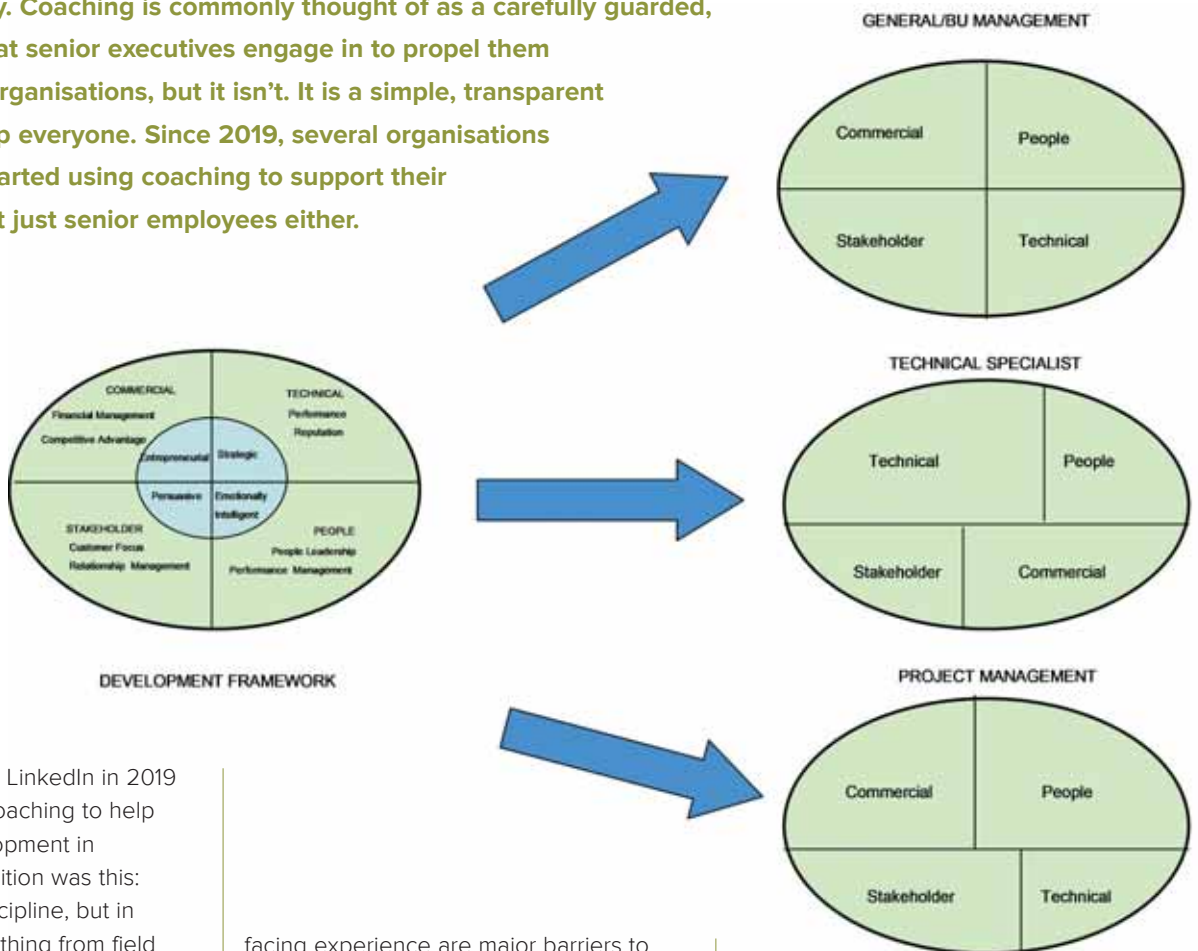


THE DARK ART OF COACHING

coaching in archaeology 2019–22

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In the last 20 years coaching has become an influential part of the learning and development strategy of many organisations large and small, across many sectors and areas of industry. Coaching is commonly thought of as a carefully guarded, exclusive process that senior executives engage in to propel them to the tops of their organisations, but it isn't. It is a simple, transparent process that can help everyone. Since 2019, several organisations in the sector have started using coaching to support their employees – and not just senior employees either.



Atkins Design and Engineering Solutions 2005 development model. Credit: Atkins

I published an article on LinkedIn in 2019 about the potential of coaching to help with professional development in archaeology. My proposition was this: specialists (from any discipline, but in archaeology I mean anything from field specialists or archaeological scientists to IT or heritage managers) can find it hard to make the transition into senior (or sometimes executive) roles, where a range of non-technical, personal skills – like professional presence, commercial thinking, communication, team leadership and client management – are needed to provide full value to an employer. Coaching offers the kind of support and challenge to career archaeologists that can help to identify these skills needs and to address them (more on that later).

Some of the comments I received agreed with this. Yes, they said, specialists do find it hard. Lack of confidence and client-

facing experience are major barriers to career progression, but also lack of training (or awareness of training need in areas such as communication) as well as undervaluing of self, of skills and of the contribution and worth of specialist knowledge to the business and beyond.

But some questioned whether specialists needed to fulfil these management roles at all – would our organisations not be better run by general managers with appropriate training and a desire to take on these roles? Specialists should be able to be more senior (and better paid) in their organisations without having to lead teams of people, sell themselves or understand clients – these things could be left to

professional managers, letting specialists do their thing in peace.

Of course, there needs to be a route for specialists to progress and be better rewarded alongside business leaders. This was the principle behind the development model we used at Atkins in the early 2000s. The idea was that you chose a route – 'commercial', 'technical', 'people' or 'stakeholder', depending on preference – and focused your professional development in one quadrant over the others.

In this model, though, everyone was expected to be able to offer something in every quadrant. Even technical specialists were required to be able to communicate with confidence, to share their specialist knowledge beyond the business, to understand its value to clients or other stakeholders and to plan for growth. The importance of specialist input and the potential for specialist research and innovation to add value to commercial projects does not speak for itself – it needs good advocacy, and the best advocates are the experts themselves.

It seems to me that the more senior you become in any organisation, whatever route through the organisation you are taking, you will need non-technical skills to achieve your career goals. Whether you can articulate your goals and identify what skills you lack, or conversely whether you have skills or talents you don't even recognise as being of value and which are going unrecognised, are all excellent topics for coaching – at any level and for specialists and generalists.

Coaching is based on the premise that the coachee has all or most of the resources they need to achieve their goals – coaching helps to identify them and put them to effective use. A coach needn't be (and isn't usually) an expert in the area that the coachee works in – the only thing the coach is expert in is in coaching itself – in listening, in 'reflecting back' in a way that inspires new understanding, in reframing issues and challenges and in guiding the coachee to identify their own goals and solutions. A coach should be trained but could either be an external consultant or someone in the organisation, as long as



Great coaching is about actively listening.....

Credit: CartoonStock

they are not a line manager or close colleague of the coachee.

The benefit of coaching is not remedial (think sports coaching, not 'extra maths' coaching) – it is a personalised, solution-focused and often efficient alternative to general training in some of these areas. Organisations are gradually coming round to the idea of 'growing their own', and coaching is a handy tool for that. Outcomes I've witnessed range from improved communication, better work focus, increased job satisfaction, a new job, a promotion, a more positive outlook, clear career goals, improved confidence and stronger professional presence. All have value to an employer.

In fact, employers are ahead of me – I have spotted professional development coaching as part of the package offered for two new jobs advertised through ClfA's Jobs Information Service and Training bulletin (JIST) this year. And as I write this, a coaching paper has dropped into the conference programme.

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Look out for more on coaching in future editions of *The Archaeologist*.



Andrea Bradley

Andrea is a self-employed consultant providing historic environment advice on major infrastructure projects. She also specialises in advice on professional development, providing consultancy on the NLHF-funded Workplace Learning Bursaries and Skills for the Future Projects and chairing the Apprenticeships Working Group that delivered the Apprenticeship Standard for Historic Environment Advice. She took her coaching qualification in 2018/2019 at Henley Business School and has been coaching in the sector ever since.



Credit: Centre for Creative Leadership 2022