do to get through the practical necessities, while dealing also with turmoil and emotional fallout.

Divorce coaching is typically done with only one of the partners (there may be models where a divorce coach engages both parties). Some of the specific objectives of divorce coaching depending on the client's stated needs, are to help people:

- map out both short and long term goals of what they want, to be able to get on with their lives
- identify and accomplish related practical tasks to facilitate moving on
- by providing a supportive forum to deal with the emotional consequences and vent self-doubt, frustration, sadness, anger, grief, fears, guilt, loneliness and so on
- make adjustments pertaining to being single and/or a single parent
- provide referrals and resources, e.g. lawyers, therapists, mediators, relevant organizations, pertinent literature, etc.
- restructure their lives to accommodate changes in one's social life, career plans, daycare, familial obligations, etc.
- establish boundaries when interacting with the ex-partner
- develop communication skills that address conflict and stressful situations with the ex-partner
- learn about effective negotiating
- by supporting them and giving them feedback
- by providing encouragement and motivation to move forward
- participate effectively with their lawyers in litigation or in other processes relating to the separation or divorce, including mediation, arbitration and collaborative law meetings

Coaching is not Therapy

Relationship separation is typically fraught with angst. Coaching, as a supportive and goal-directed intervention, provides therapeutic value. As previously discussed though, it is not therapy. Putting back the broken pieces that result from relationship breakdowns, presents major challenges for the individuals, their children and families, friends and others. It takes varying degrees of time for people to feel whole again and one way of facilitating and in many cases, expediting the journey is through coaching.

Divorce coaching is a relatively new tool to help divorcing or separating clients cope with the inherent adjustments and transitions, to be able to restructure and reorient their lives. As a form

of conflict coaching, divorce coaching also helps people prevent and resolve specific disputes, that result from or relate to their separations.

SKILLS OF CONFLICT COACHES

Mediators and other ADR professionals have many skills to offer and that are also used in conflict coaching. There are other skills though that are particular to coaching and require training. Here are a few:

“Powerful” Questioning

“Powerful” questions help coachees discover new and different thoughts, ideas, perspectives and feelings. To be most effective, powerful questions are open-ended, timely and strategically considered, before being asked. In addition to encouraging self-reflection and discovery, they are intended to:

- increase insights
- motivate and inspire
- plant seeds
- transform perceptions
- uncover other perspectives
- get to underlying motivation
- be challenging to answer
- move coachees forward and in different directions
- promote deeper thinking, insights and awareness
- systematically unbundle the complexities of the coachees’ situation

Not Advising

It is common to suggest ways to fix things when people tell us a problem they are experiencing. Often, the person is not necessarily asking for advice, but would rather just be heard and sort out how to move forward by himself or herself. Advice-giving presents us with the illusion that we are really helping. We want to help and there is nothing wrong with that. However, help comes in different forms and doing someone else’s problem-solving does not enable people to rely on their own abilities.

One of the other problems with advice-giving is that advice is focused on outcome, the genesis of which is the givers’ beliefs, values, opinions, and possibly, desires about what would be a good result. It is difficult to offer advice that doesn’t originate in **our** thinking about what outcomes would be best and which outcomes may not be suitable. Our opinions and beliefs about outcome,

including our assumptions about what is going on and what needs to happen, preclude us from using other more appropriate tools to help coachees explore their own motivations, beliefs, interests, ideas, challenges, hopes, concerns, or goals. Tendencies of this nature also interfere with careful listening, the main skill of coaches and ADR professionals.

Sustaining Rapport

A strong coach-coachee relationship is not surprisingly, the foundation for the success of a coaching dynamic. The importance of instilling trust and creating synergy (and sustaining both) cannot be overstated. Generally-speaking, people who decide to become a coach have innate qualities that include strong intuition, empathy and openness. These traits and many others, are necessary to be effective as a coach and to build the type of rapport that facilitates coachees' comfort and confidence.

It may take considerable time to build rapport, depending on variables such as the coach's comfort with coachees' issues, personality, expectations and other factors. Coachees' motivation, their attitude to reasons for coaching, general levels of trust, self-esteem, etc., are variables that have an impact too, on how amenable coachees are to being coached.

Making Appropriate and Effective Observations

One of the skills that coaches learn to master, is the art of providing appropriate and effective feedback and observations to coachees. Observations are for instance, what coaches see, hear and sense, that coachees may not be consciously aware of. Similarly, coaches notice the dissonance between what coachees say compared to what they do, or other mismatches, that coachees do not notice. An example may occur when coachees' objectives and behaviors do not match their words or actions. Providing effective feedback provides coachees with the opportunity to learn what words and actions do and do not align with their stated goals is an important coach function.

In conflict coaching, feedback and observations are important for a number of reasons. For example, coachees who come to coaching because of the identified need to improve their conflict management skills, may demonstrate inappropriate behaviors in their actions, tone, body language, words, attitude, etc. They may not always be aware of their conduct and even if they are, they may not appreciate the impact on others, or how they may be perceived.

CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

It is interesting and exciting to be part of the growth of conflict coaching and from this presenter's perspective, there are a number of possible challenges ahead, to be able to successfully integrate "ADR for One" into the range of conflict management options and legitimize conflict coaching, as an ADR technique. As conflict coaching has increasingly become a subject of articles and presentations at ACR, several considerations arise, leading to

discussions on the need to increase communications at local and global levels. On the one hand, it is a good thing that our field continues to expand and provide a broader range of service. On the other hand, the credibility of conflict coaching as a new process will be challenged without addressing the following types of considerations.

One consideration is that as conflict coaching has increasingly taken hold, numerous practitioners report that they have been providing people with individual assistance, for many years and until recently, they did not attach a name to their interventions. However, what is evident is that the bases of what is called conflict coaching is not necessarily consistent with the premise of coaching contained in the following general definition, according to the International Coach Federation:

“Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching is an ongoing relationship which focuses on clients taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client’s level of awareness and responsibility and provides the client with structure, support and feedback. The coaching process helps clients both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise.”

The essence of this definition is also inherent in the philosophy of the ICF and this presenter’s model of conflict coaching (CINERGY model), stated as follows:

“The International Coach Federation adheres to a form of coaching that honours the client as the expert in his/her personal and/or professional life and believes that every client is creative, resourceful and whole. Standing on this foundation, the coach’s responsibility is to:

1. Discover, clarify and align with what the client wants to achieve
2. Encourage client self-discovery
3. Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
4. Hold the client as responsible and accountable”

It appears from this presenter’s research to date, that many things being called coaching, may be more consistent with mentoring, or consulting and accordingly, need to be properly represented. Differing perspectives on what actually constitutes ‘conflict coaching’ warrant a collaborative discourse that reflects an intention to at the very least, establish a framework for the development of conflict coaching as an ADR technique. A challenge in this regard is as with mediation, there are various models of conflict coaching developing. One size will not fit all and as we embark on conversations about standards and proficiencies, there are likely to be disparate views to reconcile. Also, it is predicted there will be numerous conflict coaching workshops that will not consider requisite competencies and many practitioners, who refer to themselves as conflict coaches, will offer conflict coaching without substantial, if any coaching training.

Looking again at the coaching world, the International Coach Federation established a rigorous accreditation process for coaching schools, practitioners and trainers, who are all required to meet extensive requirements and competencies. While as discussed, there are similarities between some ADR processes, principles and skills and those of coaching, there are differences. Hopefully, our local and global communities will sooner than later, come together and take a page from the field of coaching, to develop standards of practice and proficiencies, to ensure that conflict coaching finds its place within the ADR spectrum, in a way that also provides legitimacy, for both practitioners and consumers.

SUMMARY

In sum, although the notion of “ADR for One” has taken various forms in our field, conflict coaching as a distinct mechanism is fast emerging as a unique process. This includes that it provides the support, assistance and encouragement that helps people improve their knowledge, skills and abilities to manage conflict, in an individualized process, specific to the consumer’s needs. The growth of this process will undoubtedly be of interest to practitioners in the field of conflict management and coaching, as an addition to the range of techniques available to help people engage effectively in conflict. Conflict coaching is a dynamic process that has many applications and may be used instead of or, in conjunction with training, mediation and other conflict management processes. It may also be used to help people to effectively participate in interest- and rights-based processes. In short, coaching has applications in many places along the spectrum of conflict management processes, within or without an “informal” or Integrated Conflict Management System.

As conflict coaching models develop and more and more people become coaches, it is expected that there will be challenges and competing interests. The best case scenario from the perspective of this presenter, is that those of us who share the overall objective of developing conflict coaching competencies and standards of practice, will work together to establish the integrity of the concept of conflict coaching in the ADR field and provide a solid and credible frame of reference, from which to operate.

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